Women's Equality—Stalled or Achieved?
An Intersectional Analysis of New Zealand Women's Experiences of (In)Equality and Perceptions of Feminism

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Abstract

A statement made in 2013 by Professor Judy McGregor, the former Equal Employment Opportunities Commissioner of the New Zealand Human Rights Commission, suggested that equality for women in New Zealand had stalled, and that little progress was being made towards achieving women's equality. New Zealand has maintained a strong socially progressive reputation with women's issues, as the first country where women won the right to vote, and as a consistent feature at the top levels of global equality rankings. A cultural narrative of progression is also represented in the amplified visibility of women in diverse contexts that enables individual women to have the confidence to pursue equality for themselves—consistent with Western narrative portrayals of neoliberal individualism. An awareness of the gains made by past feminist action, together with latent inequality and its (lack of) presence within women's individual lives, can create the illusion that equality for women has been achieved, evidenced in postfeminist perspectives that reduce the need for collective approaches to women-centred issues.

This research examined 16 women's experiences of being a woman in 21st Century New Zealand. Women's experiences were positioned in this study as the "starting off thought" (Harding, 1993) for understanding women's identification with feminism. The thesis includes a discussion of New Zealand's progressive reputation and understandings of women's equality over time, in the context of the narrative waves of feminism and socio-cultural and political explanations of a plateau in women's equality progression in New Zealand. The theoretical discussion focused on intersectionality to highlight heterogeneity within the category of "women", while the methodology for this research used a narrative approach to understand the unique

differences and lived experiences of the women who participated. The examination of narrative influences in the form of grand, master, and personal narratives helped to explain how participants made sense of the world around them, and the intersectional focus on generational cohorts highlighted difference among and across women based on the category of age. Diary methods followed by interviews captured the unique individual differences in lived experience.

The use of thematic and narrative analysis in this study demonstrated participants' sense-making and decision-making in their enactment and retelling of lived experience in association with feminism and understandings of equality, and their simultaneous experiences of privilege and oppression were key themes identified in this study. While this study first sought to uncover the ways in which women might demonstrate postfeminist *complacency,* as a possible cause of the plateau in moves towards equality for women, three forms of *agency* were identified as influencing lived experience: Constrained agency, conferred agency, and comparative agency. It seems that, for a variety of different reasons, the women challenged or accepted societal roles and behaviours based on the relationships, environments, and narrative influences that informed individual lived experience. The challenge then, is in understanding how it might be possible to continue building on the legacy of equality for women in 21st Century New Zealand.

Keywords: Intersectionality, women's equality, stalled progression, feminism, social change.

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Pursuing Doctoral study was always something that I had dreamed of doing but had never envisioned as within the realm of possibility. My journey through the education system, especially at the secondary level, was not entirely smooth and I have since been determined to prove to myself and others that I can succeed. This thesis is the product of that determination and I am very proud of it. With that being said, I have not completed this journey alone and there are a number of people and groups who deeply deserve my thanks.

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Chapter One: Introduction

New Zealand has established itself as a progressive country internationally and developed a national identity founded on early egalitarian events, such as acknowledging women's right to vote in 1893. Despite a cultural narrative of progression being upheld on the global and local level, women in New Zealand still do not possess complete and substantive equality; nor does equality look close to being achieved. For example, in 2010(a) the Human Rights Commission's *Human Rights in New Zealand* report noted that "despite positive economic and social progress, equality between men and women has not yet been achieved, and progress on many key indicators is either painfully slow or static" (p. 281). In 2013, former Equal Employment Opportunities Commissioner, Judy McGregor, echoed the observation of the Human Rights Commission, suggesting that New Zealand's progressive reputation "is based on undeniable historical realities that we should be proud of and are proud of…[However] progressing gender equality in New Zealand has in fact stalled and that we are now slipping in some important areas" (p. 1). These sentiments have been reiterated and affirmed more recently by Farvid (2017) and the World Economic Forum (2020). New Zealand's historical advancements, alongside the perception of legislative equality and female visibility in positions of significance, contribute to a cultural narrative of progression that does not appear to be reflected in statistics or lived experience. Historically, equality movements have focused on highlighting heterogenous differences between men and women. In many respects, this binary focus gives the impression that all women are the same and share similar experiences. To not recognise the heterogeneity among women masks the true extent to which inequality is experienced between New Zealand women.

Therefore, in this thesis I explore McGregor's observation that progression towards women's equality has stalled in New Zealand, from an intersectional perspective. Rather than maintain McGregor's terminology and refer to the "stalling" of equality progression, I have chosen to name it a *plateau* to signal that while substantive movements towards achieving equality for women may have stalled or reverted backwards, a cultural narrative of progression fuels a perception of advancement. This chapter will begin by examining New Zealand's cultural narrative of progression to unpack global comparisons of progress and perceptions of improvement for women. Then, I will present evidence that reflects the existence of a plateau before discussing the aims and scope of this research and addressing the structure of this thesis.

New Zealand's Cultural Narrative of Progression

Understanding the key goal of feminist activism in New Zealand contributes to a broader picture of equality progression as a cultural narrative. Traditionally the underlying framework for feminist activism was based on a distinction between sexes (male/female) and the overarching goal was to achieve equal treatment of men and women (Hughes, 2002). Movements aimed at achieving equal rights for women have been fuelled by examples of women's subordination to men. Central to feminist movements in New Zealand are egalitarian values (Farvid, 2017) and the idea that women deserve the same rights and privileges as men and that women should not be treated as inferior citizens. While the focus of feminist activism may have changed over time, the predominant idea remains that women should not be treated differently to men (Ryan, Ravenswood, & Pringle, 2014).

In a New Zealand context, early attempts to abolish forms of discrimination and expand the opportunities available to women have resulted in a perception of

advancement and a cultural narrative that describes New Zealand as a "progressive" nation. New Zealand's cultural narrative of progression is centred on two key principles: 1) A rich history of achievements concerned with women's rights and 2) the increased visibility of women in traditionally male-dominated positions. These key principles disguise the existence of inequality and perpetuate a sense of national pride, affording feelings of achievement and progression. Here for example, McGregor (2013) offers material representations of these principles:

> The idea that New Zealand is a great place for women to live, to work, have families and to participate at all levels is fixed in national consciousness. It is sustained by at least two powerful and recurring symbols. The first is graphically demonstrated on the $10 note [with the image of Kate Sheppard]…It is a fitting source of national pride…The second piece of symbolism…[is shown by] the fact that at a certain point in New Zealand's modern political and constitutional history we had four women occupying the top leadership positions; Governor General Dame Sylvia Cartwright, Prime Minister Helen Clark, the Chief Justice Dame Sian Elias and the Attorney General Hon. Margaret Wilson (p. 2).

A cultural narrative of progression offers women a false sense of security as it relies on symbolic representations of equality achievements locally to maintain the perception of increased opportunity for women. The visibility of women in positions of power might encourage other women to pursue similar opportunities for themselves through what has been labelled, "the role model effect" (World Economic Forum, 2019). For example, McGregor (2013) references what she termed "the great female quartet" (p. 2), referring the women mentioned in the excerpt above, and credits the presence of four women in positions of power at one point in time as contributing to a cultural narrative of progression. That quartet has shifted in recent years, with three of those original positions still held by women. At present, New Zealand's Prime Minister is female, as is the leader of the opposition party. The Governor General, Chief Justice and Solicitor General are also all women. Following

the general election of 2020, 58 women are currently serving as members of Parliament which equates to 48% of Parliament (Else, 2018b); the largest number of female representatives in Parliament in New Zealand's history. As such, a cultural narrative of progression serves to heighten an awareness of women in positions of power, prompting the perception of increased opportunity and instigating the role model effect. Subsequently, a cultural narrative of progression is strengthened and perpetuated through the existence of positive global rankings and the visibility of women in positions of power.

Historical evidence of equality progression is further accentuated by New Zealand's comparative performance on the world stage. Internationally, New Zealand appears to have improved its rankings and maintained its progressive reputation. In 2019, New Zealand was ranked 33rd in the United Nations Gender Inequality Index. In 2020, New Zealand was ranked 4th on the global Social Progress Index behind Finland (3rd), Denmark (2nd), and Norway, (1st) (Statista, 2020). In the same year, New Zealand ranked 6th in the Global Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum, 2020). By subindex, New Zealand ranked 27th for economic participation and opportunity, and 13th for political empowerment (World Economic Forum, 2020). Featuring inside the top 35 for equality measures bolsters national pride and reinforces a cultural narrative of progression. As the next section will detail, New Zealand's cultural narrative of progression serves to disguise the reality of the gender equality gap by which New Zealand's progress is measured.

Evidence to Support a Plateau in Progress Towards Equality

Despite a positive reputation, both past and present, surrounding equality progression in New Zealand, the focus remains fixed on the areas around "the gap", rather than on the space(s) for improvement that the gap occupies. Women make up just over

half of New Zealand's population (Statistics New Zealand, 2020a) and are said to possess full equality within the law. On a practical level, equality is no closer to being achieved. Despite New Zealand's ranking of 6th in the Global Gender Gap Index, the World Economic Forum (2020) identified that the overall gap appeared unchanged from previous years. Similarly, a ranking of 33rd in the United Nations Gender Inequality Index (2019) is not received so positively when compared with neighbouring Australia's ranking of 25th.

In 2013, at the time of McGregor's observations of stalled equality, the gender pay gap sat at 11.2% (Statistics New Zealand, 2019). The Women at Work: 1991-2013 report, published in 2015, used 20 years of census data to show that women accounted for 93.6% of adults employed as secretaries or clerks, 92.4% of adults employed as nurse and midwife professionals, and in the mining industry, 3.6% of those employed were women. Four years later in 2017, Statistics New Zealand (2019) noted that the gender pay gap had remained relatively unchanged. The council of Trade Unions vice-president, Rachel Mackintosh told journalist Melanie Earley in 2019 that the gender pay gap, combined with occupational segregation, meant that from November 18, otherwise known as "no pay day", women essentially worked the rest of the year for free. Broken down, it is further revealed that Māori women's no pay day begins on October 12, and for Pasifika women September 29 (Earley, 2019). By 2020, the gap had decreased by just 1.7% from 2013, to show a 9.5% gap (Statistics New Zealand, 2020b). In the workplace, women remained highly represented in industries such as health care and social assistance (83.1%) and education and training (72.2%), with low proportions of women in male dominated industries such as construction (13.5%) and mining (8.7%) (Statistics New Zealand, 2020b).

Alongside occupational segregation, the existence of a glass ceiling that prevents women from moving into organisational leadership positions is disguised by the visibility of women in powerful positions. In 2004, Dame Silvia Cartwright, who is included in McGregor's great female quartet, said:

> The perceived predominance of women across some of the country's key leadership positions during recent years…carries the risk of a double-edged sword. It is all too convenient to assume that this profile accurately represents the status of all professional women (as cited in McGregor, 2013, p. 2).

While the role model effect is seen to encourage women to pursue opportunities in high-level leadership spaces, the World Economic Forum (2019) have found that in other areas of organisational leadership, "women's participation…has stalled" (para. 8). This is evident in the 2019 Diversity Report by Champions for Change, which showed that of the New Zealand businesses surveyed, women accounted for 37.3% of board members, 30.9% of general managers or other executive positions, and 37.3% of senior managers, compared to results within the 60-70% range for men. The combined number of women as heads of state in New Zealand, when translated into year span, represents 12.6 years of the past 50 years (World Economic Forum, 2020). These national statistics demonstrate the extent to which women do not have full and substantive equality, and how much work is still needed to achieve equality for women.

According to Farvid (2017), the key areas where women face persistent inequality in New Zealand are gender-based violence, public participation, leadership and pay, and the deteriorating status of minority and migrant women. With regard to minority groups of women, where previous movements towards equality sought to target the political representation of women as one group, the acknowledgement of social and cultural distinctions between women highlights how

inequality is experienced differently among the range of issues that persist (Nolan, 2007). An area where difference does not appear to be accounted for is violence against women. For example, ongoing research carried out by the Ministry of Justice and published in the *Offences by Family Members Report* (2020b) highlights the ongoing experiences and implications of "family violence". The reference to family violence is a debated issue, as this language is seen to detract from gendered aspects of domestic violence that are most commonly carried out by men (Merry, 2009). Nor does this language account for differences among those women affected. The report showed that of the adult population, women were 2.8% likely to report domestic violence, in contrast to 1.2% of men (Ministry of Justice, 2020b, p. 4). Despite legislation to combat the significant number of offences against women, and the existence of services focused on both prevention and support, the culture of violence is slow to change. The continuation of funding and support for both research and organisations tasked with providing support and raising awareness, signals the ongoing implications of violence against women, as one of the key issues preventing the achievement of women's equality. Statistics paint a picture of New Zealand's status locally and comparatively, but they also show that while some positive gains are made, little substantive change is being enacted to progress towards complete equality.

My Interest in the Research

I first came across McGregor's observations of a stalling of equality in New Zealand during the later stages of my Master's research. The focus of my Master's research was on women-centred policies developed by sitting political parties for the 2014 general election. Having explored political understandings of women's equality and attempts to address inequality through legislative change, McGregor's comments

caused me to think about the perspectives of women and their experiences of inequality. On a personal level, McGregor's observation prompted me to think about my own experiences of inequality. At the time, I was unable to identify any personal experiences where I felt my sex had affected my opportunities. Conversations with older women in my family heightened my awareness to explicit experiences and also highlighted the gap between their experiences and my own. As a result, I was curious to know how other women in New Zealand experienced (in)equality, and if those experiences matched either my own or those of my family members.

Another aspect that intrigued me about the differing experiences of myself and my family members was the apparent divide between feminist movements and actions of the past, and (a lack of) action towards women's equality in the present. This appeared to be due, in part, to assumptions made about generational perspectives of women's equality, as McGregor (2013) highlights:

> Older feminists are sometimes heard to express impatience and bewilderment about the stance of some younger women towards progressing gender equality. Younger women, they say, are relatively ungrateful for, and seemingly unknowing about, the legacy of their mother's and grandmother's generations. Younger women, though, are frustrated by the somewhat old-fashioned bureaucracy of organised women's groups…Instead they may be engaging with women's issues, or expressing aspects of feminism, is less formally organised ways through Facebook and social media, as well as casual, informal gatherings (pp. 5-6).

Perhaps a cultural narrative of progression was inhibiting the identification of inequality in individual lived experience, which was preventing more formal collective action to address women's issues, such as pay, employment and leadership opportunities, violence against women, and reproductive autonomy. It became clear to me that ideological and narrative shifts had led to the perception that a) feminism and feminist action might be outdated, and b) that younger women were complacent

about equality progression. The awareness of older generations to explicit forms of discrimination, and the existence of more subtle and latent inequalities that are not clearly identifiable, have led to misconceptions about feminism. These misconceptions are ones that I have experienced and even perpetuated personally, and in conversation with female peers. Therefore, the aims of this research are born out of my personal journey, as I navigate what it means to be a woman in 21st Century New Zealand, based on a cultural narrative of progression and evidence of a plateau in women's equality, by asking women of different ages about their lived experience.

Research Aim

This research aims to examine McGregor's observation of a plateau regarding women's equality in New Zealand, from a woman's perspective. Having explored and examined evidence to suggest the existence of a plateau, I am interested in the lived experiences of 21st Century New Zealand women, as they interact with instances of (in)equality. I am particularly interested in intergenerational perspectives and experiences and how these might explain the existence of a plateau in equality progression. Subsequently, this study examines (1) how intersectional differences between women impact individual experiences of women's equality and (2) how these differences might help to explain the stalling of equality as evidenced by the plateau.

The Significance of this Research

This research furthers understandings of a plateau regarding women's equality in a New Zealand context. The findings of this study highlight the intersectional differences between women, in relation to experiences of (in)equality, and the implications of such differences on progress towards achieving women's equality.

Moreover, consideration for generational differences, both ideologically and intersectionally, helps to build an understanding of why New Zealand is experiencing a plateau in equality progression at the individual and societal level.

Having made significant advances towards achieving legislative equality for women, it is evident that complete and substantive equality has not been achieved, and so this research prioritises intersectional difference to provide a clearer idea of how New Zealand women navigate experiences of (in)equality and make sense of the world around them. Understanding (in)equality from the perspectives of women, as embedded and unique members of New Zealand society, provides in depth insights into both the implications of a cultural narrative of progression on lived experience, and the ongoing effects of systemic oppression.

Research Scope

The objective of this research was to examine the lived experiences of New Zealand women in relation to a plateau in equality progression. As such, this research focuses solely on the existence of a plateau within a New Zealand context, with an emphasis placed on the experiences of women who were either permanent residents or citizens of New Zealand. It is also necessary to define what is meant by the identification of "woman" for the purposes of this study. In this study, the participant selection criteria were that each participant 1) identified as a woman, 2) was a permanent resident or New Zealand citizen, and 3) was aged between 18 and 100.

By foregrounding woman no distinction between sex and gender was made, only that participants identified as a woman. Therefore, the intersectional aims of the research meant that the identification as a woman was foregrounded with no restrictions placed on gendered identity or biological sex.

The Structure of this Thesis

Having evidenced the plateau in women's equality in New Zealand and introduced the aims and scope of this research, I will now outline the structure of this thesis. In Chapter Two, I outline the narrative waves of feminism and associated feminist perspectives, as they relate to the New Zealand context, and discuss the various views of women's equality to encapsulate changing definitions and implementations over time. Chapter Three builds on the knowledge of feminist waves, perspectives, and understandings of women's equality, to outline socio-cultural and political explanations of the plateau in women's equality in New Zealand. The elusiveness of women's equality is understood in the context of structures of power, as discursive and material practices that embody ways of doing and being, that mask women's intersectional differences and the illusion of choice to perpetuate assumptions of complacency. Similarly, more recent approaches to activism as an individual responsibility, and perspectives of feminism as 'irrelevant', contribute to slow progress and a lack of social change for women. The theoretical framework of this research utilised feminist communication, discourse-materiality and intersectionality to explore the lived experiences of 21st Century New Zealand women.

In Chapter Four, I define feminist standpoint theory and use Harding's (1993) principle of the "starting off thought" to place women's lived experience at the centre of this research. I explore my reflexive role in the research as the "outsider within" before detailing how an intersectional focus led the recruitment of participants. I then describe the methods of data collection, which were diary methods and semi-structured interviews, and provide a detailed explanation of the research process and my interactions with the participants. I then define and outline the methods of analysis used in this research which were intersectional analysis,

thematic analysis, and narrative analysis, which also involved exploring the ideological (grand), cultural (master) and personal narratives evident in participants' personal stories.

Chapters Five, Six and Seven outline the research findings to answer the research questions posed at the end of Chapter Three. Chapter Five focuses on the generational cohorts evident in the participant sample and includes a thematic analysis of participant stories and a discussion of participant associations with the key themes, privilege and oppression, in the context of systemic luck and infrastructure systems, and moral luck and personal relationships. Participants' discursive and material experiences of privilege and oppression (at times simultaneously) demonstrates the complex nature of women's equality in 21st Century New Zealand.

Chapter Six then explores in greater depth the personal stories of four women—as representatives of each generational cohort—to discuss the grand and master narrative entanglements that contribute to the development of personal narratives. The exploration of generational stories situates feminist waves, perspectives and understandings of women's equality in participants' lived experiences. In Chapter Seven, I discuss the final research question, describing participants' discursive and material enactments of agency by building on Herndl and Licona's (2007) concept of constrained agency to conceptualise agency as both conferred and comparative. Agency is discussed as constrained by social structures, conferred by a cultural narrative of progression, and comparative in participants' acknowledgements of local and global inequality experienced by others.

Finally, in Chapter Eight I present the conclusions of this study and outline the contributions and implications of conducting this research. I then discuss the

limitations and present pathways for future research, before closing with my personal reflections. My reflections acknowledge the interests outlined in this chapter and explain how my standpoint changed over the course of the research by providing specific examples to illustrate my position as an “outsider within”.

Chapter Two: Women's Equality and Narrative Waves of Feminist Activism in New Zealand

Feminism, as a defining ideology of the women's equality movement, has undergone several societal shifts as a concept, belief system, and theoretical framework. Few-Demo, Lloyd, and Allen (2014) note that the strength of feminism lies in its subjectivity and dynamism as it shifts and adapts to include new knowledge and practice. Similarly, the meaning of "equality", as a key goal of feminist thought and action, has adapted to meet the needs of women at each point in time. This chapter will explore adaptations to the meaning of equality within a New Zealand context. Examining how current perspectives on women's equality have been shaped over the course of New Zealand's history, through feminist activism, contributes to a wider understanding of a plateau in equality progression.

The feminist "waves" form a significant aspect of understandings of feminist activism, as they encapsulate and provide context to particular movements or moments in time. Such waves are referred to as metaphors or narratives and help to highlight subjectivities and the reasons why feminists chose to interact with the movement at a particular time (Evans, 2015). On the other hand, Gillis, Howie, and Munford (2007) argue that the use of "wave" to describe historical feminist movements is in fact limiting and instead prevents the interrogation of differences between social groups. The notion that terming movements as waves is a proliferation of discourse, suggests that such language reinforces assumptions about feminists who were associated with a particular wave (Budgeon, 2001; Evans, 2015; Gillis, Howie & Munford, 2007). Each wave of feminism has historically focused on a specific notion of equality and sought to overcome an aspect of women's

marginalisation. I have chosen to use the term “waves” in a narrative sense, as I find them useful in contextually establishing both the temporality of activism and the locality in placing attempts at gaining equality for women in New Zealand.

This chapter begins with a general approach to defining equality in the context of feminism more broadly. Then, I situate understandings of equality within narrative waves of feminism, with a particular focus on how New Zealand has interpreted equality for women and how they have gone about attempting to achieve it. I discuss first, second, and third wave feminism, as well as postfeminism, with New Zealand applications of equality within these timeframes as the focus. Throughout this chapter I will lean on the work of McDonald (2014) to inform an interpretation of equality changes in a New Zealand context.

Defining Women’s Equality Over Time

Equality in the context of feminist theory is associated with sex/gender and describes attempts to promote the equal treatment of men and women, and the provision of equal access to opportunities and resources to achieve a similar outcome (Lorber, 2012). Feminist theory approaches equality with the aim of disrupting the exclusion of women from key aspects of public life, such as politics, the economy, education, health and society (Disch & Hawkesworth, 2016). Equality is, therefore, embedded in some feminist approaches as synonymous with “sameness”, and women are encouraged to view what men “have” as the goal (Hughes, 2002). Understandings of equality in the formal sense focus on treating those who are similarly situated the same (Barnard & Hepple, 2000; Kapur & Cossman, 1999). This view of equality is otherwise known as formal equality, by which a focus is placed on equal opportunities, with differing treatments of those similarly positioned viewed as discrimination (Kapur & Cossman, 1999). Legislation traditionally aligns with

formal equality to create laws and policies aimed at improving opportunities for particular groups, such as writing into law women's right to vote.

Early feminist theorising characterised women's equality movements as those that allow women equal opportunities to men (Hughes, 2002; Squires, 2007). In fact, feminism and equality for women are often used interchangeably as concepts that serve the same purpose (Fiss, 1994; Walby, 2011). Initial equality conceptualisations in feminism have focused on women's inclusion in public life, leaving private life and domestic responsibilities relatively untouched (Evans, 1995). Similarly, early feminist writings by Mary Wollstonecraft warned against a focus on difference between men and women as it resulted in the acceptance of patriarchy in order for women to occupy male-dominated spaces. This has famously been coined the "Wollstonecraft dilemma", with tensions existing between the notions of viewing women as equal and different, or equal but different. According to this dilemma, the two paths that women have historically followed to achieve equality are flawed:

> One route involved asking for the extension to women of the rights enjoyed by male citizens (i.e. the struggle for equality); the other route consisted of claiming that women 'as women' have specific capacities, interests and needs which would require a differentiated citizenship from that of men (i.e. the struggle for difference). (Lombardo, 2003, p. 159).

In either direction, women are not accepted as fully integrated citizens as they must either accept the patriarchal system to gain citizenship or be considered as inferior citizens with special treatment based on their difference (Lombardo, 2003). The identification of both routes as problematic means that the framing of *special treatment* overshadows the intention to incorporate women as *valuable* contributors, because difference is entirely focused on comparisons with men.

With inclusion at its core, initial equality movements sought to make space for women in areas where men dominate (Cornwall and Rivas, 2015; Hughes, 2002;

Thornton, 1986) Critiques of women's equality dispute the notion that women and men are the same, and that women aspire to be the same and have the same opportunities as men (Cain, 1990; Cornell, 1998; Gaughran, 1998; Hughes, 2002; Squires, 2007). Where earlier movements sought opportunities similar to men which proved beneficial for women, a focus on sameness to address ongoing inequality became viewed as problematic. Cornell (1998) observes that a continued focus on equal opportunity has "ignored the reality that "hearts" continue to starve, no matter the new opportunities available to women" (p. ix). Women as a group are heterogeneous, which is not only highlighted by their differences with men, but also in their differences with each other.

The advancement of a narrative of difference in feminist theory proved unpopular with scholars of the 1990s, mostly because it was not clearly defined and because it undermined formal understandings of equality (Barrett, 1987; Evans, 1995; Fraser, 1997; Hekman, 1999; Moore, 1994). Feminist theories of difference traditionally compared men and women as the focus for equality progression (Ermarth, 2000; Hughes, 2002; Lorber, 2012). Disch and Hawkesworth (2016) noted a shift away from "equality feminism" towards "difference feminism", as a key category for analysis that focuses on difference not just with men, but between women also. A focus on difference is associated with substantive approaches to equality that seek to measure the impact of legislation on groups and offset this impact through positive social, economic, and educational interventions (Kapur & Cossman, 1999). Rather than a focus on opportunity, substantive equality is concerned with creating equal outcomes to decrease discrimination at the group and individual levels (Barnard & Hepple, 2000). If individuals are not fully able to utilise opportunities equally available to them, then arguments for substantive equality

suggest that the outcome could lead to the perpetuation of discrimination (Kapur & Cossman, 1999). To ignore or disregard the impact of treatment on outcomes, in the case of women, is seen to neglect the ways in which women experience inequality personally, and instead of challenging social norms, elements of them are upheld to further reinforce social divisions (Hughes, 2002).

Gaughran (1998) observes that attending to difference aligns with feminism's initial aims; "[t]he idea of commonality among persons ignores the feminist assertion that traditional political philosophy does not represent those who fall outside the mainstream" (p. 39). However, a narrative of difference was viewed as a distraction from women's interests and as complicating the real issues (Fraser, 1997; Hughes, 2002). To combat problematic notions of difference, Young (1990) draws on the work of Derrida, Lyotard, Foucault and Kristeva (Hughes, 2002) to argue that the acknowledgment of identity divisions is necessary to achieve full equality; "equality as the participation and inclusion of all groups sometimes requires different treatment for oppressed or disadvantaged groups" (p. 158). In this way, a focus on difference is likened to substantive equality and the pursuit of equal outcomes, as opposed to equality of opportunity. Disch and Hawkesworth (2016) noted the feminist theory focuses on the interplay between identities, practices, and privilege and oppression. Cavarero (1992) proposes that the aim of equality progression should be for women to be equal *and* different, acknowledging intragroup contrasts and reforming social norms associated with gender. Difference is, therefore, viewed as necessary to shaping equality measures, to avoid addressing "women's issues" in a way that generalises complex problems (Hughes, 2002).

In more recent times, a focus on difference has resulted in attempts to be more inclusive, which has led to a shift in language choices. As a result, "gender

equality" has been used to describe the equal rights of all genders and sexualities, because overarching power relations continue to validate a hierarchy that attributes dominance to one way and subordination to the other (Ermarth, 2000). Women's equality could, therefore, be considered a category of gender equality, with the acknowledgment that other gendered identities require different approaches to equality progression. The exploration of adaptions to equality over time highlight the dynamic nature of feminist activism. The next section will conceptualise these adaptations in a New Zealand context, using the narrative waves of feminism to document different feminist perspectives and approaches to achieving women's equality.

First Wave Feminism and Women's Equality: 1860s -1960

Linked to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, first wave feminism is associated with the aim of establishing legal rights for women, such as the right to vote (Evans, 2015; Lorber, 2012). This initial wave of feminism follows a liberal rights model, with a focus on the equal treatment of men and women (Auchmuty, 2008). Preliminary introductions to notions of women's legal and political rights were written about by New Zealand woman Mary Müller, under the penname "Fémmina", in the late 1860s, as women began to gain public recognition in the areas of property and divorce (Dalziel, 1990). In 1870, the writings of British Politician, John Stuart Mill, began to circulate throughout New Zealand and Australia (Franz, 2006). The introduction of liberal feminism into New Zealand was embodied by Mill, whose writings in *The Subjection of Women* spoke to the wrongful subordination of women and the inability for human improvement as a result (Okin, 1973). Mill applied the principles of liberalism to women's societal position to argue that the skills that women possessed were wasted if not utilised in

the public sphere, and that they should be given the same freedom of choice and individual autonomy available to men (Hekman, 1992). Mill's writings proved influential in adding fuel to the liberal feminist movement in New Zealand (Curtin, 2019; Hekman, 1992), noticeably marked by Mary Colclough's participation in public speeches as "Polly Plum" in the early 1870s (Cook, 2011a). In New Zealand, liberal feminist views of equality were applied, not with the intention of viewing men and women as the same, but with the aim of improving the public lives of women to match the freedoms and opportunities available to men (McDonald, 2014). This view was most prominently and successfully applied in the New Zealand suffrage movement.

The women's suffrage movement marks a significant collective moment in New Zealand's history that resulted in legislation (see Appendix A) furthering the inclusion of women in public life (Devaliant, 1992). Issues of patriarchy and men's societal superiority were challenged, and women spoke out in order to secure similar rights for themselves in areas such as marriage, education, politics, and employment (Cook, 2011b; Ministry for Culture & Heritage, 2020). Women's equality, in the context of the liberal feminist movement, focused on political equality for women and societal reformation, which started with a petition for the prohibition of alcohol led by the first national women's organisation, the New Zealand Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) (Cook, 2011c; Ministry for Culture & Heritage, 2020). The Christchurch branch of WCTU, spearheaded by Kate Sheppard, then led the campaign to give women the vote (Brookes, 2017; Cook, 2011b; Ministry for Culture & Heritage, 2020). In 1893, a petition containing almost 32,000 signatures of women over the age of 21, and a few men, reached Parliament (Brookes, 2017; Cook, 2011b). Changes were made to the Electoral Act meaning that as of 19

September 1893, *all* women were given the right to vote in general elections (Brookes, 2017; Cook, 2011b; Ministry for Culture & Heritage, 2020).

The success of the suffrage campaign for women signalled equality achievement, whereby women had obtained an element of equality before the law which was manifest in a vote available to all women, and similarly targeted pieces of legislation. For example, areas such as employment and property ownership increased women's legal presence (Else, 2018a). Similarly, political representation was obtained through the Women's Parliamentary Rights Act of 1919, which allowed women to be elected to Parliament (Brookes, 2017; Ministry for Culture & Heritage, 2020d). Liberal feminist aims of obtaining equal access to political power and representation appeared to have been achieved in New Zealand, with increased public opportunities and access previously reserved for men, made available to women.

Second Wave Feminism and Advancing Women's Equality: 1960-1990s

The second wave of feminism developed as a political movement in the 1960s, when young people began openly criticising aspects of the social order (Evans, 2015; Lorber, 2012). A greater understanding of the ways in which women experience inequality, and the social implications of this, led to a movement to penetrate more male-dominated areas of society and overcome the divide between public and private (Budgeon, 2011; Lorber, 2012). Second wave feminism is characterised by various schools of feminist theorising. Social, radical, and Marxist perspectives were used to describe both the landscape of inequality for women, and approaches to achieve women's equality. Collectively, these approaches take aim at the existence of a patriarchy, as the hierarchical, governing system created for and by men, to detail the perpetuation of inequality for women both publicly and privately (Rogan &

Budgeon, 2018). Patriarchy privileges the rule of men over the rights of women, creating a male hierarchy inside and outside of the home; “it elevates some men over other men and all men over women” (Gilligan & Richards, 2018, p. 10). Social feminism analysed power with regard to class origins and views equality as expanding the role of women beyond the home and into other areas of public life dominated by men, such as employment (Connell, 1979; Eisenstein, 1979). Radical feminism viewed the patriarchy as oppressive but placed a specific focus on the political and private victimisation of women through violence and assault, and sexual and reproductive autonomy (Doude & Tapp, 2014; Duriesmith & Meger, 2020). The main aim of radical feminism, therefore, was to achieve equality through the elimination of sex-based distinctions between men and women, which involved “radical” or more active approaches to meeting their aim (Eisenstein, 1979). For Marxist feminists, focus was placed on the oppressive nature of the economic organisation of society, meaning that equality could not be achieved until capitalism, as the cause of social divisions, was dismantled (Rafter & Natalizia, 1981; Stefano, 2014). Each of these feminist perspectives can be summated by the phrase “the personal is political”, which became a definitive slogan of second wave movements (Rogan & Budgeon, 2018). What these perspectives highlight, is the realisation and regeneration of women’s equality as a task yet to be complete.

In a New Zealand context, little substantial progress had been made after obtaining the vote, other than the increased presence of diverse women as political representatives which began with Elizabeth McCombs in 1933 (Garner, 1998). Second wave feminists adopted the liberal view of equality as equal treatment between men and women, with the additional acknowledgement of biological differences (McDonald, 2014). This move towards “different treatment” involved

attending to differences between men and women such as the physical, social, political, and economic (Munro, 2007). However, equal treatment was still the main focus, as evidenced by Mabel Howard in 1954, who waved two different sized but similarly labelled pairs of bloomers in front of the house during a debate on the Merchandise Marks Bill, to show that despite standardised sizing, variation was rife (McAloon, 2000). The result was an astonished house, as well as cross-party support and legislation in favour of standardisation (Atkinson, 2019). Mabel's waving of a societally recognised "personal item" in a public and male-dominated space symbolised the public/private dichotomy of which the private had been exempt from legal intervention (McDonald, 2014).

Legislatively, three key areas were targeted as part of second wave feminist activism in New Zealand: Violence against women, employment, and reproductive rights and motherhood (as outlined in Appendix A). As provisions to protect women from violence and allow police to intervene in instances of domestic violence were taking shape (Swarbrick, 2018), campaigns to acknowledge same-sex couples were occurring, as well as calls to decriminalise intimate relations between men (Brickell, 2020). Legislation that provided women with a framework for equal pay for equal work, receive support for raising children alone (Baker & Du Plessis, 2018) and access contraceptives and abortion services (Else, 2018a; Simpson, 2012), served to increase both individual autonomy and women's public participation. This participation was further vocalised in 1982, when the Department of Labour launched the "Positive Action" campaign (later known by the phrase "girls can do anything") to combat occupational segregation and encourage women into non-traditional industries of work (Piercy, Murray & Abernethy**,** 2006). This extensive list of legislative accomplishments towards social change during the second wave

provides both a contextual basis for the complex nature of women's inequality, and a progressive snapshot of women's equality movements in New Zealand.

Internationally, 1985 saw New Zealand ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and proclaim a global commitment to progressing substantive equality for women (Ministry of Justice, 2020a). CEDAW sparked a generation of political action towards women's equality and was described by Raday (2012) as "nourishing the tree of feminism with its branches of feminisms" (p.529). The substantive approach to women's equality encompassed by CEDAW led to a renewed focus on "women's rights as human rights", contributing to feminist activism that was now concerned with *all* forms of discrimination against women (Campbell, 2015).

Third Wave Feminism, Difference and Diversity: 1990s-2000s

Budgeon (2001) states that third wave feminism has been used to define the generational cohort of women associated with movements that began during the 1990s and continue today. A later text by Budgeon (2011) furthers her definition to describe third wave feminism as "a deconstructive impulse that seeks to challenge the construction of [social] categories and to insist on starting from the perspective of multiple differences rather than from a position that advocates equivalence" (p. 4). Third wave feminism describes an approach to equality that draws on the substantive advancement suggested in CEDAW, to focus on differences between women as opposed to differences between men and women. Conrad (2001) remarks that third wave feminism has led to the empowerment of the younger generation due to an "uncensoring" occurring within mainstream media. Such empowerment could be attributed to the focus on diversity and difference that third wave feminism encourages (Evans, 2015; Gillis, Howie, & Munford, 2004; Snyder, 2008).

A focus on diversity and differences between groups led to the (re)emergence of feminist perspectives that aimed to cater women's equality movements to those traditionally excluded from the mainstream. Postmodern approaches to feminism sought to challenge and deconstruct the category of "woman", as a loaded and hegemonic construction that contributed to the persistent divide between public and private spheres (Roseneil, 1999). Postmodern feminism pays close attention to diversity, as a discursive shift away from homogeneous representations of gender binaries (Hutcheon, 1989). Diversity has become a permanent resident in corporate discourse as organisations seek to address equality and inclusion in the workplace (Pullen, Vachhani, Gagnon & Cornelius, 2017). Diversity and difference characterise feminist approaches in the third wave through a focus on intersectional approaches to equality achievement. Developed by Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989), intersectionality describes the multiple oppressions experienced by women (Smith, 2013). With a focus on the influence and power of patriarchy, Black and post-colonial feminisms contest diverse sites of power as locations for oppression (Ebert, 1991). bell hooks (1984) suggests that difference should be addressed among women to eliminate other categories of marginalisation and create solidarity:

> The idea of common oppression [is] a false and corrupt platform disguising and mystifying the true nature of women's varied and complex social reality. Women are divided by sexist attitudes, racism, class privilege, and a host of other prejudices. Sustained woman bonding can occur only when these divisions are confronted and the necessary steps are taken to eliminate them (pp. 43-44).

For example, feminism has been criticised for its foundations in developed, Western, and predominantly white societies, that do not consider the experiences of women in under-developed countries or women of colour (Hughes, 2002; Mishra, 2013; Squire, 2007; Tripp, 2000). Symington (2004) and Campbell, Michelle, and Simon-Kumar (2011) both mention the sites of marginalisation for women as a result of

differences between women, referring to identifiers such as ethnicity, age, geographic location, and financial position, among others.

Yuval-Davis (2006) refers to these differences or categories as "social divisions" and notes the tendency to "naturalise" differences and allow them "to be seen as resulting from biological destiny linked to differential genetic pools of intelligence and personal characteristics" (p. 199). That is, naturalising difference refers to inconsistencies as biological, as opposed to socially constructed or culturally driven. In postmodern contexts, difference refers to the ways that women experience aspects of their identity within the wider society, which will differ significantly from another individual. Discourses of difference vary between cultures and traditions; however, a common theme is the tendency to "homogenize social categories and to treat all who belong to a particular social category as sharing equally the particular natural attributes (positive and negative) specific to it" (Yuval-Davis, 2006, p. 199). Where previously heterogeneity was evident in comparisons of men and women, the identical treatment of all women as one group does not consider the ways in which each woman might face marginalisation personally. Equality for Black and post-colonial feminists meant dismantling understandings of women as one group under the assumptions of shared oppression, to account for the varied ways that women experienced oppression through categories of identity (Collins, 2000b; Gines, 2011).

Discourses of difference in more recent times have focused on language such as diversity and inclusion to describe difference and equality (Ryan, Ravenswood, & Pringle, 2014). In New Zealand, gender and ethnicity have been identified as contested sites of identity. Binary categories of "man" and "woman" are increasingly unpicked and deconstructed (Butler, 1993; Fineman, 1990). The dismantling of

"womanhood" as a category of identity has opened up debates of equality as a concept, for women or more broadly, gendered identities (Jeffreys, 2014). Similarly, with increased cultural diversity in New Zealand, it is difficult to account for racial and cultural inequalities evident in individual lived experiences. The incorporation of other cultures and social norms poses further challenges to equality progression, especially when diversity is used to preface the collective national identity of "Kiwis". According to the 2018 census data, 27.4% of the population were not born in New Zealand, with the total population made up of five distinct ethnic groups: European or New Zealander (70.2%), Māori (16.5%), Asian (15.1%), Pacific peoples (8.1%), and Middle Eastern, Latin American, and African (1.5%) (Statistics New Zealand, 2018). While diversity and inclusion are considered important aspects of New Zealand society, as indicated in the next section, attempts to be intersectional are disguised and deterred by discourses of difference.

An example that best highlights the mainstreaming of diversity and inclusion in New Zealand is the 2017 women's marches, held in response to President Trump's inauguration. Research carried out by Sarah Crawford (2018) uncovered that mainstream articles praised the diversity evident in New Zealand's versions of the marches, noting aspects such as race, religion, age, ability, and gendered identity. However, the approach to diversity in these articles did not account for the intersecting identities of the individuals in attendance, or how the involvement of these individuals and their intersecting categories of identity contributed to the goals of the march (Crawford, 2018). What results is the continued grouping of individuals in alignment with particular categories of identity, without acknowledging the overlaps and intersections (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Rahman, 2010). Pringle and Strachan (2015) speak to the "fractured future" (p. 4) of diverse differences, which

appears to single out difference rather than highlight intersections of difference (Ahmed & Swan, 2016). By opening up understandings of heterogeneity in response to the homogeneous grouping of women, intersectional approaches are masked by diversity and inclusion, maintaining a focus on singular categories of identity as sites for oppression, as opposed to their interactions with one another.

Understandings of equality within the third wave involve attending to multiple categories of identity, although how to achieve equality, and for whom, is harder to distinguish. Lotz (2007) notes that this new era of feminism highlights both the complex nature of structural oppression and equality as yet to be achieved. It is not difficult to understand why some might be confused at this appearance of a crossroads in equality progression. Latent forms of inequality, a focus on diversity and inclusion, and subjective understandings of feminism have led to the questioning of feminisms applicability to present day issues of gender in the context of difference. Moreover, given the evidence of advancement, perceptions of women's equality as achieved are accentuated (Budgeon, 2011), and used as a tool for empowerment.

Postfeminism and Reclaiming Neoliberal Interpretations of Equality

The concept of "post" is used to imply that aspects associated with women's inequality "have been overcome and replaced" (Brooks, 1997, p.1). McRobbie (2004) labels postfeminism as a time after feminism that characterises the undermining of second wave feminist gains. Postfeminism as a conceptual framework is highly contested and critiqued by feminist scholars. Lotz (2007) would go as far as to suggest that postfeminism is in fact a version of third wave feminism, situating the two frameworks within close proximity of one another. Brooks (1997) identifies postfeminism as engaging with patriarchy to challenge understandings of

oppression as universally experienced, in a similar way that third wave feminism seeks to account for intersectional difference. Running alongside a renewed feminist focus on difference was the idea that feminism was dead, unnecessary, and divisive (Hawkesworth, 2004). Postfeminism stemmed from an extension of first and second-wave feminism when "some women began to examine power relations" (Baxandall & Gordon, 2005, p. 415), with "emphasis on individualism, choice, and empowerment" (Kissling, 2012, p. 492), consistent with a neoliberal ideology. Feminism had empowered women to have their voices heard, and in doing so, had made it difficult to distinguish what claiming to be a "feminist" actually meant (Mascia-Lees & Sharpe, 2000).

Neoliberalism as an ideology adheres to the fundamental concepts of principled authoritarianism and productive individualism (Giddens, 2013), allocating the role of the state to the protection of individual freedoms (Cheyne, O'Brien & Belgrave, 2000; Giddens, 2013). Further to this, Rottenberg (2014) describes neoliberalism as a politically charged grand narrative, "that moves to and from the management of the state to the inner workings of the subject, normatively constructing and interpellating individuals as entrepreneurial and capital-enhancing actors" (p. 57). The focus on constructing individual identity to illustrate creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship encourages a belief in individual choice and freedom by allocating responsibility to the individual. Neoliberal feminism, therefore, is the convergence of neoliberalism and feminism and demonstrates the notion that women should be individually responsible for their own lives and not rely on men or the state to achieve equality (Giddens, 2013; Gill & Scharff, 2011; Rottenberg, 2014). Such an approach appears to allocate a level of inherent agency to individuals for whom choice and opportunity are automatically granted. The

individual focus of neoliberal feminism means neither difference nor similarity between women take precedence, especially when the governing ideology demands individualism. The attainment of equality, therefore, is dependent on the individual to utilise and capitalise on opportunities (Teghtsoonian, 2004).

Sheryl Sandberg's "Lean In" philosophy is an example of neoliberal feminism by encouraging women to focus on what *they* can do to achieve their career ambitions (Leanin.org, 2021). Similarly, Emma Watson, and her work for the HeforShe campaign is another example of neoliberal feminism at work, as she represents the new face of feminist activism to invite men to join women in the fight to achieve equality (Jackson, 2020). These approaches to equality embody both postfeminist notions of equality achievement and neoliberal feminist ideals of individual opportunity and freedom. The visibility of women advocating for "women's rights" is seen to empower other women to be ambitious and (re)claim a seat at the male-dominated table, regardless of persistent social norms that may prevent them from doing so (Casey & Watson, 2017; Taylor, 2016).

Social campaigns also perpetuate neoliberal feminist ideals. For example, in New Zealand the "It's not OK" campaign was launched in 2007 to combat increasing rates of domestic violence. The campaign sought to create community ownership by encouraging New Zealanders to seek help for themselves (Ministry of Social Development, 2021). The campaign's overall goal was to be a "community-driven behaviour change campaign to reduce family violence in New Zealand...[by changing] attitudes and behaviour that tolerate any kind of family violence" (Ministry of Social Development, 2021, para. 1). This approach to social change relies on individuals taking responsibility for "phasing out" domestic violence through behaviour change and personal ownership (Teghtsoonian, 2004).

Gill (2016) argues that of late, only feminisms characterised by postfeminist and neoliberal ideologies are disseminated by mainstream media, as these are considered more palatable. The same associations could be made for the visibility of women as feminist role models and campaigns for social change. As a woman born into a neoliberal ideology, I was raised during a time when feminist voices were privileged and popular (Banet-Weiser & Portwood-Stacey, 2017), and discourses of difference routinely ignored intersectional experiences (Rahman, 2010). It is within this framework that McGregor's observation of stalled equality progression resides.

Summary

This chapter aimed to explore the various interpretations of equality evident through the narrative waves of feminism, as they occurred in the New Zealand context. The variation in interpretations begins with first wave liberal feminist views of equal treatment between men and women publicly, and moves to second wave social, radical and Marxist inclusions of the private sphere and critiques of patriarchal forces, before incorporating third wave postmodern perspectives on intersectional difference and diversity. Postfeminist interpretations of equality place an emphasis on the responsibility of individuals to seize equality for themselves. Similarly, increased opportunities and a focus on neoliberal tenets of individualism have given rise to feelings of achievement with regard to women's equality and fostered an indifference to feminism. Neoliberal influences, paired with the visibility of women as popular feminist role models, and the focus of social campaigns on dissemination of feminist thought through more palatable avenues, foregrounds McGregor's observation of stalled equality in New Zealand, and further evidences the existence of a plateau. The next chapter will further unpack the elusive nature of women's

equality to further support socio-cultural and political understandings of a plateau in equality progression.

Chapter Three: The Elusiveness of Women's Equality: Socio-cultural and Political Explanations of the Plateau

Despite the existence of equality movements in New Zealand, and a rich history of egalitarian measures, socio-cultural and political understandings of gender-binary stereotypes and women's roles persist. Narratives of domestication and inferior treatment firmly situate women on the metaphorical couch of traditional gender roles, while allowing them to get up and leave periodically to pursue other opportunities, so long as these other endeavours do not impinge on household responsibilities. The push and pull of women out into society and then back into the household demonstrates the elusive nature of 21st Century equality, and the norms and values that perpetuate oppressive behaviour. Where forms of political and societal inequality were once easy to pinpoint, such as the right to vote, own property, and work, latent inequalities and those associated with intersectional difference increase the complexity of attempts to progress social change.

The purpose of this chapter is to advance explanations of a plateau in women's equality in New Zealand. In this chapter I explore socio-cultural and political explanations of the plateau to explain the influence of power on a) understandings of women as a heterogenous group and b) women's individual lived experiences. I begin by discussing structures of power and how discursive and material experiences are shaped by hegemony. I then examine intersectionality and the heterogenous nature of women, as well as the appearance of resistance towards social change evidenced, for example, by later legislative changes in response to early activism. The second part of this chapter explores aspects of power that influence and interact

with women's lived experience to perpetuate feelings of individual agency and equality achievement. Lastly, I present the theoretical framework of this research and outline the research questions that inform my approach to collecting the data.

Structures of Power, Hegemony, and Discourse-Materiality

Structures of power and hegemony are said to influence communicative understandings of the world around us. Hegemony plays an important role in social structures and knowledge production. Hegemony—a term developed by Antonio Gramsci (Hopf, 2013)—is defined as the relationship between culture and power, whereby a population endorses the leadership and ideology imposed by the dominant group (Lears, 1985). Hegemony helps to explain the existence of hierarchy and social imbalance, in the perpetuation of various social structures as areas of power that inform knowledge and contribute to the experiences of social groups as privileged or oppressed. Privilege and oppression are the result of an imbalance of power which exists to highlight difference and reinforce hierarchies. In the case of women's (in)equality, structures of power generate "powerful political arguments" (Cornwall & Rivas, 2015, p. 401) in the form of oppressive social constructions that situate women below men in the hierarchy (Golub, Morokvasic, & Quiminal, 1997). Discursive and material practices help to explain the extent to which women experience privilege or oppression as a result of social imbalance.

Discourse-materiality describes how events are experienced discursively and materially, as words are credited with determining "who and what is "normal", standard and acceptable" (Meriläinen, Tienari, Thomas & Davies, 2004, p. 544), shaping the material world in the context of power. In the framework of discursive and material practices, Nealon (2008) notes that power is practiced rather than held, identifying the power effects generated by discourse which either allow for the

occurrence of change, or the perpetuation of oppressive behaviour (Hardy & Thomas, 2015). Practices describe the embodiment of power in ways of doing and being (Knights, 1992). Reckwitz (2002) describes practices as ways "in which bodies are moved, objects are handled, subjects are treated, things are described and the world is understood" (p. 250). What individuals discursively understand and materially experience are inextricably intertwined (Barad, 2007; Hardy & Thomas, 2015; Orlikowski & Scott, 2015). Discourse does not operate separately from material experience but works to provide meaning for experiences. For example, discursive understandings of "gender" roles in many cultural contexts result in material inequalities between men and women, such as unequal pay for equal work, demonstrating power relations; and Hartsock (1983) claims that if material conditions were deemed a valuable element of lived experience, then primary caretaking, as women's work, would be carefully accounted for as influencing individual worldview with regard to experiences of privilege and oppression.

Feminist understandings of privilege often refer more specifically to advantages that are granted, not earned, as well as rights or entitlements related to rank or status that are enacted for the benefit of the individual, all within the wider societal context of oppression (Black & Stone, 2005). Contrary to definitions of privilege, oppression actively details the oppressed as well as the existence of an oppressor. Oppression involves determining the source(s) of marginalisation in order to recognise and understand the lived experience of oppressed peoples (Campbell et al., 2011). Oppression, evidently, is complex and multifaceted, and has discursive and material implications on women's lived experience. The practices that women enact as part of their individual sense-making highlight the extent to which oppression is experienced and how social movements should seek to address

inequality. Harris (2017) observes that knowledge results from experience, and this knowledge is unique for groups that are differently located within social structures. My doctoral study aims to examine the interactions between discursive understandings and material ways of being and demonstrate how women navigate life and women's issues to make sense of the world around them. Understandings of discursive and material experiences of structures of power contribute to the wider discussion of socio-cultural and political explanations of the plateau, especially in the realm of intersectionality.

Intersectionality and Women's Different Access to Equality

Oppression is noted as a fundamental reason for feminism's existence (Gilligan & Richards, 2018). Focused on eradicating oppression and inequality for women, more recent feminist perspectives are based on the idea that women experience oppression in multiple forms, all resulting from the existence of a patriarchy (bell hooks, 1984). Where previously women's heterogeneity was associated with their differences with men, a focus on difference and diversity, and the multiple intersections of oppression, has led feminist theorising to focus on women's internal heterogeneity (McCall, 2005). That is, women's differences from each other. Griffin and Chávez (2012) state that to ignore difference is to neglect the complexity of individual lives and the communicative narratives that we experience. In this way, intersectionality is largely defined as a framework that focuses on various *categories of difference*, which form a person's identity in relation to how their social grouping might increase or inhibit their oppression within structures of power. However, the extent to which *differences* are acknowledged is contested, and difference has been referred to as "endless", given the multiple categories that contribute to identity and experience (Klinger, 1995; Ludvig, 2006). Thus, key pieces of scholarship choose to

focus on interactions between class, race, and gender, as centralised grounds for oppression (Collins, 2000a; King, 1988; Yuval-Davis, 1997). In this regard, intersectionality is used in this research to a) address difference and b) examine perceptions of feminism as "exclusive" (Zack, 2007).

Intersectionality has its origin in Black feminist thought and is associated with Crenshaw, who introduced the metaphor of intersectionality as a profound critique of approaches to discrimination that did not account for "intersections" (Carastathis, 2014). To unpack complex understandings of intersectionality, Crenshaw (1989) provides a narrative explanation:

> Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars travelling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in an intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination…[b]ut it is not always easy to reconstruct an accident: Sometimes the skid marks and the injuries simply indicate that they occurred simultaneously, frustrating efforts to determine which driver caused the harm (p. 149).

Crenshaw's narrative description of intersectionality demonstrates the various forms of oppression that individual women might encounter, as well as how forms of oppression intersect in a way that is not mutually exclusive. Another example relates to women apart of the LGBTQIA+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex, asexual, and non-conforming) community and how they experience oppression. Where biological definitions of "male" and "female" are imposed on individuals, gender identity, sexuality, and alignment with one particular sex are not understood as fixed and are dependent on individual choices (Howard, 2018; Human Rights Commission, 2010b). Discursive and material experiences of (in)equality demonstrate power dynamics associated with difference and highlight

wider responses to instances of oppression that may focus on one particular category of identity. In acknowledging the intersections of oppression, the focus of my doctoral research is made apparent in the attempt to use women's differences and experiences as the starting off thought (Harding, 1993) that progresses movements toward social change, where such movements that are constituted in communication are retold through stories.

Intersectionality has since been popularised in feminist theorising and thought, as somewhat of a "buzzword" (Davis, 2008). The "mainstreaming" of intersectionality in feminist movements has led some scholars to comment on the tokenistic and scattered nature in which intersectionality is applied. Carastathis (2014) speaks to the appropriation of intersectionality for the purposes of predominantly white-dominated spaces such as women's studies and feminist theory. The negation of intersectionality's origins and foundations in Black feminist thought has also caused confusion as to what the concept means and how it should be used (Belkhir, 2001; Carastathis, 2014). Similarly, multiple categories of identity and the shattering of hegemonically endorsed social constructions have resulted in fractured identities that portray society both as fixed and stable, and dynamic and chaotic (Bradley, 2015). Given the confusion surrounding intersectionality, and the focus on difference as a central tenet, I utilise Davies (2008) definition of intersectionality which provides a comprehensive account of the interactions between identity and experience; intersectionality is the "interaction between gender, race, and other categories of difference in individual lives, social practices, institutional arrangements, and cultural ideologies and the outcomes of these interactions in terms of power" (p. 68). Within this research, intersectionality is used to critically explore the heterogeneous nature of women and the intersections of categories of difference

in relation to systemic oppression and social change (Collins, 2015; Hayden & O'Brien Hallstein, 2012).

Resistance to Social Change

Discourses of resistance within social change appear to follow two paths: 1) resistance can lead to social change and 2) resistance can prevent social change. Feminist activism has historically aligned with resistance to implement social change, resisting the patriarchal structures that marginalise women. As Harris (2017) frames it, the difficulty in instigating resistance lies in attempting to both explain and change the world concurrently. Further to this, Rorty (1980) observes that discourses help develop an understanding of the world, but they do not necessarily reflect lived reality. Dutta (2011) notes that discourses of resistance should be understood in regard to socio-cultural and political processes that seek to address discursive and material inequalities that inform structures of power. The communicative processes that surround societal issues can differ from the material experience, and yet it is necessary to consider both when appealing for social change. As a communicative process, discourses of resistance define and shape how marginalised and dominant groups interact and are positioned within the wider network of power. Women are oppressed by patriarchal notions of their role within society, which leads to a resistance of patriarchy itself (Reckdenwald & Parker, 2008). However, the material experiences of women detail the extent to which inequality is felt, as experiences that are constituted in communication and enveloped by historic discourses of resistance. Dutta (2011) goes on to state that communication "creates the thread that weaves acts of resistance in relationship to the dominant structures of oppression, offering entry points for disrupting and/or transforming these structures" (p. 8). Social movements that aim to achieve equality for women are openly resisting the social

structures that have placed them within the margins. The entry points for disruption are thought to be those factors that enable the perpetuation of inequality.

However, resistance in response *to* feminist aims and goals has at times disrupted progress towards social change and prolonged instances of oppression (Beck, 1988). Gill and Scharff (2011) refer to "backlash discourses" that simultaneously describe women's rejection of feminism, and notions of feminism as outdated or irrelevant given postfeminist views of equality as achieved (Kamen, 1991). Creedon (1993) describes media framing of feminists as "bra-burners" and "man-haters" seeking to dismantle family values as to blame for the rejection of feminism as a "label". Similarly, stereotypes of feminists as confrontational (Kamen, 1991) and their enactments of resistance as "catfights" invalidates the strength of feminist activism and trivialises women's equality progression (Beck, 1988). The resistance to feminism is a product of a postfeminist perspective, where related discourses depict "the *entanglement* [emphasis in original] of feminist and antifeminist ideas" (Gill & Scharff, 2011, p. 4), as a pair of "oppositional dualisms" (Cirksena & Cuklanz, 1992, p. 20).

Legislation has historically politicised women's issue and resisted social change (Motta, Flesher Fominaya, Eschle & Cox, 2011). The period associated with second wave feminism saw the introduction of legislation that aimed to expand the political rights of women publicly and privately (Rogan & Budgeon, 2018). It was also within this time period that rapid change occurred which led to, for example, a change in attitudes towards women's rights and an increase in women's political representation and influence (Inglehart, Ponarin, & Inglehart, 2017). However, other, more complex, aspects of women's equality have been slow to change, and prior legislation that sought to increase the rights of women has been unable to contribute

to the overall picture of equality progression. For example, the introduction of the Contraception, Sterilisation, and Abortion Act 1977 was in response to second wave feminist activism that sought increased autonomy and rights of women over their bodies, but the act itself dismissed public feeling and restricted access to abortion (Cook, 2018). Abortion has stayed a contested social issue, with this particular act remaining untouched for 40 years (Family Planning, 2021). It was not until March 2020 that abortion was decriminalised in New Zealand, making it legal for an individual to self-refer for abortion services (Family Planning, 2021; New Zealand Parliament, 2020). Decriminalisation involved making changes to the legal frameworks for abortion outlined in the Crimes Act 1961 and the Contraception, Sterilisation, and Abortion Act 1977 (New Zealand Parliament, 2020). The politicisation of women's issues (such as reproductive choices) and the existence of later legislative change in response to earlier activism (see Appendix A) highlight that progress can be slow, and persistent resistance to inequality is required in the face of legislative (and public) resistance to change. While discourses of resistance are thus viewed as disruptive when aimed at achieving social change (Dutta, 2011), the enactment of agency to instigate such change is understood as only possible within the societal boundaries that regulate individual choice.

Agency and the Illusion of Choice

The opportunity to enhance individual freedoms is seen as the enactment of agency, whereby each person "is free to select whatever action she or he desires or may discriminate between different available options and pick the most suitable" (Hughes, 2002, p. 83). Agency is both a central and contested concept in feminist literature (Davies, 1991; Lee & Logan, 2019; Sylvester, 2019) with its central premise of autonomy paired with the nature of women's oppression. Agency is

understood in multiple ways, from the ability and entitlement to define self-interest and make individual choices (Mishra & Tripathi, 2011), as well as the capacity to outline personal goals and act on them (Kabeer, 1999). As such, each individual's innate access to freedom and choice is in conjunction with, and within the boundaries of, their society (Davies, 1991, Foucault, 1972).

While these definitions bring attention to *individual* agency, the feminist context includes *collective* agency by highlighting voice, empowerment, consciousness, and activism within a patriarchal and oppressive setting. Individuals are viewed as agentic until conditions cause their agency to be limited or removed, prompting calls for collective action to address collective problems. Davies (1991) describes the conditions of individuals apart of minority groups, such as women, and the societal boundaries in and around their enactment of agency. Bordo (1998) makes a similar observation, noting that agency is not held but that people or groups enact agency differently within their social conditions. In the case of women, a woman may choose to enact personal agency that benefits the individual, as opposed to agency that benefits the collective. The enactment of agency in this way might enact change but might also result in the perpetuation of oppressive discourses that reinforce hierarchy (Herndl & Licona, 2007). The ability to select opportunities to speak and act for both the individual and the collect might then be viewed as the enactment of agency, without proper recognition for the social structures that surround "choice".

Choice is closely tied to ideas of neoliberal individualism and agency, and discourses of choice tend to focus on freedom (Hughes, 2002). Power relations and structural constraints inform individual decision-making while portraying feminist ideals of freedom (Chen, 2013; Scott, 1988). Despite the interplay between

constraint and freedom, societal understandings of women as lacking agency are recognised as inhibiting women from achieving equality to men (Davies, 1991). However, the homogenous grouping of women as agency deficient does not account for the different ways in which women experience and enact agency in their lived experience. Choices have different implications for individuals based on factors such as race, class, education and so on. While similarities do exist in personal stories, differences are also presented in individual accounts of situations that either inhibit or enhance agency. As Herndl and Licona (2007) note, individuals can be agents of change, perpetrators of structures of power, or at times, a combination of both as examples of contradiction and ambiguity. Discourses of choice are then seen to encourage individual agency while at the same time they restrict "freedom".

A focus on agency and choice has faced criticism for not considering instances of "choice" that are far from the ideal (Oksala, 2011). Structural constraints prevent individuals from freely choosing their path, and instead create the "illusion of choice" (Chen, 2013; Hill & Giles, 2014). Oksala (2011) notes that women make choices within a network of oppressive power structures that restrict their options, and at the same time, construct their lived experience. She uses the example of women "opting out" of higher paid roles or "choosing" to stay at home as enactments of choice within a neoliberal framework. Similarly, Hughes (2002) describes career choice and the "gendering" of men's and women's work to show how women's career choices are constrained. It is not until individuals attempt to expand their choices that these constraints become apparent. Buzzanell and Lucas (2013) identify that individuals consent to and resist constraints as they make sense of and navigate structural limitations. An awareness of structural limitations enables individuals to resist and strategically mitigate the implications of a neoliberal

"choice" on lived experience (Chen, 2013; Parpart, 2010; Pullen, Rhodes, & Thanem, 2017). However, the illusion of choice continues to emphasise ideas of freedom and opportunity, reinforcing the perception that women's equality has been achieved despite evidence of a plateau in equality progression.

Complacency and the Appearance of Women's Equality

Arguments of complicity are sometimes described as enactments of complacency. In the feminist context, complacency is used to signal, describe, or warn against a stalling or lack of progress towards women's equality (see Brown & Diekman, 2013; Gibelman, 2002). Complacency, contentment, ignorance, and stalled progress are all associated with the frustration felt that women's equality has not yet been enacted (Beirne & Wilson, 2016; England, Levine, & Mishel, 2020; McGregor, 2013). In association with postfeminist understandings of equality as having been achieved (McRobbie, 2004), vocalised and silent enactments of complacency are negatively associated with perpetuating a plateau in progress. In the context of New Zealand, a cultural narrative of progress situated in postfeminist perspectives interprets the representation of women in positions of power as indicative of equality achievement.

New Zealand's history features many influential women who were passionate for both change and their field of expertise. The political achievements of some of these women has resulted in beneficial outcomes for women both in their own time and with continuing impact today, bringing increased access to opportunity, the ability to pursue a career, and enhanced agency to speak and act to bring about social change. What appears to result is what the World Economic Forum (2019) terms "the role model effect" with implications that Jackson (2020) explores in her discussion of "celebrity feminism" and the feminist associations of younger women. The women mentioned throughout Chapter One and later in Chapter Two contribute to

increased political freedoms and representation for New Zealand women, with more recent feminist approaches aimed at empowering younger women and encouraging collective approaches to societal issues (Casey & Watson, 2017; Taylor, 2016). These women act as role models to current and future women, masking persistent inequality through a neoliberal framework that encourages individuals to pursue equal opportunities for themselves. Cornwall and Rivas (2015) note that within a neoliberal framework, empowerment is viewed as an individual tool "to be maximised for efficiency" (p. 406).

Wolbrecht and Campbell (2007) note that women in positions of influence help to compensate for instances of inequality, past and present, increase political engagement, and empower the contribution of voices to neglected issues. The reference to the presence of role models or "celebrity feminists" as a form of "compensation" suggests the recognition of the suffering or oppression experienced by women previously as a result of gender-binary stereotypes and social norms. Women were previously kept from occupying spaces (and arguably still are) that allowed them to enact change, and these "role models" present as appealing exceptions to the rule for other aspirational women. According to Morgenroth, Ryan and Peters (2015), women as role models are able to "influence role aspirants' achievements, motivation, and goals by acting as behavioral models, representations of the possible, and/or inspirations" (p.4). Minority groups, such as women, are thought to benefit greatly from the presence of role models who demonstrate the ability to overcome barriers to achieve successful outcomes (Lockwood, 2006). The ability to relate to and feel inspired by women who occupy positions in male-dominated spaces, or work to gain inclusion, characterises the influence of role models. When an individual can identify similarities in interests or traits with a

woman leader, an upward social comparison is created that can enhance a sense of self (Hoyt & Simon, 2011). As such, other women can feel empowered to follow in the footsteps of women leaders and pursue opportunities that challenge gender-binary stereotypes.

Despite the widespread benefits of women's achievements and actions to obtain or serve in positions of political significance, role models can have negative implications for equality progression (Porter & Serra, 2020). As examples of individuals overcoming the odds, role models can appear somewhat "untouchable" to other women and their circumstances unattainable (Hoyt & Simon, 2011). The persistence of inequality, binary stereotypes, occupational segregation, and glass ceilings make replicating the path of role models difficult, given that this path is often not direct or straightforward for women. Similarly, once women are able to enter spaces that role models occupy, they can be discouraged by the "gendered" ratio which leans more towards men, or the stereotypes that embody that space that women must navigate and challenge (Cheryan et al., 2011). Those who feel unable to challenge stereotypes may display masculine traits to fit in, which results in perceptions of "bossy" managers or isolated and fixated scientists (Cheryan et al., 2011; Hoyt & Simon, 2011).

Where women are not able to pursue a similar path to role models, the existence of quotas to increase women's representation exist. Quotas are not a part of New Zealand's political landscape in a formal sense, but they are evident in other countries. In some instances, the implementation of quotas can result in further perpetuation of masculine stereotypes, as women are not seen to occupy roles based on personal merit and are then at risk of adopting stereotypical male behaviours to "earn their place" (Bonder & Nari, 1995; Krook, 2006). Likewise, the contributions

of women included in quota processes are devalued and they must work even harder in some cases to be seen as a valuable representative (Krook, 2006). The visibility of women in positions of power and significance can, therefore, be both beneficial and limiting to women who seek to pursue similar opportunities for themselves. Within a neoliberal framework and postfeminist perspective, the role model effect places an emphasis on individual action towards seizing opportunities for personal success. This has meant that less of a focus is placed on solidarity and collective action when the perception of complacency is embedded in notions that equality has been achieved, and individualism results in a concentration on "self".

Solidarity, Collectivism, and the sites of activism

Scholz (2015) and Sweetman (2013) describe solidarity as the bringing together of individuals with the aim of enacting change on the basis of a common goal. Reno (2013) speaks to the notion of being a part of something, as opposed to being the same as others. From this perspective, to enact social change women must be brought together in a way that acknowledges differences, accepts differing priorities, and all with the aim of gaining equality, as opposed to campaigning for social change with an individualistic view. Historically, women would meet in small groups to share personal experiences about oppression, which would often be confirmed by others within the group to achieve a sense of solidarity (Freeman, 1972). Consciousness-raising and the sharing of experiences helps to build a sense of solidarity and contributes to collectivism. Similarly, collectivism was manifest in physical and public acts of activism such as marches, petitions, or sit-ins.

Buzzanell (2003) observes that with a refreshed focus on diversity and difference, feminist activism is challenged with developing and sustaining feminist agendas that strike a balance between difference and commonality to form

compelling grounds for collectivism. Collectivism, as an extension of solidarity, is the action associated with extending the common ground to include social change that benefits all women. Differences are inherent within any social group, yet solidarity is the act of acknowledging difference, whilst also recognising similarity. Reno (2013) is of the opinion that solidarity is possible across differences if a common goal or belief is shared among the group. For example, working women may be concerned with equality in domestic work, whilst stay-at-home mothers may prioritise childcare provisions, consistent with a second-wave feminist perspective. This is not to say that these issues only affect certain groups of women. Ewig and Ferree (2013) distinguish between inclusivity and exclusivity in relation to solidarity and feminist organising. They state that inclusive solidarity seeks to develop common ground across differences, whereas exclusive solidarity focuses on similarities as the basis for common ground (Ewig & Ferree, 2013). Solidarity within a third wave feminist context describes the bond between women who, despite the intersectional differences among them, unite for a common cause; “when we show our concern for the collective, we strengthen our solidarity” (bell hooks, 1984, p. 64).

However, while unification suggests positive steps towards enacting social change, this alliance has at times resulted in the formation of feminist “cliques” that have divided women (bell hooks, 1984; Sweetman, 2013). Scholz (2015) also determines that solidarity is without obligation, meaning that members of the group are not bound to each other or to actions towards the goal. bell hooks (1984) advocates for inclusive solidarity by identifying the importance of individual women fighting oppressive behaviours that may not personally affect them. She goes on to highlight the destructive nature of a focus on individual concerns that trade feminist

goals for individualised participation. A turn towards narrative and personal stories has drawn criticism for creating a focus on individual issues, neglecting the problems of other diversely situated people, or acknowledging the social structures that perpetuate oppression (Disch & Hawkesworth, 2016). The implications of a neoliberal framework and a focus on individualism draw attention to the back and forth between inclusive and exclusive solidarity, and the various sites of activism that women find themselves in. Activism typically represents collective progress towards meaningful change (Benford & Snow, 2000). Sites of activism or spaces of agency (Takhar, 2007) are not only reserved for those who identify as feminist but refer to individualised places where women are active both publicly and privately. Feminist subjectivities and postfeminist perspectives have led to the fracturing of activist efforts and energies. Instead, individuals are responsible for seizing opportunities and improving their own conditions as part of a recognition of equality achievement (Giddens, 2013; Rottenberg, 2014). Moreover, globalization and global technologies have increased the identification of individual problems as global problems (Ackerly & True, 2010; Hawkesworth, 2018). Feminist activism is then viewed as simultaneously individual and global, with varied sites of activism evident for both instances.

The internet has become a site for widespread activism, evident in intersectional movements such as #MeToo and Black Lives Matter that highlight the varied ways in which women experience oppression. Social media offers women the ability to document and share individual experiences as both a personal journal and public forum (Keller, 2012), which was increasingly visible during the (re)emergence of #MeToo. Kennedy (2007) believes the internet is an effective tool for consciousness-raising for current day feminists, just as second-wave feminists

used meetings in their home to generate awareness and discuss women's issues. However, *clicktivism* describes the engagement of individuals in socio- cultural and political issues as non-committal responses that may not require specialised knowledge (Halupka, 2018). As a result, clicktivism may not lead to sustainable action or social change because solidarity is lacking. Lee and Hsieh (2013) use the examples of the "like" or "share" button on Facebook or the changing of profile pictures in support of social causes. Social media and digital interactions also highlight the contradictions between increased agency for women and public/private discourse (Cole, 2015; Faludi, 1991; Stroud, 2014). Similarly, the non-committal aspect of online participation speaks to Scholz (2015) observations of a lack of obligation, which in turn reinforces neoliberal notions of individualism and online engagement as individual agency (Halupka, 2018).

A focus on individualism under a neoliberal ideology and more latent themes of inequality have instigated forms of personalised activism that work to adjust or change personal circumstances, such as in domestic responsibilities, relationships, and career/family progression. In this way, activism may encompass refusals to conform to traditional female domestic roles, tolerate sexist comments, or remain in a toxic relationship. Ways of refusing these aspects of oppression may include vocal or silent enactments of activism. Contrary to notions of silence as an enactment of complacency, Fivush (2004) notes that both voice and silence imply the use of language and of being heard or not heard. In this way, silence is not only viewed as a "symbol of passivity and powerlessness" (Gal, 1991, p. 175), but as a site of activism as individuals choose to avoid or negate situations that might cause harm. Both voice and silence constitute sites of activism if they result in change at the individual level. The implications of overarching frameworks and perspectives, such as neoliberalism

and postfeminism, demonstrate the extent to which individuals feel and are able to engage with activist efforts to enact change for themselves. As such, the landscape of solidarity and collectivism has shifted and the existence of a plateau in equality progression is due, in part, to postfeminist perceptions of women's equality as achieved.

The Theoretical Framework

Socio-cultural and political explanations of the plateau demonstrate that despite historical achievements made by and for women, approaches to women's equality have become fractured. Structures of power have significant implications on women's lived experience and mask the true extent of women's inequality. Systemic oppression persists but is disguised by a cultural narrative of progression and neoliberal ideas of individualism, alongside postfeminist assumptions of equality achievement. Throughout this chapter, I have outlined the influence of a neoliberal framework and postfeminism on women's discursive and material lived experiences to further advance understandings of a plateau in women's equality progression. Women's equality is subsequently positioned as elusive, and as both achieved and unachieved.

New Zealand's history, the global and local data, and the socio-cultural and political evidence strongly advocate for the existence of a plateau in women's equality progression. It is also clear that women are heterogenous and experience (in)equality in varied ways. Smith (1993) observed that feminist communication should not only allow women access to communicative tools, but that women should also take an active role in communicative processes. Discursive and material lived experience communicates how individuals interact with structures of power, as important sites for understanding the nature of inequality. This research takes an

intersectional approach to understand how differences intersect to inform individual experiences of women's equality. As highlighted throughout this chapter, a focus on difference has led to fractured identities and attempts to be intersectional have resulted in the singling out of categories of identity (Ahmed & Swan, 2016), as targeted sites of social change. Similarly, feminist subjectivities are said to confuse the overall aim of achieving women's equality when no clear path is identifiable (Mascia-Lees & Sharpe, 2000).

Alongside an intersectional focus, this research utilises women's personal stories as the "starting off thought" (Harding, 1993) for understanding how structures of power discursively and materially manifest in individual accounts of lived experience. An understanding of how dominant ideologies or grand narratives, and cultural master narratives influence lived experience can provide greater insight into how women negotiate the plateau and navigate inequality. The research questions that inform the research are as follows:

1. *In what ways do personal stories of women's (in)equality inform identification with feminism and highlight intersectional difference?*
2. *In what ways are grand and master narratives evident in participants' personal narratives of women's (in)equality?*
3. *How do women negotiate the plateau and navigate experiences of (in)equality in their own lives?*

These questions support the overarching aim of this study to examine how differences between women affect individual experiences of women's equality and help to explain the plateau in progression towards women's equality. The diagram below illustrates how evidence presented so far to explain the existence of a plateau contributes to the formation of the research questions. The next chapter outlines the

methodological approach to the research and the methods applied to obtain data and undertake data analysis.

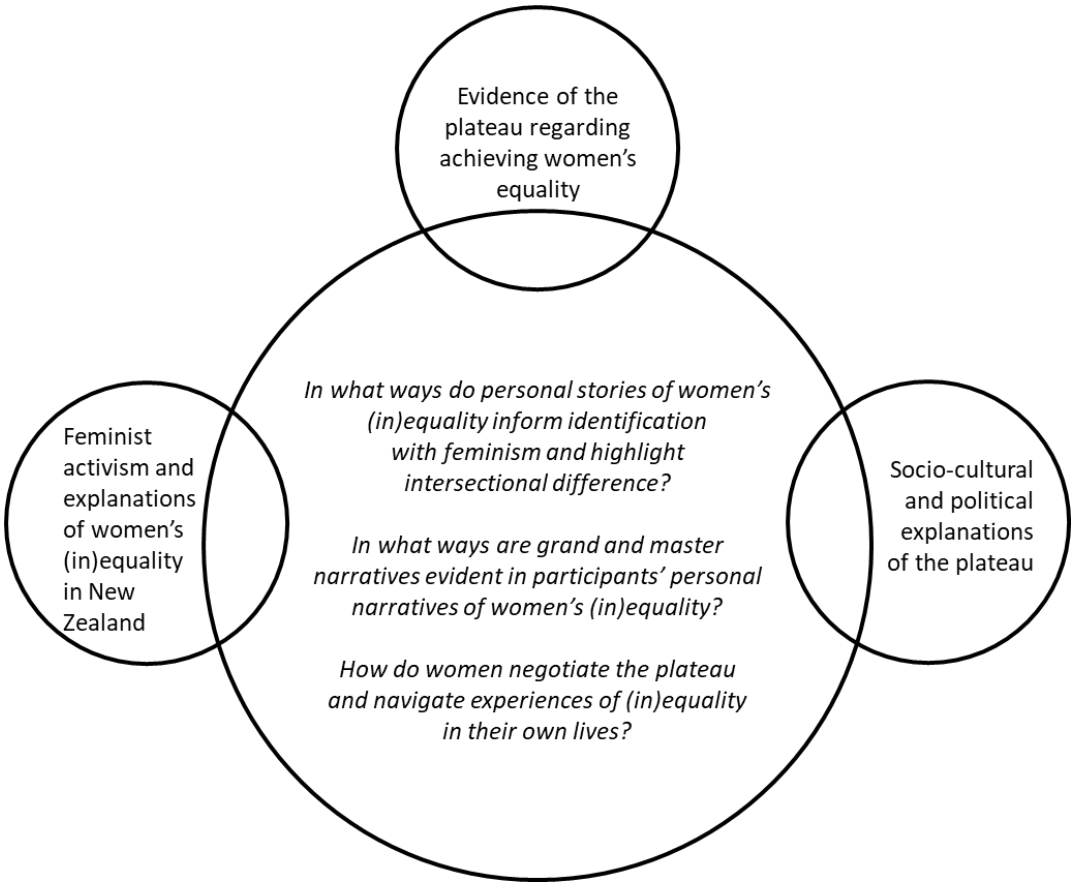

Figure 1. The relationship between evidence of a plateau in women's equality and the research questions.

Chapter Four: Capturing Women's Lived Experiences of (In)Equality: Utilising the "Materialist Moment" in Feminist Standpoint Theory

Understanding how women experience (in)equality, in the context of a plateau in women's equality in New Zealand, involves a focus on personal stories of lived experience as further evidence of *difference.* The aim of this research is to explore 1) how intersectional differences between women impact individual experiences of women's equality and 2) how these differences might help to explain the stalling of equality as evidenced by the plateau. The research questions identified in the previous chapter contribute to the wider research aim:

1. *In what ways do personal stories of women's (in)equality inform identification with feminism and highlight intersectional difference?*
2. *In what ways are grand and master narratives evident in participants' personal narratives of women's (in)equality?*
3. *How do women negotiate the plateau and navigate experiences of (in)equality in their own lives?*

These questions guided the research, which sought to uncover how the analysis of women's experiences—as perspectives communicated by a marginalised group—could highlight how women differently view, and were affected by, the current plateau in women's equality, as well as how they identified with the concept of "feminism". The purpose of this chapter is to outline the methodology and data collection methods that underpin this research. The methodology for this study was qualitative and took an interpretive ontological and feminist standpoint epistemological perspective. The focus on women's lived experience highlights the discursive and material practices that influence individual standpoint.

I begin this chapter by outlining the qualitative methodological approach to this research and the relationship between ontology and epistemology in feminist research. I then describe feminist standpoint theory and the "materialist moment" (Hirschmarm, 1998), to explain the focus of this study on women's discursive and material lived experience. My role as both a researcher and an "outsider within" the research positions me as reflexive and as such, I acknowledge that I bring my own lived experience to the research, in addition to the intersectional experiences of the participants. My exploration of reflexive practice is followed by an explanation of participant recruitment and selection, and the ethical considerations observed in the collection of data. The methods for data collection used in the research are outlined and explained, which included diary entries and interviews. The procedure for collecting the data is detailed in conjunction with a description of how member checking was used to confirm or challenge my interpretation of participant stories. Finally, I define the data analysis methods utilised to interpret and retell participant data. These methods of analysis include intersectional, thematic, and narrative, which work to reinforce the focus of this research on women's heterogeneity and their lived experience of (in)equality.

A Qualitative Interpretive Approach

A qualitative approach to research is used to get closer to participant lived experiences and perspectives through methods of observation or interviewing (Denzin & Ryan, 2011). Interpretive research focuses on human experiences and interactions as processes of sense making, acknowledging the phenomenological influences of the social, cultural, and historical that produce lived experience (Fossey Harvey, McDermott & Davidson, 2002). In feminist research, qualitative methods such as interviews are concerned with interpreting and improving the social

conditions of women, whereby the researcher advocates for change by contributing the results (Fontana & Frey, 2005). The process of sense making to interpret lived experience contributes to understandings of discursive and material reality (Anderson & Meyer, 1988). As such, this study utilises a qualitative interpretive methodology through a feminist lens, to interpret individual women's lived experiences of (in)equality within the social conditions that they inhabit. A qualitative approach requires close interaction with participants and provides subjective insight into the lives of participants, and the dynamic nature of individual identity formation. The interpretation of lived experience within the societal boundaries where meaning making takes place, demonstrates how collective norms and expectations influence understandings of women as a group. Next, I explore the dynamic relationship between ontology and epistemology in feminist research.

The Relationship between Ontology and Epistemology in Feminist Research

Within feminist research, the relationship between ontology and epistemology is contested in the sense that they are seen as *intertwined*, as opposed to separate perspectives of knowing and knowing (Hemmings, 2012; Randall, 2010; Wise & Stanley, 1983). Our reality, and the knowledge which governs our way of *being,* are subjective, continually constructed embodiments of how we view the world we live in, and how we perform within it (Hemmings, 2012; Randall, 2010). To separate ontology and epistemology would be to take an objective stance, viewing reality as somewhat *disconnected* from the experiences and perspectives we, as women, develop. Hemmings (2012) explains the advantages of a fluid relationship between ontology and epistemology:

> Feminist epistemologists have stressed the significance of intersubjectivity and relationality (MacKenzie [&] Stoljar, 2000) not only as critiques of existing fantasies of objective knowledge produced

> by autonomous subjects, but also as ways of valuing other modes of knowing that prioritise dialogue and collectivity (Assiter, 2000; Collins, 2000). Such work highlights the importance of feeling for others as a way of transforming ourselves and the world, and thus renders affect as a way of moving across ontology and epistemology (p. 148).

Hemmings (2012) use of *affect* refers to the relationship between ontology and epistemology, acknowledging an overlap by naming it "the interface" (p. 149), which describes the exchanging of information from one component to another to create a platform for collaboration. In this way, emergent feminist research is testing and rejecting the boundaries of "positivist objectivity" and placing significant value on knowledge production and experience as a way to enact social change.

Feminist Standpoint Theory and the "Materialist Moment"

The use of feminist standpoint epistemology in this research emphasises a focus on women's individual lived experience, as the "starting off thought" (Harding, 1993) for understanding women's (in)equality. Brooks (2007) states that researchers taking a feminist standpoint approach should position women at the centre of the research with the acknowledgement that their experiences, as they experience them, provide a more concrete understanding of what life looks and feels like for today's women. The aim of feminist standpoint theory is to view society from the perspective of the marginalised, acknowledging their multiple differences, and accepting their differing standpoints, which are informed by their experiences of the world (Brooks, 2007; Crasnow, 2009; Harding, 1993; Weisman, 2016). It should be acknowledged that women "occupy many different standpoints and inhabit many different realities" (Hekman, 2004, p. 227), and these multiple realities are discursively and materially experienced. Hirschmarm (1998) identified a "materialist moment" in feminist standpoint theory, and the ability to understand lived experience as residing in discourse, while acknowledging the failure of discourse alone to account for the

materiality of experience. In this regard, the discursive vision of the patriarchy structures the material experiences that women inadvertently participate in (Hartsock, 1998). A materialist moment in standpoint theory emphasises the continuous emergence of new discourses and interpretations (Hirschmarm, 1998), such as those associated with equality during the feminist waves. Furthermore, the materialist moment enables greater insight into the extent to which power is associated with specific differences through the material reality that perpetuates oppression (Hirschmarm, 1998). The articulation of different forms of oppression that affect women differently acknowledges the intersections of categories of identity that ties an intersectional focus to standpoint theory (Few-Demo, 2014). Standpoint theory is positioned as another means to highlight women's *difference* in the exploration of lived experience, and in the context of the materialist moment. As such, this research relies on Harding's (1993) principle of the "starting off thought" to place women's lived experience at the centre of the research, as a way to form an understanding of the discursive and material landscape of women's lives. As a woman myself, and as the primary researcher, understandings of my own lived experience and identity contribute to establishing my association with both the research and participants, as an "outsider within".

Researcher Reflexivity: The "Outsider Within"

Reflexive practice involves examining a personal stance—usually that of the primary researcher—on an issue in accordance with individual experiences and worldviews, as broader context for our actions (Cunliffe, 2004). Qualitative methodologies have adapted over time to include reflexivity as a way to locate the researcher's position, interest, and field of experience within their area of study (Etherington, 2004; Metta, 2010). Hertz (1997) noted that reflexivity involves ongoing interrogation of what we

know and how we know in tandem with living our lives. As a result, reflexivity represents the scrutiny of individual knowledge production and its relationship to the choice of paradigms and methods within research, as well as the research topic itself (Crotty, 1998; Etherington, 2004; Meta, 2011). Cunliffe (2004) refers to critical reflexive practice in relation to this idea of distancing oneself and yet, being able to simultaneously look both inside and out to critically examine actioned that are underpinned by assumptions. As a result, critical reflexive practice involves focusing on three key factors: "Existential: Who am I and what kind of person do I want to be? Relational: How do I relate to others and to the world around me? Praxis: The need for self-conscious and ethical action based on a critical questioning of past actions and of future possibilities" (Jun, 1994). Etherington (2004) suggests that we look beyond self-awareness, as the act of being aware of our current thoughts and standpoint, towards reflexivity, as it reveals the difference in how we view "self" and assess changes in the context of the "changing world" (p. 30). Researchers are required to acknowledge their own experiences and the impact that these experiences may have on their behaviour, whilst also acting as agents of their own lives, critically examining underlying assumptions and following through with action (Cunliffe, 2004; Etherington, 2004).

New, post-structural methods of feminist research are concerned with determining the ways that knowledge and power are linked and can be deconstructed to evoke equality for minority groups, including women (Etherington, 2004; Foucault, 1980; Metta, 2010), by taking into account intersectionality and multiple identities. Etherington (2004) notes that feminist approaches to research, in conjunction with the focus on equality and its multiple interpretations, challenge researchers to make known their beliefs and acknowledge narrative influences while

dismantling the hierarchy between the researcher and the researched. In order to effect change, researchers encourage minority group members to voice their experiences and worldview, in conjunction with an explanation of the researcher's experiences and relationship to the research. Beyond this, Etherington (2004) also notes that societally

> we have been encouraged to view all that has gone before as important "stories" that were constructions of their time. All of those stories have served a purpose and are part of where we are today—and that too is changing: nothing is fixed; knowledge can only be partial and built upon the culturally defined stocks of knowledge at any given time in history; reality is socially and personally constructed; there is no fixed and unchanging "Truth" (p. 27).

The ability to relate on differing levels to each of my participants meant that a form of comfort was established, whereby the expression of my perspective could encourage the participants to more readily express their own. The implementation of feminist reflexivity within this study was indicative of my position as both an insider and outsider in relation to the research topic. According to Hayfield and Huxley (2015), an insider, in the context of the researcher-participant relationship, is someone who belongs to the group from which participants are recruited (for example, women), while an outsider does not belong to that group. Collins (1986) conceptualises this notion as the "outsider within", noting the social positioning of Black women in relation to the analysis of race, class, and gender within numerous social settings (Brown, 2012). Using Harding's (1993) principle of the "starting off thought" for knowledge production allowed me as the primary researcher the opportunity to explore my roles as both *insider* and *outsider* within this research.

As a female researching women's equality, I was an insider within my research. I belong to a group whose individuals identify as "women". Not only this, but as a woman, data exists to support the labelling of me as *marginalised* (see

Chapter One). In relation to my role as an *outsider*, my study sought to uncover the perspectives and experiences of *different* women to gain insight into what it was like to be a woman in 21st Century New Zealand. As a result, I moved outside of the research to analyse the perspectives of other women who possess intersectional differences that I did not. Hayfield and Huxley (2015) note that just as participants possess intersectional differences from one another through categories of identity that impact experiences of privilege and oppression, so too does the researcher as an informal participant who is positioned in the "space between" (p. 95) insider and outsider. Aspects of my identity that could be considered privileged include my ethnicity, as a white female with predominantly Caucasian heritage, and my education, as a student of academia with access to higher education in the forms of research and other academics. The characteristics of my identity, including the privileged aspects, create the space between my insider/outsider perspectives. In a similar way to the participants, I could be neither entirely insider nor completely outsider. As such, I could not be completely outsider as I was able to anchor specific knowledge claims by drawing on my lived experiences. Therefore, I operated as an "outsider within" to analyse the perspectives of women with a variety of backgrounds and characteristics, while acknowledging and revealing my own experiences (Hunt & Sampson, 2006). As the primary researcher, I enacted a feminist reflexivity approach as both insider and outsider, acknowledging a) my views and experiences by reflecting privately in a personal journal throughout the research, and b) the knowledge base that informs my reality (Etherington, 2004). These acknowledgments informed the structure of questions asked of, and conversations with, participants, which led to the interpretation and critical examination of participant experience and difference. The next section will outline

strategies for participant recruitment and describe the heterogeneity of the women who participated.

Highlighting Women's Heterogeneity: Network Sampling and Participant Recruitment

In this study, purposive sampling was informed by the criteria for participation, and chain referral sampling was used to recruit participants who met the research criteria. Purposive sampling was used in this research in several ways. Firstly, participants for this study were required to identify as a woman and were selected based on this identification. They were also required to be citizens or permanent residence of New Zealand, in order to locate the research in a New Zealand setting and recruit participants embedded in societal ways of being and knowing. The study sought to engage women between the ages of 18-100 years old to gain a wide range of generational perspectives and experiences in relation to women's lived experiences. Through a focus on age and gender as intersectional aspects of women's lives, it was expected that a variety of other differences would emerge through narrative portrayals of participant's lives. There was also the opportunity to conduct more purposive sampling towards the end of the data collection process, should a need arise to increase the diversity of participants. However, I decided that this was not needed as the aim of the research was to highlight intersectional differences that already existed among those that identified as women, rather than attempt to "hand pick" these differences. The number of participants that I was aiming to recruit for this research was 50 women. However, given the high level of contribution expected from each woman, I decided to abandon this plan and instead sought quality over quantity to ensure a rich data set from both the diaries and interviews.

To ensure that an intersectional approach remained the focus of the research, a network approach informed by chain referral sampling was used. Chain referral sampling is similar to snowball sampling, which utilises study participants as a means to accumulate further members (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Browne, 2003; Penrod, Preston, Cain & Starks, 2003). Snowball sampling has been described as a sampling method that requires little input from the researcher; personal contact is used to obtain initial participants, and then the networks of those initial participants are utilised to obtain other participants (Biernacki & Waldorf, 1981; Penrod et al., 2003). Although chain referral sampling is similar to snowball sampling in the utilisation of networks, "it relies on a series of participant referrals to others who have experienced the phenomenon of interest; however, multiple networks are strategically accessed to expand the scope of investigation beyond one social network" (Penrod et al., 2003, p. 102). I approached individuals within my multiple social networks (e.g. university, sports, friendship groups, family, social media, etc.), as well as the leaders of women's focused organisations (such as Magnetic Hub and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA)). I did not personally know these leaders but saw contact with them as an opportunity to widen the pool of participants who, by virtue of being a part of these organisations, were women who appeared to have an awareness or interest in women's issues. A poster containing more detailed information on the research (see Appendix B) was provided to my networks and sent to the organisations named above, who distributed it to those they felt might be interested in participating. I also placed the poster around the university campus, as I was interested in gaining a tertiary student's perspective as a majority of my networks of a similar age to me were no longer at university. To ensure that there was a generational spread in the chain referral sampling, I made sure that I

approached individuals within my networks who represented a variety of ages, and utilised platforms such as Facebook to target other age groups. Those who I first approached were not eligible to participate. Allowing others to source participants on my behalf meant that diversity was increased because I was not acquiring participants from a single organisation or group of people.

The initial recruiting stage resulted in 26 women committing to the study, but retention proved difficult given the demanding nature of the research and the reality of women's everyday lives. Of those 26 women, two participants responded to a flyer they had seen at university, nine were sent the flyer by one of the organisations I had contacted, and the remaining fifteen acted on a recommendation from their networks to participate, either directly or through the sharing of my poster on Facebook. I did not know any of the participants directly, but we did have a mutual connection either through the use of network sampling or as university students, as previously outlined. After making contact, participants were sent a participant information sheet (see Appendix C), participant consent form (see Appendix D), and demographic questionnaire (see Appendix E) to highlight initial intersectional differences, in line with the intersectional focus of this research. Ideally, the study was to include women with a variety of intersectional differences, with a particular focus on gender and age, to remain close to the theoretical grounding of the research and allow for a deeper level of analysis. This was somewhat achieved through chain referral sampling and is further evident in the demographic information to come.

The intersectional focus of this study meant that a precursor to the main forms of data collection was needed to obtain demographic information identifying the differences between the women that wished to participate. A survey or questionnaire was the most practical approach, as recommended by Yusuf, Martins,

& Swanson (2014). The questionnaire was modelled on New Zealand census questions to provide participants with a sense of familiarity, and contained questions related to age, ethnicity, religious and educational history, relationship status, income bracket, and political identification. Each of these questions was designed to highlight diversity among participants of a societally recognised group—women—as points of interest that play a significant role in the development of an individual standpoint. The aim of this survey was to gain specific information about women who had already indicated an interest in participating, rather than as a sampling method. Although it is known that women are intersectionally different from one another, the specific information gained from the questionnaires provided a factual basis for this claim. Therefore, the data collected from the questionnaires was not representative of a population or group (Yusuf, Martins, & Swanson, 2014), and instead formed a demographic profile of each participant, in addition to the requirement that participants identified as women. This request was used to highlight the point that although the participants identified as women, they were vastly different from each other. As a result, diversity was evident across the questionnaires despite similarities in factors such as age, ethnicity, and relationship status, as shown later in this chapter. As a preliminary method of data collection, questionnaires also allowed participants to become comfortable with answering personal questions, as a precursor to the more detailed personal stories to be told in response to the use of diary methods and semi-structured interviews as methods of data collection.

Given that the participants were required to identify as women to take part in the research, I wanted to map the age ranges of participants to determine if my approach to chain referral sampling had resulted in a generational spread. Participants were allocated a generational cohort based on their age as a way to

examine any similarities or differences in the influences of feminist waves on lived experience over time. These cohorts were: Baby boomers (participants were between 70-73 years old), generation X (participants were between 41-54 years old), millennials (participants were between 22-37 years old), and generation Z (participants were 20 and 21 years old). I was satisfied with the generational spread of participants, as most cohorts appeared to contain a range of ages within their generational "category". Bradley (2015) identified that as a biological indicator of time passed, age is also understood as a sociological category that speaks to changing power relations, varied economic access and social privileges, and different governing norms and behaviours, as they have shifted over time. In this way, by focusing on women of different ages, it was hoped that evidence of socio-cultural and political shifts that had occurred might be evident in, and be an influential aspect of, the women's lived experiences. To uncover these lived experiences, the women needed to be protected and feel safe enough to participate, which forms part of my ethical obligation as a researcher.

The Ethical Considerations of Researching Women's Lived Experience

Ethical approval was obtained from the Waikato Management School Ethics Committee to undertake this research with human participants. The sensitive nature of this study and its focus on women's perspectives of being a woman in 21st Century New Zealand meant that some risk existed for potential participants. Renzetti and Lee (1993) explain that a sensitive research topic is one that may involve a significant threat that problematises data collection and dissemination. Further to this, Platzer and James (1997) note that sensitive research explores in greater depth those marginalised groups in relation to issues such as power and discrimination. The use of a feminist standpoint epistemology required the

participants to make their standpoint known to the researcher through their diaries, which required further explanation within an interview. The intersectional focus of the study also required participants to reveal aspects of their identity, which may not have been public knowledge. These factors posed a potential risk as voicing an opinion, or making standpoint known, could affect how others viewed these women and it can affect how they, as women, personally decide to enact this standpoint within their own life. The social risk involved for those women who chose to participate was dependent on how much information they chose to disclose to those they encountered in their daily life. Given the aim of the study and the potential confidentiality risk to participants in their everyday lives, I allocated pseudonyms in place of the women's own names. I chose pseudonym names, as opposed to numbers, as the study was not representative and instead focused on the lived experience of individual women and their personal stories, for which a name was more appropriate. Pseudonym names begin with the first letter of each participant's real name which helped me align my knowledge of participants with the data during the analysis of the diary and interview transcripts. Similarly, any identifying information provided by participants in their diary entries or interview conversations was removed by me to ensure that anonymity was maintained.

The Use of Diaries and Interviews to Capture Women's Lived Experiences

The methods of data collection used to obtain the personal lived experiences of women were diaries and interviews. Diary methods, otherwise known as diary studies (Ohly, Sonnentag, Niessen, & Zapf, 2010), involve data collection that seeks to uncover everyday experiences in real time. They include experience sampling, daily diaries, interaction records, momentary sampling, and real-time data capture (Laurenceau & Bolger, 2005; Ohly et al., 2010). Each of these methods of data

collection allows the researcher a level of insight into the everyday experiences of participants that is not necessarily possible with other methods. Bolger, Davis, and Rafaeli (2003) note that a "fundamental benefit of diary methods is that they permit the examination of reported events and experiences in their natural, spontaneous context, providing information complementary to that obtainable by more traditional designs" (p. 580). The principal diary method used within this study was daily diaries, to capture the everyday experiences of women through their eyes (Ohly et al, 2010) as well as prove or disprove assumptions about individual behaviour (Laurenceau & Bolger, 2005). Assumptions might refer to enactments of complacency by younger women, or frustration by older women towards feelings of a plateau in equality progression (McGregor, 2013).

In this research, the use of the word "daily" was not indicative of the frequency of the entries, but instead suggests that each entry consisted of the everyday experiences that occur within each woman's life. Participants were asked to complete seven diary entries (a metaphorical week) over a period of four months (the time allocated for this period of the data collection), with the first entry completed within the first month. The four-month period for completing all seven entries allowed entries after the initial submission to be written fortnightly. This timeframe was suggested to participants as a guideline to help manage the demands of the research, but of course time between entries varied for each participant. Participants were also given the choice of handwriting or electronically typing their diary entries, which allowed me to eliminate the influence of a digital divide among participants of difference ages, abilities, and access (Bolger et al., 2003; Ohly et al., 2010). Participants who chose to handwrite their entries were provided with a notebook, pens and return postage, which allowed for handwritten diaries to be sent back to me

and later transcribed by a professional transcriber and made electronic. Participants who completed their entries electronically returned them via email.

As part of the diary writing process, a set of 10 guiding questions was provided for participants (see Appendix F); they could respond to these, write comments, and include experiences (Ohly et al., 2010; Nicholl, 2010). The questions related to the participants' everyday lives and their perspectives on work, family, feminism, and women's equality. For example, participants were asked to talk about their "work", what they interpreted as "women's work", and their responsibilities within the different spheres of their lives. Similarly, the women were asked to explain if they or someone they know had faced difficulties because of their gender. Five additional questions were asked at the start and end of the diary writing process (see Appendix G) which signalled the main interests of the research and asked for participants' perceptions and positions. These additional questions also accounted for changes in experience or standpoint that may have occurred over the course of the diary writing process. The questions asked participants to identify their association with "feminism" and "women's equality"; explain how they had developed these views; and detail their life goals and why these were important. For the actual seven diary entries, the same 10 questions were asked/answered in each entry which meant that participants had to build on previous experiences or think carefully to avoid direct repetition. This semi-structured approach provided the participants with consistent guidelines, whilst also allowing them the opportunity to expand on the questions and provide more in-depth contextual detail. I kept a detailed record of participant progress and took the opportunity to "check-in" with participants on a monthly basis to assess progress and clarify points of concern. These check-ins also served as a reminder and indication of what number entry participants should

potentially have been focusing on, which subsequently kept me informed and allowed me to be flexible and cater to the needs of the participant. This use of daily diaries in this research reinforced a focus on women's individual lived experiences and was consistent with the intersectional focus, with entries providing individually written accounts of a person's experiences and personal perspective.

Nicholl (2010) notes that the use of diaries as the primary data set lays the foundation for interviews to follow. She further observes that the diary and interview method help "access phenomena that are not easily observed and behaviours that might be influenced by the presence of an observer" (p. 18). Semi-structured interviews involve a set of open-ended questions designed to allow the participants to share their views, and for the researcher to probe into areas of interest to increase clarity (Dearnley, 2005). Thus, semi-structured interviews followed the completion of the diaries to investigate narrative influences and researcher assumptions about individual behaviour and subsequent ideas that arose within participant entries. Interviews were recorded and sent to a professional transcriber to be converted into electronic documents for analysis.

For this study, I generated a set of guiding questions (see Appendix H) to facilitate my conversations with participants, without being particularly strict with the line of questioning. The ability to evolve and reword questions as a means of enhancing clarity allowed me to extract meaning and facilitate the flow of the conversation; "the open nature of the questions…[aims] to encourage depth and vitality" (Dearnley, 2005, p. 22). According to Barriball and While (1994), this method of conducting interviews allows for the exploration of values and beliefs, as well as attitudes and motivations. As such, in my research, semi-structured interviews also provided the opportunity for the participants and researcher to

unpack ideas surrounding women's experiences of being a woman in 21st Century New Zealand. The methods of data collection described and outlined in this section lay the foundations for exploring the wider research process that was undertaken to collect the data.

The Data Collection Process: Capturing Women's Lived Experience

The sequence of the data collection process is summarised in Figure 2 below, followed by a more detailed discussion of the methods of data collection and analysis.

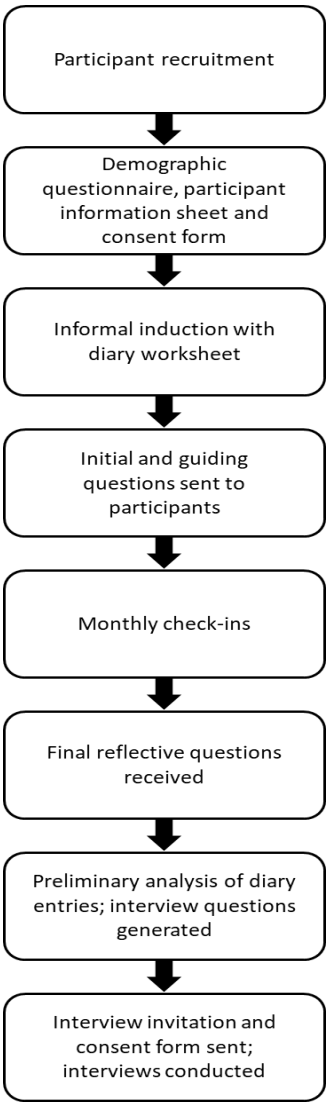

Figure 2. The Data Collection Process.

Once the women had been recruited to take part in the research, they completed and returned the demographic questionnaire and diary consent form, having also read through the participant information sheet. Participants then underwent an informal "induction" to ensure that they understood the diary writing and interview processes. Participants were given a diary worksheet containing guidelines for how they might begin to think about their initial diary entry (see Appendix I). The contents of this worksheet were discussed with them in a face-to-face training meeting, or phone call if they were not locally based. This induction also served as an opportunity for me to form relationships with each of the participants and alleviate the appearance of a researcher-participant hierarchy (Hayfield & Huxley, 2015). I stressed to participants that I was interested in their lived experiences and that my role was to support them as they contributed to the study. As part of the induction, I encouraged participants to use their first entry to familiarise themselves with diary writing, and to use events that they felt were important but were not necessarily recent to answer each question. Regardless of how each woman interpreted a question, event, or instance, their response mirrored their personal standpoint in relation to women's issues and revealed aspects of their identity, and subsequent identification with feminism.

I decided to conduct a pilot study with a small number of participants to determine the feasibility of diary methods for the purposes of this study. The pilot study involved four of the recruited women, chosen at random, who all agreed to pilot the methods. The remaining participants were made aware of the pilot study process and I maintained contact with them throughout this time to preserve their interest. Pilot study participants were asked to complete four diary entries over two and a half months, starting with the five initial questions and the first diary entry in the first month. After that first month I contacted each of the women to check their

progress and clarify any points of confusion. At this stage, one participant did not respond to my initial check-in or further emails and so was removed from the study. Following completion of the first entry, the remaining three participants then completed three further diary entries, with fortnightly check-ins with me to monitor their progress. This timeframe was in line with the suggested one entry per fortnight guidelines. The participants identified that these check-ins served as useful reminders and helped them to feel supported. During this time, I recognised that participants were finding it difficult to complete one entry each fortnight, due to competing demands on their time or because they felt they had nothing new to contribute. I reassured the participants that any entries were a valuable contribution to the study, and I extended the time frame for entries. By four months, two participants identified that they had completed the remaining three entries, with the third participant informing me that she was no longer able to take part. Conversations with the participants at the conclusion of the pilot study indicated that without the regular check-ins, the diary writing process would have been difficult to sustain. My regular communication with participants allowed me to enact flexibility with timeframes, as well as support and reassure participants where necessary. Participants felt comfortable with the diary guidelines and questions and so I decided to begin the main study, increasing the check-ins from fortnightly to monthly. Regular communication in the pilot study process allowed me to keep a close eye on how the methods and questions were operating in practice. With the key aspect of support highlighted by pilot participants, the aim of this increase was to provide this support rather than monitor participant progress, and to minimise the pressure on participants to adhere to the suggested timeframe for entries.

Once the pilot study had taken place and I was comfortable that the methods were contributing to achieving the research aim, the remaining participants were contacted to begin the main study. The pilot study participants were asked to continue with their entries at the same time as the remaining participants had begun. Of the 22 participants remaining after initial recruitment and the pilot study, four did not respond to my invitations to begin their entries. Four women identified early in the diary methods stage that they were no longer able to participate. A number of reasons were provided, such as time commitment or technological issues. Therefore, 16 participants (including the pilot study participants) took part in the overall study, completing the initial and final questions, and between three and seven diary entries each. Feedback from the participants suggested that diary content should have been new each entry. Participants expressed that they found it difficult to make their entries "interesting", which impacted their motivation to write. Despite my explanations that the important point for analysis was participant thinking and lived experience over the course of the entries, participants maintained a focus on providing new and interesting material. The women did not appear to classify their own lived experience as interesting without the addition of supplementary or new material, despite the study's focus on their everyday lives. Paired with the complexity of the women's lives, this focus was a contributing factor to the extension of the data collection process from four to eight months.

Preliminary analysis of the diary entries allowed me to generate a set of interview questions to guide my conversations with participants. Of the 16 participants who were invited to attend an interview and were sent an interview consent form, 14 participants responded and agreed to take part in an interview. The interviews largely took place in participant's homes, given the relationship that had

been established and my connection to participants as an “outsider within”. Other interviews took place over Skype where travel was not feasible, or in public cafes at the suggestion of those participants. The longest interview lasted 50 minutes, and the shortest, 15 minutes, demonstrating the flexibility of a semi-structured approach.

Central to the enactment of interviews was the ability for me to use those conservations to check my interpretation of the women’s lived experiences, as expressed in their diary entries. In this research, the standpoint of the participant was used to demonstrate how individual reality is valid and forms the foundation of individual truth. Feminist standpoint epistemology acknowledges the standpoint of both the researcher and the researched, exchanging the need for objectivity with recognition of strong reflexivity (Harding, 1993). Member checking is a way of enhancing the accuracy of the interpretation of the data and encourages credibility in the “double-checking” of descriptions and interpretations (Caretta, 2016; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Cho and Trent (2006) note that through member checking participants are involved in the process of making sure their reality matches the interpretation of the researcher. As such, the role of member checking was to ensure that the standpoints of each woman were represented in a way that *they* were comfortable with. The ability to confirm or alter the interpretation of data to reflect the reality of the participant reinforced the positioning of the women at the centre of this study. Seale (1999) suggests that feminist researchers should seek to deconstruct ideological or grand narratives as a means to understand reality and critique narrative influences. The methods of analysis selected for this research aim to interpret women’s lived experience and examine the narrative structures that underpin their reality.

Interpreting and Retelling Women's Experiences of (In)Equality

The forms of analysis used in this study were intersectional analysis, thematic analysis, and narrative analysis. These methods of analysing data focus on textual themes and material ways of being, with a focus on "difference" in the way women experience (in)equality and narrative influences. Intersectional analysis centres on categories of difference and the ways in which these categories influence individual lived experience. Furthermore, thematic analysis and narrative analysis seek to uncover the relationships between language and the social structures that inform the standpoint of the participants. This section will outline each method of analysis used in this research including when each form of analysis took place, and the coding process, illustrated in a data analysis table. First, I will describe intersectional analysis and outline how it was applied in this research.

Intersectional analysis

Intersectional research is difficult to achieve effectively when many variables exist to frame women's differences (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Winker & Degele, 2011). Accounting for intersectionality in the data collection phase involved the careful selection of participants, whereas analysis required a focus on social structures that enable differences between women to exist. Labelled as categories (Few-Demo, 2014), three main approaches exist to inform the analysis of intersectional difference, developed by Leslie McCall (2005); anticategorical complexity, intracategorical complexity, and intercategorical complexity (Few-Demo, 2014; Winker & Degele, 2011). *Anticategorical* complexity is a postmodernist approach that seeks to deconstruct "analytical categories such as gender and race, and focuses attention on the ways in which concepts, terms and categories are constructed (Winker & Degele, 2011). *Intracategorical* complexity refers to the interrogation of

the “boundary-making and boundary-defining process itself” (McCall, 2005, p. 1773). In this way, focus is placed upon a particular group and how they are situated, or how identities of those within the group are influenced by symbolic representations (Choo & Ferree, 2010; Few-Demo, 2014; Winker & Degele, 2011). Lastly, *intercategorical* complexity focuses on the relationships between social groups, placing emphasis on multiple categories of difference (Few-Demo, 2014; Winker & Degele, 2011).

This study utilised intracategorical complexity with the main group of participants selected based on their identification as a woman. McCall (2005) notes that an intracategorical approach is effective when the researcher can identify a single social group or category that are excluded from the initial analysis of principal categories e.g. the category of sexual orientation. The gendered aspect of the study made it possible to analyse categories such as age, career choice, relationship status, and so on, associated with the identity of each participant, and their identification as a woman. This allowed for the inclusion of multiple categories associated with women (McCall, 2005). The table on the next page presents the categories of the women who participated in this research, based on the information collected from the demographic survey.

Table 1. Participant demographic information.

Pseudonym	**Age**	**Ethnicity**	**Relationship status**	**Employment status and industry**	**Generational Cohort**
Katrina	70	New Zealand European	Legally married	Retired	Baby Boomers
Madeline	72	Canadian	Legally married	Retired	
Danielle	73	New Zealand European	Legally married	Retired/self-employed (Agriculture)	
Candice	73	New Zealand European	Legally married	Retired/self-employed (Horticulture)	
Marleen	73	New Zealand European	Legally married	Retired	
Sienna	41	Canadian	De Facto	Employed (STEM)	Generation X
Tracy	43	New Zealand European	Divorced	Employed (STEM)	
Lily	54	New Zealand European	De Facto	Employed (Governance)	
Susan	54	New Zealand European	De Facto	Employed (Education)	
Fiona	22	New Zealand European	Boyfriend/girlfriend	Student/employed (Agriculture)	Millennials
Vanessa	28	New Zealand European	Legally married	Employed (STEM)	
Linda	36	New Zealand European and Chinese	Single	Employed (Communications)	
Michaela	37	British	Legally married	Employed (Governance)	
Janet	37	New Zealand European	Legally married	Employed (STEM)	
Loraine	20	New Zealand European	Single	Student	Generation Z
Ronnie	21	New Zealand European	Single	Student/employed (STEM)	

Few-Demo (2014) explains that the researcher must then choose whether to examine how a group is situated within a social setting or how specific symbolic representations, such as ideology and values, influence identity constructions within the group. Within this study, generational cohort within the grouping of "woman" was identified as a principal category to recognise the influence of feminism and the changes in interpretations of equality progression over time. Duncan (2010) highlighted the significance of generation as a category when focusing on feminist associations; "generation seems to have its largest effect by determining to what social events and environments a particular group of people will be exposed" (p. 506). In this way, associations with feminism and the influence of past movements are most noticeable through a focus on generational cohorts. The use of diary methods in this study enabled an effective intracategorical analysis through the identification of difference within the category of women (Few-Demo, 2014) and a focus on age, which also allowed for the in-depth examination of standpoint and difference through thematic and narrative analysis.

Thematic analysis

Primarily used to identify, analyse and report patterns or themes, thematic analysis also captures complex meanings in textual data (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Guest, MacQueen, & Namey, 2012; Vaismoradi, Turunen, & Bondas, 2013). However, determining a theme can be difficult and time consuming (Braun & Clarke, 2006), and coding as a tool of analysis allows the researcher to determine themes based on the frequency and intended meaning of language (Guest et al., 2012). A deductive approach to analysis involves the researcher assigning what constitutes "meaning" to the coding process (Terry, Hayfield, & Clarke, 2017). My interest in intergenerational perspectives, difference, and interpretations of equality, all in the

context of a plateau, meant that I was attentive to evidence of these elements in the data. The coding process was conducted manually without the use of coding software and was initially guided by my interests. However, thematic analysis is an iterative process and involves multiple levels of coding, working from first level, descriptive coding towards more interpretive coding in later levels (Langridge, 2004).

In the initial stage of analysis, thematic analysis was used to code descriptive and more recurrent themes across diary entries, which were used as the basis for a majority of the interview questions. Thematic analysis is useful in highlighting clear and recurrent themes, but also latent ideas that require deeper examination. The focus of this study on women's lived experiences of (in)equality and how these experiences are influenced by difference, draws on a contextualist understandings of thematic analysis which describes individual reality as shaped by social contexts (Terry et al., 2017). As such, latent coding, as part of the multilevel process, accounted for a deeper analysis of underlying ideas, meanings, and assumptions (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Terry et al., 2017). Latent coding highlighted the ideological, cultural, and personal themes that influenced participant lived experience. The thematic analysis process was iterative, and I constantly refined my coding choices in line with the overarching aim of the research to examine how differences might help to explain the existence of a plateau in women's equality. The dual identification and structuring of ideological, cultural, and personal themes through thematic and narrative analysis, demonstrated the relationship between theme and story-based forms of analysis that contextualise and address important features of women's lived experience. A sample of the thematic and narrative, multilevel coding process is presented in the appendices (see Appendix J and K) to demonstrate how

the diary and interview transcripts of the women that participated were coded during each iteration of analysis.

Narrative Analysis

Narrative inquiry as a form of analysis provides an evaluation of "subjectivity and interpretive complexity…and a concern with including social agents' own views and experiences" (De Fina, 2016, p. 328). Fraser (2004) notes that narrative research should aim to reflect reality and in doing so, uncover underlying belief systems and assumptions. From a feminist research perspective, narratives can be used to challenge or reinforce dominant social practices (Fraser, 2004; Riessman, 1993; Young, 1997). The use of narrative analysis in this study provided a more in-depth method of analysis to determine the underlying ideological and cultural narratives evident in participants' personal stories and uncover the intersectional factors that informed individual standpoints. Narrative analysis, which encompasses the purposive, audience-centred nature of narratives (Josselson, 2011; Wells, 2011), is distinguished by a structure that is useful in attempting to understand participant standpoint (Clandinin, 2013).

Connelly and Clandinin (2006) identified three key indicators that were necessary for maintaining a narrative focus. These include temporality, sociality, and place (Hutchinson, 2015). These "dimensions" of narrative inquiry and the explorations of these contribute to complex understandings of individual lived experiences (Connelly & Clandinin, 2006). Temporality within narrative inquiry refers to the dynamic nature of experiences, in the sense that what has already occurred continues to shape our perspectives and identity (Clandinin & Huber, 2010; Hutchinson, 2015). Clandinin and Connelly (2000) observe that, as researchers, we enter the lives of our participants at a particular time, but "[t]heir lives do not begin

the day we arrive nor do they end as we leave. Their lives continue" (pp. 63-64). Narratives that represent and relate to individual experience, are sequential and significant, and signal changes over time (Squire, 2008). Within a narrative, there is a beginning, middle, and end or "plot line", which may not necessarily be in line with a chronological timeline. The chronological timeline of this study coincides with the data collection period, although participants reference stories and experiences that occurred before the research began. For the participants of this study, their experiences before their inclusion in this research were informed by their intersectional difference; an individual's identity traits, upbringing, family dynamic, education, line of work, and so on, contribute to the way they perceive situations that occur within their lives. During the data collection phase, the experiences written and spoken about were considered to be in "temporal transition" (Connelly and Clandinin, 2006, p. 479). Time is viewed as narrative in the sense that narrative inquiry focuses on the past, present and future of the subjects or objects of study (Clandinin and Huber, 2010).

Narrative analysis simultaneously attends to personal (hopes, desires, feelings, reactions, morals) and social conditions (social, cultural, institutional, linguistic) through sociality (Clandinin and Huber, 2010). Greene, Jensen, and Jones (1996) note that "people do not discover reality, but rather use language to construct a conception of reality through social interaction" (p. 173). For the participants of this research, their perspectives of "feminism" and "women's equality" were shaped by the personal and social conditions that surrounded them and were expressed through cultural and personal narratives. The dimension of place within narrative refers to the particular physical boundaries that surround events (Connelly &

Clandinin, 2006). It has been mentioned that narratives based on our experiences fill spaces;

> [i]f place-making is a way of constructing the past, a venerable means of doing human history, it is also a way of constructing social traditions, and, in the process, personal and social identities. We are, in a sense, the place-worlds we imagine (Basso, 1996, p. 7).

The meaning that we associate with narratives, which are attached to a place, continue to shape and change our perspectives (Hutchinson, 2015). This study positioned women's narratives in a New Zealand context, binding these experiences to a specific country, with the acknowledgement that aspects of these women's narratives could be linked to other geographical locations, as sites that individuals are raised in, move to, and continue to be a part of (Clandinin & Huber, 2010). When we consider the dimensions of narrative, it becomes increasingly clear that temporality, sociality and place are bound together. When forming our own personal narratives, it is impossible to separate the personal, social, and contextual, as well as the past, present, and future. In this study, individuals drew on discursive and material practices (culture, history, relationships, social norms, etc.) to construct personal stories that embody the grand, master and personal narrative influences evident in experiences of (in)equality (Flick, 2006; Josselson, 2011) (see Appendix L).

Grand narratives

Understood as meta-narratives, grand narratives are generally recognised as ideological storylines that inform social structure (McLean, Shucard, and Syed, 2017) and underpin the collective knowledge of different social and cultural groups (Boje, 2001). Grand narratives underpin societal rules and regulations as a means of controlling how collectives behave within a given society. In this way, grand

narratives are understood as a form of social organisation with socially and historically specific scripts (Lee, 1997). Zirnmerman and Dickerson (1994) suggest that ideological stories “determine the dimensions that organize people's experience. These narratives about what is canonical provide a backdrop against which experiences are interpreted” (p. 235). As such, while other narrative levels focus on a description of life, grand narratives determine the structure of life, as reflected in individual lived experience (White, 1995).

Master narratives

Master narratives are often understood as prevalent cultural storylines that inform an individual sense of experience and contribute to identity formation (Kerrick & Henry, 2016). Mumby (1993) describes master narratives as a method of social control that represent cultural ideologies that society lives by (Smith & Dougherty, 2012). This idea is reinforced by McLean et al. (2017) who note that master narratives “provide guidance for how to belong to, and be a good member of, a given culture” (p. 94). As such, master narratives could be considered as a system or framework of order and a means to reinforce leading ideologies (grand narratives) as truth, which are then transferred in communicative interactions (Boje, 2001; Bruner, 2004; Tannen, 2008). As an example, Smith and Dougherty (2012) discuss the master narrative of the American Dream and its influence on national identity. With clear ties to concepts such as independence, freedom, liberty, wealth, and equality, the master narrative of the “American Dream” crosses international boundaries even though this narrative is contextually situated in the US (Smith & Dougherty, 2012). In this research, I have used a cultural narrative of progression to explain the existence of a plateau in women’s equality in New Zealand, which is otherwise

understood as a master narrative. As a result, the effects of master narratives are far reaching with implications increasingly apparent throughout the Western world.

A clear characteristic of master narratives is their contribution to the categorisation of groups, evidenced in discourses of naturalisation (Yuval-Davis, 2006) and societies reference to individuals in a collective way (Symington, 2004). These master narratives are often used to assume that all women who fit these categories experience similarly what it means to be a feminist, woman, mother, and/or wife, with links often made between each master narrative; for example, it is not acceptable to be an unwed/single mother. However, participants who challenge master narratives instead develop an alternative narrative, as a contrasting route for identity formation. In relation to feminism, for example, a woman may develop an alternative narrative to the mainstream idea that caring responsibilities ought to be carried out by women, and view caregiving responsibilities as a part of the identity of both men and women as parents/caregivers. As such, master narratives are closely tied to identity formation when acknowledging the role of difference. McLean et al. (2017) state that master narratives emphasise "the critical role that power and oppression play in identity development…, particularly as identities are constrained by the cultures in which they are developing" (p. 633). While master narratives inform our individual sense of experience and our understanding of the world around us, personal narratives are accounts of our worldly experiences as *we* experience them. That is, whether we are aware of master narratives or not, personal narratives are evidence of an individual's actions to confirm or challenge the cultural storylines (Kerrick & Henry, 2016; Smith & Dougherty, 2012) in a transformational process.

Personal narratives

As a form of storytelling, personal narratives are a sense making tool that provide a snapshot of individual experience (Fraser, 2004; Riessman, 1990, 1993; Skeggs, 2002), as opposed to factual truths; emphasis is placed on how participants piece together their internal and external "chaos" in order to understand and organise the events they experience (Josselson, 2011). Similarly, Bude (1984) views personal narratives as a reconstruction of life, as informed by subjective and socially constructed notions of reality (grand and master narratives). The practice of storytelling to make sense of personal narratives (standpoint) has resulted in the need to embrace *difference* (intersectionality). Narratives that relate to individual perspectives and experience are vital in attempting to understand participants' association (or not) with master narratives, especially when considering intersectional difference. Broadly speaking, personal narratives represent and relate to individual experience, challenge, or confirm master narratives, and meaningfully exhibit transformation (Clandinin and Rosiek, 2007; Kerrick & Henry, 2016).

Summary

The methodology and methods outlined in this chapter align with the aims of the research and contribute data that evidences what it is like to be a woman in 21st Century New Zealand, given the existence of a plateau in women's equality and the intersectional differences that impact women's individual experiences. Feminist standpoint theory and the materialist moment provide a clear focus on discursive and material lived experience, as central to understanding women's reality. Diary and interview methods created an opportunity for the women to document their lived experience in a semi-structured manner, highlighting differences above and beyond categories of gender and age used as a gateway for understanding intersectionality

among the participants. While a focus on what it is like to be a woman in 21st Century New Zealand appears to be a generalised and representative claim, the use of diary entries and interviews captured a point in time and highlighted latent themes and narrative influences as they have changed over time. This study did not aim to be representative of all women, but instead sought to acknowledge that what being a 21st Century women looks and feels like will vary between women.

The chapters to come will address my research findings and answer each of the research questions that inform this research. Chapter Five examines the thematic analysis of diary and interview data, drawing on the recurrent themes of privilege and oppression. Chapter Six presents a narrative account of four participants lived experience, as generational representatives within this research, who provide evidence of interesting and nuanced narrative influences. Chapter Seven discusses the implementation of and interactions with forms of agency evident across the participants lived experience.

Chapter Five: Women's Experiences of (In)Equality: The Dialectic Relationship between Privilege and Oppression

The data discussed in this chapter sought to answer the first research question: *In what ways do personal stories of women's (in)equality inform identification with feminism and highlight intersectional difference?* Personal stories are not only used as sense-making tools, but they also contribute to how people identify with particular beliefs and ideas. The key themes presented in this chapter are the result of detailed thematic analysis of the diary and interview transcripts and demonstrate how each of the participants has created, developed, and portrayed their identification with feminism. The methodology and methods I chose for this research resulted in a rich data set, which gave me options as to which themes to explore further and what participant data to omit from this thesis. The overarching themes within the data were privilege and oppression, in a dialectic relationship that informed participants' simultaneous experiences of each. During the initial stages of analysis, there were other themes such as pride, luck and fortune, and gratefulness (see Appendix L), but these were found to be sub-themes of privilege and oppression and were experienced differently by the women. These sub-themes are instead used to evidence the participants' different associations with privilege and oppression when describing their lived experience. My choice to focus on privilege and oppression as overarching themes is to do justice to the women's individual accounts and to represent differences and commonalities between the women's experiences.

In this chapter and throughout the research, intersectional difference is highlighted in distinctions between generational cohorts, but is also apparent in

varied interpretations of equality and differing feminist perspectives, which demonstrates the complex nature of being a woman in 21st Century New Zealand. What became evident during analysis of the participant data was the influence of systems and relationships on lived experience. Social comparisons with others, known as the generalised other and particular others, informed the structure of the discussions of participant data in this chapter, in relation to associations with privilege and oppression. Participants' feelings of privilege and (in)experience of oppression were reinforced by the presence of moral and systemic luck. This chapter begins with a discussion of the concepts underpinning social comparisons with the generalised other and particular others. What follows is a discussion of the dialectic relationship between privilege and oppression, which is explored further throughout this chapter with regard to the material contextualisation of the generalised other and relationships with particular others, in the lived experiences of participants in this study.

Social Comparisons of Privilege and Oppression

How individuals use others to make sense of themselves and the world around them (Buunk, Gibbons, Dijkstra, & Krizan, 2019) are understood as social comparisons. Social comparisons of privilege and oppression, influenced by particular others and the generalised other, contributed to how participants experienced the world around them. Mead's (1934) *the generalised other* forms the foundation for understanding which societal characteristics were valued and/or challenged by participants, which in turn, led them to compare themselves to other women within their community or group, to gauge if they themselves fulfilled social norms, beliefs, attitudes and so on. When discussing personal associations with privilege, participants frequently identified their lived experience in comparison to the experiences of others.

Participants also acknowledged the significance of relationships when discussing feelings of privilege, by detailing support from close family or friends, as recognised *particular others* or, as originally coined by Sullivan (1940), "significant others". The concepts of particular others and the generalised other play an important part in social comparisons, as individuals of significance (particular others) (Sullivan, 1940) influence our perspectives in varied and/or similar ways about the rules, roles, attitudes, norms, and beliefs of a society (the generalised other) (Mead, 1934). Addressing participant experiences of societal and relational concepts that inform their association with feminism, and express their intersectional differences, involves attending to the dialectic relationship of privilege and oppression.

Privilege and Oppression: A Dialectic Relationship

Privilege and oppression are terms that commonly appear as polar opposites; privilege refers to the presence of a louder voice and feelings of advantage, while oppression is negatively associated with a lack of voice and feelings of suppression. However, these positions can be held simultaneously and are not considered mutually exclusive. In fact, the complex and intersectional nature of women's lives means that the navigation of patriarchal ways of doing and being often result in simultaneous experiences of both privilege and oppression (Symington, 2004).

The dynamic interplay of opposite and interdependent points which inform simultaneous experience (such as privilege and oppression) is known as dialectics (Mumby, 2005). Putnam (2015) noted that such an interplay "highlights the interconnections that lead to embracing the 'both–and' of the poles as opposed to making an 'either–or' choice between them" (p. 707). As will be explored in the data, a division between experiences of privilege and oppression is not always clear, resulting in the inability to generate a choice between "either–or". What results,

however, is a push-pull effect between interdependent yet opposing points that influences the construction of lived experience (Bakhtin, 1981; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Putnam, 2013; Seo, Putnam & Bartunek, 2004). As members of a societally recognised, marginalised group, the women in this study already faced varied levels of oppression, even when they lacked concrete personal examples. Similarly, many of the women described feelings of privilege. How an individual experienced dialectics in her lived experience is dependent on her standpoint and intersectional differences.

Differences can span a multitude of socially constructed categories and reinforce the notion that one person is very much unlike the other, despite both being associated with a marginalised group. Campbell et al. (2011) explained that difference constructs perceptions of winners and losers as an imbalance that perpetuates oppression. For this reason, privilege and oppression, and the convergence of different types of discrimination, continue to be the focus of intersectional analysis (Symington, 2004). In the next section, I explore how feelings of privilege and oppression are influenced by social comparisons with the generalised other.

The Generalised Other and Material Contexts

The extent to which a community endorses roles, norms, beliefs, and attitudes, influences personal standpoint (Mead, 1934). This community is known as the generalised other. Comparisons between men and women are perpetuated by the generalised other, as “the community” is used to reinforce social groups and specific characteristics. Such characteristics might refer to level of education, industry of employment, political rights, social positioning, and so on. Participants in this study made social comparisons in relation to various generalised others: underprivileged

women, women in different circumstances and situations to their own, and past feminists (and associated movements). Circumstances that are systematically arranged are known, according to Claudia Card (1996), as the "unnatural lottery". Tessman (2000) further explained this concept by stating that such "systemic luck" is used to signpost the source of luck in social systems of oppression, speaking to the simultaneous experience of privilege and oppression. Participants' comparisons described the different material outcomes that signified privilege and/or oppression and sub-themes of luck, gratitude, and pride. Participants in this study demonstrated associations with systemic luck through descriptive experiences of privilege and oppression.

Increased access to higher education.

Material experiences of education were most noticeably experienced by younger millennial and generation Z participants, highlighting feelings of privilege through increased educational opportunities. Millennial participant and veterinary student, Fiona, described simultaneous feelings of privilege and oppression when discussing her experiences of study within a veterinary degree:

> *However in the last 20 years there have been increased females coming through the degree and now males are regarded the minority in the profession! There are still absolutely situations where it is assumed that a women 'won't be able to do it'. I try to ignore this and just get on with it.*

The noticeable increase in female representation in veterinary science represents equality progression within this space and is underpinned by postfeminist ideas of equality as "achieved". However, despite this increase, Fiona described persistent assumptions that questioned the capability of women, which second wave feminism sought to overcome. She individualises oppression by noting her choice to ignore assumptions and "get on with it" as her personal responsibility within neoliberal

feminist understandings of women's equality. There is also a sense that Fiona wishes to prove these assumptions from the generalised other wrong, as part of a "girls can do anything" mentality that rests within postfeminist ideas of increased opportunities.

For generation Z participant, Loraine—a History student at university—the ability to engage in further education was also associated with privilege and gratitude:

> *I am thankful that I have been given access to an education at a high level. I think many of the younger women I have come into contact with take that for granted.*

Loraine's use of the word "given" suggests that she is unaware of the fight required to enable women access to higher education. Loraine acknowledged that by receiving these privileges she should be grateful, but she felt as though "younger women" took their privilege, specifically access to higher education, for granted. Both of these perspectives align with postfeminist understandings of equality as achieved, and for individuals to either be seen as grateful or ungrateful for current opportunities, without the commitment to further action. While associations with educational opportunities and postfeminist understandings of equality were experienced by younger women in this study, their individual lived experiences were intersectionally different and reinforced their associations with privilege and oppression.

Perceptions of improved employment opportunities.

Members of the baby boomer, generation X, and millennial cohorts describe privilege, oppression, and employment in relation to the generalised other. For baby boomer and generation X participants, a great deal of historical reflection about how things *were* informs an exploration of how employment for women has since

improved. Baby boomer participants, Katrina, Candice, and Marleen, each experienced privilege in the context of employment, but in varying ways. As women in the later stages of life and having experienced second wave feminist movements that critiqued the public/private divide for women, they have witnessed women's gradual inclusion in paid employment. In her diary entries, Katrina detailed positive associations with employment in a state government department:

> *I was quite lucky in terms of the workplace that it was relatively open for women. It was a government service and we actually at one point had a… what did they call it – a proactive process. So, if there were two equal candidates but one was a woman, they had a mandate to choose that woman, so I was quite lucky that I was in a work environment that was very friendly.*

This approach to equality achievement aligns with the introduction and influence of the New Zealand Government's positive action campaign for women in the 1980s. Similarly, an emphasis on increased representation at around this same time supports Katrina's lived experience of quotas as an "open" response to women's inclusion. This perception of openness and friendliness is underpinned by a discursive shift in employment policy to increase the representation of women in workplaces, especially in state departments. Katrina's sense of luck, in the context of socio-cultural and political forces, could be seen as the product of systematically arranged circumstance.

Candice detailed her experience as a comparative understanding of opportunities for men and women. She noted:

> *In teaching I was given responsible roles but without financial recompense until a younger more forthright woman suggested this! I do not think a male in the same position would have been taken advantage of in this way.*

The advent of workplace responsibilities drew attention to inequality in Candice's lived experience. The description of the younger woman as "more forthright"

highlights postfeminist perceptions of confidence and empowerment among young women who appear to have embraced these traits. Candice's awareness of the different expectations of men and women is influenced by second wave feminist perspectives of patriarchy; although more latent instances of inequality have become embedded in lived experience. Having also worked within the education sector, Marleen identified a relationship between her employment history and feminist perspectives:

> *Another institution which shaped my view of feminism was the Education Department (or NZ Govt). I took a studentship to attend university, which was "paid back" by teaching for the same number of years that the allowance was paid. However, anyone who married during this period, was excused and the money did not need to be repaid. I felt this was unfair and discriminatory. When I was in a permanent teaching role, married and pregnant, there was no such thing as parental leave, and women had to resign.*

Marleen describes a number of second wave feminist issues that were evident during this time. The rights to enter paid employment, receive equal pay for equal work, gain autonomy over the body, and access childcare and maternity leave, were all feminist fights that Marleen's lived experience discursively and materially evidenced. The influence of the generalised other on individual lived experience is clearly evident in Marleen's example through the opportunity to take part in paid employment, but the lack of support to continue employment used to reinforce societal norms and expectations, demonstrating a dialectic between privilege and oppression.

Lily, a generation X participant, described oppressive workplace rules as normalised behaviour. Like Marleen, she reflected on specific examples of how she was affected by discriminatory behaviour:

> *As a young woman the examples abound! I was not allowed to wear trousers to work as it was not feminine. Women were not allowed to drive the corporate cars when I first started in government. The male*

> *managers in that government department had a meeting every Friday afternoon before they went to the pub to rank all the woman in the building according to their hotness.*

Lily demonstrates an awareness of second wave feminism in her description of how employment *used* to be. In present day New Zealand, it is difficult to imagine women being unable to wear trousers or drive corporate cars as a workplace rule. Oppression at the hands of the generalised other was discursively and materially understood by Lily as the perpetuation of established rules and norms. Systemic luck, therefore, was subsequently experienced through improvements to the working environment prompted by second wave activism and continued through third wave notions of inclusion, that saw such rules overturned and oppressive behaviour discouraged.

Millennial participants demonstrated varied lived experiences of privilege and oppression in employment. Where Fiona expressed evidence of oppressive behaviour, Janet voiced assumptions of equal treatment, and Vanessa explained the existence of "mansplaining". This range of experiences demonstrates the intersectional influences on feelings of systemic luck as privilege and oppression, and subsequent feminist associations. Fiona detailed an instance in her employment that reinforced the male/female stereotypes:

> *There was a client that rang up the vet clinic with a bull that needed to be looked at. He clearly specified that he did not want a female to look at it in case they got kicked… so one of the male directors was assigned the farm visit and he invited me to come along…I was a mildly annoyed and frustrated at this because dealing with animals that may kick you is a reality of the job!...The farmer himself was fine and didn't mention anything to me when I was on farm. It was a classic case of speculation but just turning up and showing that you are capable and competent at dealing with animals will often just discard the thoughts!*

Fiona's experience demonstrates the persistence of oppressive stereotypes in male dominated industries. However, Fiona's determination to pave her own way in her

chosen career meant that her view of the situation centred on capability and her need to prove the farmer wrong. An individualised approach to resisting and fighting stereotypes is consistent with a neoliberal framework and postfeminist ideas of female empowerment. The ability to prove that she was capable provided Fiona with a sense of achievement that served to further feelings of empowerment.

With a different perspective, Janet assumed that she would be entitled to the same opportunities as a man in her workplace, should she feel the inclination to pursue those opportunities:

> *To me, it would be if I was noticing guys around me getting opportunities that I wasn't able to get that I wanted, I suppose, but I don't have that. I've assumed that if I wanted the same as what guys around me are getting then I could; I would just have to work towards that. But I haven't wanted the same things.*

Neoliberal feminist ideas are evident in Janet's lived experience in the perception that opportunities were available, but that she was personally responsible for enacting choice to pursue those opportunities for herself. The notion that she had not identified as "wanting" those opportunities points to the perception of individual freedom and choice. In contrast, and more in line with Fiona's experience, Vanessa detailed a project hand-over experience in her workplace:

> *I started a new job a few months ago [in a management position at a technology company], taking over from an older guy who's had a career's worth of experience…But the guy I'm taking over from is the biggest mansplainer. We had a 2-month handover because the project is so complex…but before he left, he thought it was necessary to explain to me how to use a hole punch.*

Vanessa feels as if her abilities were not acknowledged in the process of this hand-over. She acknowledged the wealth of experience the outgoing manager possessed but was not viewed in a similar way by that manager. A dialectic of privilege and oppression is evident in Vanessa's employment as a female manager in a male-

dominated industry, and the minimisation of her abilities by the outgoing male manager.

Lived experience of employment throughout this section has detailed what it used to look like, as well as how it looks and feels for women now. Despite improvements made for women in line with second wave fights for access into the public realm and an acknowledgement of issues within the private sphere, there is evidence to support ongoing instances of oppressive workplace behaviour. The influence of a neoliberal feminist framework masks this oppression through the lens of increased choice and opportunity for women.

The appearance of women's enhanced rights and visibility.

Participants in each generational cohort spoke to the rights and visibility of women, both in the past and of the present. Baby boomer participants, Katrina, Madeline, and Marleen attributed privilege to the visibility of women in positions of power, namely the Prime Minister. Katrina referred to Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, positioning her as a symbolic representation of equality achievement that contributes to a cultural narrative of progression:

> *I am very pleased that we have a strong woman leader in our country. I feel proud that I live where women are accepted into such a role.*

Similarly, Madeline described the visibility of women in positions of power as embodying positive leadership characteristics:

> *Mostly I am pleased that Jacinda (and Angela Merkel) have been the faces and voices for treating people with respect, compassion…Jacinda is the alternative to Trump [and] Putin and I am so proud to stand with her.*

Madeline associated positive leadership with more feminine characteristics, viewing Ardern and Merkel as role models to be proud of and that other leaders should aspire

to replicate. Marleen touched on the announcement that Ardern and her partner, Clarke Gayford, were expecting their first child:

> *Jacinda Ardern announced her pregnancy… Since then it has emerged that she told Winston Peters about the pregnancy very early on. If she had been a man there would have been no need to tell anyone so early about a partner's pregnancy.*

Ardern's pregnancy announcement was accompanied by the assumption that she would take maternity leave in order to give birth, recover, and carry out those initial stages of motherhood. Ardern's choice to tell Peters was as a means to plan for such leave. The expectation that women should plan for their absence from employment signals neoliberal notions of individualism, and that while biology determines a woman's role in childbearing, societal expectations pit family against career, forcing women to make a decision that is framed as individual "choice".

Generation X participants, Lily, Sienna, and Michaela detailed their awareness of political oppression, either personally or more generally. In her diary entries, Lily wrote about the freedoms and opportunities she was able to enjoy as a result of progress for women in the past:

> *This century, whether I get what I want or whether people agree with me on matters or not, I have the right to my opinion. I generally have to fight harder than a man to be heard but I do have a voice and it's up to me to use it and encourage others to find theirs. I can have a cause and I can promote it openly. I can congregate with like-minded people, I can drive, manage my own money, and determine my own future. I can live independently, or in a relationship - marriage or other, man or woman. I can travel and be educated to the highest level.*

The individual rights and freedoms outlined by Lily demonstrate the influence of a neoliberal feminist framework, that frames opportunities as individual responsibility. While women have gained access to opportunities not previously available, the difficulty in maintaining this access is masked by feelings of privilege. Sienna

mirrored Lily's observation in her own entries, acknowledging the work undertaken by women to progress women's equality:

> *[t]here was a time when women were excluded from many areas and they had to fight to be included. However, I think we have moved well past that and there are so many opportunities for women out there.*

Michaela, a millennial cohort member, described the "system" and its influence on simultaneous experiences of privilege and oppression:

> *The systems that control us still trouble me. Outwardly, it would appear that we are so lucky. Not everyone realises that some systems persist that discriminate against women…I am so grateful for the work others achieved to mean that women have more autonomy.*

Michaela references privilege in her feelings of gratefulness for the work achieved by others previously, in association with second wave feminist fights for individual autonomy. Her explicit acknowledgement of the systemic constraints on women speaks to simultaneous awareness and experiences of privilege and oppression.

Loraine, a generation Z participant, spoke of the political freedoms available to women in the context of voting and legislative equality, as the focus of first wave feminist movements:

> *Certainly, I think voting matters more to women than it does for men because we know we fought to have that right, we believe we have to honour it.*

Achieving equality to men where women are excluded is characteristic of liberal feminism, as illustrated by the fight for women's rights. Loraine went on to identify Kate Sheppard as a role model of women's equality in New Zealand and as a symbolic representation of women's increased rights:

> *New Zealand women know they're special. We all know who the blue lady on the tenner in our pocket is, and we do think about her, and believe we follow in her footsteps. We are very proud of Kate Sheppard…[When] we went down to the polling booth, all the women we met there were voting because it was Suffrage Day…[There] was an immense sense of pride on each woman's face who we passed.*

Loraine's identification of Sheppard's presence on the $10 (NZD) note as a symbolic representation of women's equality is similar to McGregor's (2013) more critical observation, in the context of role modelling. Loraine's description appears to confirm McGregor's observations of the stalling of women's equality in New Zealand, demonstrating that the increased visibility of women masks persistent inequality. By comparison, Ronnie demonstrated an awareness of the socio-cultural and political conditions of women's equality in New Zealand:

> *New Zealand women currently have legal equality. Social? No. A woman being better than a man at 'traditionally male' things is resented.*

Ronnie was able to look beyond the legislative aspects of a cultural narrative of progression to assess the social conditions of equality for women. While privilege is evident in the acknowledgement of legal equality as a form of progression, the oppressive nature of social inequalities demonstrates the latency of discrimination embedded within societal norms and expectations which cannot easily be legislated against. For younger women who acknowledge past progress towards equality for women, the challenge then lies in overcoming social discrimination in its embedded form.

The lived experience of the women discussed in this section demonstrates the influence of past movements that have resulted in the increased inclusion of women in the exercising of political rights and societal freedoms. Despite the conferral of privilege as a result of the actions of women previously, a cultural narrative of progression evident in the visibility of women in positions of power masks the extent to which freedoms are enjoyed and opportunities are accessed.

Individual assessments of social positioning.

Women in each of the generational cohorts wrote or spoke about their social positioning and associated feelings of privilege or oppression. Baby boomer participant, Danielle, referenced her privileged position by drawing comparisons between herself and other women:

> *I think people are in different circumstances. I spent most of my life as a farmer's wife, which is a very different situation that somebody who has gone up through the university system and being an academic or an urban person. I've been very fortunate. I have been supported…I've been in a position, probably an advantaged position.*

Danielle expressed an awareness of women's varied and intersectional experiences, labelling her own social position as one of privilege compared to other women in different circumstances. Danielle referenced fortune and support as contributing to her social positioning, noting the influence of systemic luck on her lived experience. Marleen described personal attributes she believed influenced her level of privilege:

> *I feel I'm very privileged to be a woman living in 21st century New Zealand. Should qualify that to be a Pakeha, well-educated, living in a stable relationship with a supportive family and no health issues… my life is one of privilege… It feels very good to be a woman in 21st century NZ!*

Marleen links the past and present to describe how it feels to be a woman in 21st Century New Zealand. Connections could be made to postfeminist perspectives on equality and a neoliberal feminist framework of individualism and self-preservation. The ability to be well-educated, enjoy positive relationships, and avoid health issues stem from both choice and opportunity, which are central concepts of neoliberalism.

Generation X participant, Lily, reflected on her level of privilege in relation to social position by comparison. Lily explained in her account of her lived experience how past movements and events had led her to a place of privilege:

> *Particularly in the past but also reflecting on the lives, the relatively disadvantaged lives, and the relatively privileged life that I had.*

> *[T]here's no doubt I live a relatively privileged life compared to a lot of women, now and in the past.*

Perceived notions of privilege and its "relative" positioning within Lily's lived experience describes intersectional awareness of how her own experience of privilege was only possible in relation to others' experiences of underprivilege. The assumption of comparative privilege foregrounds an inability to complain about personal circumstance, especially where the circumstances of others might be far worse. Lily highlights that perceptions of privilege and oppression are all relative within the wider socio-cultural and political landscape and that rules and norms characterise social positioning and influence lived experience. Lily also summarised her experience of what it was like to be a woman in 21st Century New Zealand:

> *Top of the list is probably "lucky"...I feel fortunate to be a woman in this century...I feel fortunate to have lived through earlier feminist movements, to have a connection to how things were and what they are becoming. That "battle" has certainly strongly influenced who I am and how I see the world. The breadth of my experiences keep me humble (I know how lucky I have been to live at a time that saw such profound change).*

The strong connection that Lily identified with social change demonstrated how luck and fortune played into her personal experience. Having lived through later second wave feminist movements and the introduction of a neoliberal feminist framework, Lily's sense of "self" and her perceptions of equality interact to reinforce feelings of luck and privilege in relation to increased opportunities.

Millennial participants, Janet and Linda also explored how the current status for women has improved but that elements of inequality still persist. Janet commented:

> *I still feel pretty lucky...I think in New Zealand there's probably more pressing issues, but then I'm reminded of countries where women are really repressed and I kind of think those people need some support and it would be good if the feminism movement could do something that*

> *made a difference there...I don't really see the inequal pay and opportunities and all that. I've looked for it and haven't come across it in my life, but I've been told that I've been lucky.*

Here, Janet dismisses the existence of women's inequality in New Zealand, demonstrating the influence of postfeminist perspectives of equality as "achieved". Janet attributed the power of *doing* to feminism as a movement, rather than to particular women behind the movement. She continued by noting her lack of experience of unequal pay and the absence of opportunities, even though she had looked for such instances. The impact of neoliberalism and postfeminism masks the existence of nuanced forms of inequality, as Janet focused on the opportunities and freedoms available to her as an individual.

In her entries, Linda commented that privilege sometimes disguised oppression. She stated:

> *[S]ometimes when we see ourselves in a privileged place in society, we're really loath to say that we have been discriminated against...I feel like my opportunities are endless, yet I still have to put up with low level sexism or harassment on a regular basis.*

Linda explicitly acknowledged the existence of a dialectic relationship between privilege and oppression and alluded to neoliberal and postfeminist notions of endless opportunity as operating in tandem with the ongoing subtleties of inequality. Ronnie demonstrated this dialectic in her lived experience by referencing luck:

> *I've been lucky enough to be pretty much insulated from female oppression my whole life…I have a radically different experience to a lot of women in my general demographic in America, or India, or Saudi Arabia or Israel. So just a function of skin colour, location, obscenely lucky with appearance.*

Ronnie notes a feeling of insulation from female oppression experienced overseas, which may be due to the appearance of a cultural narrative of progression in New Zealand. The progressive reputation that New Zealand has cultivated over time

masks the true extent of inequality evident locally. Furthermore, postfeminist applications of this cultural narrative draw on "progression" to help explain a perceived lack of inequality, despite the intersectional differences described by Ronnie evidencing the dialectic relationship between privilege and oppression.

Social positioning, for the participants discussed in this section, encompassed a range of aspects. Individual assessments of their social positioning relied on relative perceptions of privilege, in response to a perceived lack of inequality personally, and/or the appearance of oppression for others by comparison. As such, the influence of the generalised other on the lived experience of the participants demonstrated how individual perceptions of "self" are born out of comparisons with the conditions and experiences of "others". Having demonstrated intersectional difference within and across generational cohorts, and explored material contexts in conjunction with the generalised other, the next part of this chapter will examine the impact of relational connections with particular others and participant experiences of privilege and oppression.

Particular Others and Participant Relationships

When considering the impacts of particular others on feelings of privilege and oppression, participants provided detailed examples of support from close friends, family, and work colleagues. The influence of close friends and family also extended to lived experience, whereby circumstances were deemed to be the result of relationships with others. Tessman (2000) described the concept of *moral luck* and its influence on individual experiences, which in this research, relate to privilege and oppression:

> [m]oral luck...is that which is not within an agent's own control and yet affects the agent in a morally relevant way, by, for instance, influencing character, decisions, or actions...While moral luck is always outside an

> agent's own control, its source can vary: it could result from a natural event such as a hurricane; it could be caused by another person's actions. (p. 376)

In this study, relationships played an important role in the lived experiences of participants, as feelings of privilege and oppression were attributed to particular others, such as romantic partners, parents and family, children and grandchildren, and colleagues. Participants' experiences highlighted similar subthemes associated with the generalised other, such as luck and gratitude. The additional subtheme of fortune was recurrent in the context of particular others. Participants demonstrated associations with moral luck in their interactions and descriptions of relationships with others that contributed to experiences of privilege and oppression.

Romantic partners and direct experiences of (in)equality.

Partners, as significant "particular others", had a notable influence on participants' lived experience and played a part in determining each participant's feelings of privilege and oppression. Discussions of romantic partners also included comparisons between the participants' relationships and the relationships of others. The generational cohorts included in this discussion are baby boomers, generation X, and millennials. Generation Z participants did not identify as having romantic partners.

For baby boomer participants, privilege and oppression and feelings of equality were contextualised in romantic relationships through notions of "give and take" and societal expectations. Marleen spoke to the feelings of fulfilment that women expect to gain from romantic relationships:

> *Many women feel 'incomplete' without a partner and yet often make wrong choices or repeat mistakes of previous unhappy relationships… I feel frustrated and annoyed that this situation is perpetuated.*

Although married herself, Marleen challenged the social stereotype that women need a life partner to feel "complete", indicating a possible association with second wave feminist perspectives which sought to encourage female independence. In Marleen's view, this stereotype perpetuates unhealthy, oppressive relationships and the repetition of poor partner choices, and frames being single as negative. Candice similarly described common socially oppressive expectations in relationships, while similarly noting her own relationship privilege:

> *Equality in marriage is a work in progress, with some men continuing with the notion that the wife is there to serve the husband, to do as he asks and to fit in with his plans unquestioningly. Fortunately this is a dying breed (or at least I hope so!). I was fortunate to marry someone who was relatively enlightened and who has always believed and acted in ways which show women that he treats them as equals.*

Candice placed the power with men in her description by noting that some men continued to expect that women's role in relationships was to serve and submit. She also described men who do not subscribe to this mentality as "enlightened", specifically referring to her own personal treatment at the hands of her husband, demonstrating the influence that particular others have on lived experience.

Similar to Marleen and Candice, Danielle also expressed a sense of connection between feelings of fortune and her relationship:

> *I've been very fortunate. I have been supported…I do recognise that I'm in a fortunate position…I've never been faced with domestic violence…so I'm lucky I've never been in that situation.*

Danielle recognised that she was in a fortunate position and her use of "lucky" is used in the context of having never experienced unfortunate circumstances such as domestic violence, indicating that Danielle's fate was placed in the hands of particular others and that she was fortunate and lucky by chance. This perspective is contrary to neoliberal individualism, that places the responsibility on individuals to

enact their own “luck”, despite the structural constraints that prevent true freedom of choice and opportunity.

Madeline described a sense of resentment *from* her husband towards her feminist standpoint. Madeline’s excerpt began with a response to a question concerning the influence of past feminist movements and she emphasised her associated feelings:

> *Both keeping my eyes open and sharing with other women makes me feel good. But I know it is a source of conflict with [my husband] who feels feminism is just a distraction - the real issue is religion... Internally, my husband has been really upset at my following #MeToo...He doesn’t like me as a feminist. He doesn’t...I think we still stand to this day still divided with it.*

While Madeline’s husband’s point of view did not stop her from actively seeking out or being a part of women’s issues, it did cause a point of contention in her relationship. Madeline’s lived experience existed in contrast to other participants in her generational cohort, as evident in Marleen, Candice, and Danielle’s examples. However, it is noticeable that Madeline was greatly affected by her husband’s opinions. A dialectic was evident in the freedom for Madeline to pursue women’s issues, influenced by second wave feminist perspectives that aimed to overturn the patriarchy, despite the resistance she received from her husband for engaging in such activity. An element of third wave empowerment appeared to contribute to Madeline’s continued engagement with feminist activism. Women’s equality continues to face challenges publicly, and it is also important to note that privately women are not always supported to pursue equality personally or for others either, as evidenced by Madeline’s personal stories.

Katrina described task allocation in her relationship:

> *I perceive the tasks I have carried out domestically to be my “work” in the partnership that I have with my husband...My responsibility I see as*

> *the tasks inside the house - cleaning, cooking etc - and accept this since this has always been the way our partnership works. However, I know that I can ask my husband for help...This is something to do with my generation - role models from mother and grandmother.*

For Katrina and her husband, equal distribution of tasks was determined by location e.g. inside and outside of the house. Katrina lived through second wave feminist movements, and yet it appeared that she chose to role model her mother and grandmother. The framing of role allocation as individual choice and responsibility demonstrates neoliberal feminist influences within Katrina's relationship, alongside the view of equality as asking for and receiving help from her husband when needed. In this regard, it is interesting to note that sexed role allocation is not oppressive in and of itself if both parties actively agree to undertake these roles and responsibilities.

Generation X participant, Susan, spoke only of her experience of explicit partnership inequality. Susan described an unhealthy and unhappy relationship, noting her past lived experience as influencing her present situation:

> *I have had struggles with mental health – depression, anxiety – in the past (due to childhood sexual abuse)…I feel that my past experiences of abuse…have had a massive impact...I own that I have not made wise financial decisions over my last 30 years of working as a teacher. I have inherited wealth and spent it.*

While this excerpt details oppression, privilege is evident in the attainment of wealth and education. However, where other participants attributed feelings of luck and privilege to the actions of others, Susan internally attributed negative situations to her own actions and choices. Susan's choice to "own" her past decisions could be linked to postfeminist and neoliberal perspectives, and the onus placed on individuals to take responsibility for their actions as they contribute to instances of

oppression within a framework of limited "choice". Susan continued to describe her situation:

> *I have kept a family trust with some inherited wealth (invested in a jointly-owned property) so I will come out of my separation with more equity than my partner. HOWEVER!!! [sic] He has never disclosed his earnings, savings or financial position to me…I have felt I'm living in an abusive relationship (mental/emotional) for about 10 years. We share a property and have one child together. These two factors are the only things keeping me in this relationship… [H]e spends weeks in another city for work…[so] I feel like I'm really a solo parent living a dual-parent lifestyle. What does this say about feminism [today]????*

Although Susan had not yet made the decision to formally separate from her partner, she had emotionally made the decision and was making plans to move forward alone. Noting her role as a single parent in her circumstances, Susan highlighted the limitations of the choices that were available to her within a postfeminist framework, despite the past progress made during second wave feminist movements for women's equality. In this next excerpt, Susan described attempting to take back some control:

> *I have recently pointed out to my family that all my unpaid work is on top of my paid work. The unpaid work is "traditional" women's work. On this basis, I recently stopped paying money into my partner's bank account for "bills"…My partner is not happy about this, and it puts a definite strain on an already distant and strained relationship…This reality shows that in terms of progress, for <u>this</u> woman, nothing has changed since the 1800s!!! (apart from MORE work being undertaken, and being educated). But if an intelligent, educated feminist woman...is hamstrung because of financial constraints… what the actual fuck???*

Equality in the context of Susan's relationship, was understood differently by both Susan and her partner. For her partner, equality involved the equal financial contributions of both parties, consistent with postfeminist and neoliberal notions of individual responsibility and equality as achieved. For Susan, equality meant acknowledging the unpaid work that she contributed outside of paid work, openness with each other to share information such as earnings, and not being "hamstrung

because of financial constraints". Susan's understanding of equality was a demonstration of second wave feminist perspectives that sought to achieve autonomy and increased opportunities for women, which she was not seeing as "realised" within her relationship. Susan's lived experience was tangible proof of the dialectic relationship between privilege and oppression, and the simultaneous experiences of advantage and disadvantage in the context of different perspectives on equality. During the final stages of diary writing, Susan responded to one of the monthly check-in emails to say that she and her partner had decided to formally separate.

In contrast to Susan, Sienna described in her entries the sharing of values with her partner:

> *I am lucky as my partner has the same work philosophy as I do. I do not have the pressures that many women have to deal with: massive bills, mortgages, credit card debt and other debt.*

Equality for Sienna and her partner involved a shared focus on paid employment to gain financial security, a similar perspective to Susan's partner above. In this regard, both Sienna and her partner enact postfeminist and neoliberal principles of equality by maintaining individual responsibility for equal financial contributions. On the other hand, despite feeling lucky, Sienna detailed a specific area where she felt she could use more support, further demonstrating the dialectic between privilege and oppression:

> *I would like it if my partner took more time to help around the house. Especially when I am away with work and come back to a sink full of dishes. He does a lot around the house with the renovation work we have going on however sometimes it feels like the daily running of the house gets dumped on me…I think there is a subconscious expectation that I will take care of a lot of the house work from my partner.*

The breadwinner and homemaker mentalities appear to have persisted for women. It appears that although women have been included in paid employment, the demands

have increased to continue the work of the private sphere while also contributing in the public. New layers of inequality have been added to women's lives as they gain further access to aspects of public life (but are still not entirely equal) and are still expected to carry out a majority of the unpaid work in the "home". Sienna's lived experience highlights a divide between perspectives of equality in the public and private spheres. Sienna previously detailed feeling lucky that both her and her partner could share a view of equality within the public sphere. However, slow progress in the sharing of household responsibilities is being made between romantic partners.

Lily wrote about a situation where she was subsequently questioned for the decision not to change her last name after marriage:

> *Famously, one night at the rugby club after a game (my ex-husband was a representative rugby player) I was verbally accosted by one of his team mates for not having enough respect for my husband to take his name which was shameful in his view. I hotly debated the subject with him and…we traded arguments for and against taking the man's name and I parried insults from him for my lack of femininity and compassion.*

Once again, conflicting views of equality are evident. Lily attempted to argue neoliberal feminist principles of individual choice and freedom, while the man appeared to claim equality as embodied by a mutual respect between husband and wife, alongside critiques of second wave feminism and feminists as lacking femininity.

Millennial participants in this study mostly described feelings of luck and support when detailing their romantic relationships. Fiona specifically outlined how her partner positively influenced her life:

> *My partner is very supportive of me and he encourages me to follow my passions and desires! We have been together for 4 years, are planning to buy a house together soon. Marriage is on the cards eventually but*

> *not anytime soon...One day we want to start a family but again, not anytime soon...I am passionate and enthusiastic about developing my career first, locum overseas and then want to start a family after that. I feel very privileged to be able to do what I want in my life, when I want and can only wish that this is the same for everyone.*

Within a postfeminist, neoliberal framework, Fiona had developed a clear plan for her life, outlining the prioritisation of a house before marriage and a career before beginning a family. Privilege is directly associated with individual choice and freedom, with a view of equality that is shared and/or supported by Fiona's partner. The privilege of "choice" identified by Fiona was influenced by, and attributed to, particular others.

Michaela also demonstrated gratitude in relation to her relationship with her husband. Michaela's marriage directly related to her feelings of privilege:

> *I have felt grateful for my partnership at many points. [My husband] continues to be an amazingly supportive husband and father, breaking many norms in doing so… I see evidence of [my husband's] unique respect for me and for what it takes to keep a home and family, mostly when compared to other friends' partners. I have also felt lucky and aware of my privileges a lot.*

Michaela and her husband share similar perspectives of equality, in the context of both the public and private sphere. Michaela experienced privilege in comparison to other couples who do not experience the same circumstances. Michaela's husband's views and actions appear to be an exception to the rule as opposed to the norm, which Michaela acknowledges in her gratitude and sense of privilege. In another excerpt, Michaela detailed an experience where her husband's workmates were exposed to their unconventional dynamic:

> *The day [my husband] began work as a firefighter, he chose to make this really beautiful layered velvet cake…He knew hardly anyone and pretty much everyone assumed that I had made it. So, I like to be the one to say, there's no way I could make a cake like that; this is [from my husband], this is what [he] loves to do. That makes them go, woah.*

Michaela took individual responsibility for correcting others on behalf of her husband, demonstrating that she was both unafraid to challenge stereotypes and unwilling to take credit for something she did not do. Michaela somewhat demonstrated the need to both correct assumptions and justify her relationship with her husband to others, as an extension of her sense of gratitude.

Janet detailed a situation where she felt men and women were not treated equally with regard to domestic responsibilities:

> *We had a funny conversation at a BBQ the other night which was largely around how bad I am at cleaning…[and] how I don't iron [my husband's] shirts. The other women were laughing and joking about what their husbands do and don't do, and it's amazing how the default is to assume that it's not fair that women are generally doing more around the house than their husbands. But it was a very well-off group of people we were with, and the women didn't work, so to me it was another example of how the feminism movement has forgotten to take into account that men make sacrifices too, and that marriage is about partnership and teamwork.*

In this situation, Janet felt that it was unfair that blame was predominantly placed on men in relationships for a perceived lack of participation in domestic responsibilities, especially given the privilege that these women had in being "well off" and not engaging in paid employment. A neoliberal feminist framework of equality seemed to inform Janet's critique of these women who did not appear to be equally contributing through engagement in the public sphere but were assessing the value of their husband's contributions in the private sphere.

With regard to her partnership, Vanessa chose to focus on domestic tasks as an indicator of relationship equality:

> *At home we share the work. I take care of the dog more, but my partner takes care of the car more (although that doesn't take 45 minutes out of every day to do). Anyway I'd rather walk the dog than wash the car. We both vacuum, do the dishes, clean the bathrooms/toilets/kitchen...The main thing [my husband] does that I don't do is mow the lawns, but he*

> *likes doing it and usually when he's doing that I'm gardening/vacuuming/walking the dog. We try and do different chores at the same time so it evens out.*

Vanessa describes an equal distribution of domestic responsibilities on the basis of need, capability, and enjoyment. This approach to equality assumes a third wave feminist focus on difference and a more equitable approach to task distribution. However, the initial suggestion in the excerpt pointed to the length of time taken to complete one chore over another. Although a successful corporate manager in a male-dominated industry, Vanessa inferences the push and pull that so often occurs in close romantic relationships. When I met with Vanessa for her interview, she revealed that her marriage had ended:

> *I should probably tell you now I actually left my husband like five months ago. Just kind of thinking about…and different reasons for that, like I just felt a bit suffocated and there were certain things.*

Vanessa's enactment of individual choice to leave her husband demonstrated neoliberal feminist understandings of freedom, which Vanessa felt was being limited by her husband. As such, Vanessa felt empowered in accordance with postfeminist perspectives, to reclaim her individual freedom.

The participants and excerpts discussed in this section highlight the role that romantic relationships with particular others play in influencing individual lived experiences of privilege and oppression. The existence of both positive and negative aspects of romantic relationships in the personal stories of participants demonstrate the dialectic relationship between privilege and oppression, evident within and outside of these relationships. The next section will explore the role and influence of parents and wider family, as particular others identified in participant lived experience.

The influence of the family on understandings of (in)equality.

Participants detailed family relationships with parents, children, and wider family, as well as family dynamics, such as the perpetuation of stereotypes and the absence of children, that contributed to their associations with privilege and oppression. The generational cohorts represented are generation X, millennials, and generation Z. The presence of these cohorts in the discussion of family relationships could be attributed to a recognition, both past and present, of instances where they were supported and encouraged, or treated differently because of their identification as women. Where baby boomer women were raised into certain social expectations and then sought to shed and challenge these, participants in other cohorts were raised by parents, as particular others, who were already challenging expectations, or grew up in conditions that provided increased opportunities for women.

Generation X participants, Lily, Sienna, and Tracy detailed instances of privilege and oppression when discussing their family relationships. Lily extended her story about her surname and how her family felt about her decision not to change it:

> *I was the first senior female staff member of a large central government department to keep my maiden name – this caused a furore with my parents (my father didn't speak to me for over a month and my mother was worried everyone would think I was living in sin).*

Lily's position as a senior staff member in governance demonstrated progress for women in this space. Similarly, her choice not to take her husband's surname speaks to the level of progress and an increased access to choices within a neoliberal feminist framework. Despite her successful career as a woman in governance, Lily's parents maintain expectations of a woman's role in marriage. This simultaneous experience of privilege in a public sense, and oppression privately, demonstrates the complex interplay between increased neoliberal feminist understandings of freedom

and opportunity and the continued constraints of social expectations. Sienna's experience demonstrated persistent expectations associated with male/female roles within her family:

> *When I go home and visit certain family there is a lot of distinction on what girls and boys roles/jobs are. I find it amusing and sad. In this day and age that people haven't moved on…My mother was a strong advocate for her daughters being strong women. Many of my female cousins grew up and still live second to their husbands and this I find irritating.*

Sienna's experience detailed the influence of feminist waves to enact progress, alongside persistent oppression. Sienna's mother would have lived through second wave feminism and might have engaged in radical perspectives of activism to "empower" the next generation. In contrast, it appears that other members of Sienna's family did not engage with second wave social or radical perspectives of equality when raising their children and have chosen to maintain the earlier stereotypical roles of men and women, as "breadwinner" and "homemaker".

Tracy described her family as "unconventional" and referred to the lack of biological expectations placed on her to have children:

> *For me, I never really made a conscious decision…I never had that ticking clock. Women seem to have this ticking clock, which I think is not real only because I've never experienced it, but it's never happened for me. And I've had an unconventional family who never put that pressure on me which was helpful.*

Tracy's inexperience of culturally charged ideas of women's biological and time-dependent purpose, commonly understood as the reproductive "biological clock", is an example of neoliberal feminist principles of privilege as improving individual choice and freedom. It appears that Tracy's family may have adopted and passed on these neoliberal feminist principles of individual choice and freedom as an

enactment of moral luck, which explains their seemingly "unconventional" approach to the possibility of children.

Millennial participant, Janet, spoke to feelings of privilege associated with having children and the frustration she felt at not being able to experience this privilege:

> *I come across a lot on Facebook about the imbalance in parenting – particularly around the expectation that mothers should attend school activities and if fathers do they're treated as heroes for it. My reaction to that surprises me too. Perhaps because I'd love to be in that position it kind of annoys me that the authors of those comments aren't grateful and enjoying having that privilege...I've always wanted to have children. Increasingly that's looking like it won't be an option which is a hard pill to swallow.*

Janet expresses frustration at the perceptions of men and women who engage in child raising. Similarly, women who struggle to conceive and who face challenges associated with career progression and motherhood and who may not be in a position (financially, relationally, and so on) to have children despite the desire, are nuanced examples of the inequalities associated with neoliberal feminist understandings of reproductive rights, motherhood, and childbirth. Janet's examples also demonstrate the illusions of choice and challenge postfeminist notions of empowered women who can do and be anything they choose.

Millennial participants, Fiona and Linda, had varied experiences with privilege and oppression in tandem with their relationships with their parents and families. Fiona's experience of privilege was closely related to her upbringing:

> *Our upbringing was all about equality and being a female never set us apart in what we did. I remember asking my Dad in my late teens if he ever noticed a difference and if I would have been different if I was a boy. To which he replied "Of course not, to me it was never an issue and I taught you what I knew and had expectations of you according to that"...I feel very privileged to be able to do what I want in my life, when I want and can only wish that this is the same for everyone… I*

> *am very grateful for my upbringing and the opportunities we were given.*

Understandings of equality within Fiona's family demonstrate neoliberal and postfeminist perspectives. Fiona's father maintained the expectation that women could do anything, a notion associated with second wave feminist thinking, which influenced Fiona's sense of empowerment to make her own choices about the opportunities she engaged in. Fiona's feelings of gratitude appear to be in response to increased opportunities that may have resulted from her treatment throughout her upbringing, as an enactment of moral luck which is underpinned by neoliberal and postfeminist approaches to equality.

In contrast, Linda detailed feelings of discrimination when in the presence of her brothers:

> *Every time I'm with my three brothers and they half-jokingly tell me to "go and do the dishes" or "go and get them a beer". Feelings about this: I just feel like I don't want to be round them – the joke is old, it's not funny, get over yourselves and let's have some intelligent conversation instead.*

Linda does not experience support from her brothers in this example, who instead of empowering Linda, choose to joke about the roles of men and women and draw a clear distinction between the sexes. The framing of roles as "jokes" might suggest the acknowledgement of increased opportunities for women, and the subsequent choice to make a distinction between freedoms and expectations, within a neoliberal feminist framework.

Generation Z participant, Loraine had a close relationship with her father that directly influenced her feelings of privilege:

> *By the time I turned twelve I had had my first period, and on my birthday that year…my dad wrote "congratulations on becoming a woman!"…I know I'm fortunate to have a dad that sees womanhood in*

> *that light…I am thankful for a family who loves women, and a father who has championed me.*

Loraine associates her family's love of her, as a love for women more generally. This "love" influenced Loraine's understanding of equality as celebrating biological milestones experienced by women, such as beginning menstruation. This view of equality is in line with biological distinctions drawn between men and women in second wave feminism, and the aim of feminist movements of this time period to have women's physical and biological differences acknowledged, which Loraine's father attempted to do in celebrating her entry into "womanhood".

The participants' stories explored in relation to family relationships demonstrate the influence of upbringing as a source of moral luck, and understandings of equality over time on lived experience. The next section will extend the discussion of particular others to include participant descriptions of friendships.

Friendships as comparative measures of individual equality.

Feelings of privilege and oppression were further evident in particular other relationships with friends, as both support and cause for comparison. Participants in each generational cohort described their friendships in association with privilege and oppression. Baby boomer participant, Marleen, spoke of an experience of comparative privilege as a critique of younger generations:

> *Recently a friend and her daughter came to stay, with a granddaughter who was going to be settled into a university hostel. The young woman in question was nervous and excited and seemed to me "flighty" and unsuitable to live away from home/go to university in a distant city. She had every advantage… Her grandmother, my friend, was thrown out of her home, her possessions disposed of, forced to leave school at age 16. She married, for "protection" and stayed in an unhappy marriage for the next 53 years… Faced with the same situation at critical times in my life, I may have been the same. The fact that I am not indicates to me that so many variables influence our development.*

Marleen appeared to critique the granddaughter, inferring a lack of maturity in the context of increased advantages. Marleen outlined the conditions undergone by her friend in the past to highlight improved conditions for women today. Neoliberal understandings of individual choice and opportunities in the present was viewed by Marleen as comparatively improved than the past. In this regard, Marleen appeared to find it difficult to understand the granddaughter's behaviour, irrespective of the acknowledgement that development is influenced by many variables. Another member of the baby boomer cohort, Katrina, showed an awareness of privilege as grounds for commonality in her friendship circle:

> *I suppose I move in a relatively privileged circle where men and women are treated equally (or so it seems to me)… Amongst friends we talk of the "superiority" of women, but the talk is rather "tongue in cheek" and we do recognise that men need to function in our lives.*

Radical and social feminist perspectives appeared to be shared among Katrina's friend group, with the inference of a matriarchy to signal the "superiority" of women. There is also a recognition of the "function" of men in society in contention with neoliberal feminist ideas of achieving equality without the help of men.

Generation X participant, Lily, detailed commonality, and awareness among her friend group in the context of discrimination against women:

> *My friends all subscribe to equity for women and share an awareness of the challenges and barriers at a local/immediate level. However, there are differing levels of awareness of systemic/endemic discrimination against women.*

Lily had chosen to surround herself with likeminded people who share similar views. The reference to equity highlights a third wave feminist perspective on equality that focuses on more substantive interventions that account for difference and diversity. The levels of awareness Lily mentioned suggest the latency of inequality in lived

experience, as masked by neoliberal individualism and postfeminist perceptions of equality achievement.

Millennial participant, Vanessa described a shared experience of oppression after she and her friend were approached by a man:

> *A man in his 60s asked a friend (in her 20s) where she worked. When she told him, he asked, "Oh, are you the receptionist?". She's a fucking engineer for crying out loud.*

Such assumptions highlight the complexity of inequality and that despite improvement in employment opportunities made for women from the second wave, segregation (both vertical and horizontal) within the labour market continues to oppress women and limit their choices and opportunities. Linda detailed a similar experience of unwarranted assumption, but by someone she *believed* to be a friend:

> *I stayed with a male friend down south for a week, who was repeatedly inviting himself inside my personal physical space – always touching me or stroking me in some way as a boyfriend would do (he is an ex boyfriend)…When I finally made it clear enough that I didn't want his advances, he was cold towards me for the last two days I stayed with him…I thought maybe I had created the 'situation' for myself by not being strong enough from the start to tell him to lay right off and leave me alone.*

Common arguments around the part that women play in instances of rape and abuse categorise them as inviting the abuse, rather than acknowledging that they were blatantly harmed. Within a neoliberal feminist framework, individual freedom and choice play a significant role in the way individuals interact with each other. Here, both Linda and the "friend" demonstrated freedom of choice, which shows the conflict evident in actions that serve the individual when others are involved. Rather than the "friend" acknowledging that his freedom and choice are subject to the consent of Linda, his reaction caused Linda to feel as though impinging on his

freedom was her fault. Linda was equally as entitled to enact her own choice, and subsequently chose not to accept the advances.

Generation Z participant, Ronnie, compares herself to her friends in the context of lived experience:

> *At the moment a friend overseas is having kind of a rough ride, "breaking loose" of a hyper-conservative family and trying to a) get her grades up enough to go to college totally against their wishes, and b) explain to her parents that she's gay…[The] more I read and look around the more conscious I am of how incredibly privileged I've been.*

Ronnie's experience highlights the tensions that exist between a third wave feminist focus on diversity and inclusion, and more conservative views of sexuality. Ronnie's feeling of privilege was described in the context of education and sexuality, and of not feeling pressured to conform to a certain way of "being". A focus on diversity in a New Zealand context might have contributed to Ronnie's lack of experience with pressures of this nature, as experienced in other countries.

Throughout this section, friendships have been highlighted as valuable sites of comparison, as the participants measure their own sense of equality, in association with privilege and oppression, with that of their friends. In the next section, the focus will move from friendships to working relationships, as further exploration of lived experience and associations with privilege and oppression within the workplace.

Workplace relationships and (un)equal treatment.

The participants in this study commented on feelings of privilege and oppression in relation to particular other relationships with work colleagues. Interestingly, baby boomer participants did not feature in this discussion of particular others, mostly because they were either self-employed or had retired. Generation X, millennial, and generation Z participants shared their lived experience of situations with colleagues

in both employment and informal situations that spoke to feelings of privilege, as well as detailing instances where they faced oppressive behaviour.

For generation X participants, Tracy and Lily, the work context was synonymous with oppressive behaviour and the need to encourage work colleagues to see beyond social stereotypes and expectations of women. Tracy detailed an experience with her work mates in a male-dominated industry, where they were discussing rhetorical meanings and their progression over time:

> *We were talking about the bogan black singlet at work and a couple of guys referred to them as "wife beaters" which I pulled them up about. I grew up saying those words but now I know the power of words. It's a black singlet, not a top that men wear to beat their wives. The men I work with are "good guys" they were fine being pulled up about it, and by the looks of it hadn't really associated the words and their meaning.*

The rhetorical connection between a singlet and the term "wife-beater" signifies a stereotypical association with domestic violence and men that wear this particular type of clothing. Tracy highlighted the power of words and the weight that they hold when linked to material objects, as well as changes in discourse over time and the implications of this on stereotypes and equality progression. In her diary entries, Tracy detailed several instances where she corrected her work mates' social perceptions, but this was met with understanding and respect. The willingness to learn and grow demonstrated by Tracy's work mates, paired with their respect for her as a woman in a male-dominated industry, conferred feelings of privilege to Tracy as she was openly able to contest oppressive male/female stereotypes with her colleagues.

Lily's experience showed how inequality for women can be implicit, demonstrating the ingrained nature of oppression and discriminatory comments towards women:

> *This week I have also had discussions with senior staff about unacceptable misogynistic comments made by a significantly influential person to female support staff…along the lines of being able to go back to their scone-making.*

Despite increased inclusion for women in the workplace, horizontal segregation continues to appear to impact the way that women are treated. The visibility of women in positions of "support", as Lily terms them, visually demonstrates what some might believe to be the role of women in paid employment, as a public sphere replication of their "domestic" role. Lily's role enabled her to approach this topic with senior staff members and stamp out discrimination in a way that the woman involved was not safely able to do, given the implications of the hierarchical employment structure.

Millennial participants also contributed lived experiences of oppression in association with their relationships with work colleagues. Fiona described support received from work mates:

> *Discrimination is not as bad as it was but I certainly think it is still apparent…There are certainly times where women's inequality becomes apparent but then other times it hasn't…. I am very lucky and fortunate to be around individuals in my university atmosphere as well as friend group and industry that support me and see no difference in females and males.*

Fiona demonstrates postfeminist notions of equality, evident in her description of oppression as "not as bad" and her inability to identify it within her own context. Her inexperience of inequality is in the individual sense, and so to view inequality Fiona would need to look at the lived experiences of others. Similarly, the understanding of equality evident in Fiona's lived experience is the direct comparison between men and women and the equal treatment of them both, regardless of difference. On the other hand, Linda highlighted a persistent imbalance between the treatment of men and women in her workplace:

> *[I was] asked out by a work colleague – he wouldn't have done that if I had been a man (I assume)…I felt disappointed, unsurprised, annoyed that I would have to put in extra effort to make sure he knew there would be no "bad blood" between us but that there wasn't any chance we would go out together.*

Linda detailed feeling obliged to mitigate the situation to preserve the working relationship, as an enactment of self-preservation. The unspoken hierarchy between men and women that Linda implies demonstrates the limitations of choice experienced by some women in the working environment. Linda's attempts at dissipating any "bad blood" were as both self-preservation and career protection, to minimise the implications of this exchange on her employment and experience within the organisation.

Michaela detailed a conversation she overheard of a male manager discussing job candidates:

> *I heard a senior male Manager describing candidates for a job recently…He mentioned that one female candidate [whom he had worked with previously] had been trying to conceive and had followed hormone treatment (which she told people about) but it had made her unwell…He didn't mention health situations for any male candidates and I'm not sure he would think it was as relevant.*

This example highlights the persistent public/private divide for women that second wave feminists fought to overcome. It also brings to light conversations that, although deemed "illegal" in New Zealand as part of the hiring process, still appear to continue within the organisation away from the candidate. The assessment of women's suitability for paid employment, and the continuation of this practice, demonstrates the different treatment of men and women where issues such as reproductive choices and health are concerned. In contrast, Janet explained how her work colleagues viewed her in her working environment:

> *It's common at work for older men to see me at the desk and make a comment that assumes (or some have said out loud) that I'm "just an*

> *office girl" and who should they talk to about their issue…I don't choose to care about that. I can normally answer the question which exceeds their expectations and I think in turn challenges their perception a bit.*

Janet viewed it as her individual responsibility to prove her capability to the men in her workplace, in the hope that it might change their perceptions. As part owner in the company, the minimisation of her administrative position ignores the role she played in the day-to-day management of the business. Janet's choice not to allow the comments to bother her aligned with neoliberal values of productivity in the context of work-related goals, and also demonstrated the lack of consequences for men who voice these assumptions.

Generation Z participant, Ronnie, detailed her participation in an inter-university challenge in a male-dominated team:

> *We were discussing how each of us could help out extra, since it's being held [here] – all the guys were talking about doing the heavy lifting…and I got detailed off to help with baking (I'm not an amazing cook or anything)…The thing I found most striking about this was that I was okay with it; it didn't really bother me at the time that people's sex rather than abilities was being used to assign jobs.*

The assumption that Ronnie would be responsible for baking was an example of the persistent nature of male/female role stereotypes. Comparisons drawn between sexes to allocate tasks is another example of horizontal segregation within this section. The notion of being unbothered by the role distribution could be ascribed to the ingrained nature of such expectations, balanced with the ability to recognise their occurrence and the consequences of speaking out. Ronnie continued to describe her experience in this team:

> *On the same team there's one guy who is quite talkative and talks over people. A lot. I'm usually [more] right than he is, but less usually listened to, and I don't talk as much, but he's not referred to as "the noisy one" – I am. So, apparently there are different standards of how much is too much for males and females.*

Stereotypes about women and speech often use words with negative associations, such as nagging, bossy, and noisy. Words used to describe men's speech are more likely to focus on stereotypes related to assertiveness and leadership, attributing more positive features to men. While Ronnie did not feel the need to challenge these expectations and assumptions of her characteristics and capabilities, she was aware of their existence and the implications that these expectations had on her ability to be seen as an equal member of the team. Across these two examples from Ronnie, it is clear that capabilities were not considered in the allocation of roles and assumed characteristics; rather sex, and associated stereotypes, were the deciding factor.

The participants discussed in this section detailed their interactions with work colleagues, both positive and negative. The examination of work and team colleague relationships highlights the persistent nature of inequality and oppression for women in working life, which at times is masked by feelings of privilege. The next section comprises a brief summary of the data and findings discussed throughout this chapter.

Summary

Throughout this chapter, women's lived experience has informed the focus of discussions in accordance with feminist standpoint theory. The lived experiences of the participants presented and discussed in this chapter featured individual associations with privilege and oppression, as key themes identified through thematic analysis. The structure of this chapter presented lived experiences within generational cohorts as an intra-categorical approach to intersectionality, which highlighted both age-based difference, but also differences regardless of age. The recognition of feminist waves, feminist perspectives, and understandings of equality, linked members of generational cohorts together and simultaneously identified

difference between and across participants of varying ages. The identification of feminist perspectives and understandings of equality in lived experience brought to light how discursive understandings that change over time are materially experienced by women in 21st Century New Zealand.

In the context of social comparisons, the presence of systemic and moral luck underpinned to what or whom participants inferred their sense of privilege and/or oppression. In most instances, what participants identified as privilege uncovered forms of societal or relationship oppression, as a dialectic relationship. The influence of the generalised other, as a community that alters and sustains social norms, was viewed through the lens of a cultural narrative of progression that spoke to increased access and opportunities for women that masked the true extent of inequality. Explorations of participant lived experience and particular others emphasised the role that significant others played in confirming, challenging, or ignoring participants' associations with feminism and understandings of equality. The various feminist associations and understandings of equality situate a plateau in women's equality in New Zealand within the lived experience of the women who participated. The strand of neoliberal ideas and postfeminist perspectives that ran through the experiences discussed in this chapter shows how a focus on individualism breeds a sense of individual responsibility among some of the participants and causes them to pursue "equality" for themselves. Similarly, the differing understandings of equality that occur between participants, and the particular others they mention in their stories, illustrates the lack of solidarity and collectivism, and the fractured identities and feminist perspectives that contribute to the existence of a plateau in relation to equality for women in New Zealand.

The next chapter will delve deeper into the feminist perspectives and understandings of equality among participants and take a narrative approach to examine women's lived experience. Through narrative analysis, Chapter Six will address the grand, master, and personal narratives evident in each of the generational cohorts' stories, by focusing on one participant of interest from each cohort. A narrative approach to participant stories uncovers how each woman positions herself within discursive and material understandings and practices that contribute to individual experiences of (in)equality.

Chapter Six: Narrative Entanglements: The Socio-cultural and Political Influences on Personal Stories of Feminism and Women's Equality

Stories are discursive sense-making responses to (often) material experiences, drawing on narratives that may appeal to prevalent cultural storylines. Researchers contest the use of both narrative and story and attempt to draw clear distinctions between the two (Culler, 2004; Roberts 2002). From a research perspective, there are arguments outlining what constitutes "story" and how this differs from "narrative" (see Bruner, 2002; Ludvig, 2006), but it is possible to question if a divide should be insisted upon, given that both are used to make sense of the world (Rooney, Lawlor & Rohan, 2016). In this thesis I have drawn on Culler's (2004) definitions of story as an arrangement of actions or events seen as independent from their presence in discourse, and narrative as a discursive representation of narrative events. I aimed to listen to and interpret the experiences of New Zealand women, examining both lived experience (story) and socio-cultural and political influences (narrative). As such, the aim of this chapter is to address the second research question: *In what ways are grand and master narratives evident in participants' personal narratives of women's (in)equality?*

The narrative analysis in this chapter follows the narrative indicators of temporality, sociality, and place. Each of the narrative indicators demonstrates an intersectional perspective in acknowledging that temporality, sociality, and place interact and are experienced differently. The nature of the diary and interview methods meant that participants entered the study with particular perspectives, which continued to develop throughout their participation. The "temporal transition"

(Connelly and Clandinin, 2006, p. 479) that participants experienced while taking part in the research was evidenced in the analysis, as personal stories and narrative influences were detailed in alignment with the beginning, middle, and end of the data collection process. Sociality and place are evident in the relevance of narrative forms to a New Zealand context, in the 21st Century. Participants' personal stories reflected elements of the New Zealand society that they were a part of, as well as detailing how communicative interactions contributed to an identification with feminism. The key events that participants used to evidence their feelings and experience situated their personal standpoints both contextually and relationally, allowing insight into the entanglement of ideological and cultural storylines that contributed to the development and retelling of personal stories.

This chapter begins with a discussion of levels of narrative and an explanation of narrative entanglements. The remainder of this chapter explores the stories of four participants—as women from each generational cohort with significant, complex, and interesting personal stories—to examine the levels of narrative that inform their identifications with feminism and women's equality. The aim of focusing on one member from each cohort has little to do with painting a representative picture, and more to do with exploring how generational understandings were manifested in individual lives, especially where feminism and women's equality are concerned. This chapter will end with a brief discussion of the narrative influences evident within and across generational cohorts, to further evidence intersectional difference among and between the women who participated in this research.

The Levels and Entanglements of Narrative

The presence of ideological and political grand narratives and cultural master narratives work to influence lived experience. While a participant may be influenced by a particular grand narrative, they may confirm or challenge culturally accepted master narratives to create or reform their own personal narrative(s). In this chapter, the entanglement of grand and master narratives that form part of participant's personal stories shed light on the dialectic of privilege and oppression discussed in the previous chapter. The diagram below demonstrates the levels of narrative used in this research to highlight the filtering of one narrative influence into the next.

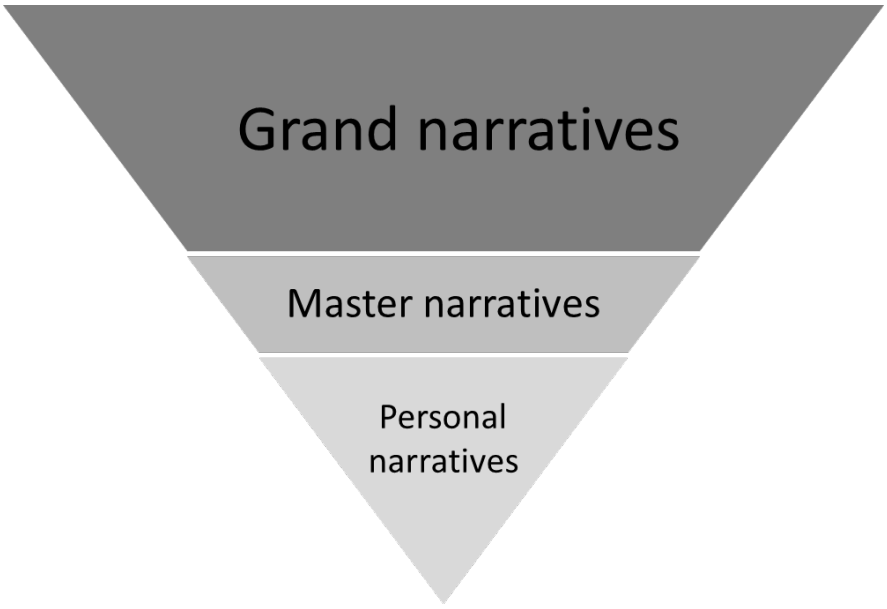

Figure 3. Filtering of one narrative form into another.

The entanglement of grand and master narratives work to inform the personal narratives that individuals live by and (re)construct in the dynamic process of meaning making. Personal narratives, therefore, could be termed a “mash-up” of grand and master narratives, and reflect the aspects of these narrative levels that

individuals choose to adopt or reject as they navigate their lives in a particular cultural and political context. In the context of the figure above, personal stories surround the narrative levels as the specific details that contribute to an understanding of how participants were influenced by grand narratives, adopted, or rejected master narratives, and constructed their personal narratives. Participants drew on key events or stories to (a) challenge or confirm master narratives and (b) inform personal narratives. Key events that participants chose to focus on brought to light master narratives at play, but also helped participants to situate their personal stories within their culture and relate to a particular audience (Woodiwiss, 2017). Participants told personal stories of their lives and the lives of those close to them, or recounted key events, in accordance with the woman-centred focus of the research, and with me, as the researcher and audience, in mind. The stories that participants retold presented as significant contributors to personal narratives, because they clearly reflected or rejected master narratives as they are understood within the context of a grand narrative. The filtering down, the "mash-up", the entanglement of narrative forms was evident in personal stories that highlight how participants drew on grand narratives, engaged with master narratives, and formulated personal narratives by which they lived out their individual standpoint (Lee, 1997).

"Women Still Have a Long Way to Go": Danielle's Cautious Approach to Activism

As a 73-year-old woman in 21st Century New Zealand, Danielle describes herself as baby boomer and a rural feminist. Duncan (2010) observed that baby boomers' earlier years and identity development were closely tied to key aspects of second wave feminist events, and as a group they were, therefore, more likely to identify as strong feminists and activists. As a generation that contributed to and lived through

significant social and political gains for women, baby boomers have transitioned through several ideologically charged grand narratives. For this group, "the old ideology and the new are tangled together" (Onyx & Benton, 1996, p. 20), resulting in master and personal narrative associations that mirrored transitions in society and were firmly situated in identity development that occurred in their younger years (Duncan, 2010). As such, Danielle's identification as a feminist is consistent with first wave liberal feminism that sought the equal treatment of men and women (Auchmuty, 2008). Danielle's personal stories detailed the ways in which a grand narrative of *liberal feminism* influenced her narrative association throughout her lifetime. Master narratives, within the context of the grand narrative of liberal feminism, were *feminist activism* as a narrative that embodies actions undertaken to progress towards liberal feminist understandings of equal opportunity, and *the sisterhood,* evoking the power of solidarity for and among women to progress social change as a characteristic of first wave, but more noticeably second wave, feminism. The grand and master narratives evidenced in Danielle's personal stories contributed to her awareness of women's issues and her cautious determination to continue to contribute towards enactments of social change, while also navigating potential for personal harm. These contributions form the personal narratives evident in Danielle's personal story as a reflection of liberal feminist perspectives and ideas.

In the early stages of her diary entries, Danielle placed a grand narrative of liberal feminism at the forefront, defining women's equality as:

> *A belief in the right of women to have equal opportunity with men in every field.*

Here, Danielle described equality of opportunity and the ability of women to access the same opportunities as men. Liberal feminist notions of equal rights are evident in

the specific emphasis on the male-dominated public sphere. Danielle expanded on the origins of this belief, in tandem with her first experiences of inequality:

> *My parents generally believed in equal opportunity…So it was really not until I was married and in my twenties and wanting to "change the world" that I was cautioned that it would be better if a man chaired the meeting, and discovered that delegates to the provincial National Party were selected in couples e.g. Mr and Mrs Smith.*

Danielle's introduction to feminist activism appears to have occurred in the early stages of second wave feminism in New Zealand, as a metaphorical "feminist awakening" that revealed explicit instances of inequality. In the context of liberal feminism, Danielle was confronted with direct examples where women were excluded from male-dominated spaces and were not given access to the same opportunities. It might also be that a sense of cautious determination began to develop for Danielle during this time, initiated by the warnings against changing the status quo.

The events of Danielle's earlier life and the inequality she experienced spurred her feminist activism, and under a liberal feminist grand narrative, she involved herself in second wave feminist movements with the aim of providing women with equal opportunities:

> *I was the Female Co-convenor for [a political party's] election campaign…I have been on the Foodbank's Board of Trustees and undertaken a number of roles…For a number of years [I] produced such material from my business which was called "Affirmative Action", "Girls can do anything", "Every mother is a working mother", "Women share the ruling of the world", "Equal pay for work of equal value" etc.…I have been active in meetings, demonstrations and collecting signatures on petitions etc. on issues relating to equality/equity for women.*

The introduction of equity into Danielle's approach to equality signals the influence of second wave feminist perspectives on Danielle's enactment of activism. Danielle maintained a focus on equality of opportunity under a liberal feminist perspective

and engaged in feminist forms of activism reminiscent of first wave feminism through textual dissemination, and both claiming and advocating for a seat at the table for herself and women more broadly. Despite Danielle's involvement in feminist activism to fight for equal opportunities, Danielle expressed frustration at the notion that:

> *[Women] still do not have true equal opportunity or pay equity.*

Danielle referenced her own children to highlight the continuation of unequal opportunity for women, and introduced a public/private paradox in her enactment of feminist activism:

> *I feel my son has had a more successful progress in his career than my daughter has…[But] you have to be careful about getting involved in family situations.*

Danielle's master narrative association with feminist activism appeared to be limited in her interactions with her children. Danielle exercised restraint with her children, opting to preserve her relationships with them at the expense of her activist aims. In a sense, Danielle might be attempting to preserve a sense of solidarity with her children, as part of the family "unit", by being selective about the issues she broached with them. A public/private paradox is evident in Danielle's pursuit of liberal feminist equality within the public sphere, and her choice not to point it out or address it in private.

In the latter half of her diary entries, Danielle explained her participation in harakeke (flax) weaving. As a traditional Māori activity, harakeke weaving formed the foundation for necessary and significant resources such as clothes, baskets, rope, and fishing nets (Department of Conservation, 2020). At a harakeke weaving wānanga (course or learning retreat), Danielle engaged in conversation about personal experiences of inequality with two members of the group:

> *At Kawhia [Miriam] recounted how, when her marriage dissolved, her husband demanded that she give his name back to him. She had to dream up a new surname. [Janice] recounted how her partner discovered that their insurance policy was held in her name. He demanded that the insurance company change it into his name. To their credit the insurance company contacted her and at her request, kept the insurance in her name. Both of these incidents reminded me that women still have a long way to go. A large percentage of women still take their husband's surname on marriage, and keeping their own surname is not really accepted in many circles. Money, business, insurance is still usually the domain of men.*

By listening to these women's experiences and allowing them to express their incidents of oppression, Danielle was actively engaging in solidarity building and the enactment of a master narrative of sisterhood. The appearance of bonding over common experiences of oppression highlighted an ongoing lack of equality of opportunity within a grand narrative of liberal feminism and served to demonstrate Danielle's awareness that women still did not possess full access to spaces dominated by men.

Danielle's provided insight into her present-day enactment of feminist activism and her search for solidarity and a sense of sisterhood:

> *At night, on my way to bed, I collect up any [news]papers lying around the house. In the morning, after reading today's paper, I carefully read through the papers I have collected [and] cut out any items which need my attention…Over time I address the issues which I have cut items about from the paper e.g. by writing a letter to the paper, by commenting on it on my Facebook page…or contacting some relevant person or authority…I play a useful role in bringing issues to the attention of others in my various networks…Others often take action when I point out issues which need to be addressed…[and their actions] will build on the work that so many of us have done.*

Danielle's feminist activism of the present saw her take on the role of collating women's issues evident in mainstream media and commenting on them or disseminating them to those able to influence change. Danielle viewed her role within the "sisterhood" as highlighting key issues and empowering others to enact

change, and this activity also served to maintain her awareness of women's issues. Her determination to enact change and the adjustment of her feminist activism over time maintains its sights on liberal feminist understandings of equality, positioning her no longer as a public spokesperson for women's issues, but as a persistent and supporting figure to increase awareness and empower others, all with the aim of increasing women's access to opportunities.

Towards the end of her participation in the study, Danielle reflected on her life as a feminist and the landscape of women's equality:

> *[Feminism is] the way I live and the way I make decisions. It's just what I am, really…I think that quite a lot of women are getting towards equality in all sorts of fields but they're not necessarily feminist…I identify as being feminist, but there are still issues where if I was a man I would be treated differently…I still think men have most of the money, they have the say about most of the things and that's just the reality of most women's lives…There's lots of other issues in society where women don't have equality even, even in cases where they actually are probably better qualified in, and in a better position to be the decision maker…There are always issues that need to be acted on and I do write quite a lot of letters to the paper, or letters to decision makers and feel moved to be active, to try and change things.*

Determination to continue her feminist activism to achieve equality of opportunity for women demonstrates the narrative entanglements evident in Danielle's personal story. Danielle's view of equality within a grand narrative of liberal feminism had not changed, nor had her awareness or determination. However, her approach to feminist activism and solidarity building had changed over time to reflect persistent issues and a changing audience. In this way, Danielle's tempered approach to activism had become influenced by an element of self-preservation:

> *As a sort of a self-preservation mechanism, I tend not to talk about some of the issues that I am concerned about. I don't think that achieves anything if you just get into exhaustion…I don't talk to my neighbours about my feminist views…so it comes back to self-*

> *preservation…Talking to my neighbours that's not going to do anything for that; but talking to the councillors…or I might write a letter.*

Danielle's feminist activism in the context of her neighbours is reminiscent of women of the first wave, who would refrain from having a public feminist presence but would carry out anonymous writing and consciousness-raising discussions more privately. The consequences for Danielle may be less severe in the modern setting, but she identified self-preservation an important element of her choices around feminist activism. Danielle identified that solidarity was potentially not achievable with her neighbours with regard to women's issues and had instead sought to focus on finding others who might share similar concerns and beliefs.

Danielle's closing remarks firmly situated her personal narratives within a grand narrative of liberal feminism and spoke to what she believed needed to occur for women to obtain true equality of opportunity:

> *I think they need the opportunity to become equal, but as is being proved already we think oh well women can get qualified as lawyers or as doctors or they can be equal…What we want to have is not necessarily for women and men to be equal at everything; what we want is to give girls and women the opportunity if that's where they want to go…In most areas I think it will be a long time before we reach that.*

Danielle critiqued postfeminist notions of the role model effect which fuel perceptions of equality as achieved. Similarly, third wave intersectional perspectives were evident in Danielle's reference to a focus on women and girls, as opposed to women and men. Maintaining an awareness of women's issues and her determination to enact change demonstrated how liberal feminist understandings of equality, approaches to feminist activism, and early iterations and later developments of a sisterhood, became entangled to inform Danielle's personal story.

“Feminism Means Being Able to Make My Own Decisions”: Sienna’s Quest for Control

Sienna was a younger member of the generation X cohort included in this study at 41 years old and was born and raised in Canada before moving to New Zealand twelve years ago. At the start of this research, Sienna worked for three different companies within the sport and medicine sector. Members of the generation X and baby boomer cohort are thought to focus on similar feminist topics of equal rights, self-determination, improving women’s position, and challenging gender roles, although the interpretation of these issues appears to be acted upon differently (Duncan, 2010). Putnam (2000) outlined the master narratives of members of generation X:

> X-ers have an extremely personal and individualistic view of politics. They came of age in an era that celebrated personal goods and private initiative over shared public concerns. Unlike boomers, who were once engaged, X-ers have never made the connection to politics, so they emphasise the personal and private over the public and collective (p. 259).

Generalised understandings of generation X attribute individualism, materialism, and political disengagement as traits that are shared among cohort members (Putnam, 2000; Vromen, 2003).

Generation X were born into second wave feminist movements, but the introduction of neoliberal and postfeminist ideas in the 1990s resulted in the adoption of an individualistic focus within the “illusion of control” (Chen, 2013; Hill & Giles, 2014). In Sienna’s personal story, she drew on the grand narrative of *postfeminism* to describe a master narrative of *progression* that celebrates the gains and achievements made for women and masks the continuation of inequality. Similarly, a master narrative of *female empowerment* is the material embodiment of second wave feminist discourse that advocated for a “girls can do anything” approach to women’s equality, empowering Sienna to focus on achieving equality for

herself. The entanglement of postfeminism, progression, and female empowerment caused Sienna to maintain a clear focus on the individual choices and freedoms available to her, as a personal narrative preserving a sense of control over her own life.

At the start of her diary entries, Sienna described her identification with feminism:

> *For me feminism means being able to make my own decisions about my health, career, daily life and finances – any decisions that need to be made about me I can make them on my own and not have others, be it government, family, society, tell me how I should be.*

The influence of neoliberal principles within a grand narrative of postfeminism was evident in Sienna's naming of those who should not be involved in her individual decision making.

Similarly, Sienna's affirmation that she *can* make decisions in both her public and private life shows the entanglement of postfeminism, progression, and female empowerment in Sienna's understanding of equality as the ability for individuals to have control of their own lives.

Towards the middle of Sienna's entries, she reflected on how feminist movements and actions of the past have had implications on individuals in the present, demonstrating further narrative entanglements:

> *Sometimes in the news you hear about…men only things being attacked and forced to accept women. This makes me angry. I see this kind of attitude as over the top or the past feminist movement. There was a time when women were excluded from many areas and they had to fight to be included. However, I think we have moved well past that and there are so many opportunities for women out there.*

Sienna acknowledged the existence of exclusion for women of the past but juxtaposed this with a rejection of exclusion in the present, consistent with postfeminist understandings of equality as achieved. The idea that men should accept

women into their spaces was noted by Sienna as “over the top” and attributed to past feminist movements, suggesting that a) the support of men is no longer necessary and b) there are other opportunities for women to explore. This view of women’s equality further demonstrated the influence of a postfeminist grand narrative, alongside a master narrative of progression in the form of “many opportunities”, and the notion that women should be empowered to pursue opportunities as an enactment of personal control. Sienna then continued by critiquing the implications of feminism and some women’s enactment of empowerment:

> *Feminism has pushed to get women wherever they want to go but some women get there and they seem to think they have to be control freaks or prove they are better than everyone, even other women, trying to control everyone.*

Sienna’s understanding of equality is framed as individualised, with neoliberal and postfeminist implications evident in associations made between “control freaks” and the control of others. As such, female empowerment is understood to be beneficial when it serves the individual, in the context of increased opportunity that does not affect others. Empowerment verges on “control freak” when actions have implications on the lives of others, which Sienna identified was a product of the misuse of opportunity visible through a master narrative of progression. Towards the end of her entries, Sienna made the decision to resign from her position at the doctor’s office and noted that a key reason for this was the increased control sought over her work by other females in that environment. Maintaining control over her life was important to Sienna, as personal narrative, and so by removing herself from that environment she was empowered to reclaim control and pursue other opportunities.

Sienna’s participation in the study ended at the submission of her diary entries, as subsequent communication went unanswered. Unfortunately, this meant

that an interview did not take place and so further exploration of Sienna's narrative beyond her diary entries was not possible. In her closing entry contributions in her diary, Sienna summarised her perceptions of feminism and women's equality movements both past and present, with a focus on generational perspectives:

> *I still think there is an older generation of women out there who are in the mindset that they have to push and prove who they are and what they can do…There is a new generation that seems to be moving forward with less of the gender role attachments that my generation has however there is still these older generations that are very quick to attach the gender roles. I think as we move forward hopefully this century will be another step forward for women. There is still the expectation that women can do it all however the tide is changing and many younger women [are] seeing they don't have to do it all.*

Sienna's description of past feminists depicts women as forthright and potentially "aggressive" in their attempt to gain equality. References to "push and prove" and a changing tide in women's attempts to occupy multiple spaces demonstrates the influence of a postfeminist grand narrative on Sienna's personal narrative. Sienna maintained the view that inequality for women had been overcome and many opportunities existed for women as a result of progression. As such, Sienna believed that women should be empowered to enact control over their own lives to pursue available opportunities, but not to the point that it interfered with the lives of others.

"What Do I Want My Life to Have Been About?": Janet's Journey to Finding Her Purpose

Janet was a 37-year-old millennial who was co-owner of a construction company, a wife, and self-described traditionalist. Millennials are thought to be more educated than previous generations and had greater access to and knowledge of technology (Milkman, 2017). Feminist movements for Millennials have focused on a third wave emphasis on diversity and inclusion, and postmodern approaches that aimed to deconstruct the category of woman and end the divide between the public and

private spheres (Roseneil, 1999). As an older millennial, Janet grew up during what we now know to be the beginning of the third wave, and at a time of neoliberal dominance and increasing postfeminist influence that perpetuated notions of equality as "achieved". Millennials tend to support movements that focus on diversity and inclusion as they apply to the individual (Giddens, 2013; Gill & Scharff, 2011), but reject associations with feminism as a label (McCabe, 2005). Janet's personal story demonstrated the influence of *neoliberal feminism* as an overarching grand narrative, in her focus on individual choice and freedom, and *public/private dichotomy* as master narrative, as she strived to balance her contributions in each space to be viewed as a productive member of society. This master narrative aligned with neoliberal individualist notions of work-family balance, alongside a master narrative of *"girls can do anything",* in approaches to participation in the public and private spheres. Grand and master narratives contributed to Janet's personal narrative of finding her purpose, as she attempted to ensure that her actions both publicly and privately a) achieved personal fulfilment and b) contributed to society.

In her initial diary entries, Janet noted her "traditional" approach to women's and men's roles:

> *I'm probably reasonably traditional myself and I like a lot of the stereotypical things about being female…I like that there are no expectations that I should earn a lot of money, but I could if I wanted. I like that if I had children it would be very normal that I'd be the primary caregiver – those things are positives for me.*

Janet referenced increased choice and opportunity within a neoliberal feminist grand narrative. Increased opportunities within the public sphere and the ability for women to be seen to "choose" to remain in the private sphere, as influenced by master narratives of the public/private dichotomy and "girls can do anything", have influenced Janet's choice to adopt a stereotypical approach to women's and men's

roles, and to view their enactment as “normal”. Janet continued by explaining her private sphere aspirations:

> *I’ve always wanted to have children. Increasingly, that’s looking like it won’t be an option which is a hard pill to swallow. For a long, long time I’d based my vision of how life would be around having a family. It’s hard to reframe that.*

Despite choosing to take a stereotypical approach to women’s roles in the private sphere, Janet acknowledged difficulty in balancing the choices she envisioned for both public and private spheres. A public/private dichotomy understood in Janet’s context as “girls can do anything”, was challenged by the absence of children. Similarly, Janet described a life purpose that was based on having children to truly enact her stereotypical approach to women’s roles. The contradictory entanglement of neoliberal feminism and a “girls can do anything” highlighted the illusion of choice within the boundaries of society, and the implications on Janet’s fulfilment of her purpose. Towards the middle of her entries Janet outlined these implications:

> *Now I’m trying to answer questions for myself around what does financial security really need to be if I’m not working to provide for a family, and what do I want my life to have been about, how do I fit and add value in the community, what do I want my marriage to be about if there isn’t a family.*

Janet’s life purpose was closely connected to her ability to become a mother. With this “choice” somewhat taken away from her, Janet began to question what her purpose might be. Having directed her life in the public sphere to align with her aims for the private, Janet began to revaluate her choices as an attempt to balance her public and private participation. A focus on adjusting her purpose demonstrated neoliberal feminist notions of individual control and evidenced the illusion of choice in the narrative of public/private dichotomy, to dispute the notion that “girls can do anything”.

Towards the end of Janet's diary entries, she described her view of the reproductive choices of other women from the perspective of a business owner**:**

> *I have had a conversation where I said that in our business we would be very hesitant to hire a young female who posed a risk in regard to needing to go on maternity leave…I don't think it's fair to expect people who have taken a huge risk…to deal with the extra challenges that go with someone else's life choices.*

Janet demonstrated neoliberal feminist notions of individual responsibility for life choices, of which Janet felt that she should not be responsible for the choices of others especially where they have financial implications on her own life. The public/private dichotomy was similarly evident in Janet's belief that she could balance her participation in each sphere but that she might not support the choices of someone else to do the same. Individual choices to achieve life purpose should, therefore, not affect the choices or lives of others within a neoliberal feminist grand narrative.

Janet appeared to demonstrate an awareness of the illusion of choice within a neoliberal feminist grand narrative and the implications on her personal narrative:

> *You grow up and there's not very many other models that are shown as genuine options other than get married, and have kids, build a family kind of thing, because the idea of being single forever is never really shown as a true option that would make somebody happy forever or even not having children and some of that kind of stuff. I certainly fell into that category of thinking that that was the path.*

Having deviated from the "model", Janet was faced with the challenge of reframing her life purpose to productively contribute to the public and private spheres. As such, Janet appeared to critique societal understandings of what constituted a valuable contribution:

> *In our society alone, for me it wouldn't be so much about anything changing for women…If we had a model where everyone's contribution was valued, I think we would do away with the idea of some of this [women's equality] sort of stuff.*

Janet acknowledged the increased opportunities for women as part of a neoliberal feminist grand narrative and in the presence of latent inequality. In revaluating her life purpose, Janet was in search of ways to productively participate in public and private life to enact a "girls can do anything" approach, beyond stereotypical understandings of women's roles. Janet's personal story highlights the significant impact that grand and master narratives have on the formation of personal narratives, especially when attempts are made to maintain alignment between complex and entangled narrative influences.

"I Could Never Call Myself a Feminist": Loraine's Exploration of Fractured Identities

Loraine was a member of the generation Z cohort in this study. She was a 20-year-old tertiary student of History with a strong association with the Christian faith. Seemiller and Grace (2019) observe that generation Z members challenge the idea of traditional ideological associations preferring to be "open-minded" as they engage with pertinent social issues that affect multiple groups, as a third wave feminist, intersectional approach to diversity. It has been said that generation Z value diversity, relationships, happiness, and meaningful work, all of which motivate their sense of passion and achievement (Parker & Igielnik, 2020; Seemiller & Grace, 2019). A focus on difference in third wave feminism and the dismantling of "womanhood" to account for other categories of non-binary gender identity, has led to debates about what equality is and for whom is it targeted (Jeffreys, 2014). Loraine's personal story interacts with the grand narrative of *Christianity* which embodies the teachings and beliefs that influence her value system. Similarly, the grand narrative of *postfeminism* is evidenced in Loraine's personal story, as a critique of a) postmodern feminist and the feminist subjectivities that had made it difficult for her to determine

what it meant to be a "feminist", and b) intersectional differences that had made it challenging for Loraine to identify what comparisons equality was based on. *Feminist subjectivities* and *fractured identities* formed the master narratives present in Loraine's personal story, as spaces that contributed to Loraine's confusion about feminism and exploration of what "womanhood" means in the 21st Century context, as her personal narrative.

At the start of her diary entries, Loraine paid close attention to the category of "woman", as a key focus of this study, by describing Caitlin Jenner's feature on the cover of *Vanity Fair* magazine to celebrate her transition:

> *But what is a woman?.. Today we say that we are what we identify as being – that our bodies don't define us. But why is it then that our bodies define us so much that transgender friends feel it necessary to obscure their bodies in order to look how they feel inside. When Bruce Jenner became Caitlyn Jenner to the world on the front cover of Vanity Fair, she did so by taking on the very feminine stereotypes that feminists have been trying to break away from for decades. Can you make yourself a woman by physical alteration alone? Do...[feminine stereotypes associated with] physical characteristics substantiate our claims upon womanhood? All very well, but what does this mean for our definition of woman? If so, what of the woman who cannot grow hair? What of the woman who lost her breasts to cancer? Am I more of a woman if I have more curves, or longer hair, or more sexual appeal? Surely not.*

Loraine acknowledged changes to societal understandings of womanhood within postmodern feminist notions of fractured identities. Postmodern feminist narratives place a specific emphasis on diversity and difference to deconstruct the category of "woman", which contributes to the fracturing of identities. Within a grand narrative of Christianity, Loraine's understanding of womanhood as biological was challenged by assumptions associated with female physical appearance.

Loraine then described her personal association with the term "feminism", outlining confusion amidst an awareness of feminist movements:

> *I prefer to pluralise the term "feminism" to become "feminisms". This is because feminism has meant different things over time, and has evolved in different waves, each one conjuring its own set of feelings and responses in my mind…Feminism was a different animal to Kate Sheppard than it was for Whina Cooper, or Helen Clark, or Jacinda Ardern. Feminism has meant boldness and courage, and it has meant intimidation and estrangement. This is because feminists have wanted different things and have had different ideas of what it means to be a woman and what women want…And this is why I could never call myself a feminist – and in some ways I don't see the need to. The label has too many faces to have a functioning identity and those who subscribe to it tend to give it their own definition.*

While Loraine acknowledges that feminism has meant and resulted in different things at different times, she struggles to understand its place in 21st Century New Zealand within a postfeminist grand narrative. Loraine acknowledged the shifts in feminist perspectives over time but could not find an aspect of present-day feminism to identify with, in the same way that fractured identities had confused what it meant to identify as a woman. Loraine used an interview between Malala Yousafzai, a girls' education activist, and actress, Emma Watson, ambassador for the United Nations #HeforShe campaign, to illustrate feminist subjectivities:

> *Malala had something more concrete to fight for than Emma did. Malala's cry was simple – every child, girl or boy, should have access to education. I heartily agree with Malala. Emma's was opaque and complicated – she wanted to invite men to stand up for women…but over what? I don't think Emma was really quite sure of that herself – so she started reading "feminist" literature...and she joined the muddy and awkwardly over-generalised equal pay movement, and wore her clothes more than once...To me this is a reflection of feminism in the West in general.*

What was distinct in Loraine's description of this interview was the presence of subjective interpretations and the complexities these subjectivities have created. Loraine's description of Emma as unsure highlighted the extent of feminist subjectivities and postfeminist understandings of feminism as lacking a relevant and "functioning identity".

In the second half of Loraine's diary entries, she drew on postfeminist, neoliberal ideas of individual responsibility to detail instances of inequality:

> *[W]hen a woman is raped, the "patriarchy" doesn't rape her, a man does – with a name, and a face. For the most part our experiences of women's inequality, are not systemic to us, they're personal. Every father makes his own individual decision about how to view his daughters, every brother his sister, every male his female co-worker, every husband his wife. Sometimes problems have been systemic, but individuals have collective power over those systems, and each and every one can choose how to interact with those systems.*

Loraine labelled inequality as individual rather than systemic, noting postfeminist associations with neoliberal choice and responsibility. Similarly, Christianity as a grand narrative aligns with neoliberal individualism through the concept of "sin", applicable to humans in individual choices to enact "good" or succumb to "evil". The interactions between postfeminism and Christianity highlights the complex interactions of ideological narratives and subsequent narrative entanglements that reflect a point in time both socially and personally.

In the final stages of Loraine's participation, she reflected on feminist subjectivities and fractured identities to explore what womanhood and equality meant to her:

> *I am perhaps a little more convinced that men and women should have equality of opportunity – but I am less convinced that pursuing equality of outcome through laws is a healthy idea for societies…The other thing is that "equality" implies that women should be equal to something – and generally I think we mean men in that – women should be equal to men…[If] you've lost a way of defining womanhood, then you've lost the ability to know whether women are equal with whatever is not a woman.*

Loraine described both equality (of opportunity) and equity (or equality of outcome), aligning herself tentatively with equality. The equal treatment of individuals appealed to a grand narrative of Christianity, and of postfeminism, whereby a lack of focus on similarity and difference requires individuals to take individual

responsibility for their choices. Fractured identities and feminist subjectivities contributed to Loraine's personal narrative by highlighting her confusion surrounding the category of "woman", which had implications on her understanding of equality. If Loraine's understandings of the categories of "man" and "woman" were no longer applicable, then she appeared to have determined that equality as a concept was no longer relevant. The narrative entanglements evident in Loraine's personal story, and the ideological influences from various grand narratives, contributed to a personal narrative that drew on multiple understandings of feminism and equality to explore what it meant to be a woman in 21st Century New Zealand. As a young woman, it was clear that Loraine was still navigating her own identity formation and so her narrative associations would likely undergo changes over time.

Concluding Remarks

The personal stories presented in this chapter demonstrate the complexity of narrative entanglements that contribute to participants' personal narratives. Despite the focus in this chapter on four women, narrative correlations were evident in the personal stories of the other participants involved in this study, as a continuation of the intersectional focus evident among and between participants. Baby boomer participants either demonstrated fatigue or chose to act silently to influence those around them, while acknowledging the events of past feminist movements that resulted in more opportunities for women than were previously available. Participants in generation X and the millennial cohorts showed varying associations with neoliberal feminism or postfeminism, with some acknowledging ongoing challenges for women while also maintaining a focus on individual responsibility, progression, choice and opportunity. On the other hand, elements of solidarity were sought by participants in these two cohorts, in contention with aspects of neoliberal

and postfeminist individualism. As members of generation Z with dynamic ideological associations, Loraine and Ronnie associated with Christianity and with neoliberal and postfeminist principles of individual responsibility and increased opportunities, to critically explore feminist subjectivities and fractured identities. The varied associations across and within cohorts and the influence of grand narratives (or not) reveals how the women consolidated their knowledge at a given point in time. While the women were discussed in this chapter in relation to their generational cohorts, their individual perspectives relating to feminism and equality at the time of participation reveal the influence of societal and cultural expectations on each woman's life.

The narrative influences evident in each generational cohort demonstrate the presence of intersectionality and the accumulated knowledge gained from personal stories. In relation to feminism, the personal stories and narrative influences discussed demonstrate how, as a term, feminism has permeated generational "divides" and has been transformed to encapsulate the issues of the time. Duncan's (2010) observations of the relevance of generational cohorts and the social conditions that surround them are evident in each personal story outlined in this chapter and speak to the importance of socio-cultural and political contexts in the interpretation of narrative influences. The purpose of this study was not to uncover if women identify as feminist or not, but instead to uncover the feelings that the term and associated movements evoke for each woman in the context of their generational understanding, as evidenced by their personal stories. As such, the stories presented in this chapter represent a period in each of the women's lives, underpinned by knowledge associated with their generational cohorts, social and cultural norms, and personal stories. The identity of each woman is not fixed within the narratives

explored in their stories but continues to evolve in a dynamic process as they have new experiences that become included in their stories beyond this research. The next chapter will discuss how participants negotiate the plateau in women's equality and navigate discursive and material experiences of (in)equality to enhance their own sense of agency.

Chapter Seven: Discursive and Material Enactments of Agency

In this chapter I present a discussion of the findings to answer the final research question: *How do women negotiate the plateau and navigate experiences of (in)equality in their own lives?* Throughout this study, the participants have been placed at the centre of the research with a focus on lived experience and intersectional difference. Thematic links to privilege and oppression, as well as the narrative influences discussed in the previous chapter, demonstrate how lived experience is constituted in communication (Dutta, 2011) and can then result in action or in-action. The concept of discourse-materiality explains how events are experienced discursively and materially in a dialectic relationship as words determine social norms and standards (Putnam, 2013; 2015), shaping the material world in the context of power (Nealon, 2008). The ways that discursive understandings of (or ways of linguistically framing) voice and silence, solidarity and collectivism, empowerment, and activism are materially enacted are explored in this chapter through the context of Herndl and Licona's (2007) constrained agency, and my own interpretations of agency enactment which I have called conferred and comparative agency.

In this chapter I discuss agentic, agentive, and complacent practices across participants' accounts of their lived experience, to further examine the discourses and materiality—thoughts, feelings, and actions—related to feminism and women's equality in their stories. My initial thinking pointed towards complacency as the reason for the plateau, based on McGregor's (2013) observations of generational perceptions which linked younger women to a postfeminist perspective on women's

equality. Rather than uncovering specific instances of complacency, participant stories highlighted instances where the women were agentic (possessed discursive agency) and/or agentive (used agency to create material outcomes) (Foucault, 1972), depending on the context and circumstances surrounding their lived experience, and as members of generational cohorts. Agency and complacency as practices are implicit in the notion of a plateau in women's equality that formed the focus of this study. The choices which women make to be agentic, agentive, or complacent in relation to feminism are examples of agency as practice and are informed by societal and material understandings of women's equality. This chapter will begin with a discussion of the following terms used to describe three different forms of agency: constrained, conferred, and comparative agency. I then explore evidence of these forms of agency in the personal stories of the participants and examine how they could be viewed as enactments of complacency.

Conceptualising Participant Enactments of Agency

This section will discuss three types of agency evident in participant stories: Constrained, conferred, and comparative. Constrained agency works to highlight the complex nature of inequality that exists in women's lives (Herndl & Licona, 2007). Closely tied to self-preservation and the notion of limited choice, Herndl and Licona (2007) use the term constrained agency to describe an individual's actions to avoid harm both personally and professionally and draw attention to an element of fatigue in the face of ongoing inequality. I build on the concept of constrained agency to highlight aspects of participant stories that signalled the limitations they faced or their (re)navigation of agency, as they worked with the choices available to them to plot their own life-course. I have identified two further forms of agency evident in participant stories that I used to demonstrate how participants enact agency a) as a

product of past movements and actions, and b) to describe comparative circumstances experienced by other women both locally and globally. Conferred agency, as a form of agency that is passed on or inherited, empowered the women to make their own decisions and carve their own path. For example, conferred agency resulted from a cultural narrative of progression in reference to past and present actions and movements and the visibility of women in positions of power. Comparative agency describes the ways in which participants demonstrated an awareness of local and global instances of inequality in comparison to themselves or New Zealand more generally. This awareness then provided the women with a sense of agency in comparison to other women and/or countries through the perception of individual privilege and more widespread oppression.

Constrained Agency and Participants' Strategic Navigation of Social Structures

Herndl and Licona (2007) introduced constrained agency in their work to describe "the relationship between agentive opportunities and the regulatory power of authority…Both agency and authority are generated by material practices established within institutional contexts" (p. 145). Constrained agency is a form of agency that operates in tandem with the authority generated by social structures. Social structures are understood to constrain individual agency to limit choice, perpetuate silence, and effect fatigue. Some participants acted within the boundaries of existing social structures as an attempt to improve their situation, while there was also evidence to suggest the enactment of constrained agency as purposeful silence to avoid personal or professional harm. Interestingly, the generational split in the data regarding constrained agency excludes generation Z participants who did not demonstrate constrained agency, perhaps because they were younger and had not yet developed

an awareness of how social structures constrain their individual agency. Baby boomer, generation X, and millennial participants demonstrated constrained agency.

Baby boomer participants acknowledged constrained agency in their expressions of fatigue, demonstrating an awareness of continued inequality as well as weariness at its persistence. Navigating the constraints of persistent inequality was not unfamiliar to Madeline and Danielle, as women who had lived through a number of experiences and movements. Each of these women voiced differing experiences of constrained agency in lived experience, as it applied to their stage of life. In her entries, Madeline likened women's equality to climate change, highlighting its explicit existence and a perceived sense of inaction towards social change. She also noted that she felt unable to enact equality on a large scale and so was only able to change what she could within her sphere of influence:

> *I'm not going to overturn Saudi Arabia, or I don't even want to overturn Africa, do you know what I mean? I'm prepared to let it stay. But in my world I want to pay attention in my own world and make it what I can the best.*

Madeline enacted constrained agency in her acknowledgment that her voice and actions were better placed on a personal, rather than public, level. This neoliberal approach to social change places an emphasis on individual responsibility for personal circumstance. In her interview, Madeline also revealed that her husband did not support her feminist views. Constrained agency in Madeline's personal story caused her to pick and choose between what to challenge and what she was prepared to let go, both publicly and privately. Her choice to stay quiet on some issues and be selective about where she was agentive speaks to the very nature of constrained agency in lived experience. Madeline's ability to enact agency in her personal life created greater personal benefits to her than attempting to raise her voice for

instances of inequality outside of her sphere of influence. Danielle maintained a similar position in her cautious approach to navigating (in)equality:

> *These days I don't usually put myself in situations where being a woman or having certain roles would be a problem.*

Constrained agency, in the context of Madeline and Danielle's personal stories, could also be understood as strategic silence enacted within the confines of social structures.

Generation X participants, Sienna, Susan, Lily, and Tracy, openly named and provided details of constrained practices. As discussed in Chapter Six, Sienna chose to leave one place of employment due to a lack of personal control. In that situation, Sienna was agentive and felt empowered to leave the job to improve her own situation and maintain a neoliberal sense of individual control. In her personal life, Sienna experienced constrained agency in her relationship as she attempted to regain control of the distribution of domestic chores:

> *I stopped cleaning the toilet! I know it's a stupid small thing but seriously why am I the only one who has to do it. Two of us live in the house!!...I left the dishes on the counter until my partner put them in the dishwasher. Another probably little thing but it's my protest to doing all the housework…I am going away with work and I am not cleaning the house before I go. My latest act of defiance.*

Sienna was agentive in her decision to stop carrying out specific domestic chores. However, this agency was constrained as her defiance took place subliminally, rather than in a way that explicitly made her feelings known to her partner. Despite material advances made for women in the public sphere, Sienna's lived experience demonstrated a lack of domestic equality, highlighting the place of neoliberal individualism in the enactment of individual actions to improve personal conditions.

Susan similarly demonstrated an association with constrained agency within the context of her relationship. As discussed in Chapter Five, Susan was open about

the conditions that surround her marriage, and her feelings of being a solo parent, shouldering a majority of the household responsibilities, and of financial instability as a result of distrust and secrecy. Susan became more vocal about her dissatisfaction, breaking away from strategic silence by discontinuing her financial contribution to household bills:

> *This is advocating for the rights of women, and for myself…. I have decided to "do nothing" in terms of radical change to living circumstances for now.*

Susan's enactment of constrained agency involved navigating agentic and agentive practices, using her voice as empowerment for her actions. Her decision to "do nothing" was an enactment of constrained agency as Susan worked to build a life for herself in secrecy, in an attempt to increase a sense of stability for when she did decide to leave her relationship. These examples of personal constraint experienced by Susan demonstrate the complex nature of relational dependence in navigating and enacting agency in instances of oppression. The enactment of personal sacrifice in the hope of future improvements may have underpinned Susan's constrained agency in the context of the conditions that obstructed her access to complete independence.

Lily described herself as "being a woman in a man's world" several times in her diary entries, detailing experiences of recognising and navigating persistent inequality. Lily openly acknowledged the existence of constrained agency in the self-limiting characteristics of neoliberal "choice":

> *Ostensibly women have "won" equality in many ways...however institutionalised patriarchy and systemic bias mean women are increasingly "opting out" of structures that don't work for them and this is seen (ironically) to be our "choice". These days I fight…so that those choices can be seen as the self-limiting options they really are…Choice can feel like a burden in itself.*

The identification of structures as discriminatory and choice as self-limiting demonstrated the ingrained nature of inequality. Women who choose to leave spaces where they experienced oppression appear to have performed personal activism in the form of strategic silence by removing themselves as a means to reduce harm. Therefore, women who do "opt out" of discriminatory situations have enacted agency but have also limited their ability to succeed within male dominated spaces. Agency is constrained to provide the illusion of choice that perpetuates women's social positioning and maintain stereotypes about women's abilities. Lily's description of choice as a burden underpins the nature of constrained agency in situations that prevent women from breaking the glass ceiling and of gaining complete access to equal opportunities within a neoliberal framework.

Constrained agency was visible to Tracy in the form of social movements that sought to raise awareness for discrimination against women, namely the #MeToo movement:

> *A positive thing about [#MeToo] is empowering the victim...[This] has made me see how many people keep quiet, and for many centuries how we all kept quiet as women with a male rule. If we kept quiet, our lives would be easier plus I imagine we really felt alone.*

As Tracy highlighted, the #MeToo movement elevated women's voices and brought women together as a material gain for a discursive problem, turning agentic practice into agentive action. While strategic silence may be viewed as less harmful to women in some instances, Tracy recognised the power of solidarity in generating agentive action. Constrained agency highlights the continuation of the suppression of women's voices by the systems and institutions that simultaneously advocate individual choice and increased opportunity while making it difficult for women to speak and be heard.

The personal stories of millennial participants, Vanessa and Michaela also contained experiences of constrained agency. Throughout Vanessa's diary entries, she described her relationship with her husband and the distribution of domestic chores based on ability and enjoyment. Vanessa also detailed personal sacrifice in the context of her relationship:

> *Sometimes I would like to do my own…BBQing because I enjoy it too, but I wouldn't want [my husband] breathing down my neck telling me how to do it, so I guess it's something I've sacrificed.*

Examples such as this foregrounded Vanessa's decision to leave her husband, as mentioned in Chapter Five. Vanessa provided an explanation of her decision which resulted from feelings of constraint:

> *I just felt a bit suffocated and there were certain things. I did start to think about feeling like I needed permission to do certain things. Even if that totally wasn't the case, it's always just kind of there and I guess that kind of triggered me thinking about this [study] and going oh, you know, and just making that connection back to this [study].*

While constrained agency was not explicitly named in this example, it was evident in Vanessa's assessment of feeling "suffocated", of acknowledging that it may not have been intentional but did give her cause for concern, and then of choosing to act to improve her situation as an enactment of postfeminist empowerment. Where Vanessa previously chose to remain silent, as in the BBQ example, her participation in this research caused her to reassess her personal life and feel empowered to evoke agentive, individual change. Vanessa's personal story demonstrates the nuanced ways that women can move between agentic and agentive.

Michaela's experience of constrained agency was in her choice to be strategically silent in workplace situations:

> *I see that feminism has a place in the workplace, but that's a big beast to tackle and sometimes I choose silence because more is at stake.*

Michaela recognised that some aspects of her working environment were not safe spaces for her to voice concerns or challenge unfair practices. Essentially, Michaela strategically selected moments of voice and silence to navigate oppressive social structures. The notion underlying Michaela's enactment of constrained agency was a sense of neoliberal individualism to avoid personal harm, most noticeably in the public sphere.

The existence of constrained agency in the participants' lives demonstrates the nature of strategic silence in everyday lived experience. Despite discursive understandings of equality perpetuated by a cultural narrative of progression, material conditions do not appear to mirror the increase in opportunities for women and instead cause them to compromise and make sacrifices as a means to reduce personal and professional harm. The enactment of constrained agency created agentive subjects, as the choice to stay silent or manoeuvre within and around oppressive situations showed a form of personal activism. Baby boomer participants were at a stage in their lives where their knowledge of inequality had caused them to enact constrained agency to avoid situations that might have caused personal harm. Generation X participants demonstrated awareness of limited choices and spoke of constrained agency in the context of the social structures that restricted decisions and suppressed voice. Millennial participants similarly navigated instances of inequality, both relationally and professionally, framing constrained agency as individual choice. On the other hand, constrained agency epitomises the simultaneous experiences of privilege and oppression that are discussed in Chapter Five, adding a layer of complexity to each woman's attempts at enacting agency in situations where they were constrained by socio-cultural and political conditions. While this discussion of constrained agency highlights the illusion of choice in the lived

experiences of the women in this study, in the next section I use the term conferred agency to explain how a cultural narrative of progression had imparted a sense of agency to participants.

Conferred Agency and the Ongoing Effects of a Cultural Narrative of Progression

The participants accredited personal feelings of agency to past achievements, as inherited or conferred. Conferred agency is evident across the stories of participants who took part in this study and details the ways in which participants felt privileged or empowered in their own life because of achievements of the past and women of the present. The presence of conferred agency highlights the ongoing implications of a cultural narrative of progression that masks the extent of inequality by placing a focus on social achievement. All four of the generational cohorts that underpin the intersectional focus of this study feature in the expression of conferred agency.

Baby boomer participants experienced quite varied associations with conferred agency, having observed both equality progression, and persistent inequality throughout their lifetimes. While some participants mentioned the present, others chose to reflect on the past as evidence of conferred agency. For Madeline, conferred agency was evident in her aim to empower others:

> *[e]xternally, in my groups I've tended to promote women...I use the wedge of the 125 [years since women won the right to vote], that was so much easier. I think it's far easier to say reflecting on this being a special year let's go for a woman.*

The leveraging of a historic event to build awareness and encourage others to act showed the conferring of agency from Madeline to others. Madeline identified that leveraging feminist history was an easier way to encourage others to act. In this way, Madeline was agentive in her actions to empower others and encourage an awareness

of women's issues enough to enact change. Katrina similarly identified #MeToo as an event that heightened awareness:

> *[T]he #MeToo movement has come, and in the middle of it all as well there was Jacinda having a baby and that brought a general awareness for all sorts of people, I think, of what's a women's place these days.*

The existence of movements and female leaders within a cultural narrative of progression promotes the perception of material progress towards equality for women. Katrina identified these aspects as challenging traditional ideas of a woman's place and growing awareness for increased opportunity. Agency is conferred through the visibility of instances of equality progression that reinforce the perception of choice and opportunity within a neoliberal feminist framework.

Candice described how material conditions were reflective of work undertaken in the past, as examples of inherited agency and increased opportunity. She also referred to areas where equality had not yet been realised, but where agentic practices were becoming agentive changes in response to societal pressures:

> *Women now play sport well beyond their teenage years and well after marriage, having babies, returning to careers, etc. Financially women are still not experiencing full pay equality or reaching high office with the same degree of success, but this is changing. Companies are being forced to confront the issue of more women on boards and take claims of sexual harassment at work or work events seriously. Women can and do change careers midlife, as freely as men do, perhaps even more freely, as home responsibilities change as children grow, move up through the education system and are able to be home alone so women feel able to work different or longer hours.*

Candice spoke to increased opportunities for women, perhaps describing postfeminist perceptions of "women can do anything". The opportunities available to women imply the conferral of agency based on past achievements. However, Candice also acknowledged the gap that existed between discursive understandings and material conditions, such as the aim to include more women on boards and pay

attention to claims of sexual harassment. A cultural narrative of progression appeared to simultaneously highlight opportunity and mask a lack of access, demonstrating that while conferred agency can lead to empowerment, it can also contribute to the latency of inequality.

For generation X participants, conferred agency was evident in the endorsement and critique of a cultural narrative of progression. Tracy spoke to feminism's societal contribution and the discursive surroundings that encompassed persistent inequality:

> *What I really love about the current feminism is that it is about empowering other women…Feminism is really now pulling apart the silly rules we put on ourselves via some old controlling "voice" in society…Observing our Prime Minister taking on a job, and then having a baby and everyone being quite supportive of it, it was a proud moment but also thinking I don't know in the past how that would have been perceived.*

The focus on empowerment and of dismantling societal "rules" speaks to the discursive nature of oppression that impacts on and works in conjunction with material conditions. Conferred agency was visible in the acknowledgment of what was previously acceptable, the societal rules that underpinned what was possible for women, and the prominence of a woman and new mother in a position of significant power. On the other hand, Lily described the implications of conferred agency on persistent inequality:

> *[T]he whole unconscious bias thing, and the whole happy to repeat patterns of the past…you know, the really entrenched thinking bits, aren't really sufficiently challenged, I don't think…it's enough for people to feel a bit complacent…The real risk for me is when we assume that this is just the way it is, good or bad.*

The perpetuation of unconscious bias prevents true realisations of equal opportunity within a neoliberal framework, bringing to light the illusion of choice. While the appearance of increased opportunity is perpetuated by a cultural narrative of

progression that confers agency, the existence of unconscious bias demonstrates how ingrained women's inequality is in social structures.

The visibility of a female Prime Minister was a significant consideration of conferred agency among millennial participants. Fiona referred to Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern as a role model:

> *I think she is a great role model...and I think it is great to show that a career can be worked around having a family.*

The labelling of Ardern as a role model indicated the empowerment Fiona experienced as a result of seeing how a woman could successfully navigate both the personal and professional. Postfeminist perspectives that determine that women can do anything were conferred to Fiona due to the visibility of increased opportunities and Ardern's material embodiment of those opportunities. Janet made similar observations:

> *[We] have a pregnant, unmarried, young, female Prime Minister, I could vote…That would not have been possible if it were not for past feminist movements…that people fought hard to [make] happen.*

Thus, agency was conferred to Fiona and Janet through evidence of discursive and material opportunities that they could each reap the benefits of and aspire to replicate.

Vanessa contextualised conferred agency by noting her lack of experience of inequality:

> *I don't think I directly feel the effects but I know that a lot of work has been done by people before me to get us to a place of near-equality now. It's almost motivating just to be female in a STEM organisation to prove a point…We've got to be one of the more advanced countries in the world for gender equality…Things like having a female Prime Minister – a pregnant one at that –…it's positive for us as a country to have a female leader.*

Vanessa provided multiple examples of how she associated with conferred agency. Vanessa's perception of discursive and material conditions of her environment

empowered her to pursue opportunities that may not have been previously possible, motivating her to enact conferred agency by using her voice and actions to orchestrate her own life. Linda demonstrated a similar association with conferred agency

> *I think that the way that women aren't afraid to question whether they are being treated respectfully and equally by their parents, their workplace, and by the media, is a result of the feminism movement from the 1960s onwards. Feminism has also grown our courage to challenge anyone who implies women are lesser in anyway because of their gender.*

Linda's credits second wave feminism and later feminist movements with conferring agency to women to enact agentic and agentive practices; to feel empowered to use their voices to affect equal outcomes for themselves.

Generation Z participants, Loraine and Ronnie differently acknowledged past feminist movements and increased freedoms and opportunities. Loraine detailed the conferral of agency that led her to the act of voting:

> *This year I voted for the first time, and, like many women around the country, I decided to vote on Suffrage Day. It was relatively unadvertised, and I thought [my friend] and I were just about the only ones getting nostalgic over it. But when we went down to the polling booth, all the women we met there were voting because it was Suffrage Day...there was an immense sense of pride on each woman's face who we passed, I confess I was even a little giddy.*

Loraine's enactment of conferred agency was as a discursive response to a material gain. The ability to vote and enact agency as a democratic practice acknowledges the conferral of agency in the 21st Century context. Similarly, this example highlights solidarity in a more nuanced sense. The visibility of other women experiencing a similar form of conferred agency evoked a sense of solidarity and empowerment that validated Loraine's individual actions. Loraine went on to draw a correlation

between women's equality and material objects that appeared to free women from domestic roles:

> *It is a legitimate question to ask – what has "feminism" (whatever we decide that means collectively) contributed to our society in New Zealand?...Could we have had #MeToo without Twitter? Could Rachael Denhollander have spoken out without her belief in the Judeo-Christian God and framework for justice and mercy? Could we have had female Prime Ministers and women with degrees without washing machines, refrigerators and other electrical appliances to do the work they were otherwise often employed with?*

Loraine associated increased opportunities for women in the public sphere with material labour saving devices, which she further identified as a product of feminist action. While technological advances undoubtedly helped to reduce the demands of the household on women—in accordance with a Marxist feminist perspective—the conferral of agency from material objects appeared to minimise the actions of past women and the contribution of feminism as a movement. The attribution of agency to technological advancements neglects the aim of their design and household implementation, which was not so much focused on removing women from the household, but of increasing domestic productivity.

Ronnie explicitly compared her agency with the actions of women in the past when considering the choices available to her mother and grandmother:

> *It's work done by women 20, 50, 100 years ago, that means I have a choice.*

Ronnie acknowledged that the choices available to her were conferred through the actions and movements of the past, which allowed her the ability to "choose" and pursue certain opportunities that were not available to her mother and grandmother. Ronnie then detailed a lack of awareness of how things might have been for women:

> *It makes me feel frustrated that I personally can't see any change. Even though I know I'm too young to have seen even a mainstream transition to third wave, or what older women I know call third wave feminism.*

Despite the conferral of agency evident in Ronnie's appreciation of increased choice, she recognised that this conferral masked the extent of inequality previously experienced. A cultural narrative of progression disguised forms of inequality that had become more latent as feminist perspectives and women's issues had changed over time. Ronnie appeared to feel as though her age had prevented her from realising the nature and scope of past inequality.

The examples of conferred agency discussed in this section highlight how a cultural narrative of progression has implications on participants' own decision making and life choices. The increased freedoms available in 21st Century New Zealand provided the participants with examples that fuelled their own perceptions of women's equality. For all four generational cohorts, awareness of what was and what has come to be underpinned associations with conferred agency. Baby boomer participants were noticeably reflective, leveraging achievements to build awareness and acknowledging that while the appearance of equality was discursively evident, material experiences of inequality persisted. Generation X participants spoke of increased opportunities for women and critiqued the cultural narrative of progression that masked inequality. Millennial participants leveraged the existence of a female Prime Minister, her pregnancy and subsequent maternity leave, and the #MeToo movement, as tools of individual empowerment. Generation Z participants mentioned past achievements and the conferral of agency in the form of material outcomes. The next section will focus on comparative agency evident in participant explanations of inequality experienced by others locally and globally.

Comparative Agency and Participants' Assessment of Local and Global Inequality

The use of comparisons in participant stories highlighted feelings of privilege and signified the presence of widespread inequality. Comparative agency is agency experienced by participants who compare their situation or local conditions to the circumstances of other women, both in New Zealand and in other countries. An element of awareness is required in the enactment of comparative agency, as participants recognised explicit instances of inequality experienced by others but were not always able to identify latent inequality in their own lived experiences, as previous discussions throughout this thesis would suggest. Comparative agency was experienced across all four generations as the participants compared levels of (in)equality both locally and globally.

Baby boomer participants, Katrina and Marleen, demonstrated an awareness of persistent inequality, as well as contributing factors. Katrina portrayed feelings of urgency when asked about what was needed to overcome inequality for women:

> *Time is of the essence. We're not just thinking here of course about women in New Zealand, are we? We're talking about women all over the world. That's the time factor... we are becoming more of a global society.*

Katrina took a global approach to equality, choosing to look beyond just the discriminatory occurrences in New Zealand to instances across the world. Women were spoken of as one group in need of assistance to gain collective access to equality, in line with liberal feminist perspectives. This approach speaks to solidarity and collectivism in the need for combined, global action. Marleen, on the other hand, noted the different approaches to equality required to combat differing social norms:

> *[S]maller nations are possibly more likely to achieve [equality] than those which are huge, economically, culturally and ethnically diverse (India, USA, China, Indonesia) or those under despotic, authoritarian or military rule when other priorities get in the way…there are so many*

> *different societal norms and what it would take for [women] to become equal in New Zealand as compared with the United States, compared with Saudi Arabia or deepest darkest Ghana.*

Comparisons between New Zealand and other countries are understood in relative terms, foregrounded by lived experience in a "progressive" New Zealand context and extended to the acknowledgment of varied socio-cultural and political circumstances in other countries. Both participants enacted comparative agency by demonstrating an awareness of inequalities locally, and more explicitly globally, that served to reinforce individual feelings of privilege that enabled Katrina and Marleen to speak on behalf of other women. Katrina and Marleen were agentic, choosing to highlight unequal circumstances and factors they believed should be considered in progression towards equality.

Lily, of generation X, compared her own motivations to progress equality with the perceived complacency of others:

> *I feel frustrated…[t]hat we notice great tragedies and injustices nationally and globally yet are not sufficiently motivated to change anything or ourselves and that we don't recognise the many minor tragedies and injustices that we contribute to, individually and collectively, which create the context for the big problems the world faces...I worry about doing too much or not enough.*

Comparative agency underpinned by frustration fuelled Lily's exploration of how she might turn her agentic practice into agentive action. A sense of responsibility can be attached to comparative agency, as evidenced by Lily, and is associated with the need to change individual behaviour as well as act on behalf of others to enact more widespread social change. A focus on individual change to influence collective equality is related to aspects of a neoliberal feminist framework that focuses on individual responsibility as a means to benefit the collective.

Millennial participant, Janet, focused on the relevance of feminism in a non-western context:

> *I watched a TED talk by Isabel Allende which I found really great…Her argument was that [feminism] is only outdated for a privileged few – women in the western world. So many millions of women in other countries are treated cruelly and as second-class citizens, and if feminism was about women's equality worldwide, then it is certainly not outdated at all, and in fact we should all be fighting for it.*

For Janet, comparative agency presented itself in the form of perceived privilege. In Janet's view, inequality for western women was non-existent, and so feminism in that context was outdated. Such a standpoint is reflective of postfeminist ideas around the achievement of equality and the assumed irrelevance of feminism as a movement and term. If women's equality was said to be achieved in a New Zealand context, then the only other comparative tool were women who faced tangible instances of inequality in other countries, as reflected in Janet's personal story. Janet was agentic in her standpoint that western women should be fighting for equality for non-western women, which assumed that these women were lacking voice and required western women to speak and act on their behalf. As such, the power dynamic evident in the categorisation of women as either privileged or oppressed attributes voice and empowerment to western women and silence and disempowerment to "other", non-western women.

Generation Z participants, Loraine and Ronnie, credited personal agency to their discursive and material freedoms within a New Zealand context, in comparison to those available to women in other countries. Loraine compared local and global experiences of inequality:

> *You might not experience [material inequalities] in New Zealand, but they're around us. They should be in our global consciousness.*

Awareness, rather than action, categorised Loraine's association with comparative agency. A lack of awareness for instances of inequality locally demonstrates the perpetuation of a cultural narrative of progression, and postfeminist perspectives of women's equality as achieved. As in Janet's lived experience above, Loraine appeared to acknowledge inequality experienced globally, indicating a sense of privilege by comparison at the lack of inequality locally. Ronnie highlighted a similar sentiment in her personal story:

> *[I]t's easy to say very generally 'women have a hard time of it' which is, on a global average, entirely true; and entirely forget that on that same global average New Zealand women are well off.*

The complexity of comparative agency is clearly evident when a cultural narrative of progression is considered. When New Zealand is compared to other countries on a global scale, its social positioning suggests both a sense of achievement and attainment, that places New Zealand women in the top percentile of equality. While she may not have intended to, Ronnie pointed out the flaw in this assessment of equality achievement, highlighting the different assumptions of women who were considered a minority globally, and yet in New Zealand were categorised as "equal".

All of the participants discussed in this section expressed individual associations with comparative agency as allowing them voice, opportunity, and access not experienced by other women, both locally, and in other parts of the world. Discussions of comparative agency appeared to perpetuate heterogeneous comparisons between men and women in descriptions of women as one group, as opposed to heterogeneity among women and the varied ways they might face oppression. Equally, associations with comparative agency across the cohorts appeared to reflect an awareness of inequality, most noticeably in other countries, which was underpinned by an attitude of privilege, resulting in enactments of

agentic, as opposed to agentive, practices. Next, I provide some concluding remarks to summarise participant enactments of and the complex interactions between forms of agency.

Concluding Remarks

Participant examples described throughout this chapter uncover the complexity of socio-cultural and political influences on women as they enact their identities, demonstrate their beliefs, and perform their everyday lives (Butler, 1990). This study originally sought to determine if complacency could be attributed as a cause of stalled progress towards equality, based on the commentary of McGregor (2013). On first glance, aspects of participant data and lived experience could be seen to demonstrate complacency. However, the above discussion of constrained agency, conferred agency, and comparative agency demonstrates nuanced ways that forms of agency were apparent in participant stories even though on the surface they appeared to be complacent. Similarly, generational perspectives highlighted by McGregor (2013) suggested that older women viewed younger women as unappreciative or unaware of past movements. The strong awareness and subsequent conferred and comparative agency demonstrated by the younger women in this study appeared to dispute these assumptions of younger women.

If awareness is not always the issue, focus then turns to the socio-cultural and political structures that perpetuate a cultural narrative of progression that masks persistent inequality and the illusion of choice. Coburn (2016) noted that despite the ability for individuals to portray a degree of agency, it is difficult to be free from the boundaries of social structures. Participant stories highlighted the complex structures that participants attempted to navigate to achieve the best outcomes within the circumstances that surrounded their lives. These structures and the influence of

postfeminist perspectives and a neoliberal individualist framework could be understood as preventing participants from engaging in collective activist efforts. Equally, enactments of conferred and comparative agency are seen to interact with structural constraints to mask the illusion of choice by emphasising a cultural narrative of progression.

Chapter Eight: Conclusion

In this final chapter, I revisit the aim of this thesis and align the research findings with this aim. I also discuss the implications and contributions of these findings, both practical and theoretical. I then outline the limitations I have identified and highlight pathways for future research, before concluding with my personal reflections on this research journey as an "outsider within".

This research sought to determine how women's intersectional differences might help to explain the stalling of equality in the context of the plateau. Throughout this thesis, I have positioned women at the centre of the research to understand their standpoint on feminism and how their intersectional difference impacted individual experiences of (in)equality as women. This focus on standpoint and intersectionality helped to explain the existence of a plateau in equality progression for women. McGregor's (2013) observations of the stalling of equality, and her subsequent explanations of symbolic representations of progress and intergenerational assumptions of women and feminism, formed the focus of this research and guided my exploration of women's personal stories. At the beginning of this thesis, I argued that a cultural narrative of progression was evident in New Zealand and was deeply embedded in socio-cultural and political structures, masking the true and persistent extent of inequality. I also argued that changing ideological and feminist perspectives, alongside shifting understandings of equality, had contributed to an emphasis on individualism and a view of feminism as unnecessary, resulting in a lack of ongoing social change. Therefore, I found women's equality to be both stalled and achieved in New Zealand, based on the existence of a plateau that disguises inequality, and postfeminist and neoliberal feminist perspectives evident in

participant stories that highlight a detachment from feminism as a term, and instead emphasise individualism.

The methodology and methods of this research focused on women's lived experiences as the "starting off thought" (Harding, 1993) to explore the embedded nature of socio-cultural and political structures, as well as each woman's association with feminism and perspective on (in)equality. The personal stories of participants, obtained through diary and interview methods, highlighted the complexity of social structures and their influence on lived experience. Participant's simultaneous experiences of privilege and oppression, and their attribution of these experiences to societal systems and personal relationships demonstrated participants' intersectional difference and the dialectic relationship between privilege and oppression. For example, Lily occupied a position at senior management level and also described disapproval at her choice not to take her ex-husbands surname after marriage. Similarly, Linda felt she had access to endless opportunities, but also described instances of unwanted attention and unequal treatment. In addition, narrative entanglements and participant interactions with grand and master narrative influences, revealed how the women participants made sense of socio-cultural and political contexts to form their own personal narratives. In Janet's personal story, the influence of neoliberal feminism and her unfulfilled goal of having children led her to explore new ways to reframe her contributions to a society that perpetuated a "girls can do anything" narrative. Experiences of privilege and oppression, and the connections made to narrative influences, also highlighted enactments of agency in lived experience. These enactments showed how the women negotiated and navigated social boundaries that encouraged the pursuit of opportunities within the context of a cultural narrative of progression. For Susan and Vanessa, this meant

negotiating romantic relationships and navigating potential exit strategies as agentive practices influenced by neoliberal individualism and past achievements for women. This navigation and negotiation occurred alongside sites of local and global comparison, most noticeable in Loraine and Ronnie's personal stories, while simultaneously restricting the same opportunities and freedoms as part of the illusion of choice, evident in Madeline, Danielle, and Michaela's enactments of strategic silence. Feelings of privilege and enactments of agency were experienced differently by the women within and between generational cohorts, highlighting intersectional differences such as age, ethnicity, relationship status, and employment, and emphasising how feminist subjectivities and changes in understandings of equality can make social change difficult to progress. This study has highlighted the importance of considering both lived experience and intersectional difference in attempts to progress women's equality.

The Contributions and Implications of this Research

The research outlined in this thesis presents practical and theoretical contributions that are valuable to the fields of feminist and social change research. Similarly, resulting implications evident in the research findings extend knowledge of participant involvement in research that utilises standpoint theory. This study is situated in a New Zealand context and so provides practical insights into experiences of (in)equality that are temporally, socially, and geographical positioned. Likewise, this research contextualises western feminist waves to document the practical implications of ideological changes in New Zealand and situate these within women's lived experiences. The intersectional focus of this study and subsequent arguments for women to be viewed as a heterogeneous group demonstrates how socio-cultural and political structures persistently view women as different from men

and seek to provide equality of opportunity in ways that do not meet the needs of all women. As such, this research could be used by women's centred organisations to contribute to arguments that highlight women's difference as a way of understanding the potential impacts of socio-cultural and political structures on individual lives. Notably, while I set out to determine participant associations with feminism and women's equality as a means to contribute to my own reflexive journey, I did not account for the ways that the research would personally impact the lives of the participants. I had anticipated that perceptions of feminism and (in)equality might change, but the agentive practices that participants engaged in to make changes in their lives highlighted the transformational process participants were a part of. For most participants, their involvement in this research resulted in heightened awareness of instances of inequality and, for some, this led to decisions to leave relationships and workplaces or re-evaluate the path they had envisioned that their life would take. The ability to have their voices and stories heard during this research process acted as a form of empowerment, by heightening awareness and challenging the participants' knowledge base to determine the persistent themes and influences evident in their personal stories.

Theoretically, this research extends understandings of individual freedom within the illusion of choice to include different forms of agency that women enact to negotiate the plateau and navigate (in)equality. I built on Herndl and Licona's (2007) concept of constrained agency within the boundaries of social structures to contribute conferred and comparative agency, providing a strong contextual basis for understanding where the women drew their sense of agency from and how they enacted forms of agency in their lived experience. Neoliberal individualism reinforced by a cultural narrative of progression empowered participants in this study

to pursue equality for themselves, through agentic and agentive practices, with evidence to suggest the constrained nature of individual choices, described by Lily as "self-limiting options". While agentive practices describe action, initial assumptions of complacency and a lack of action among women with regard to women's equality were instead found to be agentic practices perpetuated by a cultural narrative of progression. For example, Loraine's acknowledgment of global inequality, as opposed to local oppression, was an agentic response to a cultural narrative of progression, as opposed to a complacent response to ongoing inequality in New Zealand.

The intersectional focus of this research draws attention to the complexity of difference and the need to strike a balance between acknowledging difference, and the fracturing of identities that results from the segregation of difference. To focus solely on one aspect of difference, such as sexuality, results in the creation of multiple categories that fracture attempts at collectivism. Feminist subjectivities and fractured identities were factors that were evident throughout this thesis in the exploration of different feminist perspectives and understandings of "women" and "equality". In the literature, the acknowledgement of diverse differences (Jeffreys, 2014) and the deconstruction of "man" and "woman" (Butler, 1993; Fineman, 1990) have resulted in the "fractured future" (Pringle & Strachan, 2015, p. 4) of categories of identity. Equality as a concept is then called into questioned, as it applies to different categories of identity and their intersections. Loraine's personal exploration of "womanhood" illustrates feminist subjectivities and fractured identities by assessing what defines a "woman" (sex, gender identity, physical appearance) and to whom women should be compared to determine levels of (in)equality. The inability to identify or locate sites of inequality within categories of identity moves beyond a

focus on “difference” by dividing understandings of what equality is and entails, which contributes to the stalling of women’s equality progression. When difference becomes a key focus, the true purpose of an intersectional approach is overlooked, and the intersections of oppression are no longer viewed as targeted sites of inequality. Current approaches to women’s equality progression appear to focus on smaller sub-categories of identity within the wider category of “woman” which makes targeting sites of inequality much more difficult.

Limitations and Pathways for Future Research

The limitations of this study provide opportunities for future research pathways to explore. For example, this study focused on age as an intersectional category to uncover the myriad ways that women among and between generational cohorts experienced (in)equality. A limitation of this approach was that other intersectional differences were not explicitly examined, and the method of participant sampling meant that experiences of women with other ethnicities were not captured. Future research could examine other intersectional differences to provide a voice for those women. For example, indigenous voices and stories in this research could form the basis of other research projects.

While this study included participants who were not born in New Zealand, an emphasis on permanent residents and citizens firmly situated this research in a New Zealand context. Future research might seek to replicate this study in other national contexts, to explore the lived experiences of women in relation to specific ideologies and feminist perspectives associated with other geographical regions. Research of this nature may help to emphasise a focus on the different approaches needed by each nation to make progress towards women’s equality, and also contribute to an understanding of women as a heterogeneous group.

In addition, there is potential for a longitudinal study to continue what this research has begun. Valuable insights could be gained from following generation X, millennial, generation Z and younger women to understand how perspectives on feminism and experiences of (in)equality change throughout each woman's lifetime. However, the methods of data collection used for this research required significant involvement from the participants and spanned a time frame longer than was initially expected. Adjustments might need to be made to the methods for the purposes of a longitudinal study to preserve the central tenets of this research but relieve the burden of participation for participants.

Personal Reflections

When I began this research, I was unable to identify explicit experiences where my opportunities had been limited or affected by my sex. My standpoint as a woman in 21st Century New Zealand shifted during this study; my awareness of instances of inequality have heightened with regard to situations affecting others and myself. Similarly, my ability to identify with feminism as a term changed as my self-efficacy as a researcher increased, reinforcing my understanding of the importance of focusing on the lived experiences of women, as well as intersectional difference, for women's equality to progress.

Throughout the research, I maintained a diary in a similar way to the participants. By documenting personal life events, instances of inequality and the dialectic of privilege and oppression became more evident. An explicit example occurred in mid-2018 when I visited a surgeon to discuss a ligament reconstruction in my knee after an incident playing netball. At the start of the appointment, the surgeon suggested that the reason I had injured my knee was because I had landed "like a girl". At the time, I excused this comment on the biological basis that I had

thought it was intended, given the different nature of men's and women's bodies. However, later in the appointment when discussing recovery, the surgeon commented that I may not even return to playing as I might get pregnant. Other health professionals commented that surgery was the best option for me so that I could run around with my children one day. The correlation made between my reproductive choices, and seemingly unrelated knee surgery, highlighted simultaneous privilege and oppression in my own life. I was privileged to have access to surgery and skilled specialists, but my choices appeared constrained by the appearance of biological expectations. I wondered if a woman with older children, or a woman who did not want children, would receive similar comments and treatment for the same injury. Documenting my own experiences throughout this research process has highlighted the embedded nature of inequality in the socio-cultural and political structures that we, as women, operate within, and the nuanced ways privilege and oppression dialectically feature in lived experience.

My greatest learnings have developed by operating as an "outsider within", as I navigated my place as a woman in 21st Century New Zealand and conducted conversations with, and analysed the experiences of, the participants to make the lived experiences of other New Zealand women the focus of this research. The lived experience of myself and the participants uncovered a fundamental inequality that women struggle to negotiate on a daily basis. Personal stories retold by the women in this study, as well as other women in my life, have deepened my awareness of women's difference in the face of systemic oppression. Much like the women discussed in this study and their enactments of conferred and comparative agency, I felt a sense of responsibility throughout this study for those women before me, the women around me, and those to come, to use my privileged position in research as a

platform for women's lived experiences. This research magnifies the voices of those who are not always heard and enhances an awareness of the cultural narrative of progression that perpetuates postfeminist notions of equality as achieved. This study also highlights the heterogeneity of women in relation to approaches to women's equality that are generally ineffective in a society as diverse as New Zealand.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Key Legislative Events

Key dates	Events
First Wave Feminism: 1860-1960	
1860	Married Women's Property Perfection Act enacted
1867	Municipal Corporations Act and the Divorce and Matrimonial Causes Act enforced
1873	Employment of Females Act introduced
1884	Married Women's Property Act introduced
1893	At the second reading of his Women's Suffrage Bill, John Hall presents a petition spearheaded by Kate Sheppard containing 32,000 women's signatures. The Bill passes
	Electoral Bill with a clause allowing all women in New Zealand to vote passes the third reading and becomes law
1898	Divorce Act introduced
1919	Women granted right to stand for election to parliament
Second Wave Feminism: 1960-1990s	
1961	Crimes Act introduced
1970	Police begin to intervene in instances of domestic violence
1972	Equal Pay Act introduced
1973	The Domestic Purpose Benefit is introduced for single parents caring for dependents
1976	Equal Division of Property Act introduced
1977	Contraception, Sterilisation, and Abortion Act introduced
1982	Department of Labour launch the "Positive Action" campaign
	Domestic Protection Act introduced
1984	The Positive Action Programme for Women established
	Ministry for Women established
1985	Rape within marriage is acknowledged as a criminal offence
1987	Parental Leave and Employment Protection Act introduced
Third Wave Feminism and Postfeminism: 1990s-2000s	
1990	The New Zealand Bill of Rights Act is introduced to protect citizens from discrimination on the basis of sex
1993	Human Rights Act introduced
2002	De facto and same-sex couples are included in the Equal division of Property Act 1976
2005	Civil unions are introduced
2013	Marriage (Definition of Marriage) Amendment Act passed allowing same-sex couples to legally marry
2015	Changes made to adoption laws for same-sex couples
	Paid Parental Leave and Employment Protection Amendment Bill introduced
2020	Abortion is decriminalised in New Zealand
	Paid Parental Leave is increased to 26 weeks
	Equal Pay Amendment Act enacted

Appendix B: Recruitment Poster

ARE YOU A WOMAN BETWEEN THE AGES OF 18-100 YEARS OLD AND HAPPY TO SHARE YOUR STORY?

I am currently looking for a range of women to share their understandings of what it's like being a woman in 21st Century New Zealand. If this sounds like something you, or someone you know might be interested in, please read on!

What is the research study about?

This study will investigate the personal experiences and viewpoints of women in present day New Zealand. As the first country to allow women to vote in 1893, New Zealand prides itself in its "world leading" status. The aim of the research is to use women's personal experiences and perspectives, collected through diary entries and interviews, to paint a picture of what life is like for 21st Century women, in a country that takes pride in its history of women's equality.

What will you have to do if you agree to participate?

If you choose to participate, you will complete a diary, with **seven** diary entries over a four-month period. You will provide answers to a list of guiding questions in each entry, and note any experiences or opinions/comments. A notebook is provided for those who want to hand-write their diary. Alternatively, you can type your diary into a word document. You will receive some training and I will check in with you half way through the diary phase to see how you are getting on. After I've collected the diary, I will invite you to take part in an interview or conversation about aspects of your diary entries, to make sure I have interpreted your writing as you intended, as a fair representation of your experiences. The interview might last about an hour. Participation in this study is voluntary, and all diary and interview contributions will remain confidential.

THE UNIVERSITY OF WAIKATO
Te Whare Wānanga o Waikato

Call for participants:

A research project investigating personal experiences and viewpoints of women in present day New Zealand.

This is an opportunity to tell your story about your experiences of being a woman in 21st Century New Zealand.

IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO PARTICIPATE OR WANT TO HEAR MORE, PLEASE CONTACT ME:

Roxanna Holdsworth
Phone:
0211780059
Email:
reh20@students.waikato.ac.nz

Appendix C: Participant Information Sheet

What is the research about?
This study will investigate the personal experiences and viewpoints of women in present day New Zealand. The aim of the research is to use women's personal experiences and perspectives, collected through diary entries and interviews, to paint a picture of what life is like for 21st Century women in a country that prides itself in its history of women's equality. As the first country to allow women to vote in 1893, New Zealand has been deemed a world leader in regards to equality for women. I wish to know if this "world leading" image is reflected in the experiences and perspectives of New Zealand women today.

What will you have to do if you agree to take part?
If you choose to participate in this study, you will be asked to complete an ongoing diary. This will involve completing seven diary entries in 4 months. You will be asked to hand-write or type your answers to the same list of guiding questions and note your experiences. Training will be provided so that you are clear about how you should complete each diary entry, and I will check in with you half way through the diary phase to see how you are getting on. If you choose to take part in the study, you will write your diary independently and without the input of others. Any questions can be directed to me, as the primary researcher.

Following the collection of the diary, participants will be invited to take part in an interview. This interview will involve a conversation about aspects of your diary entries, and will also be used to make sure I have interpreted your writing as you intended, as a fair representation of your experiences. The interview is expected to last about an hour. Participation in this study is voluntary for diary and interview contributions.

How much of your time will participation involve?
It is anticipated that the data collection process will span 12 months, with 4 months for the completion of the seven diary entries. You will then be invited to take part in an interview, which will be scheduled in mid-2018 and is entirely voluntary.

What will happen to the information collected?
The diary entries and interview transcripts will be used to determine how women's varying differences influence their perspectives and viewpoints when considering measures to gain equality for women. Only I, as the principal researcher, and the research supervisors will have access to the diary entries and interview transcripts, and any recordings. The data will be kept in a secure storage facility; hard-copy diaries and transcripts will be held in a locked filing cabinet and recordings will be stored in a password protected online folder. The data and final analysis will be reported and discussed in my doctoral thesis and subsequent journal articles, presented at conferences, and may also be used in future research projects.

Will your participation in the project remain confidential?
The short answer is yes. Pseudonyms will be used in place of participants' given names as well as those referred to in diary entries. This is to protect the identities of

you and your peers and family members, and to ensure that your involvement in the study and/or the experiences you share do not affect your daily life.

Declaration to participants
If you take part in the study, you have the right to:

- Refuse to answer any question, and to withdraw from the study at any time up until 31st October 2018
- Ask any further questions about the study which occur to you during your participation
- Be given access to a summary of the findings from the study when it is concluded

What happens now?
If after reading about this study and what participation involves you would like to take part or want to hear more, please contact me:

Phone: 0211780059
Email: reh20@students.waikato.ac.nz

Appendix D: Diary and Interview Consent Forms

Stage one - diary consent:

I have read the **Information Sheet for Participants** and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I also understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time up until **31st October 2018**, or to decline to answer any questions in the study.

I consent to having **my diary entries** used as material for this research and agree that I will provide information to the researcher under the conditions of confidentiality set out on the **Information Sheet**.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the **Information Sheet**. I understand that my demographic information will be kept separate from my consent form and coded with a pseudonym so that my information is protected.

Signed: _____
Name: _____
Date: _____

Stage two - interview and future research consent:

I have read the **Information Sheet for Participants** and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I also understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time up until **31st October 2018**, or to decline to answer any questions in the study.

I consent to having **my interview recorded** and agree that I will provide information to the researcher under the conditions of confidentiality set out on the Information Sheet. I also agree that **my diary and interview data can be reported and discussed** in the doctoral thesis and subsequent journal articles, presented at conferences, and used in future research projects.

I agree to participate in the interview under the conditions set out in the **Information Sheet**.

Signed: _____
Name: _____
Date: _____

Appendix E: Demographic Questionnaire

1. What is your age? _____

2. What is your gender? **Female Male Either Other:**_____

3. Are you a New Zealand Citizen or Permanent Resident? **YES NO**

4a. What is your ethnic background?

a. **New Zealand European**
b. **Māori**
c. **Samoan**
d. **Cook Island Māori**
e. **Tongan**
f. **Niuean**
g. **Chinese**
h. **Indian**

Other (such as Dutch, Japanese, etc.) Please state:

_____

4b. What country were you born in? _____

4c. Where do you live now? (Include city and suburb)

_____

4d. How long have you lived there for? _____

5a. What country was your mother born in? _____

5b. What country was your father born in? _____

6. What was your childhood religion—if you had one, and if you have one, what religion do you associate with now? (Please specify both major religious grouping (e.g., Catholic, Protestant, Jewish, Non-religious, etc.) and denomination or sect (e.g., Methodist, Conservative Jew, Agonistic, Atheist, etc.).

Religion in childhood: _____
Denomination/sect in childhood: _____

Religion now: _____
Denomination/sect now: _____

7. What is your highest secondary school qualification?

a. **None**
b. **National Certificate level 1 or NCEA level 1**
c. **National Certificate level 3 or NCEA level 2**
d. **NZ University Bursary / Scholarship or National Certificate level 3 or NCEA level 3 or NZ Scholarship level 4**

e. **Other secondary school qualification gained in NZ. Please state what it is:**

_____

f. **Or other secondary school qualification gained overseas**

8. Apart from secondary school qualifications, please state your highest qualification, and the main subject, for example:
Qualification: TRADE CERTIFICATE
Subject: ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING
(DON'T count qualifications that take less than 3 months of full-time study to get)

a. **Qualification (and level, if applicable)**

_____

b. **Subject** _____

9a. Are you currently a student? **YES NO**

9b. If you answered yes, are you:

a. **Full-time undergraduate**
b. **Part-time undergraduate**
c. **Full-time Graduate**
d. **Part-time Graduate**

Please state your Programme and/or Major:

_____

10a. What is your marital/relationship status?

a. **Single**
b. **Boyfriend/girlfriend**
c. **De Facto**
d. **Legally married (and not separated)**
e. **Separated, but still legally married**
f. **Divorced**
g. **Widowed**

10b. Circle as many as you need to show all the people who live in the same household as you.

a. **My legal husband or wife**
b. **My opposite-sex civil union partner**
c. **My same-sex civil union partner**
d. **My opposite-sex partner or de facto, boyfriend or girlfriend**
e. **My same-sex partner or de facto, boyfriend or girlfriend**
f. **My mother and / or father**
g. **My son(s) and / or daughter(s)**
h. **my brother(s) and / or sister(s)**
i. **my flatmate(s)**

Other, for example MY GRANDMOTHER, MY MOTHER-IN-LAW, MY PARTNER'S FATHER or BOARDER, etc. Please state:

_____

_____

OR none of the above – I live alone

10c. From all the sources of income you (and if applicable, your spouse and/or members of household) receive, what is your total *yearly* income *before tax*:

a. zero income
b. $1 - $5,000
c. $5,001 - $10,000
d. $10,001 - $15,000
e. $15,001 - $20,000
f. $20,001 - $25,000
g. $25,001 - $30,000
h. $30,001 - $35,000
i. $35,001 - $40,000
j. $40,001 - $50,000
k. $50,001 - $70,000
l. $70,001 - $100,000
m. $100,001 or more

10d. What proportion of this total income do others contribute? Please state who contributes and roughly how much (e.g. Spouse – half of yearly income).

_____

_____

10e. Is this income wholly a result of paid employment? **YES NO**

10f. If not, what other ways do you, your spouse, or members of your household receive income? Please circle the letter of each answer that applies.

a. interest, dividends, rent, other investments
b. regular payments from ACC or a private work accident insurer
c. New Zealand Superannuation or Veterans Pension
d. other superannuation, pensions or annuities (other than NZ Superannuation, Veterans Pension or war pensions)
e. Unemployment Benefit
f. Sickness Benefit
g. Domestic Purposes Benefit
h. Invalids Benefit
i. Student Allowance
j. other government benefits, government income support payments, war pensions, or paid parental leave

11a. Which NZ political party do you identify with the most—if any?

_____

11b. If you answered question 11a, what reasons in particular influence your support of this party?

_____

_____

Please return this questionnaire to ***reh20@students.waikato.ac.nz***

Appendix F: Guiding Questions for Diary Entries

1. Tell me about the "work" you have undertaken recently—this could be domestic, employment-related, community-related or some other form of "work".

2. What is your motivation for undertaking this "work", and how do you feel whilst doing it?

3. Explain who else is involved in helping you with these roles, or whether they are your sole responsibility.

4. Based on your responses to the previous questions, and your personal experience/opinion, please explain whether any of these "work" roles are typically understood as "women's work" or "men's work".

5. Please list any situation(s) when you encountered the effects of past feminist movements. How did listing these make you feel?

6. Have you encountered any material (online or in hard-copy publications, and verbally) that you would consider "feminist"? If so, please describe this material (include a picture, drawing, or web address if applicable) and comment on your reaction to it.

7. Describe any instances when you have personally acted to try to achieve equality/equity for women e.g. at home, work, among friends, in relationships, etc.

8. Please describe any instance(s) where you, someone else, or women in general, were treated differently because of gender?

9. Please give a detailed description of how you felt in the instance(s) you identified.

10. Please add any comments, thoughts, or opinions that you might wish to express, in relation to this study.

Appendix G: Initial and Final Questions for Diary Entries

Initial questions for the first diary entry:

Please complete these questions in addition to the guiding questions.

a. Please describe what it is like to be a woman in 21st Century New Zealand.
b. Please explain what the term "feminism" means to you.
c. How have your experiences, opinions, and perceptions of the term "feminism" been shaped?
d. Please describe what the term "women's equality" means to you and explain how you came to view it this way.
e. What are your life goals? Please list any goals you have achieved or seek to achieve during your life. These can be individual, financial, work related, family related, community related, etc. Explain why these goals are important to you and why you have chosen to make them life goals.

Reflective questions for the last diary entry:

Please complete these questions in addition to the guiding questions.

Having completed your seven diary entries, you are now asked to revisit the perspectives you described at the beginning of your diary and answer some further questions.

a. Having completed your diary entries, in what ways might your perspective of the term "feminism" have changed/stayed the same?
b. Please describe the ways in which your perspective of the term "women's equality" may have changed/stayed the same?
c. How has participation in this study so far may have contributed to your experience, opinion, and perception of these terms?
d. Have any of the goals you listed in your first entry changed/stayed the same? Please list the applicable goals and explain how they have changed/stayed the same.
e. Please outline what it is like to be a woman in 21st Century New Zealand, having spent the last four months documenting your experiences.
f. Please use the space below to describe in detail your experience of logging a diary for this study e.g. did you find it easy or challenging? Why?

Appendix H: Guiding Questions for Interviews

1. What have been the implications of this research on your life e.g. views regarding women's equality or feminism; media coverage/consumption, etc.

2. How relevant is feminism in 21st century NZ and/or what does it look like in your life?

3. How do women's equality and feminism differ (if at all), and which do you comfortably identify with? And why/how?

4. I would like to know if you consider yourself and "activist" and why/why not?

5. Are you vocal about your beliefs or are you reserved with them? Are the views expressed in your diaries views that you would share with others? What forums do you use if so?

6. Do you use your views to influence others? Are you likely to adhere to your own advice?

7. Are there any times when you have compared your own experiences with other women's relationships or circumstances?

8. How important is it for women to share their stories, not just of traumatic or successful experiences, but of their life in general?

9. How important is it to acknowledge women's differences from one another?

10. What will it take for women to become equal, in your opinion?

Appendix I: Diary Training Worksheet

What am I doing?

Please complete seven diary entries (either handwritten or electronic).

I will check in with you fortnightly (either by email or phone) to discuss your progress. You may contact me at any time in-between if you have any questions. You are a member of the first group of participants for this study, so I will check in with you quite frequently to make sure my instructions and information are easy to follow.

How am I doing it?

Write your seven diary entries in response to my list of guiding questions.

If you choose to handwrite your diary, I will send you a notebook with return postage and email you the guiding questions. If you would prefer to type your diary into a word document, I will email you the guiding questions. For this option, I do ask that you send me all completed entries in the same word document you first received. You may find it helpful to use separate word documents and then combine them at the end.

Each diary entry is a space for you to retell experiences that you believe to be prominent, as you might in a personal diary or journal. So, respond to the questions with events that may have further developed or have not featured in previous entries.

When am I doing it?

Please complete all seven entries over 4 months, starting the first entry in the first month.

Exactly when (week/day/time) you decide to write these diaries is up to you. You may prefer to take notes during the week and then write up your diary. Alternatively, you may like to complete your entry and add to it later on if something significant occurs. You may also only have time to answer a question a day. Find a routine that works for you.

Where am I doing it?

Choose where you want to write your diary entries.

You may choose to write your diary in a café, at the dining table, in front of the TV, or even in bed. Allow yourself time to think about your answer to each question and, if you can, use it as a chance to enjoy some ‘alone time’. I do ask that you complete each entry without the input of others, so that I am able to understand your personal perspective.

Why am I doing it?

Share your personal experiences, viewpoints, and understandings of what it’s like being a woman in present day New Zealand.

The primary method of data collection I have chosen for this study is called ‘diary methods’. This method seeks to uncover everyday experiences in real time and is a way of obtaining individual responses to a set of questions or events. Diaries allow each of you to describe your unique everyday experiences and viewpoints, and to share your understandings of what it’s like being a woman in 21st Century New Zealand.

Appendix J: Thematic Analysis Sample

Question/Source	Lily – Sample of diary transcript	Code
Initial questions **a)** Being a woman in 21st Century New Zealand.	I can think of lots of adjectives. Top of the list is probably 'lucky' and also up there is 'frustrating' and 'worrying'. At 54 I find I look forward and back, often simultaneously. The present and future present opportunities for comparison to my past and the 'pasts' of women before me (both recent and centuries ago). So I can feel lucky to know that women in New Zealand have the best ever chance in history of surviving childbirth and giving birth to live babies… I feel frustrated that women are still living in a context built on patriarchal values and must work within man-made societies and systems – and that this is not sufficiently recognised at a societal level still.	● Increased opportunities ● Past movements and social change ● Persistent inequality despite progress (patriarchy) ● Individual luck (moral/systemic)
Entry 1 4) Women's and men's work.	I don't consider any of these work roles to be women's or men's work. As a younger woman, the domestic and parenting work fell heavily on me although for the time my ex-husband was relatively liberated in that he took a supporting role in caring for the children and with cooking and cleaning. On occasions for periods of time (such as when I was doing academic assignments) he would take the lead with these activities. The context then was that he was helping me when I had a heavy load however he was more actively engaged in domestic work than most men we knew in those years.	● Relationships ● Individualised tasks ● Helping = public/private divide ● Comparisons to others
Entry 2 8) Personal actions to achieve equality/equity	I gave a talk to a group of female lawyers… Long story short, my talk was divisive – with around half attending not accepting that there the idea of gender inequities within their field (The men I work with are very nice and supportive") and half mobilised for change ("the male partners delegate all the good work to the male associates…I learnt a number of valuable lessons from this exchange, not least of which was that in discussing unconscious bias I was reminded of my own unconscious bias – that women recognise the importance of supporting each other and achieving as women.	● Latent bias and inequality ● Complacency – lack of awareness of inequality ● Women supporting women (as one group)
Entry 6 10) Any other comments/thoughts.	In reflecting on the younger women I know and their experience of life at that age versus mine, I think that in many ways they are advantaged – their husbands/partners are accepting of their careers and aspirations, share domestic and child-care work and expect to be more fully 'partners' than might have been the experience of previous generations. At the same time I feel fortunate to have lived through earlier feminist movements, to have a connection to how things were and what they are becoming.	● Generational perspectives ● Relationships ● Influence of past movements – then and now ● Fortune as "bestowed" – systemic luck

Appendix K: Thematic and Narrative Analysis Sample

Question/Source	Lily – Sample of diary and interview transcripts	Code (1)	Code (2)
a) Being a woman in 21st Century New Zealand.	I can think of lots of adjectives. Top of the list is probably 'lucky' and also up there is 'frustrating' and 'worrying'. At 54 I find I look forward and back, often simultaneously. The present and future present opportunities for comparison to my past and the 'pasts' of women before me (both recent and centuries ago). So I can feel lucky to know that women in New Zealand have the best ever chance in history of surviving childbirth and giving birth to live babies… I feel frustrated that women are still living in a context built on patriarchal values and must work within man-made societies and systems – and that this is not sufficiently recognised at a societal level still.	• Increased opportunities • Past movements and social change • Persistent inequality despite progress • Individual luck	- Moral and systemic luck - The influence of the patriarchy - A sense of "stalling" – lacking progress - Simultaneous privilege and oppression
Entry 1 4) Women's and men's work.	I don't consider any of these work roles to be women's or men's work. As a younger woman, the domestic and parenting work fell heavily on me although for the time my ex-husband was relatively liberated in that he took a supporting role in caring for the children and with cooking and cleaning. On occasions for periods of time (such as when I was doing academic assignments) he would take the lead with these activities. The context then was that he was helping me when I had a heavy load however he was more actively engaged in domestic work than most men we knew in those years.	• Relationships • Individualised tasks • Helping = public/private divide • Comparisons to others	- Moral luck - Comparisons as sites of privilege in relationships - Individualism - Societal constraints the perpetuate the public/private divide
Entry 2 8) Personal actions to achieve equality/equity	I gave a talk to a group of female lawyers… Long story short, my talk was divisive – with around half attending not accepting that there the idea of gender inequities within their field (The men I work with are very nice and supportive") and half mobilised for change ("the male partners delegate all the good work to the male associates…I learnt a number of valuable lessons from this exchange, not least of which was that in discussing unconscious bias I was reminded of my own unconscious bias – that women recognise the importance of supporting each other and achieving as women.	• Latent bias and inequality • Complacency – lack of awareness of inequality • Women supporting women (as one group)	- Solidarity and collectivism - Perceptions of equality as achieved - Societal constraints perceived as complacency
Entry 6 10) Any other comments/thoughts.	In reflecting on the younger women I know and their experience of life at that age versus mine, I think that in many ways they are advantaged – their husbands/partners are accepting of their careers and aspirations, share domestic and child-care work and expect to be more fully 'partners' than might have been the experience of previous generations. At the same time I feel fortunate to have lived through earlier feminist movements, to have a connection to how things were and what they are becoming.	• Generational perspectives • Relationships • Influence of past movements – then and now • Fortune as "bestowed"	- Moral and systemic luck - Intersectionality based on age - Empowerment as a result of past achievements
Interview 2) Relevance of feminism in the 21st Century	Given my age, the more I reflected on feminism then and feminism now, the themes haven't really changed for me in a lot of ways but how you kind of act and how other people see them so it's almost with more rights which in many ways much has been achieved. The hard bits of it, you know, the really entrenched thinking bits, aren't really being sufficiently challenged, I don't think, because the ostensible outward facing things around language and perceptions of women across the sector and all that kind of thing, it's enough for people to feel a bit complacent.		- Intersectionality based on age - Societal constraints perceived as complacency - Feminist subjectivities
Interview 4) Difference between feminism and women's equality	I always thought that feminism was about a world view that is causatively influenced by women in all their shapes, sizes, stances. Whereas women's equality is more about where feminism started for me, which was just this place that where we at, how do we ensure that women have the same choices as men.		- Feminist lens - Intersectionality – women's difference - Equal of opportunity

Appendix L: Data Analysis Table

Main themes and application		Sub-themes	Ideological themes	Cultural themes
Privilege and oppression	*Privilege*	Increased opportunities and choices – women able to move freely between the public and private spheres.	Neoliberalism and neoliberal feminist perspectives of individualism – individual responsibility and control.	"Women can do anything" and women can have it all (public/private). The illusion of choice – choices as limited within the boundaries of society.
		Individual freedom and control to direct their own path; avoid and resist inequality.		
	Oppression	Perceptions of increased opportunity but pressure to remain engaged in the private sphere.		
		Individual navigations of inequality within the boundaries of social structures; disguised as choice and control.		
	Privilege	Feelings of pride associated with New Zealand progressive reputation; generational understandings of the past.	Postfeminist and neoliberal feminist perspectives – Equality as achieved and feminism as no longer relevant.	Progression towards equality based on New Zealand's progressive reputation locally and globally.
		Comparisons between others and local and global comparisons as reinforcing individual feelings of privilege.		
		Feminism as irrelevant or outdated based on perceived equality achievement with serves to reinforce feelings of privilege.		
	Oppression	Latent inequality in social structures masked by New Zealand's progressive reputation.		
	Privilege	Luck – moral and systemic; attributed to others and to societal conditions as influencing individual privilege.	Social and radical feminist perspectives – Equality of access and treatment. Third wave feminist and intersectional perspectives – a focus on difference.	Privilege understood as awarded and not a right – external attribution and a sense of being "allowed" into the public sphere (public/private divide).
	Oppression	Frustration at persistent inequality and behaviours enacted by others; stereotypes, unconscious bias; generational understandings of the present.		
	Privilege	Relationships as sites of gratitude and fortune based on equal treatment and support.	Liberal feminist perspectives - equality of opportunity.	
	Oppression	Relationships as sites of inequality – evidenced by unequal distribution of domestic responsibilities; obligations to the other; public/private sphere divide.		