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YOUNG AND FEMINIST
NEGOTIATING 'IDENTITIES' IN THE 1990s

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
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ABSTRACT

This study explores the experiences of seven young feminist women in relation to a feminist poststructuralist understanding of 'identity' and subjectivity. A review of both the local and international literature reveals a dearth of material about young feminist women and their experiences. Semi-structured, multiple, in-depth interviews are analysed to explore how the young women in this study:

- understand feminism and what it means to be feminist
- develop their feminist 'identities'
- negotiate their feminism in their family relations
- understand the conflicts and contradictions that arise in this situation.

Significant findings include the complexity and multiplicity of the ways the young women's feminist identities develop, their commitment to feminism and its imperative to achieving change, and the ways the women make sense of the contradictions in their actions to enable them to construct and maintain a coherent sense of self.

Two interesting aspects of this study are its critique of feminist poststructuralism in light of the concept of 'sense-making' and its engagement with the principles of feminist research, in particular, an exploration of issues arising from the decision to include the researcher as a participant in the study.

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INTRODUCTION

In the late 1960s and early 1970s a resurgence of feminism swept the western world. This 1960s feminism has been described as one of the new social movements that developed out of a decade marked by 'protest movements' (Cahill and Dann 1991:1).

As in other Western countries such as North America, Britain and Australia, the feminist movement was strong in Aotearoa/New Zealand. The feminist magazine *Broadsheet* began publication in 1972 and fifteen hundred women gathered at the first United Women's Convention held in Auckland in 1973 (Dann 1985:16). Interest in women's issues was strong at a regional and community level. Women's liberation and consciousness-raising groups sprang up around the country, challenging dominant images of and ideas about women. Androcentric and sex-role stereotyped education, equal pay for equal work and equal employment opportunities, access to child care, women's health issues, access to abortion and the representation of women in the media were targeted for action (Dann 1985).

In the 1990s however, feminism has increasingly been described as a relic of the past, no longer reflecting the concerns of today's woman. It is argued that women have achieved equality both in the work place and in the home. It is the dawning of the age of 'post feminism'. In a reply to my request for recent articles written by the magazine about feminism, Robyn Langwell, editor of *North and South* wrote:

"I think we've moved a long way past the need to cover the women's movement and feminism. From where I sit these are necessities of the past" (Personal letter dated May 30, 1994).

Despite this 'death of feminism', a survey carried out in 1992 found that 65% of the women surveyed, under the age of 25, felt that there was still a need for a strong women's movement in Aotearoa/New Zealand (MRL Research Group 1992:13). Furthermore, 15% of the women in this age group identified as feminist (ibid:1). This survey illustrates that feminism and the issues it addresses is still relevant to a significant number of young women in this country.

A variety of literature explores the experiences of feminist women in Aotearoa/New Zealand, ranging from Sue Middleton's (1985) study of feminist educators who grew up in the post World War Two period and Gaye Payze's (1991) study of Equal Employment Opportunity coordinators as feminists, to the Maud Cahill and Christine Dann (1991) collection of personal narratives of women involved in the women's movement during the '70s and '80s. Such studies have explored the experiences of older women; very little has been written about young feminist women. The literature that does focus on young women exists largely within the field of popular culture and magazines like *Broadsheet* (see, for example, Sabbage 1988, Marnie 1988, Wernham, 1990, Cooper 1993, Marno 1994).

It is this dearth of literature about young feminist women that this study aims to address. It explores the experiences of seven young, self identified feminist women aged between 18 and 25. The women represent different ethnic and class backgrounds and varying sexual identities, but have all been university educated to varying levels. Their stories reveal how they became aware of feminism in a multiplicity of ways, including through parents, sisters, books and university courses.

The study focuses on issues of subjectivity and 'identity'¹. It explores how the women took up a feminist 'identity', and examines the conflicts and contradictions that arise as the women negotiate this 'identity' with other compatible and incompatible subject positions.

The study developed out of my own experiences as a young feminist woman who was raised by a feminist mother and pro-feminist father. In Chapter Five I discuss how my experience of feminism centres around feelings of empowerment and disempowerment because of negative popular representations of feminism. I am very conscious of my 'identity' as a feminist and of how I present this to others. I am aware that I do not always do things that are consistent with my feminist ideas. When I was in the first year of my masterate I undertook a research project focusing on women and poverty as part of my research methods

¹The meaning of 'identity' as it is used in this study is explored in Chapter Two.

paper. I was uncomfortable with the gap between my research participants' experiences and my own, as this did not enable me to put into practice many of my ideas about how to do feminist research. It was while I was writing up that study that I thought about combining my desire to research people in a similar position to myself with my interest in issues of 'identity' and feminism. In particular I wanted to explore how other young women experienced being feminist in the 1990s and how they negotiated any conflicts that arose.

Thus, the study asks three main questions:

1. What does it mean for these women to be feminist?
2. How did they become feminist?
3. How do they negotiate their feminism in relation to other areas of their lives?

From this third question an unanticipated fourth issue arose. This was how the women experienced the contradictions that developed as they negotiated the conflicts between their feminism and other areas of their lives.

The theoretical perspective guiding the research is the feminist poststructuralism offered primarily by Chris Weedon (1987) and Bronwyn Davies (1989a, 1989b, 1991, 1993, 1994)². Their ideas are discussed along with an exploration of the work of scholars such as Jane Kenway, Jana Sawicki, Nicola Gavey and Vivian Scott Melton. The concept of 'sense-making'³ (Rutledge Shields and Dervin 1993) has also been proposed as a way of understanding how individuals make sense of contradictions in their lives.

Weedon and Davies argue that an individual's subjectivity is consciously and unconsciously constructed within socially, culturally and historically specific contexts through a range of competing and conflicting discourses that comprise discursive fields. Individuals

²The thesis involves an interrogation of the usefulness of feminist poststructuralism as a way of understanding the experiences of young feminist women.

³The concept of sense-making suggests that individual's experience gaps exist between time, spaces, object and persons, gaps that must be bridged. These gaps can be understood as similar to the contradictions that exist between discourses.

are offered subject positions from which they can make sense of the world and their relationship to it.

Feminist poststructuralism argues that an individual's subjectivity reflects the contradictory nature of discourses as she or he negotiates the needs and values of the different subject positions available. These different subject positions or 'identities' make up an individual's subjectivity and are neither fixed nor mutually exclusive. Instead, they co-exist and often impinge upon each other. The concerns of one subject position do not disappear when the individual takes up a another position. Rather, she carries the interests and demands of one subject position into her experience of others and in so doing must negotiate any conflicts that arise.

However, the dominant and influential discourse of humanism emphasises a coherent, unitary, non-contradictory self. The strength of this discourse means that individuals rarely accept the contradictions in their subjectivity resulting from the varying and often conflicting subject positions that they may encounter. Instead they are compelled to constitute themselves as unitary, coherent beings. The concept of sense-making is used to argue that individuals build bridges to make coherent the gaps that exist in their negotiations. This concept offers a way of understanding how individuals make sense of the dissonances that arise out of these conflicts in ways that they can feel consistent and free of any internal self-conflict.

This study uses a qualitative method of multiple in-depth semi-structured interviews which have an emphasis on creating narratives as a way of gaining access to the women's experiences. I have included myself in the research as a participant and respondent; I was interviewed by a colleague and my data exists alongside that of the other six women. I chose to do this in order to make visible how my experiences might have shaped the way I have interpreted the data. This will be discussed in more detail in Chapter Three.

Chapter One is divided into three parts. The first section provides a contemporary young feminist's view of the development of the women's movement in Aotearoa/New Zealand in

the late 1960s, through the 1970s and 1980s. It discusses the international events and authors who helped shape the local movement, and explores some of the dominant feminist discourses that emerged. The discussion also looks at some of the splits that occurred within the movement. The second section provides an overview of some of the major Aotearoa/New Zealand literature investigating the experiences of feminist women during this period. The third and final section turns to some of the national and international literature that focuses on young feminist women. It looks at the discourses about feminism that are prevalent in the 1990s, drawing together the areas identified in the literature as influencing young women in the development of their feminist 'identities'. The chapter concludes with an exploration of what the literature has to say about the ways that young women have negotiated their feminism.

Chapter Two focuses on the theoretical perspective used in the thesis, that of feminist poststructuralism (Weedon 1987, Davies 1989a, 1989b, 1991, 1993, 1994). It examines the meaning of 'discourse', and discusses the way that an individual's subjectivity is constituted through discourse. I argue that an individual's subjectivity is often conflicting and contradictory because of the multiplicity of competing meanings available within discourse. I conclude with a discussion of the difficulties encountered when I attempted to use some of the key feminist poststructuralist ideas to understand the experiences of the young feminists in the study. The concept of sense-making, which addresses the way that individuals make sense of the contradictions they experience, is introduced as possible solution to one of these problems.

Chapter Three explores the methodology and method used in the study. It discusses the principles of feminist research put forward by Brenda Smith and Carolyn Noble-Spruell (1986) and Shulamith Reinharz (1992) that guided the research process. The chapter examines the significance of two principles for the study; firstly, the principle of maximising diversity and the problems of cross-cultural research, and secondly, the issue of locating the researcher in the research process, specifically my dual role as a participant and researcher. This chapter also introduces the seven women in the study.

In Chapter Four the ways the young women understand feminism and the meanings they give to being feminist are discussed. I then explore how the women's feminist 'identities' were formed and how these circumstances shaped their specific feminist perspectives.

Chapter Five discusses two issues arising from the third research question. Firstly, how do the women negotiate their feminism with other aspects of their lives and in particular, with their families of origin? For many of the women, their families do not share their commitment to feminism. This situation has created the possibility of conflict for the women as they tried to negotiate their commitment to the feminist notion that the 'personal is political'⁴. The second issue of how the women experienced the contradictions that arose in this situation. The chapter uses 'sense-making' to explore how the women worked to resolve contradictions. The discussion ends with a brief exploration of the usefulness of the concept of sense-making.

Finally, Chapter Six draws together the findings of this study and points towards areas that need further investigation in order to develop a comprehensive understanding of the experiences of young feminist women in the '90s.

In summary then, the study explores issues of 'identity' formation and 'identity' negotiation in relation to the experiences of young feminist women in Aotearoa/New Zealand in the 1990s. It aims to address the dearth of literature about young feminist women, and to challenge the idea that feminism is not relevant to young women while also exploring some of the limits of feminist poststructuralism. In addressing these areas, it raises questions about the meanings of feminism and about the nature of 'identity'.

⁴The 'personal is political' was a central tenet of many feminist discourses in the seventies and eighties and remains strong today. It has come to mean both the idea that an individual's personal life is a key site of political struggle, and the more prescriptive idea that feminists should live their lives in line with their feminist politics (Dann 1985). This idea will also be discussed in Chapter One.

CHAPTER ONE

REVIEW OF THE MOVEMENT AND THE LITERATURE

This chapter begins by providing a brief social history of the second wave of feminism in Aotearoa/New Zealand, highlighting some of the factors that led to the revival of a public feminist movement, before identifying some of the dominant feminist discourses that developed during this period. It also discusses the divisions during the late '70s and early '80s which eventually led to the fracturing of the movement. The second section overviews some of the Aotearoa/New Zealand academic studies of the experiences of feminist women from this period. The focus then shifts, in the third section, to discuss the national and international literature about the experiences of young feminist women who grew up during the '70s and '80s, when the women's movement was at its height.

THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT: THE SEVENTIES AND EIGHTIES¹

ITS BEGINNINGS

The beginnings of the 'second wave' of feminism in Aotearoa/New Zealand are dated to the late 1960s (Dann 1985). This period was marked for many women by a growing sense of dissatisfaction with the social roles available to them, which coincided with a period of widespread protests that questioned the dominant discourses of the time. The protests focused on issues of equality and freedom including areas such as the Vietnam war, the nuclear bomb, Black civil rights and apartheid in South Africa.

Many, in particular white, middle class women both in Aotearoa/New Zealand and overseas

¹It is important to note that this review is constructed from a position outside of the events described. While I was alive during most of the period being discussed, I was not involved in the women's movement. As such the description is written from the perspective of a young feminist woman whose understanding has developed from the writings available about the period.

were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the social expectation that their primary roles would be as wives and mothers (May 1992). The shortage of jobs that followed the end of World War Two had led to pressure being placed upon women to return to the home, after their entry into paid work during the war. The 'Cult of Domesticity', which defined women in terms of nurturance, morality and above all domesticity, became even stronger during this period (James and Saville-Smith 1994:15); and as Helen May (1992:107) comments, women were expected to get their happiness and sense of fulfilment from their primary 'identity' as wives and mothers. This dominant discourse is evident in this letter to the New Zealand Women's Weekly:

"The rewards of being a housewife are in your own achievements and contributions... pay day comes every day as you see your children developing, your husband contented after a good dinner, and your home a comfortable background for them" (New Zealand Women's Weekly cited in May 1992:111).

However, many women's experiences did not match the ideal constructed within the dominant discourses. Rather, as Sandra Coney (1993:52) suggests, a sizeable number of women were "depressed, lacking in self-esteem and according to psychiatrists, were taking tranquillisers in large numbers". While May (1992) points out that not all women felt this way, it was still a common experience for many women during this period.

It was these experiences or 'the problem that had no name', that Betty Friedan explored in her 1963 book *The Feminine Mystique*. She argued that society, through the dominant discourse that constructed women as homemakers, wives and mothers (the feminine mystique), had created a major barrier to women achieving their potential as complete human beings (Friedan 1963). Friedan's book drew many women together by showing them that they were not alone in their feelings of dissatisfaction. As one woman in May's (1992:175) study of women in the post-war period remembers: "Betty Friedan's book... was terrific... [it was] the first realisation that everybody else felt the same as I did".

Women's growing frustration with what became known as 'suburban neurosis' coincided with a period of protests. Cahill and Dann (1991:1) see the sixties as a decade that:

"gave birth to what was loosely known as the 'protest movement'... (it) witnessed a dramatic rise in public protest, characterised by militant street marches on issues such as civil rights, nuclear weapons (ban the bomb), and the war in Vietnam".

These 'new social movements' had freedom as a central theme and contributed to an environment of social criticism that strongly influenced the development of the women's movement. May (1992:207) suggests that the strength and impact of the protest movements lay less in their numerical size and more in the growing awareness of new and conflicting discourses. For many women, their involvement in the women's movement originated in their participation in other protest movements (see for example Dann 1991). Many of the concerns that women faced were not being addressed by these movements however, and women were often ignored, and/or ridiculed, for attempting to explore their own experiences of inequality. Consequently, both here and internationally, women began to question the hierarchical nature of the organisations in which they were involved as well as their exclusion from the top ranks. Cahill and Dann (1991:2) suggest that women, dissatisfied with the nature of the movements, but spurred by the 'radicalism and militancy' of these campaigns, began to join together in small groups that formed the basis for the women's liberation movement. These groups were strongly influenced by ideas that were developing in North America.

THE NORTH AMERICAN INFLUENCE

While 'protest movements' occurred throughout the western world, Aotearoa/New Zealand was primarily influenced by the civil rights and peace movements and the general, university based, left-wing politics of the United States². This link between feminisms in Aotearoa/New Zealand and those in the United States can perhaps be seen most strongly in the authors and books referred to as influential by the women in the Cahill and Dann (1991) collection of narratives about the women's movement in Aotearoa/New Zealand. They included Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Robin Morgan's *Sisterhood is Powerful* (1970), Shulamith Firestone and Anne Koedt's edited book *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation, Major Writings of the Radical Feminists* (1970), Shulamith Firestone's

²This was in contrast to the development of the British movement which Coney (1993) argues was linked more strongly to the ideas of socialism and Marxism.

The Dialectics of Sex (1972) and Marilyn French's *The Women's Room* (1978) all of which originated from the United States. One exception was *The Female Eunuch* (1970) by Germaine Greer, an Australian³.

It is also from the United States that bra-burning, one of the most dominant media images of feminism originated. Media reports of a group of women dumping bras, girdles, curlers, false eyelashes, wigs and women's magazines into a Freedom Trash Can were sensationalised (Dann 1985:101). Rather than reporting that the women were rejecting the artificiality of modern concepts of beauty and wanted women to be valued for their real qualities, the media reported the protest as an example of the silliness of women involved in the movement. The accusation of bra-burning became a powerful way of ridiculing feminists. As Dann (1991:77) writes:

"in 1969 the first reports of these crazy American women's liberationists who burnt their bras began to filter through to New Zealand. The tone of the reports was snide - they were meant to make us see how foolish these would-be feminists were, these women who didn't know that the battle of the sexes was over and that women had won".

Despite this, a number of more positive discourses of feminism also developed in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Some of these were strongly shaped by the local context.

DISCOURSES OF FEMINISM IN AOTEAROA/NEW ZEALAND

Before I discuss the nature of the feminist discourses that were strong in Aotearoa/New Zealand I will briefly clarify the meaning of discourse⁴. The notion of discourse as used

³Germaine Greer's influence on the discourses of feminism available within Aotearoa/New Zealand was strengthened by her controversial visit in 1972. She made national headlines after her arrest for swearing on national television. Dann (1985:12) maintains that "the enormous publicity surrounding her visit alerted many women to women's liberation ideas for the first time". May (1992) argues that Greer reinforced the militant image and style of the women's movement in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Greer offered New Zealanders a somewhat shocking image of liberated womanhood:

"she was educated and articulate in language both of the gutter and of academia, independent and sexually liberated, bra-less and even knicker-less" (May 1992:210).

⁴This concept is explored more fully in Chapter Two.

within feminist poststructuralism is best understood as referring to a field of knowledges and meanings. Discourses exist as, and are expressed through language, representations and practices. Discourses constitute an individual's subjectivity by offering specific frames of understanding and possible ways of interacting (Weedon 1987, Davies 1989a, 1993). A wide range of discourses can exist about any one aspect of life. Some discourses are more powerful than others, and all discourses compete with each other to offer meanings about the world. Discourses do not operate in isolation however, since they reflect an individual's social circumstances and overlap with other discourses to create meaning.

Discourses of liberal, radical, socialist, Maaori⁵ and lesbian feminism have been strong within Aotearoa/New Zealand⁶. These discourses draw on and build upon each other, but have also reacted against one another. Consequently, it is difficult to clearly delineate the specific ideas and practices originating in any one discourse. When I associate certain practices and ideas with a particular discourse it does not imply that those ideas and practices are limited to that discourse alone. Nor am I arguing that the women participating in such practices would necessarily consciously associate themselves with only that discourse, to the exclusion of others.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to give a detailed analysis of the ways in which varying discourses of feminism have shaped women's experiences in Aotearoa/New Zealand⁷, but general feminist discourses can be identified. For example, May argues that the women's movement was broadly divided around liberal feminist and radical feminist discourses. She maintains that liberal feminist discourse:

"generally supported the political and economic status quo but argued that women were

⁵The double 'a' in the spelling of Maaori and Paakehaa indicates the long vowel sound in the Maaori language (Turoa 1995). While I would prefer to use a macron this option is not possible. Original spelling is used when quoting.

⁶The discourses of Maaori and lesbian feminism will be discussed later in this chapter.

⁷Sue Middleton (1985) provides a comprehensive overview of liberal, radical and Marxist/socialist feminism in Aotearoa/New Zealand in her study of feminist educators.

discriminated against and lacked the opportunity to succeed" (May 1992:212).

One example of feminist action framed within liberal feminist discourse was the 1983 *Girls Can Do Anything Campaign*. In contrast, radical feminism saw men's oppression of women, termed 'patriarchy', as the primary and central oppression for all women over and above class and ethnicity. Issues of sexuality were of fundamental importance and included subjects such as reproduction, marriage, compulsory heterosexuality and motherhood (Roland and Klein 1990:273). The *Reclaim the Night* marches were an example of the practices that expressed this discourse. In reference to this focus, Middleton (1985:137) argues that:

"while liberal feminism had influenced older, as well as younger women, radical feminism appealed to the 'post-war babies' in that it articulated their conflicts over sexuality".

Radical feminism, unlike liberal feminism, argued that the system could not be changed from within and instead needed radical change, change that often was linked to direct action tactics.

Middleton (1985:152) in contrast to May, argues that socialist and Marxist feminist discourses have also been influential in Aotearoa/New Zealand. These have had more currency within academia however. For example Alison Jones and Camille Guy (1992:303) argue that socialist feminism was relegated to the margins of the mainstream movement by 1978, when there was an attempt to expel members of the Socialist Action League from the Piha conference because their primary allegiance lay with a male dominated political party.

Central to the discourses and politics of the 'second wave' of feminism was the idea of 'the personal is political'. Dann (1985:149) argues that, in the early stages of the movement, it referred to the idea that women should "examine their daily lives and not just the formal political institutions for signs of male dominance". Women were encouraged to explore all aspects of their personal lives including their sexual relations and the division of labour within their homes. The notion of 'the personal is political' is most strongly associated with the discourse of radical feminism (Roland and Klein 1990:275).

One of the practices central to this political discourse was consciousness-raising groups which existed throughout the country during the seventies and early eighties. These groups

consisted of up to ten women who came together to share and discuss their experiences. In these groups they often became aware that they shared many experiences as women. Noreen Penny (1991:112) states of the first consciousness-raising group that she attended that: "it was great to have found a group where I could really talk". Dann (1985:97) argues that consciousness-raising groups provided women with a base and motivation for political action: "shame was converted to anger, and anger into action based on group support".

Consciousness-raising groups, and the women's liberation movement in general, promoted a sense of 'sisterhood' among many of the women involved. Coney (1993:62) argues that the movement was founded upon the notion that women formed a 'class', or group with common interests. This idea can be linked to the radical feminist view that "male power, that is patriarchy, dominates over class, religion, race and culture" (Roland and Klein 1990:277). However, as was to become evident, this notion of women as a single group denied the differences and multiplicities of women's experiences. These differences began to surface through the very political practice that had formed the base for the movement - consciousness-raising groups. Viv Walker (1991:101), a working class woman, highlights the alienation she felt from the women in her group:

"I found [it] pretty embarrassing really, these women talking about their vaginas. It was all a bit strange to me. They had long hair, and they were going to get jobs - they seemed to be from another planet".

This lack of shared experience and concerns increasingly became an issue for women involved in the women's movement during the late seventies and early eighties and led to a growth in 'identity politics'. The discourse of 'identity' politics has become a critical site of debate following on from the seventies view that feminism was itself an 'identity' structure, rather than a method or tool for social change. That is, that feminism is about *who* one is rather than *how* to change society.

Fuss (1989:97) argues that "identity politics refers to a tendency to base one's politics on a sense of personal 'identity' - as gay, as Jewish, as black, as female". Jones and Guy (1991:311) maintain that 'identity' politics, the naming of ourselves, is a crucial part of the

feminist project⁸. In Aotearoa/New Zealand during the late seventies and early eighties the women's movement became increasingly split along the lines of sexuality, ethnicity and class.

Coney (1993:62) maintains that the spark that had ignited the women's movement originated from young, white, middle class women. The goals of the movement were shaped by the concerns and beliefs of this group and did not adequately reflect the multiplicity of women's experiences in Aotearoa/New Zealand. For example, it was not until 1977 that a lesbian woman was given speaking time at the United Women's Convention and even then she was only allowed five minutes (Johnson 1991:68). "By the mid seventies, these goals needed renegotiating to be more embracing, but this process did not occur" (Coney 1993:62). Consequently women whose experiences and concerns were not being addressed by the movement began to separate off into 'identity' based groups in order to have their needs addressed. Coney argues that:

"The movement changed over the late seventies and early eighties from a network of women's liberation groups with wide aims, which came together periodically at caucuses and workshops (for instance, Hamilton 1975, Wainuiomata 1976, Auckland 1976, Christchurch 1977, Piha 1978), to a fragmented conglomeration of groups which might have no contact with each other" (ibid:60).

The first women to organise separately were lesbians (Dann 1985). Sisters for Homophile Equality (SHE) was formed in 1973 and began to publish *Circle*⁹. SHE and *Circle* were aimed at lesbian women but heterosexual women were initially welcomed.

"Women who feel exclusively heterosexual, but who are interested in love between women (which is the essence of lesbianism) are more than welcome to subscribe and write to our magazine, and to join our movement" (*Circle* cited in Dann 1985).

However, by the 1978 Women's Liberation Congress at Piha a split had formed between lesbian and heterosexual women. A paper was presented by the Wellington-based *Lesbians*

⁸Underpinning this argument is the idea of a feminist 'identity'. This study is, in part, interrogating this understanding by exploring the contradictions surrounding a feminist 'identity'.

⁹Mary-Helen Ward (1995) has written a thesis on the private lesbian-only newsletters that were a central part of the separate organisation of many lesbian feminists.

Ignite Fire Brigade in which it was argued that "lesbians, the backbone of the women's movement, were ripped off and oppressed by the movement, while heterosexual women enjoyed heterosexual privilege" (Jones and Guy 1992:302). This split culminated in the exclusion of heterosexual women from lesbian sleeping spaces and led to much personal abuse (Coney 1991:65, Awatere Huata 1991:124).

One discourse that was significant in this shift in relations between lesbian and heterosexual feminists was the element of radical feminism that interprets heterosexuality as the key to women's oppression. Women who maintained sexual relations with men were considered to be 'sleeping with the enemy'. Dann (1985:33) cites the American *CLIT papers* in which lesbian women are warned away from heterosexual women, who are described as men in disguise. These ideas were also linked to the shift in meaning of the central feminist principle 'the personal is political'. Dann (1985:149) argues that the term quickly moved from being:

"a *descriptive* slogan to a *prescriptive* injunction... there was pressure for women to live 'politically correct' personal lives".

The women's movement was also split over ethnicity. While Maaori women's issues and experiences had received more attention than those of lesbian women (for example, Maaori women were invited to address and give workshops at the 1972 Women's Liberation Conference and the 1973 United Women's Convention), Dann (1985:34-5) maintains that "their presence generated no political push on the majority of Pakeha women". In 1976 the lapsed *Nga Tamatoa* was reformed by Hilda Halkyard, Ripeka Evans and Donna Awatere Huata and took on an unprecedented feminist focus (Awatere Huata 1993:122). By 1978 Maaori women were openly challenging Paakehaa women and the women's movement for their lack of support of Maaori issues and the Treaty of Waitangi (ibid:124). In 1980 Maaori women gathered together for the first *Huihuinga Wahine Maori Anake*. Non-Maaori women were excluded from the hui in the same way that men had been excluded from the Women's Liberation Conferences.

The separate organisation of Maaori women also sparked the development of discourses

of Maaori feminism. Ngahuia Te Awekotuku (1991a:52) dates the beginnings of Maaori feminism to the 1980 Huihuinga Wahine Maori Anake. Middleton (1993:32) argues that most of the discourses of feminism that have underpinned the women's movement in Aotearoa/New Zealand were imported from overseas and did not always fit the local circumstances. The growth of indigenous discourses of feminism such as those of Maaori feminisms can be seen as a response to this mismatch. Maaori women such as Rose Pere (1983), Donna Awatere (1984), Kathie Irwin (1992), Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1992), and Ngahuia Te Awekotuku (1991a) have all written about Maaori women's experiences both in traditional Maaori society and following colonisation.

A third grouping within the 'identity' discourse of the women's movement centred around the issue of class, although in Aotearoa/New Zealand this division has received less attention than those based on sexuality and ethnicity. Historically Aotearoa/New Zealand has in popular discourse attempted to deny its class divisions. As Rosie Scott (1992:49) claims, "class is still a dirty word in many circles, including some feminist ones". The invisibility of working class women within the women's movement is demonstrated by the absence of writing about working class women. Two examples of this are *Broadsheet Been Around For Quite A While* (Rosier 1992) and *Up From Under: Women And Liberation In New Zealand* (Dann 1985). While each book contains sections which explore the concerns and experiences of Maaori and lesbian women (see for example, Rosier 1992:58-111, Dann 1985:31-39), working class women's experiences are not given the same attention¹⁰. Christine Bird (1985:39) argues that:

"working class feminists see things differently from middle class feminists. They have the same sort of frustration that Maori feminists have... they feel the same anger at the assumption that what will benefit middle class women will benefit all women".

Jones and Guy (1992) argue that the movement attempted to provide a framework for

¹⁰Working class women are not excluded completely, though. Rosier (1992) has included a piece ironically titled 'The Invisible Working Class Feminist' by Christine Bird, and Dann (1985), in various sections dealing with different issues of the movement, mentions the plight of working class women. For all intents and purposes, though, the experiences of these women are largely invisible.

exploring and negotiating differences between women by developing the notion of a 'hierarchy of oppressions'. The hierarchy was based upon the belief that while all women are oppressed, some are more oppressed than others on the basis of, for example, their sexual and ethnic identities. Jones and Guy (1992:306) argue that within this hierarchy:

"the more oppressed were to be listened to: not because we needed to understand what they had to say, but because their membership of certain suffering social categories gave them the moral edge".

Donna Awatere Huata (1993:124), in line with this discourse, remembers being safe from criticism at the Piha conference, despite her heterosexuality, because she was Maaori and disabled. At another conference, women were given biscuits to represent their 'privileges' and were instructed to take biscuits from those women below them in the hierarchy. A white, heterosexual, middle class, tertiary-educated, able-bodied, professionally employed woman who attended the conference was left feeling that she was taking something from the other women; that she was responsible for their oppression (Jones and Guy 1993:307).

The hierarchy of oppressions added more pain and divisions to an already fractured movement. Coney (1993:54) argues that:

"in the nineties it is hardly possible to talk of a 'movement', as the term implies breadth, activity and some commonality of purpose. The women's movement in New Zealand (sic) exists only in pockets, as rape crisis centres, refuges, groups against pornography, and women's centres".

However, Coney's argument emphasises an understanding of the movement as a monolith. It focuses on a unitary conception of feminism that reflects aspects of feminism in the seventies. By contrast, a feminist poststructuralist reading would emphasise the multiplicity and plurality of the current state of feminism and the women's movement. Such a reading gives space to the diversity of women's interests and experiences.

WOMEN'S STUDIES ASSOCIATION

During the eighties and on into the nineties the Women's Studies Association (WSA), which was first set up in 1976, has played an important part in shaping the form of

Aotearoa/New Zealand feminisms¹¹. This influence stemmed in part from WSA conferences which started in 1978. The conferences, which took the place of the United Women's Conventions that had been a key part of the women's movement during the seventies, provided the only national forum through which women in Aotearoa/New Zealand could come together to explore and share ideas about feminism¹².

The WSA placed an emphasis on recognising and acknowledging the differences that existed between women. For example, the advertisement calling for papers for the 1985 WSA Conference stated that:

"all women presenting material are asked to consider the visibility of lesbians, black women, the disabled and working class women" (WSA Newsletter, 1985:8).

The 1984 conference had as its specific focus the issues of racism and heterosexism. The importance of these issues to the WSA is evident in the existence of its lesbian caucus and the 1987 constitutional change that noted the Association's responsibility to address the oppression of Maaori in its work and activities (Roth and McCurdy, 1993:368).

Members of the WSA were also concerned that a division did not develop between community based feminisms and those based in the universities. Conference papers did not need to be academic in nature and the conferences were often held outside of the main university centres (for example, Blenheim hosted the 1984 conference (Dann, 1985:18) and the New Plymouth Women's Centre organised the 1986 conference (Roth and McCurdy, 1993:141)). This inclusive approach to women's studies in Aotearoa/New Zealand is reflected in the New Zealand Women's Studies Handbook. They state that the book is for: "women involved in community or formal education who wish to tutor a course in women's studies... [or] women who wish, as a group to study women..." (Craven et al 1985:9).

¹¹Mary Hancock (1979) surveyed the Women's Studies programmes being run in Aotearoa/New Zealand.

¹²I owe my understanding of the impact of the Women's Studies Association on Aotearoa/New Zealand feminisms to a personal conversation with Claire-Louise McCurdy.

SUMMARY

In this section I have argued that feminism underwent a public revival in the late sixties and early seventies. As part of the period of protest that marked the sixties and seventies, many women throughout the western world began to question the dominant images of, and ideas about, women. While the women's movement in Aotearoa/New Zealand was strongly influenced by ideas and events from the United States, the feminist discourses that developed were also specific to issues and concerns faced in this country.

One of the central issues that faced the women's movement in the seventies and eighties was the need for feminist discourses to reflect the diversity of experience amongst Aotearoa/New Zealand women. Maaori, working class and lesbian women all questioned the limited nature of the ideas being put forward by the predominantly white, middle class and heterosexual women who dominated the public face of the movement. As such there has been a strong emphasis placed upon recognising and acknowledging plurality and difference between women that has become central to understandings of feminism in Aotearoa/New Zealand. This emphasis has also been a central part of the Women's Studies Association. The Association, which was also concerned with maintaining links between university based courses and those based in the community, was the only major national forum for feminist ideas during the eighties. The academic studies that have focussed on feminism in this country have also explored and reflected many of these issues.

ACADEMIC STUDIES

A number of academic studies have explored the experiences of women who identified as feminist during this period. Sue Middleton (1985) interviewed a group of feminist teachers who were born in the post World War Two period, exploring their politicisation as feminists and the ways in which they put their feminism into practice in their teaching. Her focus centred strongly on the women's education experiences. Gaye Payze (1991) was interested the relationship between feminist practice and the state. She interviewed EEO coordinators

as 'femocrats' to explore the extent to which they used their positions to pursue a feminist agenda. Jennifer Curtin and Heather Devere (1993) interviewed 52 women from a range of backgrounds about their views of feminism and whether they identified as feminists. Bev Hong (1992) is currently undertaking doctoral research into women who support women's rights but reject the term 'feminist'. She has interviewed and surveyed women who call themselves feminists and women who do not. Her sample included two groups of women, one group comprised of those over the age of thirty five, and the other made up of younger women aged between eighteen and thirty.

Middleton completed a life history study of the experiences of twelve women who grew up in the post war period and entered the teaching profession at a stage of teacher shortage¹³. All of the women identified themselves as feminists, although they aligned themselves with a range of feminist discourses including liberal feminism, radical feminism, lesbian separatism, anti-racism, Marxism and socialist feminism¹⁴. Middleton adopted a socialist feminist approach to analyse the experiences of the women in her study. She argues that it provides the most useful framework for understanding the contradictions in the women's lives because it takes into account the "dynamics of cultural reproduction of both class and gender" (1985:17).

Middleton suggests that girls who grew up in this period, and in particular girls in the academic stream at high school:

"experienced contradictions between their sexual and intellectual/professional lives and between the dominant ideology of feminine domesticity and the permissive attitudes of the 'sexual revolution'" (Middleton 1985:9).

¹³The teacher shortage of the late fifties and sixties meant that women who normally would not have been in a financial position to get tertiary training gained access to a university education. Consequently Middleton's study includes women from a variety of class backgrounds. She also included Maaori and lesbian teachers in her sample.

¹⁴Middleton (1993:42-3) has since drawn attention to some of the problems of developing these sort of typologies. While she discusses these with particular reference to their usefulness as a framework for curriculum usage, the criticisms are also valid for research framed by such typologies.

Some of the women also experienced feelings of victimisation or marginality that led them to question the society in which they were living. Middleton (1985:13) maintains that the women became 'radicalised' when they shifted from understanding the contradictions in their lives as personal failings and began to interpret them as social phenomena. Access to feminist discourses provided the means for this shift and also enabled the women to see both the possibility and desirability of change. The second part of Middleton's study explores the different ways in which the women have put their feminist ideas into practice in their teaching and how this has led to feelings of marginalisation as feminist teachers.

The second study was completed by Payze in 1991. Payze wanted to explore the extent to which individuals can and do use the state to pursue their own personal political agendas. In particular she was interested in the possibilities for feminists (or femocrats as feminist women in this sphere are more popularly known) within this setting. Payze interviewed eight EEO coordinators who held 'head office' positions within a variety of government departments. A number of areas are explored, including the women's reasons for entering the EEO field, their involvement with the feminist movement and feminist networks (Chapter Four), and what groups the women placed importance upon maintaining legitimacy with, including other femocrats, other feminists, their peers (that is with fellow EEO coordinators), and their own status as organisational members (Chapter Five).

Payze argues that while in most cases the women considered themselves feminists, many distanced themselves from the 'social movement'. Further, she maintains that many of the coordinators sought the positions for reasons of professional development or to "access higher rates of remuneration and reward" (1991:85). The women appeared to be most concerned with maintaining credibility with other EEO coordinators rather than feminists in any wider sense. In light of these findings Payze concluded that the EEO coordinators in her study were not primarily driven by feminist agendas and were better seen as "pursuing a professional project within the field of EEO" (1991:ii)

Curtin and Devere (1993) are interested in the factors that influenced women's willingness

to identify as feminists. In their study they interviewed 16 groups of between three and five women about their views of feminism. The women were selected on the basis of age, education, religion, class, ethnicity, sexual orientation, party activism and location and were interviewed in informal discussion groups based upon shared socio-economic characteristics (Curtin and Devere 1993:10-11). Twenty women identified themselves as feminists, twenty one did not and ten were undecided in that they expressed both positive and negative feelings towards feminism. Curtin and Devere argue that education, level of religious commitment, age, class and ethnicity were important factors in the willingness of the women to link themselves with feminism. However, the validity of these results is difficult to assess due to a lack of information about the selection process of the study.

Curtin and Devere highlight a number of popularised discourses of feminism that were significant in discouraging the women from identifying with feminism. This was despite their widespread support for issues or values that are commonly associated with feminism, such as equal pay, child care provisions, sexual harassment and equity in education¹⁵. These popular discourses of feminism included an image of feminists as separatists or 'anti-men' and as wanting to look like men, including having 'butch haircuts'. Some of the women also saw feminists as prioritising careers and as attacking women who chose to work in the home. Linked with this idea was a belief of some of the older women that feminists have made life harder for women. Curtin and Devere conclude, following bell hooks, that if feminism is to increase its level of support it should "not demand that feminism be an 'identity' or a lifestyle, but rather action which seeks to end sexist, racist and other oppressions" (1993:26).

Hong (1995a) is currently undertaking doctoral research exploring the reasons why some women call themselves feminist and others do not. As part of this study she interviewed 40 women who were divided according to age and identification with feminism. The first group, aged over 35 consisted of 12 women who called themselves feminists and eight who did not. The second group of women were aged between 18 and 30 years and 11 were feminists and

¹⁵Many of these issues have been central to the discourses of liberal feminism. The high level of support reflects the way in which liberal feminist ideas have become part of popular discourses of gender relations.

nine were not. Hong identifies nine factors as important in determining whether the women identified as feminist or not. These included:

Whether they perceived the feminist label as negative or positive.

Whether feminists only focused on women's inequality with men.

How politically active they were.

Whether feminists were derogatory of traditionally feminine roles such as housewife and mother.

Whether more political action is needed before there is gender equality.

How the general public perceive the feminist label.

How well their lifestyle fits in with that generally expected of women in society.

To what extent they had contact with support groups of women (Hong 1995a:3).

The second part of Hong's study is a survey of 301 women and explored statistically the importance of these different factors (Hong 1995b). She concludes that perceptions of the label feminist vary with the respondent's belief that more political activity is necessary, and their involvement in such activity. For the older women, issues concerning the expectations of women in society and the central focus on gender were also influential; while for the younger women, contact with support networks was an important component (ibid:2).

SUMMARY

While a range of academic studies have explored the experiences of feminists in Aotearoa/New Zealand, few of these have focused on young feminist women. Of the two studies that have included young women among their participants (see Curtin and Devere 1993, Hong 1992, 1995a, 1995b), both have focused on the reasons behind women accepting or rejecting the label of 'feminist'. As such, neither explore what it is like to be young feminist woman. Nor do these studies adopt a sociological perspective for the analysis of their results.

YOUNG FEMINIST WOMEN IN THE LITERATURE

So, what literature does address the experiences of young feminist women? Much of the literature that does exist, like that on older feminist women, takes the form of popular literature (for example, in magazines such as *Ms* and *Broadsheet*), rather than as academic research¹⁶. This popular literature is diverse in its focus and includes narratives about young feminist women's experiences, explorations of their views on a number of issues including education, work, marriage and motherhood as well as prescriptions about how to make feminism more accessible and appropriate for themselves and other young women. While I am primarily interested in the literature that explores young women's experiences of feminism, some of this literature still helps to reflect the social and cultural context of these experiences. One exception to the pattern is Kimberly Dill's United States masters thesis titled *Feminism in the nineties: the influence of collective identity and community on young feminist activists* (1991)¹⁷.

The following discussion focuses on material relevant to this study, including the range and nature of the popular discourses of feminism available to and discussed by the young women; the ways in which the women encountered feminist ideas; how the young women have experienced their feminist identities; and in particular, how they have experienced and negotiated conflicts. The first section explores what the Aotearoa/New Zealand literature highlights as important and then surveys the perspectives expressed in the international literature. The second and third sections focus more on the international literature, as very little has been written in the Aotearoa/New Zealand context about young feminist women's

¹⁶My search for literature in this area included searching the Sociological Abstracts, the Social Sciences Citation Indexes, First Search, INNZ, Massey University, Auckland University, Waikato University, Canterbury University and Otago University library catalogues, and the Australian Bibliographic Network. I also wrote to a number of magazines requesting any recently published articles that dealt with feminism or the women's movement.

¹⁷Dill (1991) explores the experiences of a group of young feminists who are members of activist groups. She discusses both how the young women encountered feminism and their experiences of activism. Only those issues which are relevant to this study are included in this review.

entry into feminist ideas and their negotiation of their subjectivities. Although the discussion is skewed towards the international literature, Aotearoa/New Zealand material is brought in wherever possible.

DISCOURSES OF FEMINISM IN THE LITERATURE ABOUT YOUNG WOMEN

The Stereotype:

One of the most prominent ideas of feminism that is discussed is the popular stereotype of feminism and feminists (see Marnie 1988, Cooper 1993, Marno 1994). As Lisa Sabbage (1988:20) states: "many young women are convinced that feminists are aggressive, polemical, fat and hairy manhaters". She remembers her friends looks of horror when she expressed interest in going to the Women's Space at her university. They saw the space as being full of "strident lesbians" (ibid). Lyn Loates (1992:35), who talked to eight young women aged between 16 and 22 reports a similar view of feminists. "The word [feminist]... drummed up images of hairy legs and strident voice. To three out of the eight, it meant lesbianism". This discourse is seen as strongly linked to the media presentation of feminism in the seventies, an image which Sabbage (1988) argues is still strong today. Loates (1992) and Larissa Marno (1994) argue that this discourse is a significant reason why so many young women reject the term feminist¹⁸.

An almost identical discourse about feminism and feminists is identified in the international literature (see for example Lutz in Van Gelder 1983, Donald 1985, Ermacora 1985, Dill 1991, Kamen 1991, Stephen 1991, Glickman 1993). As one woman comments:

"feminists are seen as overweight, overallded, spike-haired lesbians, while feminism itself is regarded as a radical movement concerned with separatist, 'man-hating' politics" (Gillman 1985:31).

Similar arguments to those in the Aotearoa/New Zealand literature are also put forward about

¹⁸The strength of this discourse is demonstrated by the *Cosmopolitan* framing of a Naomi Wolf (1994) article on what modern men must be like if feminist women are to accept them. The article title reversed the focus of the article by asking "Can you be a feminist and *still* be attractive to men?" (my emphasis).

the negative effect of this discourse on young women's willingness to identify as feminists (see for example, Kamen 1991, Faludi 1991, Wolf 1993).

Another popular discourse, 'postfeminism', also shapes young women's experiences of feminism in the nineties.

Postfeminism:

The discourse of 'postfeminism' is also mentioned in the literature although to a lesser degree¹⁹. This discourse suggests that feminism is not needed any more, or as Rachel Cooper (1993:9) comments "'You've done a great job girls, now let's get on with more important stuff'". Like the previous discourse, the idea that feminism is an idea of the past is linked to the media (see Cooper 1993, Marno 1994). As mentioned in the Introduction, Robyn Langwell, editor of *North and South*, drew on this discourse in her comment that we have moved beyond the need to write about feminism. The strength and widespread nature of this discourse is also demonstrated by its use as the name of one of the talks ('I'll be a Post-Feminist in Post-Patriarchy') at the 1993 Listener Women's Book Festival.

Like the discourse of feminists as hairy, strident man-haters, the discourse of post-feminism is also discussed in the international literature (see Hornaday 1983, Stott 1985, Stephen 1991), which suggests that young feminist women easily reject this discourse as an invalid representation of the current state of gender relations. This idea is further reinforced by the existence of more positive discourse that suggests the existence of a 'third wave of feminism'.

The Third Wave:

This more positive discourse evident in the literature is one which sees feminism entering a 'third wave', of which young women are the spearhead (see for example Marno 1994, Ehrenreich 1988, Schrof 1993). A central aspect of this discourse is the need to acknowledge

¹⁹Lynne Alice explores some popular culture representations of 'postfeminism' in a paper delivered to the Feminism/Postmodernism/Postfeminism conference held at Massey University, November 17-19th, 1995.

the differences between women. Joannie Schrof argues that:

"Third wavers are acutely aware of their predecessors' reputation for being hateful to men, focussing on too narrow a set of goals and marginalising minority and low-income women...[they] are looking to eradicate the image of feminism as a rich white woman's club" (Schrof 1993:27).

This idea of diversity is also present in other literature:

"Well, being feminist doesn't mean that everyone does everything one certain way. Feminism for every woman is different because of the different environments we all come from" (Ambey in Stephen 1991:31-2).

These popular discourses of feminism form part of the discursive field within which young feminist women have developed their feminist identities.

ACCESS TO FEMINIST DISCOURSES AND IDENTITIES

A significant factor shaping the different meanings of feminism for different women is the ways they encountered feminist discourses and identities. While the literature does include discussions of the ways in which young women have developed their feminist ideas, such discussions are very limited and exist primarily in narrative forms (see for example the Scutt 1985 collection and Stephen 1991). Interestingly, most of the literature that addresses this issue comes from Australia and the United States rather than Aotearoa/New Zealand. Two exceptions are Marnie (1988) and Helen Wernham (1990). However, while the articles mention the ways in which young women encountered feminism, they do not really discuss their experiences. Consequently the focus of this next section is on the international literature. Aotearoa/New Zealand material is included when possible. The major areas identified within the literature are the family, education, literature and the media, feminist communities, and experiences of other forms of oppression.

The Family:

The first and perhaps strongest of the ways in which the young women encountered feminism was the family. For some of the women, feminism was among the political perspectives available in their homes (see Donald 1985, Ermacora 1985, Gartrell 1985, Giles

1985, Dill 1991, Glickman 1993). This was the case for several of the women in Dill's (1991:37) study. These young women gained support and information from their feminist mothers. For other women, their families fostered a strong belief in equality.

"Although [my mother was] not an ardent feminist she has always instilled in me the belief that women are equal and that anything I wanted to do - I could" (Trewick 1985:95).

The narratives suggest that this belief system was often combined with an emphasis on politics: "[as I was] exposed to politics and economics from birth, debating and heated arguments were a regular part of my childhood" (Gillman 1985:32). A few of the women were introduced to feminist discourse through their older sisters who were part of the women's movement of the 1970s (see Corley 1985, Stephen 1991).

Interestingly, the literature that discusses families of origin (namely the Scutt (1985) collection) does not include young women who grew up in households where conservative discourses about women's roles were dominant²⁰. Rather, the narratives are of women who grew up in households where at least a liberal discourse of equality was strong. The notable exception to this pattern exists within the Aotearoa/New Zealand literature. Marnie (1988) describes her father a 'male chauvinist'; however, other than noting that she was a 'tomboy' she does not explore how these discourses influenced the development of her feminist 'identity'.

The literature also suggests, however, that even for those young women who grew up in families with feminist ideas, the development of their feminist identities was neither a straight forward, nor necessarily painless, process. For example, Mia, the fourth of the five daughters from a feminist family, struggled with her family's reputation as feminist. For her it meant that she was singled out for purposely sexist comments from teachers (Glickman 1993:44). When Mia left her community to go to college, she was:

²⁰Clearly, the women in Glickman's (1993) study must also be mentioned here. However, given that Glickman's sample was of daughters of feminists the fact that at least liberal discourses of feminism were strong is intentional.

"relieved to shed the 'baggage of all those sisters and that reputation'... During the first year, 'when someone would ask me if I'm feminist, my immediate reaction was to run away and say no, no. It was so hard to take pride in it'... She eventually was flushed out and pegged as a radical advocate of 'the women's thing'... still, her first year at college was a slow painful gathering of strength... Now when people ask me that question I turn it on them - I say 'Of course, aren't you?'" (Glickman 1993:10-11).

In a similar vein, Australian Cathy Henry recalls being hostile towards her mother's "comparatively mild interest in feminism". Feminism was something Henry thought was stupid (Henry 1985:68).

Education:

A second site where the young women encountered feminism was in education. For several women, school offered the opportunity to discover significant women and to explore topics linked to feminism such as lesbianism and sexual harassment (see Gillman 1985, Donald 1985, Stephen 1991). For others, university opened up this space: "Doing my degree was when it all happened. My mind opened up. It did a bit of a shuffle" (Stott 1985:155). "I started calling myself feminist... when I enrolled in my first women's studies course" (Monagle in Stephen 1991:30). Women's studies courses were also central to the experiences of the young women in Dill's (1991:31) study. The classes provided the women with alternative ways of understanding their experiences that could better explain how they were feeling. Wernham (1990), an Aotearoa/New Zealand writer argues that attending feminist studies courses provided her with a site for exploring her feelings and experiences with other young women.

Literature/Media:

Literature and the media was another important medium through which some of the young women encountered feminist ideas (see Donald 1985, Gillman 1985, Giles 1985, Stephen 1991). Diana Forward (1985) recalls seeing a BBC documentary about the Pankhursts and the suffrage movement in Britain when she was nine:

"I can still feel my horror, frustration and anger as I watched the treatment of those women, and the pride and admiration their actions inspired in me" (Forward 1985:136-7).

Anna Donald (1985:25) spoke of finding out about feminism through literature. She was

given a biography of Emily Pankhurst, among others, which gave her access to a list of new words including "suffragette" and "feminism". These caught her attention: "Emily Pankhurst became a hero, inspiring me to find out all I could about feminism" (Donald 1985:26). Biographies and autobiographies of women involved in feminism were also central to Sarah Gillman's (1985) experience of feminism. This access to the ideas of women who had gone before was a key part of the young women's entry into feminism. Some of the young women in Dill's (1991) study also encountered feminist ideas through literature. Their reading of feminist texts was often stimulated by wider social events or by friends who were interested in feminist issues or participated in women's studies courses.

Feminist Communities:

Unlike the previous generation, few of the young women in this literature talk about entering into feminism through consciousness-raising groups or women's action groups. Several women in Rose Glickman's study talked about their mothers' feminist communities of which they were part. For these women: "their mother's feminist communities represent to them the halcyon days (Glickman 1993:44). As noted earlier, Helen Wernham (1990) saw her feminist studies classes as providing a community for exploring feminist ideas.

Nevertheless there is an awareness among the young women that they are the second generation of 'second wave' feminists, and as such can draw on the strength of their predecessors and look to them for ideas (see for example, Giles 1985). Jennifer Stott, a young Australian feminist maintains that:

"the work of the women's movement in the late 1960s and 1970s has influenced my consciousness and behaviour. It has meant that although society may continue to criticise choice of lifestyle and sexuality, a strong network of support reaffirms that you're not mad, not weird, not the only one. The women's movement has given us female role models, mentors, a network of alternative options" (Stott 1985:156).

This idea of the women's movement in the '70s and '80s providing support to younger women is echoed by Barbara Findleton in reference to the American movement:

"One of the reasons I don't despair is because no matter how difficult it is being feminist today, it certainly had to be harder to be one of the pioneers who laid the foundation. There's my sense of standing on the shoulders of the previous generation: it comforts me"

(Stephen 1991:33).

For some American women, though, the previous generation's involvement in the women's movement is seen as a barrier to younger women getting involved. Many of the existing feminist organisations are dominated by older woman. Barbara Ehrenreich (1988:32) comments that some young women feel that: "In the 'older women's movement, if you're under thirty, you may as well be invisible'". Similarly, Henry (1985), a young Australian woman, also feels inhibited by the 'generation gap' between the younger and older women.

Wernham (1990), referring to the Aotearoa/New Zealand context, describes the lack of consciousness-raising groups as making it harder for young women to develop their feminist ideas and actions. She comments that it is difficult being:

"younger than the main body of feminists in New Zealand... the women who did consciousness raising in the 70s obviously got such a big buzz of energy and went on to do a whole lot of other things. It's hard to be younger than that, and sort of jump in" (Wernham 1990:16).

Interestingly, the positive feelings associated with 'standing upon the shoulders of older feminists' do not appear at all in the Aotearoa/New Zealand literature. Instead, both Sabbage (1988) and Wernham (1990) report a sense that a woman must have been through the 'school of hard knocks' in order to qualify as a feminist. Sabbage (1988:19) argues that this feeling is particularly strong amongst white middle class women, "desperate to prove that they are 'worthy' of feminism"²¹.

Experiences of Other Forms of Oppression:

Dill (1991) identifies a further area through which the young women in her study entered feminism, that is through an awareness of other forms of oppression such as racism or heterosexism. These young women felt that their experiences of being in a minority group enabled them to 'open their eyes' to other things that were going on around them. Some of

²¹The significance of this difference should not be over stated given the limited amount of Aotearoa/New Zealand literature about young feminist women.

the African-American women felt that their awareness of their ethnicity blocked their entry into feminism though; they did not want to be viewed as "white middle class" (Dill 1991:36).

NEGOTIATING A FEMINIST 'IDENTITY'

As with the previous section, the Aotearoa/New Zealand literature does not explore how young feminist women experience and negotiate their feminist identities. Consequently, we must consider again the international literature.

Negotiating the Meaning of Being 'Feminist':

The literature reveals a number of responses by young feminist women to the popular discourse of feminism which constructs feminists as hairy, radical man-haters. In Glickman's (1993) study of the daughters of feminist mothers in America, she found that while many of the young women called themselves feminists, they were wary of the implications of the term.

"For these daughters the problem is how to call themselves feminists in a world that selectively and disapprovingly defines the word to exclude everything but the most dramatic and extreme elements. They tenaciously refuse to distance themselves from the label, but it causes them discomfort" (ibid:9).

Glickman reports that many of the daughters discussed this discourse when asked about their own identities as feminists even though she did not ask them for others' perceptions of the word. While rejecting this popular discourse of feminism, the women clearly felt constrained by it. Some in Glickman's study came closer to accepting the discourse. She writes: "Yes, they would call themselves feminists as long as it is clear they are not *that* kind of feminist" (1993:11). Only a few women in Glickman's group unequivocally embraced the term feminist, regardless of its popular presentation.

Another response discussed in the literature was the use of alternatives to the term 'feminist' as a way to negotiate the stereotype within the popular discourse. One woman in Paula Kamen's sample said:

"I would describe myself more as an egalitarian because feminist, in my mind... has a lot of negative connotations. Feminism in its purest form is what I believe in: equal rights

for women - politically, socially, economically. But some elements in 'feminism' bother me" (Kamen 1991:42).

A similar view is voiced by a young Australian woman:

"I don't exactly dislike the term 'feminist'... I believe it conjures up radical and 'burn your bra' connotations. I prefer the term 'equal opportunities' because it implies seeking equal rights and opportunities, and that's what women need" (Trewick 1985:97).

While these women express support for the basic feminist tenets of equal opportunities, they associate the term feminist with more 'radical' images of feminism such as bra-burning. The women try to negotiate this conflict by turning to alternative terms to represent their position. The conflicts and tensions that the women experience between their feminism and other aspects of their lives are not so easily resolved however.

With the exception of Mary Suh (in Stephen 1991) who refers to her struggle to negotiate her feminism with her Korean heritage, Glickman's American study is the only literature that explores conflict between feminism and the young women's other life choices and broader societal values. In her account, she explores the negotiations many of the women have employed to combine their feminism with other areas of their lives such as their careers, marriage and children, as well as their own bodies. One example of such a negotiation process centred around the issue of shaving body hair. One woman was taught by her mother that it was "sexist and unnatural to shave". Heeding her mother, Antonia chose not to shave but did not feel comfortable baring her unshaved body to the world. Consequently she chose to hide her 'shaggy armpits' in sleeved shirts even though this made running on the track team uncomfortable.

"I struggled and struggled and finally thought - 'This is ridiculous. It's just some hair. Big deal.' Antonia shaved, 'still hoping some day to be strong enough not to care.' Then, she recounts, came the big break through. She began to go swimming without shaving. 'And now, in fact I don't shave my legs or my pits. Never! When people notice, I say. 'Never been shaved.' She grins raising her arm in a gesture of triumph." (Glickman 1993:91-92).

Antonia struggled to negotiate non-feminist discourses about women's body hair with her feminist up-bringing. However, Glickman does not offer any exploration of the reasons behind Antonia's shift from shaving to not shaving.

After being raped, Nina (another daughter in Glickman's study) experienced conflict between her desire to dress how she chose and the wider societal discourses that link women's clothing with their sexuality. She comments:

"I used to dress very differently - tank tops and miniskirts. Now I realise that regardless of what you think or of who you are, what you wear puts out a message. And you need to take responsibility for that'. Only when Nina is in a rebellious mood does she say to herself, 'Fuck it! I'm going to dress however I want. I want to yell out - you have no right to hassle me. Just leave me alone!'" (Glickman 1993:95).

In this area of their lives the young women seem to have less room for negotiation and resistance because of their lack of control over the thoughts and beliefs of others. In both cases Glickman draws attention to the conflicts that the young women experience as they negotiate their feminist identities with other demands in their lives. However, in neither case does she explore the processes they become involved in as they negotiate these conflicts.

SUMMARY

This review of the literature about young feminist women has revealed a number of interesting points not the least of which is the lack of literature available in Aotearoa/New Zealand. While there is more international literature, much of it exists in a popular medium. The young women in the literature highlighted a range of discourses about feminism including those of 'postfeminism' and 'feminism's third wave'. However, the most influential discourse was one which represented feminists as hairy, butch lesbians. Many of the women had to negotiate this discourse as they took up their feminist identities and in some cases the women chose not to call themselves feminists because of the 'radical' associations.

The range of ways that young women can gain access to feminist discourses and identities is also evident in the literature. The most central were the family, education, literature and the media, feminist communities, and experiences of other forms of oppression. Interestingly, most of the literature that discussed the influence of families focussed on those young women who had grown up in families that were supportive of liberal or feminist discourses. Even for the daughters of these families though, the process by which they took up a feminist 'identity'

was not simple or without conflict. In the case of the influence of feminist communities, both positive and negative feelings towards older feminist women were evident.

The final area explored centred around the young women's negotiations of their feminist identities. As already mentioned the literature explores the way many of the women negotiated their understanding of feminism in relation to the dominant discourses. Glickman was the only writer who explored the conflicts that developed as the young women negotiated their feminism in relation to other aspects of their lives. Glickman's account does not provide any detailed exploration of how the young women experience this process though.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have explored three quite distinct areas including an account of the development of the women's movement in Aotearoa/New Zealand and the key discourses that have shaped the dominant meanings of feminisms in this country; a brief overview of the academic studies that have explored the experiences of feminist women in Aotearoa/New Zealand; and finally a review of the literature about and by young feminist women both locally and internationally.

The dominant meanings of feminism in Aotearoa/ New Zealand have been shaped by the social history of the movement in this country. While a number of discourses have been imported from overseas (in particular from North America), a range of more local discourses have also developed. These reflect and draw on the specific cultural and historical conditions of Aotearoa/New Zealand, such as discourses of Maaori feminism. There has also been particular concern or attention focussed on recognising and acknowledging the diversity and plurality of women's experiences. This has arisen particularly out of the issues raised at the United Women's Conventions during the '70s and the focus of the WSA during the '80s and '90s.

The academic studies that have been undertaken also reflect a number of these themes.

For example, Middleton (1985) acknowledges the diversity of women's experiences in her selection of participants for her study of feminist teachers. Another important aspect of these studies, however, is the lack of focus on the experiences of young feminist women. While two studies (Curtin and Devere 1993; Hong 1995a) do include young women, they focus primarily on why some women identify as feminist and others do not. As such, they do not really address the issue of how young women experience being feminist.

Although this issue is addressed more fully in the literature that does talk about young feminist women's experiences, much of this literature only exists in a popular culture form. Further, there is a general lack of literature that focuses on the experience of young feminist women in Aotearoa/New Zealand. A number of discourses are evident in both the national and international literature that does exist however, including the stereotype of feminists, the idea of postfeminism and the more positive conception of a third wave of feminism. The literature identifies a number of key areas through which the young women gain access to feminist ideas including the family, education, literature and the media, feminist communities, and experiencing other forms of oppression. There is little discussion though, of the ways that young women negotiate their feminism with other aspects of their lives.

In the next chapter I will explore the theoretical perspective used in the study, that of feminist poststructuralism. It discusses the key ideas of feminist poststructuralism before highlighting some of the difficulties that arose during this study.

CHAPTER TWO

FEMINIST POSTSTRUCTURALISM: A REVIEW AND CRITIQUE

This chapter is an exploration of feminist poststructuralism and its usefulness for understanding the experiences of young feminist women. In the 1980s and 1990s poststructuralism has been an important new development in social theory. Essentially pluralist in emphasis, it has engaged with a wide range of disciplines and provides new perspectives on a number of social and theoretical issues. Examples include textual analysis and deconstruction (Derrida, Barthes), psychoanalysis (Lacan), the state of knowledge (Lyotard, Jameson), challenges to 'gender' (Kristeva, Irigaray, Alice) identity and sexuality (Butler and Foucault), media (Debord, Baudrillard) and power and the subject (Foucault).

In this thesis, my attraction to some of the writings of feminist poststructuralism has led me to explore the issue of 'identity'¹. Specifically my research focuses on the construction of gendered 'identity' and how it is played out in the everyday experiences of young feminist women. For this reason I have turned to the form of feminist poststructuralism proposed by Chris Weedon, Bronwyn Davies, Nicola Gavey, and Vivian Scott Melton². While these authors draw upon the ideas explored by other poststructuralist writers, their focus centres upon the construction and experience of gendered subjectivity. I had hoped that they would provide useful theoretical tools for exploring issues of 'identity' in relation to the experiences of the young feminist women interviewed. However, as I increasingly concluded, many of the key concepts within feminist poststructuralism offer only limited explanatory power.

The chapter begins by exploring the understandings of language and meaning that

¹The term 'identity' is explored towards the end of this chapter.

²There are many other authors involved in the debates about the subject. However, they tend to focus on meta-theoretical issues including the 'death of the subject' and the processes through which individuals are constituted as subjects of knowledge within discourses (See for example, Foucault 1967, 1981, Barrett 1991, Flax 1990, McNay 1992, Benhabib 1992, Rosenau 1992). Further discussion of the issues raised by these authors is outside of the scope of this study.

underpins the feminist poststructuralist understanding of subjectivity. It then discusses subjectivity in more detail, including the central concepts of 'discourse', 'subject position' and 'discursive fields' before exploring the understanding of 'power', 'resistance' and 'agency' in feminist poststructuralism. A discussion of some of the limitations of this approach concludes this chapter. This section includes an interrogation of the concepts of 'subjectivity', 'positioning' and 'identity', a discussion of the relationship between individuals and discourse and finally, an exploration of the concept of 'sense-making' as a way of understanding how individuals experience conflict and contradiction.

LANGUAGE, MEANING AND THE SUBJECT

A central feature of feminist poststructuralism (and many other forms of poststructuralist theory) is the importance of language. Feminist poststructuralists argue that it is through language that the gendered subject is able to interpret the world around her (Weedon 1987).

This marks a shift away from the humanist understanding of language, in which language is believed to reflect a pre-existing, natural and fixed social reality. Humanism³ locates the production of meaning in the sphere of the individual; individuals create and determine the meaning of their own statements. Within this framework, the individual, drawing on Enlightenment ideas, is seen as a conscious, rational and unified being whose self is located in an inner core. This core unfolds as the individual develops, but remains "essentially the same - continuous or 'identical' with itself" (Hall 1992:275)⁴. The individual is believed to

³It is difficult to find a concise definition of humanism. I understand it as a perspective on society and politics that places the conscious individual at the centre of social life (McLennan 1995:103). As part of this, history is understood as the actions and achievements of these individuals.

⁴Davies (1993) notes that while the assumptions of humanist discourses of the self were liberatory in their original intention and in many of their effects:

"humanism also constrained each person to constitute themselves as rational, unitary and non-contradictory, and as if they were distinct and fundamentally separate from

be ontologically prior to and, as such, autonomous from society. Liberal humanists in particular argues that individual needs, interests, capacities and desires exist independently of social context; they are neither created nor even fundamentally altered by the social world (Jaggar, 1983:29). As such, within humanism, the individual was seen as a largely transcultural, transhistorical and transcendent being.

The humanist theory of language that underlay this conception of the self has been critiqued by the structuralist linguist Ferdinand de Saussure. Saussure rejects the argument that language reflects a pre-existing social reality, and instead suggests that language "constitutes social reality for us" (Weedon, 1987:22). This understanding of language is premised on the idea of meaning as a social construct. That is, rather than individuals controlling meaning, it is constituted through the social system of language⁵. As such, language is seen as pre-existing individuals, and it structures the way we express our thoughts.

Rather than seeing the self as pre-social, structuralists such as Marx, Freud, and Althusser argue that an individual's subjectivity is constructed in relation to the structures of society (Hall 1992). They question the idea of a unitary, fixed, conscious and rational self and instead suggest that subjectivity is shaped by both conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions and develops across a person's life time (ibid).

Poststructuralism moves beyond the structuralist understanding of language, meaning and

the social world" (1993:10).

As such it limited the possibilities for individuals to see the multifaceted and fluid nature of their own experience and in effect drew tighter boundaries around an individual's sense of self.

⁵Saussure argues that language is an abstract system made up of chains of signs. Each sign is in turn composed of a signifier (the sound or symbol) and a signified (idea) (Weedon, 1987:23). The signifier and signified are only arbitrarily related and have no natural connection (Saussure, 1970:45). Rather, the meaning of a sign is established relationally on the basis of its difference from other signs (Hall, 1992:288). Hence, 'man' gets its meaning by being 'not woman' rather than intrinsically or naturally meaning 'male'.

the subject. While Saussure acknowledges the impact of social communities and time upon language, his analysis focuses on facets of continuity rather than difference (see Saussure 1970:50-54). By contrast, poststructuralists such as Derrida focus on the difference and discontinuity within language and meaning, and argue that meaning must be seen as multiple and shifting⁶ (Derrida 1976).

Within feminist poststructuralism Derrida's arguments about the temporality of meaning are further enhanced by an emphasis on context. Weedon (1987:25) argues that the, albeit temporary, meaning given to any signifier is always shaped by the specific social, cultural and historical context within which it is located⁷. Thus, for feminist poststructuralists:

"meaning is not fixed in language [or] in other cultural symbols... it shifts as different linguistic, institutional, cultural and social factors come together in various ways" (Kenway et al 1994:189).

This understanding of language and meaning as context specific, multiple and shifting opens up a space for exploring the ways individuals negotiate the different meanings available to them. Such negotiations are central to the experiences of the women in this study both in terms of the meaning of their feminism and their broader understandings of themselves and the world around them.

⁶Derrida (1976) maintains that the meaning of words (which exists in the relationship of difference between signifiers) is in a constant state of 'deferral', that is, because a signifier only gets its meaning from its difference from other signifiers, meaning can never be fixed as it is always suspended in a web of deferral to other signifiers.

⁷Barrett (1991:124) argues that Derrida is associated with a group of literary, art and film critics who argue that a text should be engaged with on its 'own' terms rather than in reference to factors such as historical, social or biographical 'contexts' which are seen as external to the text. This concern within feminist poststructuralism for the social and historical contextualisation of language and meaning is linked in part to Foucault's work.

SUBJECTIVITY, DISCOURSE AND SUBJECT POSITIONS

Subjectivity within feminist poststructuralism can be broadly understood as:

"the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her ways of understanding her relation to the world" (Weedon 1987:32).

Several assumptions underlie this notion of subjectivity including, the idea that subjectivity is socially constructed within discourse. It is through discourse that we are able to give meaning to the world around us, and that we are constituted as conscious thinking subjects (Weedon 1987). Central to this argument is the belief that subjectivity is always in process, shifting and changing as the individual encounters new discourses and has new experiences. Further, because of the conflicting and often contradictory nature of discourses, subjectivity is seen as a site of conflict and contradiction as individuals negotiate the multiplicity of meanings available to them. However, the contradictions within an individual's subjectivity are shaped within a strong discourse that emphasises coherence and continuity. This conception of subjectivity will be explored more fully as the chapter proceeds.

The concept of 'discourse' as understood within feminist poststructuralism involves a shift away from the traditional meanings of discourse as either 'text', as in formal linguistics, or in its more common usage, as 'conversation' (McHoul and Grace 1993, Barrett 1991). Instead, drawing in particular upon the work of Michel Foucault, the term discourse represents the networking of knowledge, power and pleasure.

Foucault, particularly in his later work (post 1970) was interested in exploring the links between power and knowledge and more specifically in the ways that subjects are constituted within discourse. For Foucault, following Nietzsche, power and knowledge are inextricably intertwined; "a site where power is exercised is also a place at which knowledge is produced" (Smart, 1985:64). Central to Foucault's argument is an understanding of power as primarily a productive rather than repressive force. For example, while the church is often portrayed

as repressing sexual expression, Foucault argued that it actually helps to produce our conceptions of sexuality through its discourses of acceptable and unacceptable forms of sexuality (Foucault 1981). In this sense, power operating through discourse, is seen as systematically constituting the subject about which it speaks.

Barrett (1991:135) argues that in Foucault's later works, namely *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality*, there is an increasing emphasis on practices as a central feature of discourses. Davies (1989a) and Weedon (1987) draw attention to this aspect of Foucault's work to argue that discourses exist not only in written and oral forms but also in social practices. For example, Davies (1989a:14) suggests that the process of positioning oneself as female or male is both a conceptual and physical one, such as in the practices of dress and hairstyle that inscribe a child's body with her or his gender. Weedon argues that discourses even inhere within the very physical layout of our institutions such as schools, churches, law courts and houses. She states:

"discourses, as realised in institutional practices, for example in the family and the school, constitute the meaning of the physical body, psychic energy, the emotions and desire, as well as conscious subjectivity. They define individual identities and the forms of pleasure derived from them" (Weedon 1987:112).

Weedon's inclusion of psychic energy and emotions as factors constituted within discourse can be seen as an extension of Foucault's argument in order to include the concerns of feminism⁸.

However, this emphasis on practices as an important factor in the constituting nature of discourse is largely absent from the remainder of Weedon's work. In her discussion of discourses she tends to prioritise language over practices. For example, she argues that it is primarily through *language* that the political struggle over the meaning of social institutions is waged (Weedon 1987:38). But her emphasis on language is perhaps more aptly demonstrated in this quote:

⁸Thanks to Lynne Star for drawing my attention to this point.

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"In order to be effective and powerful, a discourse needs a material base in established social institutions and practices" (ibid:100).

Here Weedon separates out the ideas of discourse and practices and in doing so implies that practices are a medium for the operation of discourses rather than a central feature of the discourses themselves. Thus, while defining discourse as inclusive of practices, Weedon seems to exclude practices from her notion of how the concept operates.

In Davies' work there is a similar level of confusion. She places 'practices' as central to her discussion of discourses by combining the two words to talk about 'discursive practices' (see for example Davies 1989a, 1993). However, she undermines this by also using the term of 'discourse' throughout her work, thereby, in these instances separating practices from the language element (see for example Davies 1994:63).

While I could follow Davies' initial approach by referring to discursive practices (rather than discourses), I am not completely comfortable with this. In part my discomfort stems from the dominant use in the literature of the term discourse as inclusive of practices. By contrast Davies' use of discursive practices focuses our attention upon practices rather than the discourse as a whole. Consequently I will use the term 'discourse' as inclusive of both language and practices while avoiding the pitfalls that both Weedon and Davies fall into.

The third central component of discourse is representation. This aspect of discourse refers to the images that help to constitute the way that we understand the world around us. O'Sullivan et al (1983:199) argue that representations can take form in, for example, speech, writing, print, video, film, and audio tape. The popular image of feminists as hairy legged, butch lesbians is an example of a discursive representation in that it shapes how some individuals conceive of feminism, that is, through an entirely mediated popular stereotype.

However, beyond this broad framework the concept of discourse is not comprehensively explored by the feminist poststructuralist writers drawn upon in this study. While Weedon's (1987) discussion is more extensive, Davies' tends to be more limited. For example, in

Davies' book *Poststructuralist Theory and Classroom Practice* (1994:16-18) her discussion is confined to an analysis of other writers' definitions of the term. At no time does she clearly state how she understands or intends to use the term⁹. This lack of clear definition created problems when I applied the concept to the data. This issue will be explored later in the chapter, but for now discourses can be understood as: "historically, socially and institutionally specific structure[s] of statements, terms, categories, and beliefs" (Scott 1988:135) that shape the subjects about which they speak.

Thus, in the research at hand, discourse can be broadly understood as specific bodies of meaning and knowledge that exist within and are made up of language, practices and representations. Discourses offer individuals different ways of understanding the world around them. As such, they are primarily productive, and are central to the constitution and shaping of an individual's subjectivity.

Discourses constitute subjectivity by providing subject positions that enable ways of seeing, interpreting and interacting with the world and the people in it. For example, discourses of femininity within romantic fiction offer the reader different ways of being a woman through the dominant subject positions of the 'madonna', which constructs women as caring, nurturing, passive and virginal, and the 'whore', where women are presented as assertive, bitchy, flirtatious and sexually permissive (Gilbert and Taylor 1991:82).

Subject positions such as madonna/whore are an example of the dichotomies or binary oppositions that poststructuralists argue structure our thought. Grosz maintains that:

"within such a conceptual structure, one of the terms, the dominant one, defines the terrain of the other, placing it in a position of subordination or secondariness" (1990:93).

These dichotomies, which valorise one term or category over another are central to the operation of subject positions. Weedon (1987:96) argues that dominant subject positions offer

⁹Davies' most detailed definition is in her article with Harre on positioning (Davies and Harre 1989). More often though, she leaves the term unexplored (see for example 1989a, 1989b, 1993).

individuals "particular types of individual satisfaction, pleasure and self-fulfilment and deny the validity of others". In the case of romantic fiction the subject position of the 'madonna' is validated at the expense of the position of 'whore' for it is the madonna who 'wins' the man and lives 'happily ever after' which is constituted as the goal of women in this discourse (Summers 1975, Christian-Smith 1988)¹⁰. Yet each gains its coherence from the existence of the other as its oppositional meaning.

As already implied, a wide variety of discourses exist about any given phenomenon within a society. For example, there are a wide range of different discourses both about and of feminism. Each one constitutes what it means to be feminist in a different way. These different discourses form what has been termed a discursive field which:

"consists of competing [and often contradictory] ways of giving meaning to the world and of organising social institutions and processes" (Weedon 1987:35).

In the case of feminism, different institutions such as the law, church, women's groups such as Rape Crisis, Women Against Pornography, the Maori Women's Welfare League, men's groups and feminists themselves propose different conceptions of what feminism is, conceptions which are often conflicting. These competing discourses overlap and incorporate ideas and images from other discourses and discursive fields in society. For example, any discourse of feminism is constructed in relation to discourses of the femininity, masculinity, the family and law.

These discourses and the different forms of meaning they offer to individuals do not all have the same status in society: rather, some are more powerful than others and are termed 'dominant discourses' (Weedon 1987). In part, the level of social power of a particular discourse is related to the institution with which it is linked. Further, the more power people attribute to an institution the more powerful the discourse is that emanates from it. For example, discourses of sexuality stemming from the state tend to have more power than those

¹⁰In Aotearoa/New Zealand, Paakehaa are constructed as the valorised group over Maaori who occupy a position as Other (Tuhiwai Smith 1992).

associated with radical or lesbian separatist feminism. However, it is important to note that not all discourses have a secure institutional base, a lack which does not always render a discourse ineffective. A discourse needs only to be in circulation in order to have a social effect (Weedon 1987:110).

One further point can be made about discourses, that is, they do not all operate in the same way. Some discourses support the status quo, while others challenge existing practices (Weedon 1987:35). This challenge can operate from within the current framework, for example liberal feminism, or it can challenge the very basis of the organisation, as some radical feminist discourses do. Discourses that challenge the status quo often occupy marginal positions and are defined in negative terms by the dominant discourses. The negative construction of feminism and feminists by the media in the '70s and '80s discussed earlier can be understood within this framework. While such discourses are marginal, they can still offer individuals spaces from which to resist dominant subject positions. The challenge that feminist discourses offer to dominant definitions of femininity can be seen as offering women such a space¹¹.

One consequence of the multiplicity of discourses is that the different discourses, their subject positions, and the different meanings they offer about the world are invariably in conflict, and sometimes contradict each other. For example, Bordo (1993) discusses the way pregnant women have increasingly been constructed within recent Supreme Court rulings in America as human 'incubators', that is, their primary role is defined as producing human offspring. As such pregnant women (once the foetus is past a certain date of gestation) do not have the right to make decisions that could jeopardise the foetus. This discourse exists alongside another legal discourse which constructs each individual as having the right to control her or his own body regardless of the implications this may have for the life or death of others. Bordo (1993:73) gives the example where a man's refusal to donate life saving bone marrow to his dying cousin was upheld by the court. The former discourse concerning

¹¹The issue of power and resistance will be explored later in the chapter.

the role of pregnant women is in conflict with, and in fact contradicts the construction of an individual's (including women) right to control her or his own body.

This presentation of discourses as multiple and contradictory forms the basis for a poststructuralist understanding of subjectivity as a site of conflict and contradiction. For example, a feminist is never just a feminist; she is also often a daughter, a worker, a lover, an activist and a friend. In line with this Weedon argues that:

"in thought, speech or writing individuals of necessity commit themselves to specific subject positions and embrace quite contradictory modes of subjectivity at different moments" (Weedon 1987:97);

Conflict and contradiction between subject positions can also be experienced in a single moment. To extend the example, the ideas and concerns of feminism do not disappear when the woman becomes a worker, or when she is with her family. Rather, the woman may carry the needs of one subject position into her experience of another and in doing so must negotiate any conflicts that arise.

There are also possibilities for conflict within a particular subject position. For example, a feminist's beliefs about pornography may be shaped by a variety of different feminist discourses about pornography including left or right wing discourses. She might respond to different aspects of each and must negotiate any conflicts that arise out of this situation¹², sometimes at great emotional cost (Weedon 1987:34).

Davies and Harre (1990) argue that making choices between such conflicting or contradictory demands is not a simple process; it involves a complex meshing together of a variety of discourses, subject positions and experiences from different moments. From the Davies and Harre argument an important point can be drawn about the nature of the relationship between an individual and the discourses available in society. That is, individuals should not be seen as merely slotting into different discourses and acting out the discursive

¹²Thank you to Lynne Star for drawing my attention to this point.

positionings available within them. Nor should it be assumed that different individuals will interpret and experience a discourse in similar ways. Instead, as Davies and Harre (1990:230) suggest, an individual's interpretation and experience of discourses must be understood as being mediated by a number of factors, including the availability of other discourses and previous experiences of that discourse, subject position or discursive field¹³. However, I would argue that the specific ways that individuals interact with discourses is not explored in any sustained way in these feminist poststructuralist writings. This issue will be explored more fully later in the chapter.

As already mentioned, a central idea within feminist poststructuralism is that an individual's subjectivity is non-coherent, and a site of conflict and contradiction. As Weedon argues:

"[feminist] poststructuralism proposes a subjectivity which is precarious, contradictory and in process, constantly being reconstituted in discourse each time we think or speak" (Weedon 1987:33).

In contrast to humanist notions of subjectivity, this understanding of subjectivity places an emphasis upon discontinuity and contradiction. Much of the research into subjectivity that uses feminist poststructuralism focuses on this particular aspect of subjectivity. For example, Petra Munro's research (Bloom and Munro 1995:103) into women educators' life histories drew on feminist poststructuralism as a way of exploring the fragmentation of, and conflicts within, her participants' experiences and Munro's account of them.

However as Davies (1989b) points out, many of us have a sense of ourselves as continuous and unitary. This understanding stems from the dominant discourses of humanism that emphasise coherence and consistency. Davies suggests that:

"we... struggle with the diversity of experience to produce a story of ourselves which is unitary and consistent. If we don't, others demand of us that we do" (Davies and Harre 1990:59).

¹³Underlying this argument is the idea that individual's retain some form of agency. This issue will be discussed later in the chapter.

Munro (Bloom and Munro 1995:103) also recognises this when she notes that one of her participants 'masked' the conflicts she experienced as she struggled to challenge gender norms. She did this by constructing a unitary representation of herself as 'rebellious'.

However, feminist poststructuralism does not provide a detailed account of how individuals experience the conflicts and dissonance that arise as they negotiate the multiplicity of meanings available, and specifically why they select some positions and not others.

POWER, RESISTANCE AND AGENCY

The understanding of power within feminist poststructuralism moves away from assuming that, firstly, power is something that can be possessed, both by individuals and groups; secondly, that power flows from a centralised source in a top down manner (for example through the state, the economy and law) thereby emphasising sovereign-subject relations and thirdly, that power operates primarily through repression, through prohibitions by sanctions (Sawicki 1986:26). While feminist poststructuralists do not reject outright this understanding of power, they argue that it does not adequately account for the multitude of power relations at the microlevel of society that make centralised and repressive forms of power possible (Sawicki 1991:20).

Instead, feminist poststructuralists draw on the work of Foucault for an alternative conception of power. Foucault maintains that in order to understand power we must focus on **how** power operates rather than look at who possesses it (Foucault 1981:92). Sawicki (1991) suggests that Foucault developed three central arguments about the nature of power. First, power is not possessed: "power is not something that is acquired, seized or shared, something that one holds on to or allows to slip away", rather power is *exercised* (Foucault 1981:94). Second, as discussed earlier, power "needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the entire social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression" (Foucault 1985:91). Third, power should be seen as "coextensive with the social body" (Scott Melton 1992:81).

It is out of these central premises that a number of other arguments have developed. Gavey (1989) suggests that for Foucault power operates primarily through the subjection of individuals within discourse, that is, through the discursive construction of our subjectivities¹⁴. In Weedon's (1987:119) words:

"to speak is to assume a subject position within discourse and to become subjected to the power and regulation of the discourse".

This understanding is linked to Foucault's argument that power is a productive rather than repressive force.

Foucault also rejects the idea that power operates primarily from the top down. He maintains that power is not organised around binary, all-encompassing oppositions between rulers and the ruled (Foucault 1981:94). Instead power should be seen as capillary or as a network of relations. For Foucault, power operates at every point in the social body:

"between a man and a woman, between members of a family, between a master and his pupil, between everyone who knows and everyone who does not, there exist relations of power..." (Foucault cited in Scott Melton 1992:82).

Foucault does not see power as operating unchallenged. He argues that "where there is power, there is resistance" (Foucault 1981:95). He maintains that every instance of power opens up a possibility of resistance (Sawicki 1986:29).

Central to Foucault's notion of resistance is his focus on micro level or local relations of power. While Foucault does not completely reject large scale shifts in power, as in the case of revolutions, he maintains that resistance more commonly operates in a mobile and transitory fashion "producing cleavages in society that shift about, fracturing unities and effecting

¹⁴It is important to note, however that the operation of power through discourse is precarious. As Foucault states:

"discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it but it also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it" (Foucault 1980:101).

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regroupings" (Foucault cited in Weedon 1987:125). An implication of Foucault's understanding of power is that resistance is understood in terms of localised struggles against the many forms of power operating at an everyday level of social relations (Sawicki 1991:23).

The notion of resistance within feminist poststructuralism focuses on the discursive spaces available for individuals to negotiate and refuse the meanings available within dominant discourses. Vivian Scott Melton (1992:83) suggests that there are three primary means for resistance of this form, including the spaces made available through binary oppositions, the gaps or silences within discourses, and through the contradictions between discourses.

First, she points to the way in which discourses, through their use of binary oppositions, simultaneously indicate the positions that they wish to exclude while they construct the preferred subject position (Scott Melton 1992). To draw upon the example of romantic fiction, while the 'madonna' is placed against the 'whore' as the preferred subject position and is presented in a positive light, the position of the 'whore' is nevertheless available to the reader, thereby opening up a possibility for resisting the dominant subject position of the 'madonna'.

The second point Scott Melton raises builds upon this idea but focuses on the spaces or gaps and silences **within** discourses. Again, in order to talk about one aspect, discourses of necessity create the image of an alternative. While the alternative is clear within the discourses of romantic fiction this is not always the case in other sites. Scott Melton (1992) argues that within discourses of marriage in the past, cohabitation existed as an unspoken space or gap through which individuals could resist the dominant subject position of marriage. She goes on to argue that such spaces, "because they are sites of invisibility function as areas of tolerance... [as they are] less subject to the normalising and regulating pressures" of the dominant discourse (Scott Melton 1992:83). That is, because the 'rules' of cohabitation within this discourse of marriage were less well defined and rigid, they were thereby more easily negotiated or rewritten by individuals. Such local levels of resistance can be seen as the first step in challenging meaning, and consequently power, in that they potentially establish a space

for new, emerging resistant discourses.

Finally, Scott Melton (1992:84) looks to the contradictions within and between discourses as further spaces for resistance. Given that our subjectivity is constructed from within a multiplicity of discourses, it is possible for an individual to take a 'liberalising' facet of one discourse and apply it to a subject position of another. Thus, women could draw on the discourse of liberal humanism, which emphasises individualism and equality, as a way of contesting the "patriarchal elements within traditional marriage discourse" (Scott Melton 1992:84).

Underlying this discussion of resistance is the assumption that individuals have social agency and are capable of resistance. For example, Weedon (1987:125) argues that the individual is a:

"thinking, feeling subject and social agent, capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash between contradictory subject positions and practices".

Central to this argument is the belief that individuals are capable of reflecting upon the discursive relations that constitute them and that they can make choices, albeit limited, between those positions available¹⁵.

Davies agrees with Weedon's approach, arguing that an individual's agency and ability to resist come from reflecting upon one's discursive construction.

"Agency is never freedom from discursive constitution of self but the capacity to recognise that constitution and to resist, subvert and change the discourses themselves through which one is being constituted" (Davies 1991:51).

¹⁵Davies notes, though, that within feminist poststructuralism this notion of choice is "more akin to 'forced choices', since the subject's positioning within particular discourses makes the 'chosen' line of action the only possible action, not because there are no other lines of action but because one has been subjectively constituted through one's placement within that discourse to want that line of action" (1991:46).

As such any notion of agency in the sense of 'free choice' is fundamentally illusory.

Thus, Davies suggests that agency lies within our ability to recognise the multiplicity of meaning within and between discourses. By becoming aware of the ways we are discursively positioned within discourses, the possibility of refusing positions and taking up alternatives becomes more viable (Davies 1989b:239). When we recognise the existence of multiple readings, it also becomes more difficult for 'powerful others' to control our self understanding by positioning us in particular ways (Davies 1991:51).

Such a notion of agency and resistance fits well with the research at hand. Many feminist discourses are concerned with recognising the ways in which dominant discourses of femininity help to shape women's sense of themselves and as such are directed towards offering alternative subject positions of what it means to be a woman.

ISSUES WITH FEMINIST POSTSTRUCTURALISM

The ideas of feminist poststructuralism and poststructuralisms in general have been widely debated in social theory¹⁶. In this next section I will explore some of the difficulties with feminist poststructuralism that have developed in relation to the research at hand. These include the feminist poststructuralist understanding of 'subjectivity', 'identity', and 'positioning', the relationship between discourses and individuals, and the ways individuals experience conflict and contradiction.

SUBJECTIVITY, POSITIONING, AND 'IDENTITY'

When I initially explored using feminist poststructuralism as the theoretical approach for this thesis I felt it offered a number of useful tools for understanding the experiences of the

¹⁶Some of the central debates surrounding feminist poststructuralism include the use for feminism of Foucault's notion of power (Fraser 1989, Hartsock 1990, Deveaux 1994), and the tension between Foucault's argument that discourses are neither true nor false (Sarup 1988) and many feminisms' claims to be producing a less androcentric and therefore more true knowledge.

young feminist women in the study, one of which was the concept of subjectivity.

As already discussed, the feminist poststructuralists I have drawn on define subjectivity as an individual's conscious and unconscious understandings of herself and the world around her (Weedon 1987). This conception emphasises a 'self' which is multiple, fragmented, always in process and often conflicting and contradictory. Such an understanding seemed useful as a way of exploring both the young women's feminist interpretations of the world and how they negotiated any conflicts that arose in relation to this.

However, when I attempted to use the concept I became aware of its implicit assumptions. The argument that an individual's subjectivity can be conflicting and contradictory suggests that 'subjectivity' refers to the whole 'self' of an individual which contains conflicting although fluid parts. Consequently I could not refer to the women's feminist subjectivities without implying that they either had many other subjectivities that existed alongside their feminist one, or that their feminism was all pervasive and as such represented their 'true' being.

I needed a concept that would enable me to discuss one aspect of the women's subjectivities, such as their feminism without under or over-emphasising its importance or creating an image of separate parts that were distinct and independent from each other. To find this concept I returned to the feminist poststructuralist literature.

The first option was the concept of 'positioning' as offered by Davies and Harre (1990). They define positioning as:

"the discursive practice whereby selves are located in conversations as observably and subjectively coherent participants in jointly produced storylines" (ibid:48).

This approach argues that individuals both position themselves and are positioned by others through interactions depending on the discourses available to each individual. Having taken

up a particular position, an individual views the world from the perspectives made available¹⁷. Davies (1989a, 1989b, and 1993) uses this concept to explore the ways the children in her studies take up different subject positions.

The second option was the concept of 'identity'. This term occupies an ambiguous position within feminist poststructuralism. Primarily, the term is critiqued as a modernist concept that draws on the humanist notion of a conscious, unitary, coherent and developmental self (Davies 1993:8). Davies argues that this concept is "*under erasure* in poststructuralist writing" (1993: 8); while we still need the term it needs deconstructing. This erasure is indicated, following Derrida, by putting a line through it, leaving the word visible but drawing attention to its contested meaning. However, despite this critique 'identity' most often appears in feminist poststructuralist writings in its uncrossed form (see for example, Davies 1993:22,51,107 and 120; and Weedon 1987: 112).

Neither positioning nor 'identity' offer straightforward solutions to the difficulties with subjectivity. Positioning, firstly, emphasises the momentary or temporary subject positions that are taken up during social interactions. This creates problems for exploring the more long term nature of a feminist sense of self¹⁸. Secondly, while positioning is useful for examining the difficulties that arise when an individual's own positioning clashes with the way she is positioned by others, positioning is less useful for understanding the positions an individual may take up when she is by herself, as the notion is always relational. Thus, positioning has difficulty accounting for the more conscious, 'isolated', and long term understandings that an individual might take up.

The concept of 'identity' also has problems. As mentioned earlier, 'identity' evokes the modernist images of a unitary, coherent and developmental self. Such images are clearly in

¹⁷It is important to remember that the experience of these positionings is not always coherent and non-contradictory given the multiple and often conflicting nature of discourses.

¹⁸Although the concept of positioning is more useful for exploring the particular feminist positionings taken up in different situations.

conflict with the feminist poststructuralist emphasis on multiplicity, fragmentation and process. The concept of 'identity' is also associated with the political approach known as 'identity politics' in which an individual's politics is based on her sense of personal 'identity' as, for example, Jewish, lesbian, black or female (Fuss 1989). In this conception 'identity' refers to an individual's sense of herself as part of a group that has particular characteristics.

The concept of 'identity', as deployed in identity politics tends to be associated with ideas of essence and essentialism. The 'identity' in question is thought to be the real or true identity of the individual rather than a socially constituted way of being¹⁹. The term 'identity' tends to evoke the images and ideas associated with its usage in 'identity politics' because of the centrality of 'identity politics' to many forms of feminism.

Notwithstanding these problems, the term 'identity' provides a better way of conceptualising the young women's feminism as a sense of self, in part *because* of its association with politics. However, if it is to be usefully deployed the concept of identity needs clarification.

'Identity', as it will be used in this study, means a part of an individual's subjectivity that is consciously taken up as a way of understanding herself and her relation to the world. An individual can take up any number of 'identities' at any point in time and these interact with and draw upon each other²⁰. An 'identity' is not fixed in time, nor is it necessarily coherent. An individual can position herself differently in relation to her 'identity' at different moments and even take up different positions within it; or she could shift away from the 'identity' altogether, choosing to drop it rather than continue to use it as a way of understanding herself.

¹⁹While Diana Fuss (1989) challenges this assumption in her exploration of both lesbian and gay identity politics and of essentialism more broadly, the term identity still carries these associations.

²⁰It is important to note, therefore, that I do not wish to evoke an essentialist understanding of 'identity'.

Alongside the concept of 'identity' I will also draw on the concept 'positioning' as defined earlier. However I do not wish to evoke a hierarchy of subjectivity, 'identities' and positionings by assuming that 'identity' is more important or central to an individual's sense of self than a possibly more fleeting positioning. I am aware that the concepts as constructed here do tend towards such a pattern, and hence want to point out that the relative importance of an 'identity' or positioning is specific to the individual and to the particular instance in which they are played out.

DISCOURSES AND INDIVIDUALS

The second difficulty with feminist poststructuralism centres around the concept of 'discourse'. When I first encountered 'discourse' I felt that it offered a useful tool for exploring the ways subjectivity is constituted. However, when I tried to apply it to the data it became problematic, particularly in reference to the relationship between discourses and individuals.

Feminist poststructuralism fails to provide an account of the way discourses operate at the level of the individual. While Scott Melton (1992) explores the spaces available to individuals to resist the meanings available in dominant discourse, she does not provide a comprehensive account of what shapes an individual's responses to different discourses and why they may accept some parts but not others. Davies and Harre (1989) go further towards addressing this issue in their discussion of the different factors that shape an individual's response to a particular discourse, but they too do not explore in any detail how particular discourses are mediated through and by individuals as they consciously and unconsciously reproduce and rewrite them.

It is to this task that I now turn. In my view, an individual woman will experience a discourse in reference to the different discourses available to her both previously and at that moment in time. For example, her reaction to a feminist discourse is likely to be influenced by her access to other liberal or conservative discourses. Both the number and nature of the

discourses available to individuals at any point in time is influenced by their position within society, that is, by their gender, class, ethnicity, embodiedness, age and religion.

Secondly, the experiences that an individual has had in relation to a discourse will necessarily influence her response to the discourse, as will her feelings about an individual who is now, or has been in the past, associated with that discourse. For example, if a woman's most recent experience of feminist discourse was being challenged by feminist women for her associations with men she loved (an experience she found disconcerting), her future responses to feminist discourses are likely to be shaped by that experience²¹. Thus, individuals do not respond to and negotiate discourses as 'blank slates' but carry their previous experiences into the encounter. An individual's response in such a situation may not be framed by only conscious thoughts or beliefs though. Our responses to and experiences of discourses are shaped by our subjectivity which operates at both conscious and sub-conscious levels.

The ways that individuals mediate discourses is also shaped by the form the discourse takes. Purvis and Hunt (1993:486) argue that a distinction should be made between 'popular discourses' and 'professional discourses'. Popular discourses can be understood as discourses which no longer have a strong institutionalised base and instead exist at the level of 'common sense'. An example of a popular discourse is that which constructs feminists as radical, hairy legged, butch lesbians. While the origins of this discourse in Aotearoa/ New Zealand can be traced to the media's presentation of the 1970s women's movement, and in particular, to the activities of radical and cultural feminism, it has moved beyond this base and has seeped into many people's 'common sense' perceptions of feminism and feminists. Thus, while the media

²¹It is important to note that within feminist poststructuralism, experience is seen as having no inherent or essential meaning (Weedon 1987:34), that is to say, no REAL meaning. Rather, experience gets its meaning through discourse. As such, the ways that we understand and express our experiences are never independent of discourse (Gavey 1990:5). This argument exists in contrast to other feminist theories such as cultural feminism which privilege women's experience, presenting it as pure and essential and often, consequently, as universal and transhistorical (Gavey 1990:5).

still presents this image of feminists²², the discourse is not primarily dependent on the media for its circulation or its strength.

Purvis and Hunt (1993:486) contrast such popular discourses with professional discourses, those discourses associated with professional institutions or bodies such as medicine, psychology, education, social welfare or the legal system. They maintain that while popular discourses are strongly influenced by the changing balance of forces between professional discourses, the two should not be conflated. Such a conflation would limit the analysis of the power relations at play in the world. After all, different sorts of discourse would surely incorporate different mechanisms of power and consequently lead to different forms of mediation, negotiation and resistance. Thus, this idea of 'popular discourses' must be central to feminist poststructuralism if it is to understand the constitution of the subject within discourse.

CONFLICT AND CONTRADICTION

The final area of difficulty I encountered centred around how an individual experiences the conflict and dissonance that results from the multiplicity of discourses. As discussed earlier, Davies argues that while an individual's subjectivity is often conflicting and contradictory our experience of this is strongly shaped by the humanist discourse which emphasises a coherent and unitary self. However, neither Weedon (1987), Davies (1989a, 1989b, 1993, 1994) nor Munro (Bloom and Munro 1995) address the issue of how an individual experiences the need to maintain a coherent and unitary sense of self while negotiating the disjunctures that result from conflicting discourses. These writers tend to focus on identifying and acknowledging multiple ways of being. To address this issue I argue that feminist poststructuralism could turn to 'sense-making' (Rutledge Shields and Dervin 1993).

²²See for example, Frank Haden's representation of feminists as "bearded ladies" (Alice 1995:10).

Sense-making is a methodology that explores how people construct the ideas that form their pictures of reality. It assumes that gaps exist between times, spaces, objects and persons, gaps that need to be negotiated and made sense of by individuals as they encounter them. Thus, sense-making can be defined as conscious and unconscious (as well as cognitive and procedural) behaviour that enables individuals to negotiate the gaps or contradictions that they experience (Rutledge Shields and Dervin 1993:73). This notion of gaps is similar to the idea of conflicting and contradictory discourses within feminist poststructuralism and as such provides a way for understanding how an individual makes sense of the dissonances within her subjectivity.

This continual process of making sense of gaps is understood as 'bridge building' or 'constructings'. As Rutledge Shields and Dervin (1993:73) argue, such 'constructings' may: (i) be repetitions of past bridges, or develop as new responses to contradictions; (ii) be responsive to shifting circumstances or remain more rigid; and (iii) appear to be restricted by hegemonic forces or be spontaneous and imaginative thereby belying these forces. This understanding of bridge building provides a useful tool for exploring the multiple ways that individuals respond to different conflicts and contradictions in their lives.

Narrative or story telling is one way in which individuals negotiate the gaps that are created by discourse. Individuals typically construct narratives about who they are as people and how they experience themselves and the world around them. It is through these narratives that individuals can create and speak the 'constructings' that enable them to bridge the gaps in discourses.

I would further suggest that the constructions that individuals create to bridge the gaps between discourses can and often do consist of other discourses or subject positions. That is, they draw upon other discourses in order to create some 'legitimate' account of their behaviour or beliefs. To some extent feminist poststructuralism, through its argument that contradictions and conflicts exist, is quickly becoming a powerful discourse for explaining our contradictions. However, while this may be so, the mere fact that we feel the need to account

for contradictions at all seems to reflect the strength of the humanist discourse. This issue of sense-making will be explored in relation to the narratives of young feminist women in chapter five.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have explored the feminist poststructuralist arguments about subjectivity using the work of Weedon, Davies, Gavey, Sawicki and Scott Melton. They suggest that an individual's subjectivity is constituted within discourse through the taking up of subject positions. The multiplicity of discourses that give meaning to the world around us are sometimes conflicting and contradictory which in turn means that an individual's subjectivity is also often multiple and conflicting. I have argued that the writers I have drawn on do not provide an adequate account of the ways that individuals mediate discourses, of the differences between subjectivity, 'identity' and positionings and of the way that individuals make sense of their contradictory subjectivities in a society that emphasises unitary and coherence.

The next chapter discusses the methodology and method used in the study. It details the guiding principles of feminist research and the justification for the use of multiple in-depth interviewing. It also explores the experiences I had as I tried to implement the feminist principles of maximising diversity and locating the role of the researcher in the research process.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY: ISSUES OF DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

As discussed in the Introduction, the research questions emerged from my experiences as a young feminist, my reading of literature which revealed a lack of research into the experiences of young feminist women in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and my concerns about feminist poststructuralism's account of subjectivity. The study looks at the experiences of seven young, self-identified feminist women who were currently attending, or had in the past attended, university. I have included myself, a young feminist woman, as one of the seven participants. The research questions fall into three categories:

1. What does it mean to be feminist?
2. How did the young women's feminist 'identities' develop?
3. How do they negotiate their feminist beliefs in relation to other areas of their lives?

In this chapter I discuss the methodology and method employed, and some of the issues that arose during the research process. The first section draws attention to the principles of feminist research that guided my approach. Here, I investigate two central issues: firstly, the goal of maximising diversity, and secondly, the role of the researcher in the research process. The justification for using the qualitative method of multiple, in-depth interviewing to explore the issues around subjectivity is also discussed. The chapter goes on to describe the participants, the criteria guiding their inclusion, and the selection process. I then explain the reasons for including myself as a participant in the study. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the interview process and an examination of the problems that arose out of the inclusion of a range of ethnic groups and the difficulties of including myself as a participant.

THE RESEARCH DESIGN: KEY ISSUES

FEMINIST RESEARCH

Feminists engaging in empirical research in the 1990s draw on over twenty years of debates about the nature of feminist research. Smith and Noble-Spruell (1986:134) argue that the beginnings of a distinctive feminist methodology are linked to a culture of growing disillusionment with positivism, the dominant social science philosophy of the time¹. However, feminist methodology and dialogue about it has moved beyond a response to the problems of positivism to a stage where feminist researchers identify a series of themes or guiding principles that generally underlie feminist research practices² (Smith and Noble-Spruell 1986; Stanley and Wise 1983; Reinharz 1992).

This study has been shaped by a number of these general principles, especially the idea that feminist research should be guided by feminist theory and that it should aim to better the position of women in society (Smith and Noble-Spruell 1986:139, Reinharz 1992:240). The research design also reflected the principle that feminist research:

"emphasises a non-exploitative relationship between the researcher and researched which is based on collaboration, co-operation and mutual respect" (Smith and Noble-Spruell 1986:139).

Other key principles include the goal of striving to recognise and reflect human diversity (Reinharz 1992:240) and the emphasis placed on self-consciously positioning the researcher

¹Feminists questioned the positivist demand that researchers should produce scientific (that is definable, measurable and testable) knowledge. Central to this process was a critique of the positivist demand for and assumption of, researcher objectivity, and its separation of the development of empirical knowledge from the pursuit of moral aims (Oakley 1981, Harding 1986).

²This process has not been one without debate, however. As Stanley and Wise (1990:26) note, feminist sociologists have responded to the suggestion of a feminist methodology in a range of ways. These include denying its existence, seeing its promotion as a 'hijacking' of feminism, and presenting it as an uncontested arena with generally accepted principles.

as a person and acknowledging her presence as intrinsic to the research process (Smith and Noble-Spruell 1986:139, Reinharz 1992:240). As these two principles have most strongly shaped my research process, much of this chapter explores how they have been implemented and the wider implications for the practice of feminist research.

MAXIMISING DIVERSITY: CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH

Feminism recognises that, while women are bound together by their gender, their experiences are also marked by differences. It strives to acknowledge this within research. Reinharz (1992:253) maintains that "diversity has become a new criterion for feminist research excellence". This has been particularly important in cross-cultural research.

However, the history of cross-cultural research, both within feminism and outside, has been a chequered one. The first of two conflicting strands here is a growing awareness that many non-feminist and feminist researchers have tended historically to study white, middle class heterosexual men or women and then treated their findings as generalisable to the wider population. In so doing they have ignored the different realities and experiences of minority groups such as Maaori, people of colour³, the so called 'Third World' populations, gays and lesbians and members of the working class. Secondly, when researchers turn their focus to these groups, they tend to provide analyses that reflect their own cultural beliefs and practices. Consequently many of these analyses have interpreted minority groups as either deviants, or powerless victims. Carby (1982:212) states that:

"the black women's critique of history has not only involved us coming to terms with 'absences'; we have also been outraged by the ways in which it has made us visible, when it has chosen to see us".

³I am using people of colour to refer to a wide range of ethnic groups who are minorities in the countries in which they reside, including North America, Canada, and Britain. I am aware that the experiences of these groups of people vary in many ways and am referring to them collectively for ease of discussion.

In attempting to resolve these two dilemmas, a contradictory situation has arisen for white, middle class heterosexual women. On the one hand, as Reinharz (1992:255) states, there has been a call for researchers to adequately reflect the diversity of the population in their research to a point where:

"producing research that is inadequately diversified with regard to race, age, ethnicity, and sexual preference has become a sign of methodological weakness and moral failure, an impermissible reflection of a lack of effort and unwitting prejudice" (1992:255).

On the other hand, minority groups have increasingly questioned the ability and appropriateness of members of the dominant group studying those outside of their social and cultural settings. This argument is possibly strongest when applied to white researchers investigating the experiences of people of colour. Phoenix argues that because academic work is conducted primarily within racist settings in which blacks are devalued in relation to whites:

"when comparisons are made between groups of black people and groups of white people research continues to construct white people as the norm and black people as abnormal by comparison" (cited in Edwards 1990:482-3).

She argues that this problem is heightened because most researchers are white, and as such, are unlikely to share the same perspectives as people of colour.

Barrett and McIntosh's response to this sort of criticism is to back away from researching the experiences of people of colour. They argue that:

"while feminist theories need to take account of Black women, the empirical studies of Black people's lives which can provide the basis for them need to be carried out by Blacks; [they state] 'we do still believe that white women are not the best placed to tackle these specific matters'" (ibid).

Similar arguments have been made in reference to Paakehaa and Maaori in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Donna Awatere (1984), in her book *Maori Sovereignty*, challenged the racism of Paakehaa feminists, arguing that "the first loyalty of white women is always to the White Culture and the White Way" (ibid:42). Kathie Irwin (1992) makes a similar point, arguing that research for Maaori women must be undertaken by Maaori women. "People have

spoken on our behalf for long enough" (Irwin 1992:7).

With an awareness of these debates I am committed to recognising and appreciating the differences between women, and as I wanted to maximise the diversity in the study I built this into my research design. However, this approach resulted in conflicting experiences, particularly around the issue of ethnicity. I will discuss these experiences as they arise throughout the chapter.

LOCATING THE RESEARCHER WITHIN THE RESEARCH

As stated, both Reinharz (1992) and Smith and Noble-Spruell (1986) argue that feminist research must involve the researcher as a person, thereby recognising "the open presence of the researcher as intrinsic to the [research] process" (Smith and Noble-Spruell, 1986:139). Reinharz (1992) reports that this recognition takes a number of forms including describing the personal origins of a researcher's questions, a description of the actual research process as a lived experience and a reflection upon what was learnt from that process.

These considerations rest on a belief in the efficacy of 'starting with one's own experience': "the 'problem' is frequently a blend of an intellectual question and a personal trouble" (Reinharz, 1992:260). For example, Athena Theodore after having to fight to retain her job as a tenured Associate Professor was alerted to the gendered nature of her experience and consequently developed a research project that aimed to document the experiences of other academic women who had fought discrimination (ibid:259). It is argued that researchers who start with their own experience occupy the position of 'the insider'. Reinharz (1992:258-263) maintains that the researcher is able to use her own experiences to help define and construct the research questions, to lead her to useful data, to gain the trust of those involved in the research as well as enabling her to partially test her findings.

This approach to research also helps overcome some of the unequal power relations typical of traditional research/respondent relations. For example, a researcher can offer

information about her own experiences as a way to reduce a respondents's feelings of vulnerability. Such information sharing can work to place the researcher and the respondent on a more even plane (Oakley 1981)⁴.

Feminists have also challenged the traditional positivist notion of the researcher as detached, objective and value neutral (Smith and Noble-Spruell 1986:135). Some feminists argue that:

"researcher's understandings are necessarily temporally, intellectually, politically and emotionally grounded and are thus as contextually specific as those of the 'researched'" (Stanley and Wise cited in Stanley 1990:23).

Feminist researchers who 'situate' themselves within the research often do so as part of a challenge to epistemological claims about the objective nature of knowledge and knowledge construction, arguing that it necessarily includes the subjective involvement of the knowledge creator. It is suggested that by locating the researcher in relation to her work we are better able to scrutinise that work (Harding 1986). Typically this 'placing' of the researcher involves a precis describing who the researcher is and discussing her experiences as related to the research topic.

I have followed many of these practices in my research. However, rather than just acknowledging my presence in the research process, I have gone further and included myself as a research participant. That is, I have been interviewed with the same interview schedule, and my 'data' has been analysed and my story told alongside those of the six other women in the study. The issues that surfaced as a consequence of this will be addressed later in this chapter.

⁴However, as Finch (1984) has pointed out, this sort of situation can increase the vulnerability of the respondents as they expose more information about themselves than intended. Feminist researchers need to be careful to balance the desire to break down the traditional researcher/respondent relationship with the need to protect the respondent from vulnerabilities stemming from over-exposure.

RATIONALE FOR MULTIPLE, IN-DEPTH INTERVIEWING

Qualitative research methods, and in particular interviewing, are seen to have two main advantages over quantitative approaches. Firstly, they emphasise exploring the respondent's world in her own words, thereby accessing those experiences as closely as possible to how the participants have lived or felt them (Ely et al 1991:4). The aim is to develop a sense of the participants as "rounded individuals rather than as numbers in boxes" (Yeandle, cited in Reinharz 1992:24), thereby capturing the complexities of an individual's life (Healy and Stewart cited in Jayaratne and Stewart 1991:93). The second advantage of qualitative research is that it offers spaces for breaking down traditionally rigid relationships between the researcher and the researched (Ely et al 1991).

For the purposes of this study multiple, semi-structured, in-depth interviews were chosen, a method that has many similarities to the life history method. Multiple, in-depth interviewing provides space for the construction of narratives which are valuable for:

"reveal[ing] the frameworks of meaning through which individuals locate themselves in the world and make sense of their lives" (Personal Narratives Group 1989:23).

Narratives are useful for exploring subjectivity as it is constructed within discourse. By enabling respondents to use their own language we can gain a better understanding of how they understand and experience the discourses that influence them. In particular, as Geiger (1986:348) argues, life histories and other narrative based methods provide critical data for understanding an individual's transition from perceiving gender constraints as natural or as 'facts of life' to interpreting them as social and linked to their 'oppression'. This issue is central to the research questions at hand; I argue that the ways in which young women experience, interpret and negotiate their personal and social lives is central to the ways they develop and negotiate their feminist 'identities'.

A common feature of narrative based methods is the use of multiple interviews. Multiple interviewing was required for this study because of the breadth and depth of the research questions. As the research was largely exploratory, the interviews needed to cover a wide

range of areas that could have been influential in the women's lives. I wanted to understand the complexity of their experiences, and thus I needed to provide the space for complexities to surface. Further, multiple interviewing provides opportunities to "get corrective feedback on previously obtained information" and are therefore "likely to be more accurate than single interviews" (Reinharz 1992:31).

Multiple interviews also provide the space for stronger bonds between the researcher and respondent. As Reinharz (1992:30) suggests:

"in addition to the potential for developing trust, the asset of this method is the opportunity to share interview transcripts or notes with the interviewee and then invite the interviewee's analysis".

This practice was central to my aim of reducing the respondents' feelings of powerlessness and alienation from their data and the research process as a whole.

THE PARTICIPANTS

I chose to investigate a group of university women who shared a similar educational level, largely for reasons of ease of access. A number of criteria were used to select the women to be interviewed. To ensure that I did not impose my definition of feminism on the participants it was important that the women were self-identified feminists. I chose the ages of 18 and 24⁵ because I wanted the women to have grown up in a roughly similar period, which was during the height of the 'second wave' of feminism. As discussed earlier, I was concerned to include some aspects of diversity in the study, so the women were also selected on the basis of ethnicity, sexuality and the way they saw their entry into feminism. Although I did not seek a range of class backgrounds, this **was** represented in the final group of participants.

⁵One woman turned 25 during the research process. Her age has been listed as 25.

I originally intended that all the women involved would be volunteers so I advertised the study in a variety of ways including advertisements in a student newspaper, the staff/post graduate newsletter, a small article about my research in the local newspaper, and posters placed around campus inviting participants to join the study (for an example see Appendix 1). I received about 15 replies to these requests. These women were sent an information letter explaining what would be involved if they decided to participate (see Appendix 2)⁶. However, choosing from this group of women would have resulted in a number of key positions, such as a Maaori feminist and a lesbian feminist being excluded from the study. I wanted the study to reflect the diversity of feminism in Aotearoa/New Zealand and this was more important than limiting the participants to volunteers⁷. I sought women who met my criteria by contacting the local gay and lesbian support group, lesbian and Maaori staff members as well as using my personal networks. Two names were put forward and these women were approached and responded positively to participating in the study. The final group of women in the study thus came from a number of different sources including those who responded to my call for volunteers, a personal contact who was initially a pilot interviewee, and women whom I encountered through personal contacts.

I included myself as a participant for several reasons, one of which was that my experiences as a young feminist woman are interesting and add a further dimension to the study. More importantly though, was an awareness that my interpretations of the data are inevitably linked to my own experiences and beliefs. Given this understanding, the explicit inclusion of my experiences provides the reader with more information from which to critically explore the analysis. I wanted to be **on** the pages rather than merely embedded **in** them. While any attempt at such 'intellectual honesty' is necessarily limited by my subjective construction of the final text, I see this process as a valuable exercise in reflexive theorising.

⁶The final group of women signed a consent form based on this information letter.

⁷This decision reflects the emphasis within many Aotearoa/New Zealand feminisms on acknowledging the differences between women.

INTRODUCING THE WOMEN IN THE STUDY

Catherine⁸ identified herself as a middle class Paakehaa and at 18 was the youngest of the seven women. She was raised by her feminist lesbian mother and describes herself as bi-sexual. Catherine dressed in the most amazing alternative clothes including a second hand velvet jacket⁹.

Marie was 21, heterosexual and identified as Paakehaa but also claimed her Maaori heritage. She grew up in an upper working class, two parent family and was introduced to feminism at university. Marie reminded me of Cleopatra with her elegant bobbed hairstyle.

Ali, aged 22, describes herself as a working class, Paakehaa lesbian and discovered her first positive presentation of feminism through the books in her school library at the same time as she came across her first fictional accounts of lesbianism. Ali's interviews were conducted with a continuous background symphony of a chainsaw's buzz and a cat's meow.

Emma (me) was 22, Paakehaa, middle class and heterosexual and as already stated was raised by a feminist mother and pro-feminist father. Emma's voice is mediated through the endless tapping of computer keys.

Robyn was Maaori and was raised by her working class Paakehaa father. She was 22 and saw feminism as something she had always instinctively been aware of but did not have the words to describe until she got to university. Robyn chose to locate herself as pan-tribal for the purposes of this study, a choice that will be discussed in Chapter Four. During the interviews Robyn's cat also frequently tried to put her views of feminism on record.

⁸The women's identities are protected by pseudonyms. Each woman chose her own name as a way of reducing their potential alienation from their stories.

⁹I have attempted to include small visual cues such as this to help the reader construct a mental picture of each woman.

Shelley was the youngest of six children in her middle class family and was aged 23. She identified as Paakehaa and heterosexual. Her feminism developed during her time as a university student. At the time of the interview Shelley had frizzy red hair and felt that her red shoes epitomised feminism.

Beth, at 25, was the oldest of the women. She is a first generation Dutch/New Zealander and identified as heterosexual. Beth grew up in a middle class family and was introduced to feminism at the age of 9 by her sister when she came home for the university holidays. Beth could replicate a most amazing Dutch accent.

The final group of seven women then, including myself, ranged in age between 18 and 25 with the majority in their early 20's. One woman was Maaori, one a Dutch/New Zealander, the others identified as Paakehaa and included one woman who also claimed her Maaori ancestry. Five of the women were heterosexual, one woman was lesbian and one bisexual. Their class backgrounds (family of origin) included working class and middle class. Five of the women were raised in nuclear families, four of which were organised around traditional gendered roles. The remaining two women were raised in single parent families, one by her lesbian mother and the other by her heterosexual father.

All the women had attended New Zealand universities at some stage. At the time of the interviews five were involved in either undergraduate or post-graduate studies and the remaining two were no longer students; one was in full-time paid employment and the other was unemployed but anticipating further study. The women had been, or were, studying a range of disciplines, including the social sciences, humanities, business and agriculture/horticulture.

As will be discussed in chapter four, the women came to feminism in a variety of ways and at different ages. Two were 'raised feminist' by their parents, another became feminist at a young age through a family member, a fourth came across feminist ideas in books at school, while the remainder encountered feminism in their late teens and early twenties

through university courses or in campus groups.

INTERVIEWING

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Thinking through the theoretical issues surrounding subjectivity, and about my own entry into feminism, was central to the process of constructing the interview schedule (see Appendix 3). I tested the schedule in two pilot interviews during which I explored different ways to guide the interviews. As a result of these pilot interviews the schedule was used but not followed rigidly. I often followed the women's stories, exploring their ideas and experiences as they arose; this technique is commonly known as tracking.

Each woman was interviewed three or four times, with most interviews lasting about two hours and the longest three hours. Most of the interviews took place in the respondents' homes, although some were conducted in my office at university or in my home.

I was concerned to try to break down the power imbalances between myself and my participants. These attempts centred around volunteering information about myself to partially balance the exchange of information and reduce the women's vulnerability (Oakley 1981). When it seemed appropriate I offered more information about myself¹⁰. I was aware that researchers must be careful to balance their 'need' to volunteer information against the participant's wish to hear such information. For some of the women, this exchange seemed more welcome than for others and these women often initiated discussions about my

¹⁰In most of the interviews the women's experiences were markedly different to mine because they had not grown up in 'feminist families'. Catherine was the one exception to this pattern.

experiences¹¹.

INTERVIEWING: CROSS-CULTURAL RESEARCH

As discussed earlier there has been much debate about the appropriateness of cross-cultural research, debates that I was conscious of. At the beginning I was simultaneously aware of the need to represent the plurality of Aotearoa/New Zealand feminisms, particularly in regard to ethnicity and sexuality, while also struggling with my roles as Paakehaa, heterosexual, feminist researcher. I had for a long time believed that it was inappropriate for Paakehaa to study Maaori because I felt the likelihood of producing exploitative, racist research was overwhelming. Yet at the same time, to ignore the experiences of a Maaori feminist would effectively silence that standpoint. I decided that it was important to carry out the interviews but my reluctance and nervousness strongly shaped my initial experience of the process.

Central to this was my wariness of the possibility that Robyn (the Maaori woman who participated in the research) would deny me access to her experiences because she feared an appropriation of her knowledge. I experienced a range of emotions commonly associated with 'studying up' (Lofland and Lofland 1984). Most notable of these was my desire to list my 'credentials' (that is, for example, my awareness of and deep respect for Maaori tanga, and my involvement in and commitment to Te Reo) in order to legitimise me, as a Paakehaa, interviewing a Maaori woman. While I ultimately stepped back from this anxiety, because I felt that it was inappropriate, I was relieved when a space opened in our first interview that allowed me to express some of my respect and limited knowledge to Robyn.

Further discomfort arose when it came to discussing sensitive topics such as alcoholism

¹¹Bombyk et al (cited in Reinharz, 1992:33) have drawn attention to the possibility of participants feeling constrained or discomforted by such disclosures. As Marilyn Wedenoja, one of the participants in that study comments, during the early stages of the interview she wanted space to establish herself "within the role of participant before moving towards more of an interactive sharing" (cited in Reinharz, 1992:33).

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and sexuality with Robyn, discomfort that I did not feel when I discussed similarly sensitive topics with the other women in the study. With Robin, I was wary of seeming too white, too middle class and untainted by the 'shame' of alcoholism, and I was also heedful of warnings about cultural sensitivity and of crossing boundaries of social taboo. While the first issue was negotiated by alerting Robyn to instances of alcoholism within my own family, the second was one in which Robyn's own comfort in discussing sexuality came to my rescue.

It seems to me that my experiences of interviewing Robyn result largely from the particular environment within feminism and broader social research regarding cross-cultural research. That is, my feelings of 'studying up' seem to be more closely associated with my perceptions of Robyn as Maaori and my awareness of issues around racism than any power Robyn had to refuse me access to her world.

Despite the research environment that led to these experiences, my awareness of the issues and power relations involved did not protect Robyn (or myself) from the problems of meaning that often exist within cross cultural studies (see Edwards 1990). My concern about Robyn shutting the door to her life led me to fail to 'hear' her description of that life. I went into the interviews expecting to hear about conflict between being Maaori and being feminist, particularly in reference to traditional settings such as on the Marae. I was not however expecting to hear a different approach towards feminism itself (despite the copious amounts of literature that indicate this, see for example Te Awekotuku 1991a, Irwin 1992). Consequently I initially not only failed to hear her version of feminism, but by repeatedly asking her to define feminism for me, I responded to her as if it was she who was failing to answer my questions.

The fourth time I asked Robyn to do this, she responded with a mildly exasperated "What have I just been telling you!". At this point I stopped and mentally re-examined what she had been telling me, and sure enough she had been describing her feminism to me - it simply was

not what I had expected to hear and accordingly had not heard it¹².

Nonetheless, despite my initial failure to understand Robyn's words, the fact that feminist methodologies have problematised the nature of our relationship alerted me to these problems and enabled me to attempt to overcome them. Unfortunately, this sensitivity was glaringly absent in my relationship with Beth who is a first generation Dutch/New Zealander. At no point during our interviews did I problematise my relationship with her in terms of cross-cultural research, despite including her in the study to break down the bi-cultural dichotomy of Maaori and Paakehaa in Aotearoa/New Zealand. I did not question the possibility of mismatched meanings, or the issue of cultural sensitivity.

This oversight led me later to question both the literature that explores cross-cultural methodologies and the differences and similarities between my relationships with Robyn and Beth. I argue that in part my omission stems from the focus taken by feminist literature towards cross cultural research and cross cultural relations more broadly. For example, in some British literature there is an increasing awareness of the problems with cross cultural research done in indigenous countries, as well as a degree of recognition of the differences between different ethnicities within countries. Edwards (1990) illustrates this point in her discussion of her experiences as a white woman interviewing women of colour. She is careful to point out that her discussion refers to Afro-Caribbean women and does not apply directly to the two Asian women involved in her study.

However, the literature does not explore the problems that could arise when the researcher's and respondent's skin colour (ie. 'race') or country of origin are **not** different but their cultural heritage (ie. 'ethnicity') is. That is, any problems generated when the respondent and researcher are both white and both born and raised in the same country but do not share the same cultural heritage. This was the case with Beth who was raised in a strong Dutch/New Zealand community. While it seems that many of the difficulties around racism

¹²Joan Metge and Patricia Kinloch explore the problem of 'talking past each other' in their book *Talking past each other: Problems of cross-cultural communication* (1984)

and power differentials between white researchers and white respondents are not as significant as they are in a white/people of colour relationship, there is still potential for a lack of shared meanings and understandings, and therefore, the possibility of racism or racist interpretations of the emerging data.

These experiences and concerns raise three questions about cross-cultural research and about my own research in particular:

- (1) to what extent does the literature on feminist methodology retain notions of race rather than ethnicity in its exploration of cross cultural research?
- (2) what differences did Beth's and my shared historical heritage as colonisers (Dutch and Paakehaa) have on our relationship in terms of power and how does this compare to the impact of Robyn's heritage as colonised and Maaori?
- (3) what similarities did Beth and Robyn's shared status as members of minority cultures in Aotearoa/New Zealand have for my relationship with them in regard to shared (or lack of) meanings?

While I do not have the space to directly explore the answers to these questions, they must be considered if we are to further our understanding of cross-cultural research. They are implicit in this thesis discussion.

INTERVIEWING: THE RESEARCHER AS A PARTICIPANT

During the period in which I interviewed the six other women in the study, I was also being interviewed by a colleague who used the same interview schedule. I had explored a number of ways of including myself in the study. The first option was to include my experiences as side commentaries to the discussion of the primary data. I felt that to do this would reduce my experiences to an anecdotal level. Further, writing in my story at relevant

moments would have been unlikely to foreground significant conflicts and contradictions in my experiences. As this was a central focus of the research, I felt it was important to have a 'data set' of interview transcripts that could be analysed alongside the other participants' transcripts.

A second possibility has been offered by Martha Bell (1993) in her study of the experiences of women outdoor pursuit leaders in Canada. Bell analyses her own experiences as an outdoor pursuits leader as they were expressed in her interviews/dialogues with the women she interviewed. However, this approach limits Bell to exploring only those issues raised in response to her participants. Consequently, Bell's experiences as an outdoor pursuits leader remain implicit, and this was not what I intended for my study.

The option I finally chose, was to be interviewed by someone else, using the schedule I had developed for the other interviews. Not only would this approach produce a series of transcripts, but the process of actively telling my story would hopefully raise issues that I had not clearly identified before when thinking about my life.

This process of data collection involved unanticipated problems and issues however. Prior to starting my interview I became increasingly vulnerable and I initially interpreted this as the feelings often faced by 'normal' respondents, that is, the vulnerability of personal exposure to a stranger. However, I quickly realised that some different processes were at play.

There were two issues. Firstly, the degree of knowledge I possessed about the interviews and secondly, a concern about who was suitable to conduct my interviews. Unlike my respondents I anticipated the interview questions prior to the interview taking place! I was aware of the nature and degree of personal information I was to make available to my interviewer. My relationship to my interviewer was also different. While most of the women were talking to a stranger with whom they did not need to maintain an on-going relationship, I was to talk to a colleague with whom I was likely to have contact on a regular basis. The

degree and nature of the personal information I was to reveal to this woman became more significant and more threatening as the interviews loomed.

This experience raises interesting questions about the precise nature of respondents' vulnerabilities in research. Firstly, to what extent are participants protected by a lack of knowledge about the research process? Their vulnerability to exploitation is heightened by this lack of knowledge, but can their actual feelings of vulnerability be reduced? When I put this scenario to one of the participants in my study, she agreed that it had been her experience. She commented that prior to the interview she was more curious about how I was going to talk to her for up six hours about her experiences as a feminist, than about the sort of information she was to make available. However, it is important to note that this lack of awareness does not protect participants from feelings of vulnerability **following** the completion of the research process.

Secondly, to what extent does the status of the researcher as a stranger offer protection to the respondent on the grounds that the information made available is unlikely to impact upon the woman's relationships? A comment made by one of the participants in Cotterill's (1992) study of mother-in-law and daughter-in-law relationships supports such a possibility:

"I can tell you these things. Terrible things really... I've never discussed them with anybody before. But you see, you're a stranger so it doesn't matter" (Cotterill 1992:596).

While feminist researchers often maintain relationships with their respondents after the research has been completed (Oakley 1981), their relationship is usually controlled by the respondent rather than the researcher. The researcher, having requested entry into the respondent's life requires an invitation to remain there. Consequently, if the respondent is uncomfortable about the information the researcher possesses she does not have to maintain the relationship beyond the research period.

My relationship with the interviewer was more complex and possibly less 'safe'. Not

only did I invite her into my world rather than her requesting entry, she was also doing me a favour by giving up her time to help me with my research. Rather than the interviewer being in debt to the interviewee the relationship was reversed. Further, because my interviewer was a colleague, my ability to define our future relationship was far more limited. Consequently the nature of the information she possessed about me was more critical.

I negotiated my discomfort by choosing a person, Monique¹³, who I did not feel threatened by, or in awe of as my interviewer. Several further problems arose out of this choice, however. These can perhaps be best explored using the feminist poststructuralist concept of positioning as discussed in Chapter Two (Davies and Harre 1990, Davies 1994).

In a 'normal' semi-structured interview situation the interviewer is most often positioned as the 'expert', as the person who knows the most about the aims of the project and therefore about the directions the interview should follow. While the interviewer listens to, and is guided by, the responses of the respondents, it is primarily her job to direct the interview to the areas relevant to the study¹⁴. Such a positioning was evident in my interview with Shelley, a participant in the study. During one of the interviews Shelley, feeling that she had misinterpreted my question commented "Oh, I'm not answering your questions very well am I?". Other participants similarly positioned me as the 'expert' or 'director' of the interview pointedly looking at me for the next question.

By contrast, during Monique's interviews with me, I unintentionally occupied the conflicting positions of the expert or director who possessed the knowledge about the project, and the position of the respondent, or actor who was being directed. Monique, on the other hand took up the position of a sounding board or listener rather than the expert or director position of the interviewer.

¹³My interviewer's identity is protected by the use of a pseudonym.

¹⁴Cotterill (1993) draws attention to the problems that can occur when there is not a shared understanding of the positions the researcher and participant occupy.

In the first two interviews these positions were played out in a way that left me in control of the interview. Rather than responding to Monique's questions, I talked my way through the interview schedule needing, and getting, few prompts. This partly undermined one of the original goals of having someone interview me, that is, to disrupt the narrative of my entry into feminism. But it also placed my interview narrative on a different level to those of the other women in the study whose narratives were disrupted by my questions. For example, Shelley noted after one of her interviews, that I had connected aspects of her life that she had not previously seen as linked. In this sense we had constructed, through our conversation, an alternative narrative to her understanding of herself. My narrative, by contrast, remained much more intact because I controlled the interview, rather than Monique.

In the final interview, however, different problems arose. While familiar with the interview schedule for the first two interviews, I was not prepared for the remaining interviews. I had thought quite a lot about the issues and topics covered by the first two interviews and consequently had ideas of what I wanted to say¹⁵, but this was not the case in the final interviews. In the third interview I occupied a position that more closely resembled that of the other participants. However, despite this shift in my own understanding of my position, Monique, continued to position me as the 'expert'; she assumed that whenever I stopped talking that I had said all I wanted to say. Instead of drawing me out and encouraging me to say more, she often moved onto the next question or topic.

Added to this conflict of understandings about respective roles was my growing awareness during the third interview, of Monique's position as an unpaid worker who was gaining little from my research process. I consequently felt an increasing need to limit my answers rather than expand upon them and these feelings made it difficult to challenge Monique's continued positioning of me as the expert. At the same time though, as the researcher I felt increasingly angry with Monique's position as a sounding board because I

¹⁵This situation was in marked contrast to that of my other respondents who did not know more than the broad research questions prior to their interviews. In this sense the coherence of my own narrative was even greater in comparison to those of the other participants.

was not able to maximise the data produced in the interview. However, my annoyance was inappropriate because Monique was clearly doing me a favour, and therefore, was to be thanked rather than chastised. While this situation could have been partially resolved by paying Monique, there are conflicts in trying to simultaneously occupy the positions of respondent and researcher. These are to a certain degree unresolvable.

The choice to include myself in the research was not just fraught with problems of vulnerability and dissatisfaction though, it also provided me with a window into my respondents' worlds. While interviewing the women about how they came into feminism I experienced a great deal of frustration about their inability to remember things. I thought: 'surely if they just tried harder they would be able to tell me'. I was conscious that these feelings contradicted the feminist stance of the importance of believing respondents. While Reinharz (1992:28) notes that believing an interviewee is controversial within social research because of the certain amount of deception that typically occurs in most social interactions, "some feminist researchers reinterpret the notion of believing the interviewee as a utilitarian and decidedly feminist approach" (ibid). While I believed my participant's stories, I questioned their inability to actually remember. However, in my first interview as a respondent, I quickly discovered that I too could not remember certain things. I was unable to gain a clear picture about certain aspects of my life. Having to answer my own questions demonstrated the difficulty of some of the questions and helped to explain some of my respondents' lack of responses. By experiencing my interview schedule from the other side of the fence, I felt I was in a better position to understand my respondents and to analyse their responses.

ANALYSING THE DATA AND WRITING UP

The interviews were all taped and were either transcribed or summarised. My approach to the data analysis was influenced by Middleton (1985) and Court (1989). Like these researchers I colour coded the data into themes. Some of these themes were related to the

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areas targeted by the interview schedule, for example, education, literature and media, and family, while others 'arose' out of my 'reading' of the data. If an idea appeared in several of the narratives I included it as a possible theme. In this sense, while my focus was on the individual narratives, I also placed importance on any emerging patterns in the data. A total of ten themes were used to 'colour' the data, and were as follows:

- **red** - access to feminist discourse
- **light green** - positive family influences (these referred to experiences which supported the women's developing feminist ideas)
- **dark green** - negative family influences (experiences that the women reacted against as part of the development of their feminist ideas)
- **blue** - experiences of marginalisation that were not gender related but drew the women's attention to social relations (for example, being marginalised because of their ethnicity or sexuality)
- **yellow** - education, primary, secondary and tertiary
- **purple** - people who influenced the women and in particular offered positive subject positions or spaces for the women to discuss ideas or experiences that were personally important
- **brown** - references to literature or the media (either positive or negative)
- **pink** - references to an environment within which the women felt safe (or unsafe) to adopt a marginal 'identity'
- **orange** - changes in the women's lives that they regarded as influential in shifting their understanding of social relations (for example, breaking up with a partner, coming to university and maturing).

Clearly some of these themes overlap and consequently sections of the data were often marked with more than one colour. The colours were then used to identify the most significant

themes for each woman¹⁶.

These themes related primarily to development of the women's feminist beliefs (see Chapter Four). However, the themes were also useful in identifying possible areas of focus for exploring how the women negotiated their feminist 'identities' with other aspects of their lives. The family emerged as a site where many of the women negotiated conflicts between their own ideas and those of other family members. Colour coding enabled me to access the different times and places that the women had talked about their families from which I took notes about the ideas expressed. The pattern that emerged was used as the framework for exploring how the women negotiated conflict (see Chapter Five).

Copies of the interview transcripts were sent to the women along with outlines of my interpretations of their experiences. They were invited to contact me regarding any areas/issues that they felt needed further clarification. One woman chose to do so and I discussed my analysis with her in more detail. The women were also asked to choose their own pseudonyms as a way to minimise any sense of alienation from their stories as they appear in the thesis.

A number of predictable difficulties arose as I processed and analysed the data from my own interviews. While I transcribed the first interviews for the six other women, I chose not to transcribe my own interviews because I was uncomfortable about what I had said. When it was necessary to listen to my interviews, as was the case for the second interview which was summarised rather than transcribed, I needed frequent breaks and did not summarise my story in as much detail as I had done for the other women. This discomfort with working with my own material also extended to the writing up stage. My data was often written up several months after the six other case studies.

¹⁶Colour coding is often done fairly routinely in sociology and there is little data on why researchers choose certain colours for aspects and not others. I acknowledge that my choices might be interestingly interrogated for meanings I do not reflect on here.

This pattern of avoidance arose, in part, from my feelings of discomfort about the way I had controlled the first interview, despite my beliefs about how feminist research should be conducted. As I wrote in my research notebook: 'I just took over...[and] raved so much... feelings of anger and frustration towards Monique [were] now feelings of embarrassment'. Further discomfort stemmed from facing my spoken thoughts in written form. I found it difficult to separate myself from this discomfort, I wanted to throw the transcripts away rather than face the contradictions in myself. Again my dual positioning as both the researcher and the researched was creating difficulties. While the other women in the study did not have to continually read their transcripts, did not have to face the written reality of their spoken thoughts, I had to not only confront, but keep working with mine. My discomfort alerted me to the range of feelings that my participants may have been experiencing when reading their transcripts. It also again raises the question of the extent to which respondents are protected from feelings of vulnerability by their lack of involvement with the research after the interviews.

A second important issue is the question of how I analysed my own case study. Despite my concern that my narrative would remain intact during the interview process a number of issues and experiences were highlighted that I had not originally identified as important in my understanding of myself. In this sense the method chosen had served its purpose. However, as I discussed earlier, while I tried to track the women's stories and to explore whatever arose, Monique tended not to probe my responses. A consequence of this different approach was a lack of explicit data about how I negotiated conflict within my family, an area that became the focus of Chapter Five. This lack of data stems from the fact that my parents and I share a similar interest in and approach to feminism. However, this is not the case with my brother and it is about this crucial relationship that there is little interview data.

The lack of data becomes more significant due to the focus of the chapter on the experience of contradictions in subjectivity and the social importance placed on maintaining a coherent, unitary sense of self. While as with the other participants, my subjectivity is riddled with contradictions, these focus on my relationship with my brother. I feel that the

lack of data about this relationship means that I have little material to explore the extent of other contradictions in my life. This in turn makes me appear less contradictory than the other women in the study. In light of the importance placed on having a coherent, unitary subjectivity in western society, this lack of data could be interpreted as my smoothing over or refusing to explore the contradictions in my life (and my position as a feminist researcher). I acknowledge that this is in part true, and that I did not talk much about this issue in the interviews choosing instead to focus on other aspects of my family relationships¹⁷, but this lack of exploration also results from the interview process itself.

In light of these issues I would argue that the analysis of my data is different from and possibly weaker than the analysis of the other women's stories. However, given that one of the motivations for including my own material in the study was to give the reader more information about myself from which to interpret my arguments, something that I would argue has been achieved, I feel that this difference in the level of analysis is not crucial.

Another important issue is the nature of my 'voice' in the final text. A central concern is that of confidentiality. Whereas the guarantee of confidentiality for my respondents is unquestionable, the issue is more complex when it comes to my own confidentiality. The issue becomes a debate between intellectual honesty and individual privacy. On the one hand, it is important that I am visible as the researcher in the thesis, but on the other hand, I also needed to protect myself and those I talked about from the possible harmful effects of such visibility. The conflict is a direct result of my contradictory positioning as both researcher and respondent, and it inevitably affects the production of a piece of work which maximises its critical potential.

The issue of confidentiality not only affects me, it also impacts upon those who have been central to my experiences as a feminist, such as my parents, my friends and my partner.

¹⁷This lack of discussion in the first interview also stems from the pain I feel about my relationship with my brother. While I probably would have talked about it more if I had been probed I did not discuss it more voluntarily.

The question becomes: to what extent do these people have similar rights to confidentiality as do my respondents? Should they have rights regarding what is said about them in the thesis and how is this possibility negotiated in relation to the need for intellectual honesty? These questions have only arisen because of the level of my involvement in the research process. I chose to be open about who I am in the study (Emma) and offered those around me the right to veto any information about them that is included in the thesis.

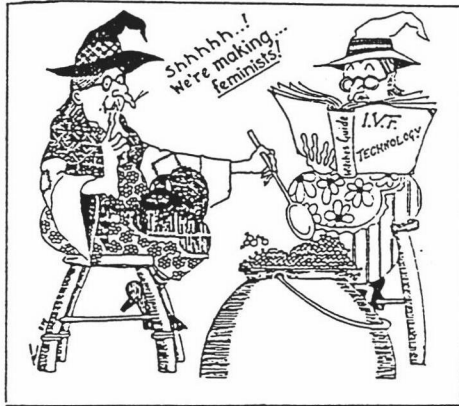
CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have discussed the principles of feminist research that have guided this study and the method used, that of multiple in-depth interviewing. The central focus of the chapter, however, is the many, often vexing issues that developed as I attempted to put into practice two of the principles of feminist research; firstly, the aim of maximising diversity and secondly, locating the researcher in the research process. I do not regard the research as solving these issues but it has made me acutely aware of the contradictory spaces that feminists occupy.

The next chapter begins to explore the experiences of the young women in this study. It starts with a discussion of the ways the young women understand what it means to be feminist before going on to trace the different ways that the young women's feminist 'identities' developed.

CHAPTER FOUR

SHHHH! WE'RE MAKING FEMINISTS!!!



This chapter is the heart of my thesis. It focuses on two of the three research questions identified in the introduction, exploring how the women define feminism and the development of their feminist 'identities'.

As this analysis is necessarily long, I have explored a number of ways of organising it to make the complexity of the findings accessible for the reader. I have decided, to present the stories of Catherine, Emma, Beth, Ali, Robyn, Shelley and Marie in a way that allows the similarities and differences between their narratives to surface **and** intersect with the theoretical analyses. The summaries at the end of each case study review for the reader the key aspects of each narrative, and draw out the links between them. The chapter concludes with a discussion of one of the key findings of the thesis, that is the emphasis the women place on plurality.

The chapter argues that 'becoming feminist' can be understood in terms of a complex intersection of experience and discourse. It also reveals how the women come to label themselves as 'feminist'. Its discussion focuses on how the women came to label themselves feminist, that is, to consciously take up the term feminist to describe their beliefs about how women fit into society. This second facet is important because of the number of women who espouse feminist ideas, and are to an extent politicised, but reject feminism and say 'I'm not a feminist'.

In this thesis I limit my discussion of the women's stories to when they began to label themselves and/or their beliefs as feminist. However, if the women had significant experiences following this point, that they identified as influencing their feminism, then these have also been included. This has been done to enable the reader to better understand how the women reached the feminist positions they occupied and how they negotiated this with other aspects of their lives.

It is important to remember that this limit has been used as an analytical boundary. Within feminist poststructuralism subjectivity is seen as continually in process, never completed and always provisional. The construction of the women's feminist 'identities' is therefore never finished, but continues to change as they are exposed to new discourses and new experiences.

DEFINING FEMINISM: WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO BE FEMINIST?

Rosalind Delmar in her article "What is feminism" defines a feminist as:

"someone who holds that women suffer discrimination because of their sex, that they have specific needs which remain negated and unsatisfied and that the satisfaction of those needs would require a radical change... in the social, economic and political order" (1986:8).

The women in my research responded to the question in a variety of ways, few as succinct as Delmar. As they talked about how they would define feminism and what they saw as important aspects of being feminist four features or themes emerged as significant. These were:

- recognising social inequality between men and women;
- wanting to change that inequality at a societal level;
- being committed to bringing feminism into their lives at a personal level;
- having a strong sense of self¹.

¹These themes are very similar to those identified by Hong (1992). The key difference is theme four. She argues that the women in her study saw feminism as relating to other "isms" such as racism and ageism". While some of the women in my study commented about this aspect of feminism, it was not central to their understandings.

The first and perhaps the strongest of these themes was a recognition of social inequality between men and women. In Shelley's words this meant "recognising and acknowledging that our society systematically oppresses women". Her definition of feminism was echoed by several of the women. Emma, Marie and Ali all talked about oppression. For Ali though, feminism also meant having the choice to be who she wanted to be, and as such was about liberation. Catherine took a broader perspective:

"feminism is really just about believing in equality... its broader than it just being... equality for women... I situate my feminism... [as] equality... for everything and everyone... I guess it's a vision of a different society".

The status of women was still of central concern for Catherine though, as when asked what being feminist meant to her she replied:

"a lot of the people in my life who are really important to me are women and... seeing the raw deal that a lot of women get... [I feel like] I would like the opportunity to work for change".

This desire to change the position of women in society was a second aspect the women identified in their definitions of feminism. As Emma said:

"feminism is about recognising women's unequal position in society and recognising it needs to change and striving to change it".

The ways that the women approached changing women's position in society varied markedly though. For example, both Shelley and Ali were members of women's action groups, pressure and lobby groups. For them, achieving change included sometimes protesting outside pornography shows. Beth saw her contribution as providing a role model for others by succeeding in a 'top' job. Catherine saw work as a means to achieve change:

"I would like the opportunity to work for change for... women ... I see I've got an opportunity being white, middle class... and having access to education and all that sort of stuff to perhaps make a change".

A similar sentiment was expressed by Emma, for whom feminism was not just about challenging barriers in her own life but also about fighting for the equality of others. Both Emma and Catherine noted that this process of achieving change could and does operate at

a number of levels.

One level at which the women were all committed to change was in their personal lives. This commitment was the third feature of feminism identified by the women. Perhaps surprisingly the battle cry of the '70s "the personal is political" still rings true for these young women in the '90s. Ali draws directly on this understanding within feminism, stating that:

"I 'spose its a lifestyle... if you say the personal is political... then for me it means certain things happen... you make sure that your feminism is actually played out in your life... it [also] sort of imposes things I suppose on your lifestyle ... I don't just mean ...sexual choices but also a whole range of other things, all sorts of relationships".

Feminism enabled Ali to impose, what she described as "certain baselines of behaviour [on] other people". For Shelley the 'other things' included, "negotiation of change with your partner, equality in household chores and things like that". Shelley also talked about:

"not taking shit from men any more and not take anything less than the best basically, not settling for second best".

For Marie this meant living for herself by which she meant placing her interests and needs first. Beth talked about feminism altering how she lived both in the private and public spheres, and how she disassociated herself from people who did not support women. She plans to 'power dress' in trousers rather than skirts when she enters the corporate world. As Shelley sums up, the women all believed that "you have to bring feminism into every part of your life".

The fourth aspect of being feminist highlighted by the women was having a strong sense of self. For Marie this characteristic was seen as a requirement for being feminist. In her words "you need a strong sense of yourself... to be a feminist... you need to know where you're coming from". For Shelley this strong sense of self came **from** feminism:

"I've come to value myself a lot more than I have in the past and say I am not going to let you treat me like this any more and stand up for myself in relationships".

While Marie discussed this sense of self in gender neutral terms, (she talked about 'people'), Robyn, Emma and Beth emphasised women's gender as important. For Robyn, feminism was

about "women knowing who they are". Beth agreed, stating that being feminist meant being conscious of her femininity, her womanhood. This focus on gender was coupled with ideas of women's distinct strength and power. As Robyn said, a feminist is a "woman who knows her own power and uses [it]". Emma saw feminism as enabling "women to stand tall and stand proud".

In summary, these young women maintained that being feminist is about wanting to change the position of women in society. For some of them, their concern for social equality means that their focus is wider than just women, and includes other minority groups. The young women's feminism, like the generations of women before them, is located at both a societal and a personal level. They want to achieve structural changes as well as changes in their own lives. While some of the women aim to achieve change by participating in women's action groups, not all the women took this approach. All of them saw it as important to bring feminism into all aspects of their lives. Central to many of the women's sense of themselves as feminist was a strong sense of self, and for some this meant having a strong sense of being a woman.

The conceptions of feminism that these young women put forward is in marked contrast to the image Robyn Langwell (1994), editor of *North and South*, constructs in her statement that feminism is a thing of the past. For the women in this study, feminism is a relevant part of their lives and is still very relevant to society in general. Their understanding of feminism is also markedly different to that put forward by Lynne Loates (1992:28) who suggests that feminism in the nineties is about changing oneself rather than an "enduring commitment to changing society". The young feminists in this study are clearly committed to changing society.

DEVELOPMENT OF FEMINIST 'IDENTITIES': THE CASE STUDIES

In this section I trace the process through which each woman came to identify as a

feminist. A number of important themes emerged from the data about this process. They are as follows:

- Access to feminist discourse
- Experiences of gender discrimination
- Marginalisation
- Family
- Education
- Literature
- Key people
- Safe environment
- Change

Exploration of these themes will be combined with a discussion of how the case studies illustrate central ideas within feminist poststructuralism². The themes will be summarised at the end of the case studies.

CATHERINE

Catherine's parents separated when Catherine was six. Around the same time Catherine's mother came out as lesbian and became involved with feminism. Catherine spent her early years in a small rural community before moving with her mother and sister to the city to attend secondary school. Her mother has now returned to the country with her current partner, to run their farm. Catherine began to identify as a feminist around the age of 15 or 16. At the time of the interview she was 18 and in her second year at university.

In discussing her feminist development, Catherine remembers her upbringing as one in which issues of social justice were discussed at home. Through her mother, Catherine gained access to a range of progressive ideas about gender, ethnicity, sexuality and the environment.

²The order in which the case studies are recounted has no significance other than that of ease of comparison. The women are grouped both in terms of the ages they came into feminism (the youngest first) and because of broad similarities between their experiences.

It is these ideas that Catherine describes as the most influential factor in the development of her feminist 'identity'. In her words: "I was brought up as a feminist".

Catherine was not only exposed to progressive ideas though. Conservative discourses about gender and sexuality were strong in her community. For example, while they were living on the farm Catherine was excluded from a birthday party because her mother was a dyke, and a local man ran a campaign, which included writing to the Prime Minister, against Catherine's mother conducting women-only access programs to teach women rural skills. Catherine remembers that the displeasure of some parents at her mother's actions and lifestyle was aimed at her through their children at primary school.

Catherine also had access to conservative ideas about familial and gender relations through her father's new family, where the gender relations split along more traditional and gendered (public/private) lines. Catherine's step mother was not involved in paid work and had responsibility for the home, while her father did paid work. Catherine did not like this arrangement. She said, "it just made me feel ughh".

Catherine's rejection of these traditional gendered practices may have been influenced by the negative relationship she had with her father. She describes her visits to her father's home as "denunciation Catherine" times. Catherine sees her relationship with her father as significant in undermining her confidence which led to her developing an eating disorder in her early teens. She broke her relationship with her father when she was 16, something her sister also did shortly after.

By contrast Catherine's relationship with her mother was close. Catherine describes her as a "strong figure" in her life and sees this relationship as central to her acceptance of feminism. Feminist ideas, though, were also reinforced by the strong community of women that Catherine's mother gathered around them. These women offered Catherine a "different outlook" on the dominant values of her community and her relationship with her father.

While Catherine ultimately accepted the feminist construction of society offered by her mother, the conflicting perspectives she was exposed to made her confused and anguished when she was younger.

"Like I sort of felt in some ways that it was really unfair what I got at home because it was just so in conflict with everything else".

Catherine's confusion was combined with feelings of marginalisation:

"I'd feel like I didn't fit in all the time because I just couldn't put up with some of the stuff that people would do and say".

These feelings did not result in Catherine rejecting the feminist discourses mediated through her mother and her mother's friends. She experienced strong feelings of displeasure when people said things which clashed with the 'progressive' ideas she was exposed to at home with her mother. At this stage of her life though, Catherine describes her understanding of what was going on as limited. Her ideas about feminism stemmed primarily from her mother and she commented that she was unable to challenge the conservative discourses outside them. Consequently, at that time, she tended to express her displeasure in emotional rather than analytical or theoretically articulate terms.

Catherine's feminist 'identity' began to develop more strongly when she reached high school. She remembers at primary school choosing not to talk about sexism and going along with what the other children were doing. However, when she got to high school her feelings of frustration about sexism got stronger:

"... [now] it was my own views that started to be in conflict with people rather than [my mothers]"

By the time she was in the 5th and 6th form Catherine was beginning to feel more comfortable with publicly identifying as feminist, feelings that became even stronger when she started university. Several factors seem to have been significant in this shift.

The first of these is Catherine's maturing and beginning to develop her own ideas rather

than merely following her mother's beliefs. Catherine links this shift to being more intellectually developed, as well as reading and learning more things for herself.

"I can say that feminism was with me most of my life, but it's really in my later years of school and in my first year of university that I really would have been able to have felt comfortable in identifying with it... with being able to clearly state... and defend what I believed... rather than just being really emotive about it".

Thus, for Catherine having knowledge to back up her beliefs was an important factor that gave her confidence to identify as feminist even though she thinks people previously saw her this way.

Secondly, finding an environment within which she felt safe to identify as feminist was important. Catherine went to three high schools during her four years of secondary schooling. Catherine's first school was a large girls school (1500 pupils). While there were some feminist teachers there, Catherine remembers the students as being "everything horrible that they say girls are in our culture". This did not fit with her feminist-inflected image of women and girls. Then, in the second school Catherine felt even more out of place. At the beginning Catherine challenged instances of sexism but she quickly earned a reputation as being "over the top". She found these experiences really frustrating and destructive of her sense of self. "It got to the point where it just made me really unhappy to say anything". In neither of these schools did Catherine feel comfortable enough to openly call herself feminist.

It was at her third school, a middle sized, co-educational school, that Catherine began to feel more confident about herself³. She describes this school as being quite liberal. Feminism was "...still not quite what someone wanted to hear, but they made it not so far out". Catherine felt like she "fitted in more" with those around her.

This feeling became even stronger during Catherine's first year at university where she came in contact with other young feminist women through the 'women's space'. For Catherine this space provided a "community" of like-minded women with whom she felt really

³By this point Catherine was beginning to recover from her eating disorder.

comfortable. It was also at university that Catherine was able to gain access to further knowledge that enabled her to feel more comfortable and confident about expressing her feminist beliefs.

It was at university that Catherine's feminist beliefs began to shift away from her mother's "radical feminism". Catherine took part in a women's studies class that offered her the alternative discourse of feminist poststructuralism. She combined this perspective with that offered by the discourse of eco-feminism⁴.

Catherine appreciates feminist poststructuralism's emphasis on acknowledging plurality and difference. She sees it as providing a "more holistic idea of our experiences... a philosophy of taking everything into account". Catherine also likes its approach to power, which emphasises "networks of power relations", rather than 'power over' as evidenced in the hierarchical notions of radical feminism. For her, a feminist poststructural approach means that:

"...you can look at different things like Paakehaa/Maaori relations ... [as] compared to something like radical feminism, where patriarchy... [is] the main thing in society".

Catherine's concern for plurality and embracing of a feminist perspective is linked to her mother's practices of foregrounding ethnicity and sexuality as well as gender during Catherine's childhood. Her emphasis on plurality overrides other elements of radical feminism advocated by Catherine's mother. Catherine has some reservations about feminist poststructuralism, however. These include a reluctance to call herself a post-structuralist feminist because of the inaccessibility of its language to women with less education, and its alienating image as an intellectual theory.

⁴Mies and Shiva (1993) define ecofeminism as a women- identified movement that places a concern for the environment alongside and equal with broader social concerns. They also state that "ecofeminism is about connectedness and wholeness of theory and practice" (ibid:14).

As already mentioned, Catherine also draws strongly on another feminist discourse, that of eco-feminism. She often finds that this separates her from other feminist women who have little environmental awareness. For Catherine, "the social (world) can't survive without the environment". She thinks that "feminists can [sometimes] get too involved in the social and just not worry about anything else". She links her feminism with her environmentalism, "combining issues of social and environmental justice". Again, Catherine's mother placed a great emphasis on environmental issues.

The way in which Catherine draws upon two quite different feminist discourses demonstrates how subjectivity is constituted within a range of discourses. It is never singular. However, Catherine does not necessarily accept all aspects of the discourses she is attracted to. Within a feminist poststructuralist explanation it is argued that individuals never simply adopt a discursive position in its entirety. Poststructuralism enables us to see that subjectivities are not totally determined by the discourses in which they are located. Rather, at some level, individuals embrace some aspects of discourses and reject others. In Catherine's case, drawing on two different discourses, feminist poststructuralism and eco-feminism, did not give rise to significant conflicts or contradiction. The way that these two positions interact will be discussed later in reference to Marie's experiences.

SUMMARY

Central to Catherine's development as a feminist was her relationship with her mother. It was through her mother that Catherine gained access to feminist discourses. These discourses were reinforced by the community of women that Catherine's mother gathered around them. While Catherine had access to more conservative discourses, through her wider community and her father, she was not attracted to these. Catherine did not begin to publicly identify as feminist until she was 15 or 16. A number of factors were significant in Catherine's shift from merely agreeing with feminist ideas to actively taking up a feminist 'identity'. These factors included Catherine maturing and gaining access to knowledge to back up her ideas. This meant she could make the ideas her own rather than just something her

mother was talking about. Another key factor was Catherine's discovery of a supportive environment where being feminist was not ridiculed. This gave her the space to take up a marginalised 'identity'. Catherine's attraction to feminist poststructuralism and eco-feminism can be seen to be linked to the emphasis Catherine's mother put on recognising difference and the concern she had for the environment.

EMMA

Emma encountered feminist ideas in a similar way to Catherine, that is through her pro-feminist family. In Emma's case however, Emma's father, as well as her mother, was supportive of feminism. Emma, like Catherine, began to identify as feminist when she was 15 or 16. At the time of the interview she was 22, and in her fifth year at university.

Emma describes her upbringing as one where progressive ideas were emphasised. These ideas centred in particular around the education system where Emma's parent's worked. The structural impact of gender, class and ethnicity on an individual's experience of education and the opportunities open to them were often openly discussed at home. The discussions also went broader. For example, they supported the anti-Springbok tour protests and the struggle by local Maaori to get the Tangata Whenua name for the region's mountain (Taranaki) recognised.

Emma became more aware of these conversations when she reached high school and these ideas began to be increasingly applied to her own situation. A conversation that Emma remembers vividly occurred when her mother, Charlotte, sat her down to teach her how to study for science after Emma had nearly failed a third form science test. However, the focus had quickly shifted to the ways that girls were represented in the science book.

"We went through my science book and [Mum] was pointing out who was doing what in the text book. The fact that... there were very few pictures of women... doing science things... [and in] the pictures of girls they were most likely to be blowing things up in their faces or doing things wrong. Mum got really angry".

Such conversations drew Emma's attention to the conservative gendered discourses in her school curriculum and pedagogy at the same time as offering her an alternative way of interpreting the world around her. By the time Emma was in the fourth form these conversations had shifted to encouraging Emma to challenge her teachers when they gave more attention to the boys than to the girls.

In contrast to Catherine's experience, Emma's father also played an important role in the development of Emma's ideas. While Catherine's father was essentially anti-feminist, Emma described her father as "committed to the beliefs, practices and values of feminism". She remembers him encouraging her to be assertive and teaching her how to do things that girls and women tended not to learn, such as how to change a car tyre. Emma's father felt that the teaching relationship was two-way, though. When Emma was 19, her father commented that he had told a colleague that he learnt his feminist ideas from his partner and his daughter. This made Emma feel "really neat". Emma feels that the things that her father taught her formed an important part of her ultimate understanding of feminism as being centred around a sense of women as strong. It also fitted well with the ideas behind the *Girls can do Anything* sticker she had on her bedroom door.

Emma not only discussed these progressive ideas at home. She also debated many of these issues, and in particular those surrounding ethnicity, at high school with her close friend Anna. While Anna rarely agreed with Emma's ideas it gave Emma an opportunity to explore and discuss the ideas she had gained access to through her parents. Although Emma could not remember explicitly exploring ideas about feminism with Anna, she felt that they probably did talk about gender issues. These could have centred around the constraints on solo parents (mothers) when they receive the Domestic Purposes Benefit, as Anna's mother did.

Emma's feelings about feminism became more focused when she was in the 6th form. During this year Emma discovered *Broadsheet* through a feminist self-defence instructor who was running classes at her school. Emma took out a year's subscription, though she did not read it much. The woman who ran the course provided Emma with another image of a strong

woman who was supportive of feminist ideas to put alongside the image of Emma's mother, Charlotte.

Possibly instigated by the self-defence course, it was during this year that Emma began to think more consciously about what it meant to be 'feminist'. The self-defence instructor had offered an image of a feminist as someone who was active in the community. For Emma, feminism and activism in the form of for example, street protests became strongly linked. However, she did not see herself as someone active in that way. The question became one of "Can I be feminist without being out in the street marching?".

"When I was about sixteen I went through a really active phase of wanting to claim that identity of being feminist but not being sure if I was allowed to... feminism [was about] recognising women's inequality and wanting to change it, but wanting to change it meant being actively out there with placards and banners... I didn't see myself as measuring up to that. If I claimed myself as feminist I would be cheating and someone would find me out - that I wasn't really what I said I was."

While Emma wanted to be able to call herself a feminist she felt that she did not fit all of what she perceived being a feminist meant.

Emma's ideas about feminism and activism were ultimately challenged by a discussion with her mother, Charlotte. Charlotte suggested to Emma that activism did not always require 'big' acts, that change was also brought about by a million small instances. Talking to friends about these ideas was just as important as going on street marches. This discourse of change was later backed up by a badge that Emma found when she was on an student exchange to North America. The badge quoted Ghandi as saying 'Whatever you do may seem insignificant, but it's most important that you do it'. This idea supported Emma's desire to identify as feminist.

Emma's feelings about feminism and being feminist were mixed however. She describes them as simultaneously 'empowering' and 'disempowering'. The aspect of feminism that said she was strong as a woman made Emma feel empowered, as did the idea that she was seeing the power relations in society more clearly than others. However, her peer's adverse

reactions to her being feminist and the conflict it sometimes caused, made her feel marginalised. This feeling of marginalisation was further heightened by her perception that her peers, both at school and in her early years at university, did not share her views. "I always felt like I was the only young person interested in, or concerned with, these issues". For Emma, feminism, outside of her family, became associated with conflict. This was reinforced by instances such as when she challenged the principal at her second school, who was also her history teacher, for describing John F. Kennedy as a 'womaniser'. She remembers her classmates and friends not appreciating her action. They expressed their feelings quite clearly and harshly.

Emma's feelings of difference from her peers became more marked when at the end of her sixth form year she went on a three month exchange to Oregon, in North America. When she returned she changed schools and within a year started university in another town. On each occasion she was, to a degree, able to reconstruct the way she presented herself to others. Commenting about the exchange situation she states:

"...you go in and you are with a whole group of people... [who] know nothing about you... you've got a chance to present yourself in a certain way [and] you have a certain amount of control about how you do it... [I could] actively claim my identity in a way that was different than if I had just... carried on at school where everyone knew me and knew what I thought... I think that was really significant."

Emma was relatively self-conscious about her 'identity' as feminist. She said, "I could practice it out on them".

During this period Emma's 'identity' as a feminist increasingly became a marked category that made her different to those around her. She talks about the process of identifying herself as feminist to others as similar to "coming out of the closet". It was something that she had to manage and as she met new people she often tried out different ways of telling people. Initially, she did not say anything but let people know by the things she did. However, given her feelings that feminism meant conflict, this often left Emma with the feeling of "Oh God if I say that, they'll know what I am, which was basically feminist".

Shhhh! We're Making Feminists!!!

Emma resolved this problem by telling the people in her university hostel outright that she was feminist, which she said gave her the space to say feminist things without feeling defensive. However, in line with her feeling of 'coming out' as feminist, she remembers overhearing some of her fellow students talking about the fact that she was feminist, "as if I had some disease".

Emma's feelings of being marginalised because of her politics became less strong as she encountered, and became friends with, a group of women and men who shared her views.

Emma, like Catherine, is interested in feminist poststructuralism. She is attracted to its emphasis on difference and plurality and its complex conceptions of power. Feminist poststructuralism also provides Emma with a way of exploring issues of subjectivity and 'identity', something she was interested in because of the way that she had been consciously crafting her feminist 'identity'. Again, like Catherine, Emma's interest in feminist poststructuralism fits with the ideas she had had access to as she grew up. Emma's parents were not only concerned about the position of women, they were also aware of issues around ethnicity, sexuality and class, and they emphasised a need to recognise and acknowledge differences.

SUMMARY

Emma's mother, like Catherine's mother played a central role in Emma's development as a feminist. She drew Emma's attention to sexism in her environment and gave her access to feminist interpretations of that sexism. In contrast to Catherine's situation though, Emma's father also played an important part in the formation of Emma's ideas. Emma also began to identify as feminist when she was 16 but was unsure about the validity of claiming a feminist 'identity' because she associated it with street action, something that she was not involved in. This association was possibly created through a feminist self-defence instructor whom Emma met around this time.

Emma's narrative contains a strong awareness that her feminist 'identity' makes her different to her peers. It also reveals how she consciously crafted her presentation of herself in terms of feminism. Emma found her feelings of difference both empowering and disempowering. However, they were resolved to, a certain degree, when she made friends with like-minded peers. Like Catherine, Emma's interest in feminist poststructuralism is linked to the emphasis on plurality with which she grew up.

BETH

Beth's story takes a different path to those of Catherine and Emma. Beth is the daughter of Dutch immigrant parents and is the youngest of six children. She has two older sisters and three older brothers. While Catherine and Emma's families were the main sources of their feminist beliefs, Beth's family environment was where she first experienced and became aware of gender discrimination. At the time of the interview, she had just turned 25 and was in her sixth year at university.

Beth describes her family as having a very traditional structure. Her mother worked full time in the home while her father worked in the family business and did not participate in the home. Beth's role was seen as similar to her mother's; domestic duties always fell to her rather than to her brothers, a gender division she was acutely aware of. She comments: "I saw that and I did it but at the same time I thought it was very unfair and unjust".

Alongside this sexual division of labour, Beth was aware that her brothers got to do things that she did not. While they were outside working on the farm she stayed inside doing the sewing and cooking. These differences were made even more marked by Beth's brothers' beliefs that she could not do certain things "because she was a girl". One significant memory for Beth is the time that her brothers gagged her and tied her to the flying fox on their farm. She remembers being left, suspended 20 feet off the ground till it got dark. "They did that because I was the girl and I wasn't to play with them".

Shhhh! We're Making Feminists!!!

Beth now sees the development of her feminist ideas as a response to her environment:

"... it was a reaction to perceived unfairness. Like 'the boys are going, why can't I go?' basically. I think someone only has to say to you a couple of times 'oh he's a boy' and you start going - 'well, so!'".

These feelings became stronger during her early teens.

"...at 12 I was going this isn't fair, but I kinda liked hanging out with mum... but... by 13, 14 I was definitely angry at the way they were getting away with it".

Beth's awareness of the gendered ideas available at home was heightened both by the discourses available in her high school and through her sister's feminism. When Beth was 10, her eldest sister, Zoe came home from university and began to challenge their father about his lack of involvement in the family home. As part of this, Beth remembers Zoe also challenging her. Zoe "tapped" Beth into "a wave of feminism" that she would have probably missed. Despite the fact that Zoe's conflict with their father, in Beth's words "disrupted the family's whole way of life", Beth still found Zoe's feminism attractive. This was, in part, due to the fact that Beth "really admired" Zoe.

"... basically she was the only one who had the guts to stand up to him... I always looked to her... even though I felt kinda sad about the way their whole relationship disintegrated, I was still kinda proud of her... cause even my brothers wouldn't stand up to him. I just thought she was so gutsy".

Beth talks about Zoe as a really positive role model who offered her an alternative way of seeing the world. Zoe came home at a time when Beth was beginning to see the discrimination as her "problem" and as something she was going to have to "fight". Zoe's feminism gave Beth some means to do this. For her, Zoe is a "true feminist because she was prepared to fight... and prepared to fight her father".

This subject position of a strong women was further reinforced by Beth's attendance at a private Catholic girls' school. For Beth there was a strong contrast between school, where she found "few constraints on her academic achievement", and home, where "I wasn't accepted for being bright, I was basically just a little maid". While Beth's brothers were

telling her at home that "you can't do that you're a girl", she remembers her school being "quite good at sort of like... telling us we could do anything and we were quite empowered". The image of strong capable women was available to Beth through the nuns who ran the school. Beth describes these women as "good role models" who empowered her.

The image of her school as a sanctuary away from boys and men was reinforced by Beth's experiences of sexual harassment when she had to go to the local Boy's High School to do 7th form physics. She was shouted at, ignored and had things thrown at her.

"And if they didn't ignore you, they sent you notes or gave you a questionnaire on your sexual activity or on what colour underwear you were wearing".

For Beth these experiences reinforced her feelings that boys and men did not take her seriously.

Beth cannot remember the time when she first began to think of herself as feminist. On one level she appears to have adopted a feminist viewpoint in her early teens. Yet after that, she seemed to explain only some of her experiences, and not others, from a feminist perspective. For example, she did not interpret the sexual harassment she received at school as a feminist issue, but when she was harassed at university she did see this through a feminist lens. To a degree, Beth's shifting position could be understood as a linear progression of increasing knowledge. However, throughout the interviews I found that it was not possible to construct such a linear narrative of development. I am unclear about what Beth was thinking during the different stages of her development as a feminist, despite the fact that it was with Beth that I developed the greatest rapport and had the longest interviews.

This aspect of the research draws attention to the ways researchers try to construct coherent and linear narratives of the research participants' lives and experiences. In my case I found myself trying to draw out links and consistencies despite adopting a theoretical perspective that emphasises contradiction and questions the place of coherence.

However, by the time I interviewed Beth, she was identifying as a feminist. Her

feminism appeared to take the form of "liberal feminism". While she did not have the terminology to label herself as such, her language and visions of change were clearly influenced by liberal feminist discourse. Sue Middleton argues that liberal feminists:

"seek equal representation with men throughout the hierarchies of capitalist society, eg in management, in the skilled trades, in political office, and a sharing of domestic tasks between husband and wife; the object of liberal feminists is to bring about equality within the present social order for both sexes" (1985:7).

Beth's arguments that general attitudes about women limit women's potential, and her belief that improving women's general lack of political representation is one of the key areas feminism needs to target, are framed within the liberal feminist discourse Middleton describes. As such, her goal to provide a role model for other women, by succeeding in the paid work force, relies on working within the system rather than challenging it.

SUMMARY

Again, like Catherine and Emma, Beth's entry into feminism centred around a strong woman, her sister, who gave Beth access to feminist ideas. Beth had a strong relationship with her sister and admired her greatly. In contrast to Catherine and Emma though, Beth's development as a feminist was also marked by strong experiences of gender discrimination, both at home and at the boy's school she attended for physics and calculus. Prior to gaining access to feminist discourses Beth was aware of this discrimination and thought it was unfair. As such, feminist discourses gave her an alternative way of interpreting what was happening around her. Beth's narrative was also marked by a lack of linearity. She seemed to weave in and out of identifying as feminist and using feminist ideas to interpret what was going on around her. Her account demonstrates the feminist poststructuralist idea of subjectivity as being constantly in process rather than developing in a linear progression. It also draws attention to how researchers most often use linear narratives to develop an understanding of research participants' lives.

ALI

Ali's experience of feminism is similar to Beth's. Both women grew up in traditional family structures and both experienced, and were aware of, gender discrimination while they were young. Ali grew up with both her parents and her twin elder sisters. Her mother worked within the home, except during tough financial times when she entered the paid work force. Even during these times Ali's mother still did all the work in the home, performing what has been called the 'second shift' (Hochschild and Machung 1989). Ali's Dad worked outside the home and participated little in the household chores. Ali was 22 when she was interviewed and was unemployed after spending three years at university.

Ali first remembers noticing gendered differences between boys and girls when she was six. She saw the boys playing a greater range of games than the girls and felt angry. Ali became increasingly aware that:

"...there were all sorts of things that one didn't do because one was a girl. But boys did, and [it] was because they were boys that they were allowed to do these things".

This gendered distinction was perhaps strongest in Ali's family. She was repeatedly told that there were certain forbidden activities that "weren't open" to her because she "was a girl", such as tadpolling which involved getting dirty, wearing trousers instead of skirts, playing hockey, and doing horticulture at school instead of typing. For Ali, these limitations were:

"ludicrous... sort of artificial distinctions between people based... not on their ability to do it, just on the fact that they were girls or boys or they happened to have the wrong skin colour... I just thought it was foolish".

Ali's awareness of gender discrimination also extended to the way that relations were organised in her family home. She could see that her mother was "being really oppressed". While at seven she did not have the words to describe this she remembers feeling how wrong the family organisation was. Ali was aware that her mother had not wanted to get married but that she had had to. There was a strong expectation that Ali would follow in this path.

This was evident in Ali's parents belief that their daughters needed "only enough education so we could depend on ourselves until we got married...".

Implicit in this discourse of domesticity is another, that of 'compulsory heterosexuality'⁵. For Ali both discourses were problematic. She remembers "always knowing" that she was "queer" despite not having the words to label her sexuality or an understanding of "how it worked in any sort of context". This awareness was combined with her knowledge that she was "never getting married". The subject positions available to Ali within her family, those of wife and home-maker, did not fit with her understanding of herself as queer.

A result of this contradiction was Ali remembering that she was always aware of being "different" from her family and from others in her wider community. This sense of marginalisation and the contradictions that led to it are similar to the experiences of the women studied by Middleton (1985). For those women, marginalisation was an important fore-runner to their later politicisation as feminists.

While Ali was aware of gender discrimination she did not begin to identify as feminist until she was 14. She now describes the critique she was making of gendered relations in primary school as "feminist". At the time though, she says she was unaware of feminism.

Ali's family was not only a source of negative experiences however. It was also through her family that Ali was introduced to political issues like environmentalism. For Ali, this provided "a starting point for me to be political". Her awareness of the world around her began with environmental issues but she gradually became aware of other issues, like ethnicity and gender, at her primary school. Ali drew on the political aspect of the environmental discourse and applied it to other relations in her life. Thus, the impetus to look at the world in political terms came, in part, from her family, but her thinking moved beyond her family's focus on environmentalism.

⁵This concept, which refers to the idea that all people are and must be heterosexual was developed by Adrienne Rich (1980).

Ali's family were not supportive of feminism. Ali's mother associated feminism with:

"lesbianism, bristly hairy people and things of this nature... [with] stuff about home breaking and disruptive influences, stropy women of the world... it was the downfall of western civilisation".

Although this popular representation of feminism was strongest within Ali's family, she experienced similar ideas at secondary school, and through the media. These discouraged her from identifying as feminist. "It implied things that I was not ready for", in particular, the link between feminism and lesbianism.

For Ali, coming out as queer was very traumatic. Throughout her teens she often went in and out of the 'closet', both personally and publicly. For her, this difficulty with accepting what she now defines as "natural" was linked to her parents' homophobia.

Ali did not entirely reject feminism as it was presented by her mother. Prior to discovering an alternative discourse of feminism, Ali would often challenge her mother's rejection of feminism by stating "'don't talk like that, I'm a feminist!'" She did this, without "really knowing what it [feminism] meant". While feminism was used to resist her mother's views it was also the starting point of her ultimate acceptance of feminism.

Ali encountered an alternative representation of feminism through *The Women's Room* (French 1978) and other books to which she was directed by her English teacher. The positive depictions of feminists and what feminism was trying to achieve made feminism feel less "threatening". It also gave Ali more knowledge from which to construct an alternative interpretation of the world around her.

This coincided with her discovery of positive depictions of lesbianism. Ali's discomfort about identifying as lesbian was not resolved as easily as her discomfort about feminism. Books like *The Women's Room* offered Ali a feminist subject position that was not so closely tied to lesbianism as it was in her mother's representation of it. This gave Ali the space to take on a feminist 'identity' and to escape some of the earlier negative images of feminism

associated with lesbianism.

Interestingly, Ali, like Catherine and Emma, felt marginalised as a result of her feminism. Students at Ali's school rejected feminism because they associated it with "home breaking" and other negative images. At home, Ali's parents saw her feminism as something "pathological". For Ali these negative experiences upset her and also made her feel separate from those around her. These strong feelings of difference continued until Ali started university and met other young feminist women.

Ali identified herself as a "radical feminist". She defined her politics as:

"the sort of demonstrating type of radical, doing feminism... standing on the street with Women Against Pornography [WAP] and protesting against a porno show, that sort of radical".

When Ali was at university she spent a lot of time at the 'Women's Space' where political activism was regarded as important. She strongly rejected the stance taken by the group of women she called 'femocrats'. In her opinion these women adopted:

"[a] sort of mild way of doing things... [which is linked with] a sort of diplomacy... that I find quite irritating".

SUMMARY

Ali, like Beth was aware of gender discrimination as she grew up. She knew that there were certain things that she could not do because she was a girl. Her awareness of this was heightened by the discourse of politics that was mediated through her parent's environmentalism. Ali's narrative illustrates Scott Melton's (1992) argument that individuals take aspects of one discourse and apply it to an area outside of the original discourse. Ali's first access to feminist discourse was through her mother, but unlike the women already discussed, feminism was represented in a negative way. While this representation put Ali off from identifying as feminist, her relationship with her mother was so problematic that she often used feminism to challenge her mother. Ali finally took up a feminist 'identity' when

she was 14 after finding a positive representation of feminism in her school library books.

ROBYN

Robyn's entry into feminism, like Ali's, was strongly framed by feelings of marginalisation and contradiction. For Robyn these experiences stemmed from being a Maaori woman growing up with her racist and sexist Paakeha father. Robyn's Maaori mother left her two daughters with their father when Robyn was two. Robyn had no more contact with her mother or her Maaori whanau until she was 16. Like Emma and Ali, Robyn was 22 when she was interviewed but having finished three years at university she was in her first year of a full-time job.

Robyn compares her father to the character of Jake Heke in the Aotearoa/New Zealand film *Once Were Warriors* (1994, see also Duff 1990).

"I was watching *Once Were Warriors* again the other night and it was just incredible 'cause there was Jake Heke going 'Don't you go down the bloody marae. All those bloody Maaoris [sic] living in the past blah blah'. And it was like it was my father. It was incredible because all those lines... 'Oh ya lippy woman', it was all the classic lines. I mean Jake Heke's this alcoholic and he's like abusive. My father didn't hit me like that but I mean, the classic lines".

Robyn's father, like the character in the film was an alcoholic and Robyn remembers him "verbally and emotionally abusing" her and her sister as they were growing up.

Robyn grew up within a strong discourse of misogyny which was mediated by her father. Women were the alleged source of all her father's problems.

"There were all the stories about how women shit on him and took advantage of him and you know they were evil. Its like almost biblical. The cause of all his sin, his pain and suffering were women".

His dislike of women extended to the point where he said to Robyn "don't ever grow up to be a woman". For a long time Robyn saw 'woman' as a "dirty word".

At the same time Robyn remembers her father encouraging her and her sister to get a good education and to look after themselves.

"The bad message was coming from him, but at the same time it was like 'don't let anyone else get you down'...that kind of double message [thing] was happening".

These contradictions, in particular, about what it was to be a woman led to some confusion for her as she was growing up:

"Half of me thought, if he says it, it must have some truth to it, but, then the other half of me thinking well, I'm a female... it can't be true".

Her father's racism also contributed to Robyn's feelings of marginalisation. Prior to 're-discovering' her Maaori whaanau, Robyn describes herself as "lost" and as never fitting in anywhere because she did not have any connection to what she describes as her "base... in a Maaori world". Robyn describes herself as being raised Pakeha, but when she re-established contact with her mother, this understanding of herself changed. She shifted from seeing herself as having Maaori blood to seeing herself as Maaori, something "totally different".

Robyn's conception of her ethnicity has since shifted again towards a more multi-faceted understanding of herself. During the time she was at university Robyn spent a lot of time trying to define meanings. She came to the conclusion that a complete definition is not possible, "there is no kind of full stop to these things". As a consequence she now sees herself as embracing difference. While she still sees her "centre" as Maaori her concern for difference also means acknowledging all the different cultures in her ancestral heritage including her Irish, Welsh, and German forebears. Robyn's shifting understanding of her ethnicity and her focus on difference causes problems when she has to tell people in a Maaori setting who she is and where she comes from:

"How do I tell anyone that I'm all these things... there's so many tribes... such an enormous history that I find that idea really difficult".

This was one of the issues that shaped Robyn's decision to locate herself as pan-tribal in this study (the other reason being one of confidentiality). Robyn's focus on her multiplicity could

be seen as part of the increasing focus on difference and plurality evident in young women's accounts of '90s feminism.

While these experiences of contradiction and marginalisation led Robyn to question some of her father's ideas, they did not result in her developing a feminist 'identity' (as was the case with Ali). Rather, a number of other factors, which she describes as "peaks", came into play before Robyn started to actively call herself feminist. For Robyn, the pinnacle was reached when she found the term "colonisation" to describe her experiences of sexism and racism.

The first of these peaks occurred during Robyn's mid-teens. Prior to this period, Robyn had had access to liberal feminist ideas through her friends and their parents, the latter she describes as "liberals" and "hippies". Her friends often rejected certain practices as sexist, such as, the teachers asking the boys to do things because they were boys. However, little was challenged beyond these practices.

Robyn did not actively take on these ideas at this point though:

"For me, my personal life was kind of my biggest problem. So between boys, my personal life and finding some decent clothes to wear, I just didn't have time for [feminism]".

During her early teens, Robyn remembers being obsessed with boys. There was an imperative at school to be popular with the boys and preferably to have a boyfriend.

"If I could have given up all the good marks in the world to have a boyfriend, I would have at the time".

Prior to this time Robyn had read a lot of romantic fiction, such as the *Sweet Valley High* series. The popular discourse of femininity within this literature constructs girls as lacking an identity unless they have a boyfriend (Christian-Smith 1988).

Then, during her 6th and 7th form years, a number of changes occurred that gave Robyn the space she needed to explore these ideas further.

Shhhh! We're Making Feminists!!!

"I left home, and the problems started decreasing. I made a lot of male friends and I started earning my own money and so then I started educating myself on this stuff and reading a lot more".

During this period, Robyn was able to shift from an 'unsafe' environment where many of her energies went into "keeping the peace", to an environment where she had the mental and emotional space to explore new ideas. Further, at this time Robyn remembers "finding out that not everyone lived the way we did."

For Robyn, books like *The Clan of the Cave Bear* (Auel 1980), and the *Mists of Avalon* (Bradley 1984) proved to be a source of female based mythologies. "Women were these great and powerful, mythical creatures that do all these wonderful things". Robyn discussed the ideas in these books and the art she was studying, which she now sees as feminist, with her friends. She sees herself as absorbing feminist ideas throughout this process.

These ideas about, and images of, women were further reinforced when Robyn re-established contact with her mother at the age of 16. Robyn's mother and grandmother provided her with the image of strong, assertive and confident women. While neither woman identifies as feminist they have many of the beliefs associated with feminism. Robyn talks about her mother being "a really powerful woman" who is aware of who she is and does not take "shit from men".

These images of strong women were combined with Robyn's rediscovery of her Maaori roots. For her this is a significant event in her life. It meant finding "who" she was. Alongside this, Robyn also gained access to Maaori mythology which provided her with another means, apart from art, for spiritual growth.

Robyn could not remember when she first started calling herself feminist, but it was some time during her late teens. During her first few years at university she not only enrolled in some women's studies papers but also came into contact with a group of women who identified as feminist. At this time, she was also involved with an older man who she

describes as, in some senses, a "feminist supporter". This relationship further contributed to the development of Robyn's feminism. One example of this was the way her partner used the word 'woman' in a positive way. In doing so, Robyn's partner provided her with an alternative discourse to that of her father's. It was during this relationship that Robyn shifted from seeing 'woman' as something dirty to seeing it as something strong.

For Robyn:

"university was a really safe place to say you're something. But I still wasn't sure of describing myself as such outside those circles".

For much of this time though, she sees herself as espousing a discourse of "white feminism". For Robyn her development as a Maaori feminist came as she learnt more about her people and her culture. Robyn describes the pinnacle of this process as when she came across the discourse of colonisation.

"I remember at some stage I kinda went 'ding', like you know the light bulb...and thinking 'hey colonialism, my father colonised me' I mean colonisation in fact that all women are colonised in the same way that all Maaori are colonised in the world at the moment".

Robyn's experiences are congruent with Middleton's (1985) analysis of the women in her study who had experiences of marginalisation and then through a process of politicisation began to analyse those experiences in social rather than personal terms. She describes learning that what had happened to her was a result of an oppression "higher" and "deeper" than just her father as "incredible".

"I was obviously looking for this... searching... [It made me feel that] I could do something about that. I can say this structure is wrong, that attitude is wrong... I felt really good to be able to put those things in that context. Cause then it took away that personal anguish to a certain extent".

Robyn now describes her feminism as 'brown feminism' as opposed to the 'white feminism' of Pakeha women. She sees marked differences between these two perspectives. For Robyn 'brown feminism' draws strongly on Maaori mythology, in particular its goddesses,

for its strength. It also looks to its tribal heritage - as Robyn states:

"when Maaori women write about feminism they also write about their ancestors and their land and all those other things and you can't divorce the two".

For Robyn, Ngahuia Te Awekotuku's (1991a) ideas represent her ideas about feminism.

SUMMARY

Robyn's development as a feminist is marked by an intersection of her gender and ethnicity. Her father's racism and sexism caused her confusion because of her conception of herself as female and as Maaori. Robyn's feminist ideas began to develop in her later years at high school. Prior to this period she describes herself as being too concerned with being safe at home, and with money, fashion and boys to engage with feminism. It was also during this period that she re-established contact with her mother and gained access to feminist ideas through books and friends. Robyn initially took up what she describes as white feminism, but as she became more involved with her Maaori whaanau she shifted towards identifying as a Maaori feminist. Robyn's narrative exists in contrast to the way Beth's narrative resisted being placed in a linear framework, Robyn actively constructed her narrative in this form by talking about connected peaks and pinnacles in the development of her feminist 'identity'.

SHELLEY

Shelley's story is in marked contrast to those of Beth, Ali and Robyn. Shelley's overriding memory of her childhood was its "normality".

"It was very sheltered, it was very... white, middle class and all very nice. It was an ordinary life, all very ordinary".

She grew up as the youngest child of older parents, and had four sisters and one brother. At the time of the interview she was 23 and in her fifth year at university.

While Shelley's family was organised around traditional gender relations, her mother

worked in the home and her father in paid work, Shelley never saw this as an issue. Unlike Beth and Ali, Shelley does not remember being aware of the gendered differences in her parents' roles before she encountered feminism. Her experiences were seen as ordinary and satisfying and she "never felt any need to seek out any alternative analysis of what was happening"⁶.

The only memories Shelley has of noticing negative aspects of gendered relations are from high school and are similar to the complaints made by Robyn's friends. For example, Shelley challenged a teacher for asking the boys to stack away the chairs. However, this challenge was not couched in terms of sexism, because Shelley remembers "not wanting to be left out". Shelley also remembers not wanting to do maths in 6th form despite being good at it "because not many girls did it".

"In 7th form I wanted to do classics and history because of impressions that they were girls subjects... I always kind of felt, even though there were quite a number of girls in the [maths] class... it was a very much a boys class in terms of attention and time and resources".

Shelley ended up doing maths in the 7th form after her career's adviser pushed her to do so because of her high grades.

Shelley first came across a discourse of feminism through an education course in her first year at university. The course included a section on gender and sexism in the education system and was taken by a woman Shelley describes as a "wonderful lecturer". Shelley remembers these lectures as an "enlightening experience... [which] opened my eyes up to what was happening in the world".

As already mentioned, Shelley had previously felt no need to seek out an alternative analysis of her experiences. Her acceptance of feminism at this point in her life, is linked to

⁶This statement is in marked contrast to Robyn's idea that she had always been searching for an adequate analysis of her upbringing, *searchings* that came to an 'end' when she encountered the discourse of colonisation.

factors other than the availability of an alternative construction of her schooling. Firstly, Shelley describes the ideas as being presented in a very powerful way.

"I saw university research as indisputably correct in every way, you could not argue with it. I've changed those ideas now, but at the time, coming from school into this great establishment... it was something I couldn't ignore".

Also Shelley's lecturer tapped into some of Shelley's memories of her schooling, in particular her reluctance to do maths because it was a 'boy's subject'.

However, not all the students in the class would have accepted the ideas because they accepted the validity of university research. Alongside the powerful institutional backing for the discourse of feminism, Shelley had strong feelings about the individual through whom the discourse was mediated. For Shelley her lecturer "was a very inspirational woman... she spoke in such a way that you had to listen".

Shelley and her friend would also discuss the ideas raised by the lecturer and relate it to their own experiences. For Shelley, this provided an important space to explore the ideas being raised.

The "context" and the "time" in which these ideas were offered were also central to Shelley's acceptance of them. She strongly links the development of her feminism to her university experience.

"For me it [was] just a part of going to university... you meet all these amazing people that you've never come in contact with before and they introduce all these ideas".

In this sense the environment was one in which taking on board new ideas was seen as appropriate. More than this though, Shelley also saw university as "starting adult life" and as such she wanted "something to stand up for and to shout about". Feminism provided this.

Shelley did not take on feminism straight away though; it was a gradual process. While the lectures were a "starting point", people Shelley met, the ideas discussed in meetings, and personal experiences, triggered new ideas that contributed to her politicisation.

One such event was discovering a wider range of discourses of feminism than the "liberal feminism" available to her through her courses. During her time at university Shelley had a part-time job at a local bookshop which stocked the feminist magazine *Broadsheet*. She took out a subscription. She also discovered that the local women's bookshop stocked international magazines like *Trouble and Strife* and *Spare Rib*. One of these included letters from readers about how they came into feminism. For Shelley these magazines and in particular *Broadsheet* gave her:

"a different slant on it all than I was getting at university and it [had] a very strong lesbian ... and bisexual visibility. Something I certainly wasn't getting from [my lecturer]".

The bookshop Shelley worked in also provided her with experiences that "provoked" the development of her feminist consciousness by giving her "examples of feminist controversies and... things to rally against". On one occasion, when Shelley had tried to pacify (and implicitly support) a woman who was complaining about the way the magazines were arranged and labelled, her boss saw Shelley as being "in cahoots with this nasty feminist". This experience made Shelley "enormously angry" and gave her "another example" with which to shape her understanding of what feminism was.

Many of Shelley's other experiences centred around pornography. Shelley sees one of the significant factors in her development as a feminist as helping to start up the local faction of WAP. She came in contact with WAP during the women's festival held on campus. As part of the festival different women were invited to speak on issues such as anorexia and pornography. For Shelley the festival and consequently the setting up of WAP came at a time when she was ready to do something publicly. WAP linked into Shelley's desire to get up and shout about something. However, it was still difficult for her to actually take part in protests.

"It was a real test for me, the ability to go out in public and stand up for an issue... even if nobody sees you its the fact that you're out there, you're perhaps vulnerable, perhaps available to be labelled as a particular type of person and I think that's a really important part of the process".

The women's festival and WAP provided this for Shelley and it is during this time that she began to identify more strongly as feminist.

For Shelley, unlike Beth, Ali and Robyn, feminism drew her attention to sexism that she had not previously been aware of.

"Rather than seeing the problems and then finding the solution, I saw the solution and then realised that there were problems in my life and I'd just found the solution".

Shelley's feminism took a similar line to Ali's but she labelled her position "anarchistic feminism". In the initial interviews Shelley associated her views with that of radical feminism, for example, stating that:

"to me radical feminism says we cannot achieve equality within the system... we need to make really wide spread changes and I really go along with that because I don't think that the system we have, that's been established for so many centuries... can accommodate women equally within it... We need a full scale overhaul".

Following the interviews though she discovered a new feminist discourse that better represented how she saw her feminist beliefs. In her description of 'anarchistic feminism' she emphasises revolution and overthrowing the system; it is non-authoritative, anti-hierarchical and believes in decentralised power. However, as she states:

"it's not saying we're going to ...get out there with machine guns and have guerilla warfare and overthrow the government and replace it. It's much more a hollowing out process of the present system, whereby people construct their own alternative systems to the mainstream... and by the withdrawal of the energy and money from the mainstream system... that alternative will just grow... and blossom until that alternative is bigger than the mainstream system which will just whither away and die".

Shelley sees this philosophy as building upon and extending her original radical feminist perspective. Shelley's shifting feminist views illustrates the feminist poststructuralist understanding of subjectivity as always processual. Feminist poststructuralism argues that subjectivities should be seen as always open to change (Weedon 1987:33). Such change can occur within short periods of time such as that involved in this present research process.

SUMMARY

Shelley's entry into feminism was different to Beth's, Ali's and Robyn's. While these women experienced gender discrimination prior to gaining access to feminist discourse, Shelley was not very conscious of sexism until after she encountered feminist ideas. Shelley gained access to feminist discourses through a university course at a time when she felt that she wanted something to shout about. As such, the time and place that Shelley encountered feminist ideas was very important, as was the person who mediated the ideas, her lecturer.

However, while the feminist ideas tapped into experiences that Shelley had had at school, she did not immediately begin to identify as feminist. She describes it as a gradual process. Other significant factors included Shelley joining a women's action group which provided her with people to share her ideas with, and an increasing awareness of gender discrimination that she now interprets within a feminist framework. Shelley's attraction to radical feminism and anarchistic feminism can be seen as linked to her involvement in radical action groups such as WAP.

MARIE

Marie's story is similar to Shelley's in that her development as a feminist was closely tied to her experience of university. Marie also grew up in a family that relied on traditional gender roles. Marie's father worked in the public sphere while her mother worked predominantly in the home. She participated in paid work on a part-time basis so that she could be at home for her three children (even after they had started high school).

Marie's earliest memory of feminism is being labelled by her classmates in her 7th form school magazine, as a 'future feminist politician'. At this point in her life, Marie was heavily involved in school activities including being the head prefect. She was also strongly career minded, she wanted more out of life than marriage and children. Marie describes herself as "a leader more than a follower...I think that came across to my male classmates. They'd say

'oh you feminist!''.

Marie, though did not see herself as being feminist in the way she now understands it. At this time she saw feminists as "radical, butch and hairy" which was something she did not want to be associated with. Instead Marie's 'feminism' was based upon her image of herself as a strong, independent woman. Marie's understanding was formed by a number of events.

The first of these was her success at over-coming what she describes as a "weight" problem at the age of 13 or 14. She had received a lot of harassment for her size and after losing the weight she felt like a:

"different person. It was like a sense of empowerment because I was no longer the butt of jokes... That was quite a dramatic time, I think, for developing my strength from inside".

Marie also developed a strong relationship with her aunt following her aunt's marriage break up. Marie describes her aunt as "a good role model" who shifted from being "totally dependant on her husband to being very financially and emotionally independent". Marie's aunt provided Marie with the image of a strong independent woman who earned her own money, had her own car and operated her own business. Marie's then boyfriend's parents provided a similar role model, as they shared the responsibility for housework and earning the family income. This image of women as involved in the paid work force, particularly in terms of a career, was, and still is, very important to Marie.

Such images contrasted strongly with other ideas around Marie. For example, the discourse of domesticity was strong within her community. Marie remembers a friend of her mothers saying:

"Its a waste of time you going to university, Marie... You'll just come out, get married and have children. It's a waste of money".

Marie's feminism began to develop more when she started university, where she gained

access to a range of ideas which offered her new ways of understanding the world. Marie describes this changing outlook as beginning with issues of "race" and "class". Issues around ethnicity in particular tapped into Marie's understanding of her own ancestry.

"I'm part Maaori... I come from Ngai Tahu... from down south. I'm proud of that fact,... but my parents are a bit iffy about it because they are about Maaoris (sic) full stop. But because of my education I've learnt to widen my views".

This link between the ideas in the courses she was taking and her own understanding of her subjectivity was one of the reasons she enrolled in a women's studies paper in her third year. "I thought 'oh cool, I'm a woman. I'll take this woman paper and see what it's like'".

Interestingly, Marie does not remember discourses of feminism and gender being explored in her other papers despite its presence in one of the courses. In part, this could be explained by Marie's reaction to the lecturer taking those sections of the courses. Marie did not like this woman and consequently "I didn't take any notice of what she said". Marie felt far more positive about the lecturer who took the third year paper though, which further compelled her to do the paper.

"I really liked [Jane]... from my very brief interaction with her in my classes in second year... I thought she had some really interesting things to say".

This attraction became stronger as the course progressed. Like Shelley, Marie describes her lecturer as inspirational and central to her interest in feminism. For Marie, Jane:

"was a feminist because she wasn't married and she doesn't think she will ever have kids and I see that as really... standing up against the establishment... She never seemed to me to be a run of the mill type of woman".

Marie's lecturer, by challenging the discourse of domesticity which constructs women as wives and mothers, tapped into the very issues that Marie felt most strongly about in her own life.

It was also through this paper that the negative representation of feminists as radical, butch and hairy was challenged. This image was central to Marie's understanding of

feminism up to this point and it had helped to scare Marie away from feminism:

"I never saw myself as [a feminist] because I didn't identify with anything, with what they thought... The works that I had dealt with were very very against men... men were the crux of women's problems. And I don't agree with that... [But this paper said that] you don't have to be a radical to be a feminist... So [it] definitely gave me something to base my ideas on"⁷.

Marie's feminism, was and still is tied very closely to her desire to enter the paid work force and to not be a home maker. As such, she is able to construct a high level of continuity between her ideas at high school and the feminist framework she acquired at university.

Marie's acceptance of feminist discourse was also strongly linked to her experience of gender discrimination and to changes occurring in her personal life. Prior to taking the paper in her third year, Marie attended a wedding with her then partner, where she was left out of the conversation between the men. She felt invisible, an experience which made her furious but was also "a real eye opener". Prior to this experience Marie had never felt discriminated against, "I had never thought of myself as a second gender, a second person... I've always done or said what I wanted". This episode provided Marie with experience to draw upon when she encountered discourses of feminism in her third year class.

A second influential event was the break up of Marie's four year relationship with her boyfriend while she was enrolled in the women's studies paper.

"I [had] thought that he was my world. I was trained to think... that we could get married and stuff like that... [But then we broke and] he wasn't central to my life any more... all of a sudden my whole world opened up, my horizons broadened".

This change gave Marie the space to explore new ideas and construct a new understanding of herself as a person.

Marie, again like Shelley, also had someone with whom to share these experiences and

⁷Marie's experience is in marked contrast to Emma's. As discussed earlier the representation of feminists as radical activists made Emma feel inadequate and not 'active' enough to identify as a feminist whereas it turned Marie away from feminism.

the ideas she was encountering, outside of class. This friendship provided Marie with support for developing her ideas.

Marie sums up her entry into feminism as being:

"my development from my experiences... [both] good and bad, and just from my friends. And my interaction with my academic life has definitely broadened my horizons to look... at other issues".

Marie's feminist ideas can also be understood in this way. She associated herself with feminist poststructuralism, but it took a slightly different form to that taken by Emma and Catherine. For Marie, the attraction of poststructuralism was its focus on deconstruction, and in particular the deconstruction of the category 'women'. While she recognises that there are problems associated with this position, she still finds the approach interesting. In part, her interest stems from her belief that while feminism was initially focused on equality and equal rights, she argues that, "we have moved on from that now". She also liked the term post-feminisms and although she was vague about what this term exactly meant, she seemed to be using it as feminism within postmodernism, rather than referring to the possibility of an 'identity' or philosophy beyond feminism.

Marie's narrative is an interesting illustration of a feminist poststructuralist approach to subjectivity and its argument that individuals are located within contradictory discourses and inevitably involved in negotiating contradictory subject positions. Marie's feminist position at times seems internally contradictory. For example, she raised the issue of stereotypes pushing women into marriage and motherhood as one of the key areas that feminism needs to target in the 1990s. This was one of the main concerns of 'second wave' feminists such as Betty Friedan (1963). This concern seems to contradict her belief that feminism in the 1990s is beyond the equality and equal rights issues that faced feminism in the 1960s and 1970s and that feminism should now be more concerned with issues around postfeminisms. Thus, Marie seems to straddle two different feminist discourses by both wanting to challenge the stereotype of women as mothers (liberal feminism) while also wanting to deconstruct the

very category of 'women' (postfeminisms).

As discussed earlier, the existence of this contradiction in Marie's position can, in part, be explained by the strong discourse of motherhood within her home community. This discourse shaped her concern that women in the '90s are still being pushed into mothering roles. Alongside this conservative discourse however, Marie has also accessed academic discourses of postfeminism, which she has found very attractive.

Catherine also drew on different feminist discourses, that of feminist poststructuralism and eco-feminism, but the contradictions in Marie's narrative were even more marked than in Catherine's accounts. This could perhaps be explained by looking at the nature of the discourses each woman drew upon. Catherine's feminism has been constituted within a feminist poststructuralist emphasis on plurality and multiplicity. Thus she can accommodate the possibility of disjunctions between her feminism and her concerns for the environment. For Marie however, conflict arises as she constructs a counter-discourse to the conservative discourse of her community. She does this within a postfeminist discourse, which does not prioritise the challenging of such ideas. To resolve this she turns to liberal feminism as illustrated in her concerns about stereotypes. Consequently she is currently espousing two sets of apparently incompatible ideas. That Marie is still able to construct for herself a largely coherent narrative of feminism demonstrates the ways that subjects engage in negotiating conflict. However, at the same time Marie does not appear to be aware of the contradictions in her views.

Interestingly Marie also states that her:

"idea of what feminism was a year ago is very different to what it is today; I think perhaps it is not based so much in the material existence... [instead] its quite abstract".

This is illustrated by her interest in deconstructing the very category of 'woman', which further supports the feminist poststructuralist understanding of subjectivity 'as always in process'.

SUMMARY

Marie's narrative is similar to Shelley's. Both women encountered feminist ideas at university and took up a feminist 'identity' during this period. Like Shelley, Marie also feels that the university environment was important in the shifting of her ideas. Marie's narrative also provides a contrast to Emma's experience. While Emma felt that she did not fit the image of feminism because she was not radical enough, Marie was put off identifying as feminist because of its radical image.

Marie did not feel comfortable identifying as feminist until she accessed a discourse of feminism which said that there are many different sorts of feminists. Like the other women, how Marie perceived the person who gave her access to feminist discourses was central to her ultimate acceptance of feminism. Marie and Shelley saw their lecturers as inspirational. In Marie's narrative, the centrality of the individual mediating the discourse is even more marked because she did not take up the feminist ideas offered to her by another lecturer around the same time. Marie's adoption of a feminist 'identity' was also shaped by a number of other factors. These included an experience of gender discrimination that she interpreted within a feminist framework, and a relationship break-up which opened up a space for her to re-think how she saw herself. Her interest in both liberal feminism and feminist poststructuralism is linked to her concerns about stereotyping of women and her interest in academic theories.

KEY THEMES IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE YOUNG WOMEN'S FEMINIST 'IDENTITIES'

Nine themes emerged out of the data as important aspects of the process through which the women went to become feminist. The themes highlight a number of issues that seemed to be important within the women's narratives. In none of the seven narratives were all of the themes evident and nor did any of the women share the same combination of themes. In many cases the themes arose at different stages in the women's development as feminist and

in differing levels of importance. This section outlines these different themes.

ACCESS TO FEMINIST DISCOURSE

This theme was central for all the women in the development of their feminist 'identities'. At some point they all had access to both popular and professional feminist discourses, in one form or another. Some of the women, however, were first exposed to popular discourses of feminism. That is, a discourse *about* feminism rather than *of* feminism. An example of this type of discourse is that which constructs feminists as hairy legged, aggressive, butch lesbian women. The women for whom this discourse was strong did not begin to identify as feminist until they had a more positive presentation of feminism.

GENDER DISCRIMINATION

All of the women, at some point experienced gender discrimination. However, for several of the women this was more central to the development of their feminist 'identities'. These women experienced and were aware of discrimination prior to discovering feminist discourses. By contrast, experiences of gender discrimination worked for the other women as evidence supporting or reinforcing the feminist discourses about which they were already aware.

MARGINALISATION

This theme echoes one a central idea in Sue Middleton's (1985) work and is also linked to the theme of gender discrimination. For several of the women, the contradictions in their lives, or the sense that they were different from those around them, contributed to their politicisation. These experiences, while linked to issues around gender, were also broader than this.

FAMILY

Experiences within the family shaped the way in which many of the women entered into feminism. When family was highlighted as important, it tended to be as simply positive and/or negative influences. For several of the women, the family was a primary source of their experiences of gender discrimination and marginalisation. For others, it was through the family that they gained access to feminist or other political discourses. These two poles, however, were not mutually exclusive. For some of the women, the family (through different family members) was simultaneously the source of discrimination and the means through which they began to analyse those experiences.

EDUCATION

Education was another important theme for many of the women. Tertiary education provided access to feminist discourses for some, while for others it provided broader discourses of equality that often contradicted the gendering at play within their homes.

LITERATURE

This theme also emerged as a means through which the women gained access to feminist discourses. In some cases these took the form of explicit feminist ideas such as those within the feminist magazine *Broadsheet*, while in others it involved broader constructions of women as strong, active individuals.

PEOPLE

For many of the women, individual people also played an important role in their development as feminists. For some, these individuals provided access to a range of feminist discourses. But a more central issue here was the positive examples of feminist subject positions such women offered. This was not limited to women who were explicitly feminist.

The people considered to be role models who shaped the young women's feminism, also offered the women alternative subject positions to those offered by, for example, the women's families. Of particular importance were women who transverse traditional gender relations, or who were seen as strong, confident women.

SAFE ENVIRONMENT

This theme took two forms, the first of which is explicit in its title. For many of the women, identifying as feminist was linked to having a safe or secure environment within which to do so. For others, their environment was less strongly connected to the idea of safety and more centrally linked to what, for example, a university signified to them in terms of the stage of their life, and the university's culture.

CHANGE

This theme refers to changes occurring in the women's lives that contributed to the process by which they began to identify as feminist. It includes for example, the break up of a relationship, moving away from home, and losing weight. In some cases, the change was significant in that the women felt empowered following the change. For one woman, removing the source of negative experiences from her life meant she had the space to 'educate' herself, while for others the change was about maturing and beginning to consciously construct belief systems.

A PLURALITY OF FEMINISMS

The feminist poststructuralism proposed by Weedon (1987) and Davies (1994) is useful to explain the development of new positions, such as anarchistic feminism, feminist poststructuralism and postfeminisms that were adopted by these women. This development can be demonstrated by looking to previous research into the experiences of feminists in New

Zealand. Sue Middleton (1985), in her study of feminist educators that was written a decade ago, identified the frameworks of liberal, Marxist radical, socialist and bi-cultural feminists and targeted a cross-section of women who adopted these positions for her study. Gaye Payze, in her 1991 thesis on EEO co-ordinators as feminists, included women who positioned themselves as socialist, Marxist, radical/lesbian, and liberal feminist. She also included those women who had no knowledge of the different theoretical strands within feminism and consequently did not label themselves, and one woman who described herself as a "disillusioned" feminist and rejected all of the above positions.

From my study, it is clear that the young women, in particular those with access to university education, have a wider range of feminist discourses open to them. These are offering new ways of understanding the world around them and the usefulness of feminism as a tool for social change. This factor is impacting upon their experiences of feminism and their analysis of their gendered 'identities'.

The young women's location as a second generation of feminists has influenced their feminist beliefs. Particularly significant is the emphasis they place on acknowledging and accepting differences between women. Feminism in the 1970's, both in theory and in practice, tended to treat women as an homogeneous group. In Aotearoa/New Zealand, this resulted in criticism from many feminists within minority groups, such as working class, lesbian and Maaori, a situation which Ngahuia Te Awekotuku (1991) recalls as causing a lot of hurt and anger for many women. It was following this historical period that the young feminists in this research encountered feminism. A consequence of this has been their heightened awareness of the significance of difference. For example, both Catherine and Emma grew up in feminist households where racism, class discrimination and homophobia were discussed alongside sexism. However, difference was an issue for all the women. Throughout the interviews I was told repeatedly that women (and feminists) have different experiences. As Shelley put it:

"Feminisms comes in all shapes and sizes... and that's what I like about feminism, that it's about multiples... There's always more than one way to do things".

This concern about accepting the differences between women, was perhaps emphasised most strongly by those women who had been involved in feminist action groups. In such groups conflict may arise over differences in philosophies. As such, Ali identifies the acceptance of difference as one of the biggest issues facing the feminist movement today. For her, inclusivity is seen as central to the success of any movement.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have discussed the ways that the young women in this study understand feminism. Four key aspects emerged, including the centrality of recognising social inequality between men and women and the desire to change this situation. The women saw that this change needed to occur at both a societal and personal level. They also placed a strong sense of self at the centre of being feminist.

The chapter has also explored the different ways the young women's 'identities' as feminists have developed. Several areas emerged as significant in this process. These included gaining access to feminist discourses, experiencing gender discrimination and/or marginalisation, education, literature, significant people, a safe environment, undergoing change in their lives, and both positive and negative family experiences. This chapter has also argued that a number of new feminist positions have opened up including poststructuralist feminism and anarchistic feminism. More significant though, is the centrality of pluralism to the young women's understandings of feminism.

In the next chapter I will discuss how the young women negotiate the conflicts that arise, for example as between their families and their feminism. I will also use the idea of sense-making to explore how the young women make sense of the conflicts and contradictions they experience.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE PERSONAL IS POLITICAL: NEGOTIATING CONFLICTS AND CONTRADICTIONS

Enlightenment humanism maintained that individuals possessed a coherent, rational and continuous self. When faced with a contradiction or conflict, each individual it was believed, would react in a logical manner based on her or his beliefs. Feminist poststructuralism rejects this understanding of the self, and argues instead that an individual's subjectivity is precarious, contradictory and constantly changing. The contradictory nature of our subjectivity stems from the multiplicity of discourses that shapes our sense of who we are. These discourses, and the subject positions offered within them, provide an individual with different and sometimes contradictory ways of seeing the world as well as a variety of means to gain "satisfaction, pleasure and self-fulfilment" (Weedon 1987:96). In this view, as we do not draw on one discourse exclusively to understand the world, our subjectivity reflects the always conflicting and contradictory nature of discourse. A consequence of this is that we often need to make conscious choices between different often conflicting demands. The choices we make can, and often do contradict other aspects of our subjectivity.

This chapter aims to explore this aspect of the experiences of the young feminist women in this study, and in particular, how the women negotiate their feminist viewpoints with other aspects of their lives. Originally this section of the thesis explored the women's relationships with their friends, partners and those they live with, as well as their understanding of themselves with regards to their ethnicity, class, and sexuality. Eventually, however, I narrowed the focus to the women's experiences of, and within, their families. For many of the women, the family was a site of conflict and contradiction as they negotiated their families often more traditional beliefs about the role of women in society, with their feminism. The cultural importance placed on the family meant that the maintenance of these relationships is a high priority for the women.

This finer focus gave rise to some valuable insights into the ways that individuals

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negotiate conflict and contradiction, in this, case between the women's feminist beliefs in the 'personal is political' and their need to maintain familial relationships. It also opened up a space for exploring an unanticipated facet, that is, how the women understand these contradictions. It is these issues that this chapter explores. I begin by examining some of the different ways the women negotiate relationships with family members in relation to their feminist beliefs. After this I outline for the ways the women account for these contradictions.

NEGOTIATING TRADITIONAL FEMININITY

From the interviews it was clear that not only do the women occupy the usual subject positions of child, daughter and sister, they may also be friend, flatmate, and care giver (in a more paternal sense). Many discourses were impacting upon how the women chose between and negotiated a range of subject positions. These discourses sometimes conflicted with the women's feminist viewpoints, as the following examples show.

MARIE AND BETH

For two of the women this conflict in their relationships with their mothers was very marked. When Marie and Beth talked about their relationships with their mothers they interpreted their mothers' behaviours from a range of different positions.

For Marie and Beth, making choices between contradictory demands centred around negotiating the discourse of the cult of domesticity, which valorises the subject position of "the good daughter", against their understandings of feminism.

Marie and Beth both grew up within families where the cult of domesticity shaped familial relations (James and Saville-Smith 1994). This meant that their mothers had primary responsibility for taking care of the home, regardless of their involvement in paid work. Their fathers were involved in the public sphere.

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As daughters, Beth and Marie were expected to follow in their mothers', rather than their fathers', footsteps. Marie remembers cooking, cleaning and doing dishes by the time she was 14. Her sister was also required to do this. By contrast Marie's younger brother was not expected to do these jobs. "[Mum's] got no problem with dishing it [the housework] out to myself and Jenny but she does with the men". Beth's experience of growing up as a girl was similar. When guests were visiting, Beth was always asked to make the lunch or coffee regardless of her brothers' availability for this task.

"He would ask me to do it in a very commanding tone, 'Beth, you go and make that' and not even a please or thank you... it was expected of me... 'oh good on you, you've been a good girl'".

The expectations that they would take responsibility for the domestic sphere clashed with both Beth's and Marie's feminism. Both women rejected the cult of domesticity as a way of understanding and organising their family relations. Marie still does not accept the idea that a wife should look after her husband, as her father expected and her mother did.

"the way I see my mum is not the way I see myself... I'm very staunch in my belief that I am not going to be stuck in the realm of the house".

This rejection of a traditional subject position is combined with Marie's strong dislike of housework: she hates ironing, cleaning up and other "domestic work".

Beth also rejected the traditional subject position that she feels her mother still epitomises. While she recognised that her father worked hard outside of the home, she did not like the image of her mum as a "sort of slave" who did everything for her husband and sons when they could easily "muck in".

"I don't want to be part of the cycle... I've had to almost, like reject [my mother] or reject what she was, to go ahead and do what I'm doing".

Both women have experienced conflicts between how they understand themselves as feminist 'women' and how their parents understand them as 'women' within the traditional discourse shaped by the cult of domesticity.

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A range of possibilities for negotiating this conflict were evident in Marie and Beth's narratives. One possibility was to resist the traditional definition of their role as 'women' and to refuse to take responsibility for the domestic duties in the home. This option was taken by Marie in her student flat where she was "really conscious of doing things for [her] male flatmates". She would often leave washing hanging on the line as a way of challenging traditional understandings of women. Marie was not completely comfortable with this action, but it was one she was prepared to take as part of her resistance to her view of the cult of domesticity:

"I'd come in and think that's a really bitchy thing to do. But I was scared that if I started lapsing into that... they'd expect me to do it all the time".

Interestingly, despite Marie's rejection of the traditional roles of domesticity, the impact of its discourse was still strong enough to make her feel uncomfortable in this situation. This conflict was not completely resolved by her choosing a feminist strategy.

Beth and Marie also talked about challenging the lack of participation in the home by the men in their families. In Beth's case this option had already been taken by her elder sister Zoe, and Beth saw that this had cost her sister a great deal of unhappiness.

"I could never try and change my father. God, my sister tried when she was 17 and that was 16 years ago... he just bit her head off and she was basically thrown out of the house for it."

Beth did not believe that challenging her father was a safe action to take. In Marie's case such an option was not as scary but ultimately met with little success. While Marie's father acknowledged that her mother did much of the work in the home and contributed more when Marie was home, as soon as she left it returned to 'normal'.

Marie and Beth did not tend to opt for the paths of refusing to participate in domestic work or challenging their fathers, as ways of negotiating the conflict between their feminism and their family's expectations. Instead they usually took responsibility for the domestic chores even when the men in the family were not participating. In doing so they were going against

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their feminist beliefs about the division of labour in the home and their belief that being feminist meant creating change in their personal lives. Marie and Beth's choices in this situation can in part be explained by strength of another discourse within our society, that of the 'good daughter'.

For both Beth and Marie the discourse the 'good daughter' was stronger than any absolute refusal to operate within the discourse of domesticity. Marie commented that:

"Its all very fine to say 'I don't think women should have to be doing all the housework' and leave it to the men. But I know the men wouldn't do it in my household and that means that my mum would do it."

Marie felt responsible for ensuring that her mother was not over-worked. She often chooses to do the work herself so that her Mum can have a break and relax.

Beth was conscious that choosing to resist the dominant discourse affected her mother. Beth's father became "grumpy" if Beth was not home to make lunch when her mother was out of the house. "It's like anything to keep the peace... its basically to save my mother from getting a hard time".

Interestingly, neither Marie nor Beth saw the choice to support their mothers as undermining their feminist beliefs. In Maries's case this can in part be understood by the idea of sense-making introduced in Chapter Two. Marie was drawing on other discourses or aspects of her relationship with her family to construct bridges that make sense of the gaps between her feminism and her actions in the family context. She was doing this sense-making in such a way that the gap did not bother her. These bridges gave her the space to maintain both her feminism and her commitment to her family. I argue that underlying this process of sense-making is Marie's need to present herself as coherent and non-contradictory. Yet she also acutely aware of the dissonances, although rejecting of their negative effects.

When asked how she felt about the gap between her ideas and her actions, Marie commented that it was not a problem because of the way her family saw her. Although they

did not openly discuss or even explicitly label Marie as feminist, she felt that they realised, that she was "different". For example, Marie's mother challenged a friend who assumed that Marie would get married and have children rather than having a career.

"My Mum does have a sense of where I am coming from but doesn't quite know how to explain it. But she knows that I'm different to most women".

Marie's drawing on this acceptance as a way of bridging the gap between her sense of herself as feminist and her choice to participate in domestic work. Her relationship with her mother providing another way of accounting for this dissonance: "Because I love my mother it doesn't bother me". Marie was also consciously choosing discourses that construct individuals as coherent and unitary. This is evident in her comment that she did not:

"compromise my values because I don't have to ever step back from what I think. I always have what I think firmly embedded in what I do".

Evident in this comment are Marie's multiple positionings as both a daughter and a feminist. Even when she was doing domestic jobs she was aware of the feminist issues surrounding her actions. However, Marie did not appear to understand her multiple positioning as fragmentary, or contradictory, but, in line with the dominant humanist discourse, she was emphasising and constructing a coherent and unitary subjectivity¹.

Beth was negotiating the conflict between her desire to keep the peace for her mother, and her feminist need to resist her father's definition of her being responsible for the domestic sphere in a different way to Marie. Most of Beth's family neither supported nor accepted her feminist beliefs and she had seen the consequence of her sister challenging their father. But perhaps stronger than both of these factors in shaping Beth's response to the conflict, was the discourse of harmonious family relations originating from her Dutch cultural heritage. This discourse is still strong within the Dutch/New Zealand community Beth's family is part of and entails:

¹The constitution of Marie's subjectivity as unitary in the statement becomes more evident when compared to the way that Catherine positions herself. This will be discussed later in the chapter.

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"different rules and regulations... in the context of the family life and of the home... It's like 'don't ever rock the boat' ... Everyone knows about everyone else, what they're doing, who's living with who and got pregnant... You're always frightened of bringing down the family name".

The discourse strongly influenced the way Beth responds to the conflict between her feminism and the expectations of her father. She said:

"I essentially... submitted to my father, probably in a Dutch way... I sort of stuck to the rules. I didn't assert myself either in a feminist way or as a person. Yeah. I toed the line, especially for my father".

However, this 'submission' was not complete. Beth resisted her father's defining of her, in a subtle yet still powerful manner that gave her space to maintain herself as a 'woman' and as a feminist.

"Even though I was doing those subservient things [for my father], sort of in my mind I was going 'Up you'... I knew I was doing it just.. to keep the peace. And if anything I felt like I was being condescending... The only way I've dealt with [him] all these years is just to be condescending and just to feel sorry for him".

By refusing to completely accept her father's definition, Beth was able to create a space within which she could meet the needs of both her mother and her family within the Dutch/New Zealand community, while still maintaining her 'identity' as a feminist. Like Marie, Beth's multiple positioning is evident in her statement. She occupied both the positions of a Dutch/New Zealand daughter and self-defined feminist. She also turned towards a more coherent, rather than fragmented, subjectivity, although, as suggested in the previous chapter, Beth did not seem to be so strongly shaped by the discourse emphasising a coherent and unitary subjectivity.

The process of sense-making is also evident in Beth's narrative. She was drawing both on the discourse of Dutch family relations and her sister's experience of challenging her father's behaviour to make coherent the way she related to her father.

Beth's and Marie's conflicts centred on negotiating the contradictory discourses of being

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a good daughter, which means going along with the discourse of domesticity, and the discourses of feminism that question the positioning of women in the domestic sphere. They negotiated this conflict by creating spaces for their beliefs while still being good daughters. These spaces were enabled through the process of sense-making where bridges were built over the disjunctive gaps between their ideas and actions.

It is important to note, that Marie's and Beth's relationships with their mothers were not only shaped by the discourse of the 'good daughter'. They also interacted with their mothers as fellow women, and specifically as feminists in relation to non-feminist women. Within this framework Marie saw her mother's generation as:

"our worst enemies... it's our mother's generation that your fighting against all the time. You know they're drilling into you what you should be doing... If I'm not married with kids by the time I'm thirty then something's wrong".

Marie became frustrated and angry with the way her mother supported and reinforced the discourse of the cult of domesticity by not teaching her son how to cook and clean. Marie saw her mother as "breeding a monster".

"[It] makes me mad. I don't hold it against her but I think the way she's bringing up my brother is perpetuating a problem in society. And we're the ones who've got to deal with it".

Beth's relationship with her mother was also ambiguous. While on the one hand Beth wanted to support her mother against her father's sexism, on the other hand she resented some of her mother's actions both towards her husband, Beth and the other children. Beth felt angry with her mother for waiting on them as children because she felt it did not give her and her siblings the space to develop and grow. Beth rejected the tactics that her mother used to gain power over Beth's father.

"As much as I dislike [Dad], I still dislike some of the ways [Mum] does things... I can see that the only way that she has been able to regain some power is by... undercutting him, manipulating him, manipulating the children against him... but I don't like those tactics".

Beth was also frustrated by the fact that her mother was not a role model for her

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because her mother does not fit the image of what feminism constitutes as a woman who has resisted and challenged patriarchy.

Beth's relationship with her mother is further complicated by the fact that Beth saw her mother as the person who is least supportive of her. For example, when Beth expressed an interest in doing a doctorate it was her mother who said "but you might not be good enough". Beth felt less willing to support her mother because of this aspect of their relationship. However, this reluctance conflicted with her feminism. When Beth last went home her mother asked Beth to act as a mediator between herself and her husband. Beth was torn:

"Part of me goes 'Ha ha stupid' because I was still angry with her... 'why should I do that for you 'cause you just put me down'. But part of me goes 'Oh god, for the womanhood, for my mother, you've got to do these things'. But that part of me still says 'Oh fight your own battles'".

Beth felt that the following poem which she had written described her relationship with her mother:

Mother,
Watch me destroy your dreams.
Mother,
Did you see me stay and fight?
I did that for you.
You said 'Never let them take your spirit'.
So when you try to take it
I'm just fighting you for you.

In these situations Beth and Marie were more strongly positioned within the discourses of feminism, while seeing their mothers as women who were not supporting the fight against sexism and inequality.

While Marie and Beth negotiated spaces to combine their commitment to feminism, and their families, both women were dissatisfied that their family members were not interested in, or actively disagreed with feminism. They wanted more support from their families and somebody to share their ideas with. Shelley's experiences and feelings about her family were

quite different, however.

Shelley

Shelley, like Beth, Marie and Ali, grew up in a family where her mother took responsibility for the household, even when her father was out of work. But in contrast to most of the other young women, Shelley expressed complete comfort with her family's lack of interest in feminism and also with her choice not to challenge them about it.

In instances where Shelley's ideas clashed with those of her family members, she ignored it. She preferred to stay away from touchy subjects. This approach did not always mean that Shelley's family knew what she thought about a particular issue though. For example, Shelley's mother disagreed with Shelley's sister and her husband sharing the housework. Shelley's decision not to say anything meant that her mother thought Shelley also disapproved of her sister and brother-in-law's arrangement. Yet Shelley's feminism inclined her to the contrary view.

Shelley's not challenging her family's way of life conflicted with her notion that feminists actively challenge sexism. It also conflicted with her notion of the 'ideal feminist', which she felt pressure to be. She described such a woman as :

"alert...and enormously committed in every aspect of her life [and] every single hour of the day to feminist ideals... 24 hours a day [we] are feminist".

If Shelley was to be an 'ideal feminist' according to her understanding, she would have needed to bring her feminism into her family, but this was something she chose not to do.

Shelley drew on a number of discourses and experiences to make sense of and bridge the gap between her idealising of feminism and her actions as a feminist. A central discourse was the importance of familial relations. In reference to her mother, Shelly commented:

"I've never talked to her about it because I know it's going to get both of us into strife... we're just both very stubborn and very hot tempered...[and] we'll just get into this really

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nasty argument all for nothing... I don't want to jeopardise our relationship".

In this situation Shelley drew on a discourse of family relationships as more important than her feminist ideas, despite having the goal of achieving personal and social change.

Shelley also drew on the discourse of 'aging' to negotiate the way her parents organise their domestic relations around traditional gender roles. Shelley's parents were in their late 60's at the time of the interview and she saw their age as a reason not to challenge the way they live.

"I think there is this particular age group out there that grew up with such different environment, different role models, different gender roles that I really think that they should be kind of left to live through their roles... I don't like this idea of trying to make them part of the '90s when they're not".

Similarly, Beth, whose parents were also in their sixties, also spoke of the inappropriateness of the younger generation judging those older.:

"[Maybe mum] was really happy being a home maker and [maybe] she understood separation of labour and she understood that if she keeps the house going and Dad could put all his energy into the business... but to us new age sort of things is was like 'hey oh my god she just runs after him'... With our new age feminism creeping up on us it was like 'shouldn't he be doing something around the house?'".

For Beth though, this idea of feminist discourses as something 'new age' and irrelevant to the older generation was not a dominant one. She still resented her father's lack of involvement in the house and wanted to challenge it.

In contrast Shelley placed a great emphasis on the issue of age and the relevance of 'new' ideas. This could be linked to her strong interest in the academic discipline of history, where the idea that it is inappropriate to judge one generation with the ideas of another, are strongly held.

Shelley also considered that the development of her feminist 'identity' accounted for why

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she did not feel uncomfortable with her family's lack of interest in feminism. Shelley described her feminism as a "university-inspired thing" that was far removed from home. She remembered seeing feminist discourses as something not relevant to her mother.

"Possibly even, in my pompous youth I thought it wasn't something mum needed to... or should know about. It was an intellectual thing, it was all the intellectual elite who were discussing it. I didn't initially see it as a down to earth issue. It was probably all tied up with the context and age that I was getting into [feminism]".

The discourse of age also helped Shelley to constitute herself as coherent and non-contradictory to explain why she did not bring her feminism into her family.

Shelley's feelings about feminism also influenced her interaction with her family in a different way. She saw her family as providing a space or "haven" in which she did not have to be 'feminist' all the time.

"Its quite nice having this [place] where I don't have to be feminist and if I'm not no-one's going to jump on me... I can just sit there and let it all wash over me if I want to and not have to say anything".

For Shelley this 'haven' from feminism provided a space from the pressures she placed on herself to be a "24 hour feminist". While she said her feminism was "still all there" the pressure to act on it was removed. Shelley's understanding of feminism was similar to Marie's in this instance, in that both women use the discourse of a unitary self to bridge the dissonance between their ideals and their actions. Again, like Marie, for Shelley the space not to be 'feminist' was made comfortable by the general acceptance and support she got from her family for her feminist beliefs.

"[its like] 'yes we know where your coming from and we can understand that and stand by you on it'... but they're never going to come out and say it, they're never going to come out and openly do it and that's okay".

Shelley maintained that her decision not to talk about feminism was entirely hers to make or unmake.

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"It's my choice, it's my decision [not to talk about feminism]. If I wanted to I could but I just don't want to".

Shelley draws on a discourse which constructed her as an autonomous social agent so she saw herself as having the power to make such a choice.

The importance of this is clear in other situations where Shelley did not see herself as being powerful or as having agency. In these situations not being able to freely talk about feminist ideas was more of an issue for her. An example was in Shelley's student flat, when watching an Elle MacPherson advertisement, she commented "'oh isn't this awful. I really can't stand this ad'". While Shelley felt that her disgust was self-evident, her flatmates did not and looked to her for an explanation. She became uncomfortable and felt a need to be more careful about how she said things and how she "presented" herself. Shelley did not want her feminism to become a "big issue" or for her flatmates to define her as a particular sort of feminist, that is as an aggressive, hairy butch radical feminist. Shelley interpreted her flatmates as having the power in this situation.

"Well it occurred to me when I said I don't want them to make it an issue, [that] they're in a situation when they as flatmates... can create it and make it an issue. It only takes one person to say something. Which is a power thing... they have the ability to make it an issue. Its beyond me... other people... have this ability to look at you and reconstruct and redefine who you are".

Shelley did not perceive herself as having power or agency in this situation and while she did not interpret the situation as about being 'power' prior to the interview, because of her persistent discomfort she changed her mind about the sort of people she would prefer to live with².

"I feel that in the future I would be more inclined to put feminism as a priority [in choosing who I live with] because of the experiences I've had when I haven't been 100% comfortable. I just want to feel 100% comfortable with saying and doing things and that's not really what I've been. I don't want to hide things, I want to talk about the

²This situation illustrates the impact that a researcher can have on the lives of research participants and on how they understand themselves and their relationships with others.

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things that I want to [talk about]".

In contrast to her position in her family, in her non-feminist peer group Shelley was uncomfortable speaking about feminism and chose to move away from that situation rather than negotiate it. Her situation highlights the different ways that the women negotiate conflicts around their feminism inside and outside of the family and peer groups.

Ali

Many of the other women in the study also needed to work around the differences between their family's belief systems and their own. For some of the women these negotiations are quite extreme. For example, Ali's family neither accepted her feminism nor her lesbianism, while Robyn and her mother agreed on some issues but disagreed strongly on others. Their negotiations were inevitably shaped by views about the family and family relations.

Conservative discourses of femininity were uppermost within Ali's family. While she was growing up she was continually told that she could not do certain things because she was a girl, including going tadpolling, wearing trousers and playing hockey. This image of what it meant to be a girl did not make sense to Ali when she was younger and she challenged it with "stubborn refusal".

"[We had] tremendous fights over trousers. I came home when I was seven and said to mum I wasn't going to wear skirts any more... and we just fought and fought about it... I was allowed shorts but I wasn't allowed to wear trousers... Eventually because I just refused to wear dresses... they gave in".

Ali now sees her challenges as feminist, although she did not locate herself within this framework until she was 14 when she wanted to discuss feminist issues with her family. Her family were not supportive and viewed feminism as "something almost pathological". Ali continued to try to talk to them:

"I used to battle away with them about all the issues... and I got myself into awful states

trying to make them understand where I was coming from".

This approach and the earlier 'stubborn refusal' cost Ali quite a lot emotionally. She described herself as an unhappy child who was depressed a lot of the time. "I don't know whether I coped with it... I just shut myself off".

As she got older Ali developed new ways of negotiating the conflicts between her's and her family's beliefs. She said: "well I actually believe that this is the way it is or should be" rather than arguing about it. She chose not to fight because it was not "worth it".

Choosing not to fight was not without its conflict for Ali.

"I feel really awful [when I don't challenge them] it just means I have to sit on everything and just ignore it. And I know that what's going wrong is because of whatever system that's around us... patriarchy whatever... and I can't actually make them see it".

Ali also saw herself, in this situation, as "avoiding conflict like a 'good woman'"; being someone who does not create problems for others. Ali's discomfort was evident in her ironical tone and almost embarrassed laugh.

The necessity for Ali to negotiate between her feminism and the beliefs of her family was eased by her limited contact with them. "It is quite easy for me to negotiate that [not challenging the family] with myself for say a dinner". For Ali the limited contact meant simply that she did not have to choose between the conflicting demands on her as often.

When she did have to negotiate the conflict though, she chose not to actively challenge her family. Ali made sense of this choice by drawing on the dominant discourse that constructs the family as most important.

"what I come back to is always thinking... is it more important that I stand up and fight for my feminist principles? Or is it more important what I get from these people as people?... I s'pose that in the end principles always lose out to stuff like relationships...".

Interestingly Ali did not feel this way about other relationships. If a partner or friend did

things that were in conflict with her feminism Ali would most often leave the relationship. In these situations her principles were seen as more important.

Robyn

Robyn's relationships with her family are more complex than many of the other women in the study³. As discussed in the previous chapter, Robyn lived with her Paakehaa father until the age of 16 when she left home. At 17 she re-established contact with her Maaori mother whom she had not seen since she was two or three. Robyn began to publicly identify as feminist around the same time.

Robyn described her father as racist and misogynist. Although Robyn did not identify as a feminist while she was living with her father she disagreed with many of his ideas. During this period her main goal was "keeping the peace"; she would shut up and just nod her head.

Robyn's relationship with her mother was different to the one she has with her father. While Robyn's mother would not call herself a feminist, Robyn saw her as having many of ideas that would be associated with feminism including being anti-sexist. Robyn summed up her mother's position as one of being "reactive" against sexism rather than taking a more "pro-active" stance that characterised feminism for Robyn. Her mother got angry about sexism but she did not explicitly talk about feminism or see herself as a feminist. But Robyn and her mother also disagreed on what Robyn described as some "fundamental beliefs".

One consequence of this was that Robyn, like many of the other women in the study did not discuss her feminism with her mother. "We've stopped talking about [feminism] because we get into such fierce fights". In part, Robyn and her mother disagreed with the approaches

³It is important to note that Robyn's relationship with her mother and the way she negotiated conflicts that arose between them was shaped by the fact that Robyn did not live with her mother as she was growing up and has not lived with her for any extended period of time. This makes her situation different to the other women in the study.

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each took to understanding the world: "we don't speak the same language". While Robyn draws on her academic knowledge, her mother referred instead to her life experiences.

"Her opinion is based on life experience and so she says... 'look you haven't done it so don't try and tell me' and I turn around and start with this kind of academic reasoning. But it just doesn't work either way. I don't believe her and she doesn't believe me".

Robyn negotiated this situation by avoiding certain topics: it was better not to talk about feminism rather than risk a fight about it.

Again like many of the other women, Robyn did not see this decision as a problem or as contradicting her feminism and her goal of helping to achieve change. Robyn, like Ali, drew on discourses that emphasise the importance of maintaining family relations. For Robyn, the family relationship was more important than any other. Robyn also commented that her mother was a strong and confident woman who did not let men "push her around", and in this sense, Robyn saw her mother as acting in ways that did not contradict feminism as Robyn understood it. Robyn also felt that her mother accepted 'who Robyn is'. Like Marie and Shelley this affirmation provided Robyn with a certain amount of space to negotiate any conflicts.

Catherine

Most of this chapter has discussed the different ways the women negotiated feminist beliefs within non-feminist families. For many of the women this has meant altering the way they have presented their feminism. The final part of this chapter will explore issues raised for Catherine and Emma, whose families supported feminism.

Catherine had lived most of her life with her mother and sister, both of whom shared Catherine's support for feminism. For Catherine this meant that there was little conflict between her feminist beliefs and her family's belief system. However, the specific forms that Catherine's feminism took was at times in conflict with, in particular her mother's approach to feminism. Catherine described her mother's feminism as "radical feminism" and

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quite separatist. She saw it as placing the notion of 'patriarchy' at the centre of its social analysis.

Catherine was brought up within this particular discourse of feminism, as mediated by her mother, but she saw her own feminism as changing a lot in the past year. Catherine now associates strongly with feminist poststructuralism and its emphasis on plurality and difference, as well as with eco-feminism. While Catherine's eco-feminism does not clash with her mother's ideas, she commented that she felt that her mother saw her shift towards the ideas of feminist poststructuralism negatively. "I think she thinks in some ways that I am watering things down and that I am being all wussy...". Catherine did not think this had impacted strongly on their relationship because she felt her mother respects her.

Despite the acceptance of Catherine's different feminist beliefs by her mother, Catherine still sees herself, like the other women, as changing the way she presents her feminist beliefs when she's at home.

"I think I do present my ideas differently when I'm around... my mother. Cause I'm more easily lapsed into the ideas that I was brought up with... I think I probably act more like a radical feminist when I'm home than anywhere else".

In part Catherine's 'lapsing' as she described it, stems from her understanding of where her mother (and her current partner) are coming from. She said she could see why they were angry and she did not see it as outrageous. But it also comes from a feeling that it's better to present her ideas differently than to constantly "niggle" about things. "I know that they know the points... [and this way] there's more of a sense of togetherness".

Again like many of the other women, Catherine did not see altering how she presents her feminism as problematic. She said:

"[while] in another setting, maybe in an academic setting I might say 'hey what about this...' [when I don't with mum] I don't feel like I've changed myself... its not like I compromise myself... I've still got some identity... I just get into more what they're into. Which is fine because its part of me too... I don't feel uncomfortable with it".

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A number of things are evident in Catherine's description of her self. Firstly, like Marie and Shelley, Catherine constructs herself as coherent. She does not feel that she changes herself when she takes up a different feminist position. At the same time though, unlike the other women she is also conscious that her subjectivity is multiple - "it's part of me too". Catherine had access to the discourse of feminist poststructuralism, which emphasises an understanding of subjectivity as contradictory, and is attracted to it. I would argue that this discourse provides Catherine with an alternative way of making sense of the contradictions in her subjectivity, that is by seeing them as a facet of her multiplicity. The discourse of coherence was still strong enough though that she needed to have some account of the contradictions. For example, like Marie, Shelley and Robyn Catherine felt that her mother accepted where she was coming from.

"I think she respects what I think about things... her respect for me doesn't change according to what sort of feminism I'm into... and we've got the same goal. So its like it doesn't really matter what we think is the way to get there".

That Catherine and her mother shared a broad feminist perspective meant that Catherine did not see herself as contradicting her own beliefs. In fact Catherine saw her mother as the person she most enjoyed talking to about feminism.

"I still talk to her [my mother] more about it [feminism] than I would to any others... I still have the best discussions... with her".

EMMA

Emma, like Catherine grew up in a feminist family. However, Emma did not experience conflict between her own feminism and that of her parents. While Catherine's conflict centred around the specific feminist understanding each woman adopted, this was not an issue for Emma as both her and her mother were interested in feminist poststructuralism.

Emma did experience conflict around feminism in her relationship with her brother. While Emma's parents had tried to raise both children with an awareness of feminist issues,

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Emma's brother was not as attracted to feminism as Emma was. Emma still fights with her brother about different feminist issues. While she has not stepped back from all of the arguments, she said that she increasingly sees the fights as "not worth the hassle".

Emma has drawn on similar discourses to the other women to make sense of the conflict between her feminism and her growing choice not to fight her brother. Like Ali, Emma now sees the limited amount of contact she has with her brother as meaning the conflict becoming less of an issue. Emma also saw her brother as implicitly supporting feminist ideas in other areas of his life: "he does have a basic belief in feminist ideas". Emma, like Robyn, draws on this basic level of support as a way of making sense of her desire not to fight with her brother. Alongside this, Emma also felt that the conflict between herself and her brother around feminism is not necessarily just about feminism but was also about sibling conflict more broadly. In this sense she saw the fights about feminism as a symptom of a different set of concerns.

SENSE-MAKING

The chapter will now turn to an examination of the usefulness of sense-making as a means for exploring the ways the young women negotiate and experience the conflicts between their feminism and their relationships with their families. I would argue that sense-making has a number of strengths and weaknesses.

As discussed in Chapter Two feminist poststructuralism argues that subjectivity is multiple and often contradictory. However, as has been illustrated in this chapter, the women in this study tended to offer coherent, non-conflictual accounts of their experiences. This gap between the theoretical understandings of subjectivity offered by feminist poststructuralism and the way the women presented their subjectivity needed to be addressed.

The concept of sense-making offers a way of accounting for this gap by exploring how

the young women bridge the conflicts in their subjectivities in ways that enable them to see themselves as coherent. The strength of the notion of sense-making is that it points to the possible range of ways that individuals can experience their subjectivity within specific historical and social contexts. Thus, while the feminist poststructuralist understanding of subjectivity as multiple and non-coherent is substantially accurate, under specific historical conditions that privilege the coherent subject, individuals may not necessarily experience themselves as multiple. In accounting for this aspect of subjectivity, sense-making could further the feminist poststructuralist understanding of subjectivity.

However, there is a possibility that sense-making could over-emphasise coherence in a way that glosses over the particular dissonances that individuals experience. While the women in this study placed a lot of emphasis on presenting themselves as coherent, this is not necessarily always the case. Consequently, by focussing attention on the bridges that make sense of the conflicts, the concept of sense-making may be complicit in producing coherence rather than opening up space to explore the potentials in acknowledging dissonance.

I also draw attention to the way that the interview process itself creates conflicting impulses towards both coherence and contradiction. Because of the amount and depth of the information being gathered, multiple, in-depth interviewing provides a space for contradictions to surface. However, it also demands a coherent narrative from the research participants. In my study, the women were often asked to explain their answers and were challenged if what they said conflicted with an earlier statement. This dual facet of the interview process enables the sense-making process to come to the fore (the women have to explain why the conflicts do not bother them), but it also encourages the sense-making process to occur.

A further concern I have about the concept of sense-making as it is implemented here, is the function it assigns to discourses. I have argued that individuals draw on other discourses, such as those about the family, to make sense of the dissonances resulting from their choice to maintain their familial relationships rather than push their feminism. However, this implies that the choices the women make are somehow separate from discourses, that is,

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it ignores the constitutive nature of discourses. The discourse of the family not only enables the women to make sense of their choices it actually helps to shape the choices they make.

However, despite these potential problems with the concept of sense-making, I still feel that it contributes to our understanding of subjectivity and the way it is experienced. Further research could address some of the issues raised here.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter I have explored the feminist poststructuralist view that subjectivity is often conflicting and contradictory, and that individuals experience conflict as they take up and negotiate the different meanings and subject positions offered to them through discourses.

I have argued that for the young feminist women in this study, this conflict is most marked in their attempts to negotiate, within their families, the feminist idea that the 'personal is political'. In all cases, the women responded to this conflict by placing greater importance on maintaining their family relationships than on implementing their feminist ideas. This choice conflicted with their idea that being feminist involves bringing feminist ideas of achieving change into every aspect of life. While it could be suggested that the women's choice of privileging their family relationships over their feminism stems from their youthfulness, I would argue that their responses to the conflict would be unlikely to shift in any marked way as they got older.

However, in the interviews the women did not present this conflict or contradiction as a problem. I have suggested that this situation can be understood by the idea of 'sense-making', a process where individuals make sense of contradictions (or gaps) by building 'bridges' that enable them to explain contradictions in ways that makes them unproblematic. I have argued that the different discourses the women called upon to explain why the contradictions were unimportant, can be seen as the bridges that enabled them to make sense of their situation and

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enabled them to present a coherent self. I have concluded the chapter with an exploration of some of the strengths and potential weaknesses of the concept of sense-making, maintaining that sense-making still offers us some interesting insights into subjectivity and the way it is experienced.

In the next chapter I draw together the findings of this study in a concluding statement. I also discuss the contribution the study offers to its field and point to future areas of investigation.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION: YOUNG FEMINISTS IN THE NINETIES

In this thesis I have explored the experiences of seven young feminist women in Aotearoa/New Zealand in the 1990s. The thesis focused on three areas: their understandings of feminism and being feminist; the ways that the women have encountered feminist ideas and consequently developed their feminist 'identities'; and they have negotiated conflicting and sometimes contradictory demands in their lives. These areas have been explored through the lens of feminist poststructuralism. This concluding chapter will highlight the major findings of this study. It will then go on to identify the contributions of the study to feminism in Aotearoa/New Zealand and point to areas that need further exploration.

THE LITERATURE

One of the first major findings of the study was the lack of literature written about young feminist women both in Aotearoa/New Zealand and internationally. While there have been a number of studies exploring the experiences of older feminist women in this country (such as, Middleton 1985, Payze 1991, Hong 1992) as well as a range of books that provide insights into this period through narratives of women who were part of the Women's Liberation Movement (for example Cahill and Dann 1991, and Kedgley and Varnham 1993), very little has been written about young women. The Aotearoa/New Zealand material that does exist is primarily in popular magazines.

Very little the available material explores young women's understandings of feminism, or their experiences of putting the feminist notion of the personal as political into practice. One exception is Glickman's (1993) study of the daughters of feminists. The literature has more to say about feminist influences on young women, within the family, education, the media and literature, as well as feminist communities. I hope that my study will be a useful contribution to this area, and will stimulate more young feminists to write about their experiences of family, politics and theory.

FEMINISM, WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

The women in this study described what it meant to be feminist in a variety of ways, and four themes emerge. These are the recognition of social inequalities between women and men in our society and the need to have a goals for changing this situation both socially and personally. As such the latter theme echoes the battle cry of the seventies 'the personal is political' despite the alleged 'post-feminist' era of the '90s. Finally most of the women identified a strong sense of self as a central aspect of being feminist. For three of the women, it was a sense of what it was to be female that was centrally important.

In an arguably different fashion to the feminisms of the '70s and '80s, the ideas and concerns expressed by the young women in the nineties were essentially plural. This plurality not only applied to their appreciation of a range of different feminist philosophies, but also to their foregrounding of differences between women. The feminist positions taken up by the young women illustrate an opening up of new positions within feminism and feminist discourses.

MAKING FEMINISTS

The women's narratives revealed a number of themes as important in their development as feminists. These included having access to positive discourses of feminism in an era of backlash, family relations (either positive or negative), education, literature and the media, experience of gender discrimination, feelings of marginalisation, being in a 'safe' environment to identify as feminist, and undergoing change in other aspects of their lives. These themes were not equally important for the women and in each case they interacted differently, often overlapping and thus demonstrating some of the complexities of 'identity' development.

For many of the woman the 'negative' representation of feminists as hairy legged, butch lesbians that developed during the '70s and '80s played a significant role in influencing their experiences of feminism and feminist ideas.

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In this study I have concluded that while feminist poststructuralism offers insights into the ways in which the young women developed their own feminist ideas, its usefulness is limited because of the difficulties around accessing the specific discourses available to an individual as she grows up. It is simply too difficult to conclusively explore why individuals choose between different discourses in order to explain the world around them. I maintain that the feminist poststructuralist explanations of 'identity' critiqued in Chapter Two tend towards a *description* of discourses and 'identity' but do not enable a close *analysis* of agency and the ways that discourses are mediated through individuals.

CONFLICTS AND CONTRADICTIONS

The '70s feminist principle of the 'personal as political' has remained central to the young women's understanding of feminism. However the women's attempts to put this principle into practice was not without conflict. Like many before them, the women had to negotiate this principle while maintaining familial relationships they valued. Although this struggle was most marked for the women who came from traditional families, the women who grew up in families where feminism was a central part of the family relations also needed to negotiate generational differences in feminist perspectives. In all of the cases the women placed more importance on their relationships than on prioritising their ideas and practices of feminism. Perhaps this reflects the age of the young women, but it may also indicate a new flexibility in young 1990s feminisms.

SENSE-MAKING

One of the major and unanticipated findings of the study was the way that the women made sense of the conflicts and contradictions they experienced as they negotiated their feminism. The humanist discourses that emphasise the importance of a coherent subjectivity remain influential. In line with this, when the women were asked how they felt about conflicts or contradictions, they repeatedly explained that these did not bother them. While feminist poststructuralism draws attention to the contradictions that individuals experience as

a result of conflicting demands, I argue that it does not offer a way of understanding **how** the conflicts and contradictions are experienced. It can not explain much that happened in the interviews. In contrast, sense-making looks at the way that individuals build bridges to construct coherence from the gaps in their experiences. In the study the bridges were the variety of discourses that the women drew upon to explain why the conflicts and contradictions did not bother them. It is important to note that the interview situation itself, which emphasised the constructions of narratives, contributed to this situation.

THE STUDY'S CONTRIBUTION

This study makes a number of contributions, both to understanding feminisms in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and to understanding subjectivity and 'identity' more generally. Primarily it contributes to this country's existing feminist literature, and provides access to some young feminists' experiences that have not featured in Aotearoa/New Zealand. Specifically it provides a starting point for understanding the experiences of young feminist women. The young women in this study are not only adamant that feminism is relevant to them: they are already shaping tomorrow's feminisms.

The study challenges the idea that feminism is not relevant to young women in the nineties as well. As such it offers all feminists and young women in general, a way of exploring and understanding feminism in the nineties.

The study further presents a critique of some aspects of feminist poststructuralism, drawing attention to the limitations of the theory's application in a specific context. It makes suggestions about some possible developments in the areas of 'identity', the relationship between individuals and discourses, and sense-making. The combination of the idea of sense-making with feminist poststructuralism provides a way of exploring contradictory subjectivities that may be useful for extending feminist poststructuralism. In line with this, the exploration of the way that individuals experience conflict and contradiction also offers some insights in the modernity/postmodernity debate around the issue of subjectivity,

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'identity' and the coherent self.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The study also highlights a number of areas that need further investigation. These include:

- How non-university educated young feminist women understand and experience feminism.
- How young women see feminist activism.
- How young feminist women negotiate the 'personal as political' in specific areas of their lives like personal relationships, or the workplace.
- How young women experience women's studies in its various sites and what function this aspect of Aotearoa/New Zealand feminisms has for young women.
- The impact of gendered education on the availability of feminist choices for young women.

In conclusion, I have learned much while undertaking this study. Not least, has been that I can do it! The pleasure of investigating issues that have concerned me personally, as well as professionally, has at times been interrupted by my own negotiations of my various subject positions. This process has itself fed into my reflections about the politics and practices of feminist research and feminism more broadly. Most importantly, this study has renewed my confidence in the commitment and ability of young feminist women to achieving change at both personal and social levels. In my opinion the future of feminism is in good hands.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

♀ Participants Wanted ♀

Hi, my name is Helena Court, and I am researching the experiences of young feminist women for my masters thesis in Sociology.

- Do you identify as a feminist?
- Are you aged between 18 and 24?
- Would you be interested in talking about your experiences as a feminist?

If the answer is yes ~ then I'm interested in interviewing you for my study.

Your responses would be confidential and the research complies with the ethical procedures of the Sociological Association of Aotearoa.

If you are interested in participating or would like more information - please phone Helena Court on:

~ 3569099 ext 8741 (work)
~ 3587774 (Home)
or come and see me at SST 8.23

Helena
- 3587774
or work
- 3569099
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SST 8.23

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APPENDIX 2

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Young Women and Feminism in the 1990s



MASSEY
UNIVERSITY

Private Bag
Palmerston North
New Zealand
Telephone 0-6-356 9099
Facsimile 0-6-350 5627

FACULTY OF
SOCIAL SCIENCES

DEPARTMENT OF
SOCIOLOGY

My name is Helena Court and I am currently enrolled in my thesis for my Masterate in Sociology at Massey University. My thesis explores the experiences of young (18-24 years) feminist women in the 1990s in Aotearoa/New Zealand. It will focus on the public and private experiences of the women participants by exploring three issues:

- What does it mean for you to be feminist?
- How have you become feminist?
- How do you negotiate your feminist beliefs with other areas of your life such as family, friends, partners?

I plan to explore these questions through the life histories of young women who are part of the Massey University community in Palmerston North. My experiences as a young feminist woman will also be included in the thesis alongside those of the women I interview.

If you agree to participate in the research you will be asked to meet with me for a series of three interviews, each up to two hours long. They will take place at a time and place convenient to you and I would like to use a tape recorder if that is acceptable.

As I would like you, as a participant, to be involved in the analysis of your experiences you would be invited to discuss your transcripts of the interviews as well as my analysis of your experiences. You will also be given a copy of your transcripts to keep.

This project complies with the ethical procedures set out by the Sociological Association of Aotearoa/New Zealand. If you agree to participate in the study the following ethical procedures would be followed. That:

1. You would tell Helena Court, the researcher, when it is convenient for you to see her.
2. You do not have to answer questions you are uncomfortable with.

3. Your confidentiality would be kept through the following measures:
 - All names and any special characteristics that would lead to your identification or those of whom you refer to, will be changed.
 - Interview tapes will only be listened to by Helena Court and an assistant who will transcribe the tapes. The assistant will sign an agreement that she or he will treat the tapes as confidential and will not discuss them with anyone other than Helena Court.
 - The interview tapes will not be released to anyone and will be yours to decide what to do with at the end of the research.
4. You will be shown the transcript from your interview and will be given the opportunity to indicate the material that you do not wish to be used, or that can be used but not connected with the false name you will be given. You will be given a typed transcript of this material to keep.
5. If you request access to publications from the research these will be supplied.
6. You are free to withdraw from the research project at any time.
7. You are free to ask any further questions about the study that occur to you during your participation.
8. At any time during the research you can renegotiate this agreement with Helena Court.

This research project is being jointly supervised by Ms Nicola Armstrong, Sociology Department, Massey University and Dr Brian Ponter, Sociology Department, Massey University.

I look forward to your participation in this research. I will contact you again in the next four days and am contactable myself at the following locations:

Work: Sociology Department
 Social Sciences Tower Room 8.23
 Massey University
 (06) 356 9099 extension 8741

Home: 103a Manawatu Street
 Palmerston North
 (06) 358 7774

Thank you for your time.

Yours sincerely

Helena Court

APPENDIX 3

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

SECTION ONE

Definitions of and entry into feminism

- 1 How would you define feminism?
- 2 Do you use the word 'feminist' to describe yourself?
- 3 What does being feminist means to you?
- 4 Can you remember deciding that you were a feminist?
- 5 What was happening for you at that time?
- 6 Was there anyone around you at that time who you feel influenced your identifying as a feminist?
- 7 Where or from whom do you think you have learnt the most about feminism?
- 8 Do you think your understanding of feminism has changed through time? How?
- 9 Can you describe to me what a feminist is like?
- 10 Could you describe for me an ideal feminist person?
- 11 How do you see yourself in relation to other feminist women (on an individual and collective basis)?
- 12 How do you think feminism is seen by non-feminists?
- 13 Why do you think feminism is seen this way?
- 14 How do you see non-feminist women?

Feminism as a social movement and theoretical tradition

- 15 What do you think are the most important issues for feminism today?
 - 16 Are there any issues/areas that are important to you personally?
 - 17 Do you know about the different theories within feminism?
- If no go to (21). If yes:
- 18 Where did this knowledge about the different theories come from?
 - 19 Do you prefer any one theory in particular?
 - 20 Does this 'theoretical feminism' differ from your personal feminist beliefs? In what ways?
 - 21 Do you think academic feminism has a place within the feminist movement?
 - 22 Do you agree with the way academic feminism explores the issues of feminism (for example - the construction of gendered identities, violence in the home, pornography)?
 - 23 Can you tell me what you know about the feminist movement in the 1960s and 1970s?
 - 24 What do you think about the form the movement took during this period?
 - 25 Can you tell me how you see the 'feminist movement' now?
 - 26 Do you see yourself as having a place within this 'movement'? What?
 - 27 Do any of the different stages of the feminist movement appeal more to you?
 - 28 What directions do you see the feminist movement taking in the future?

SECTION TWO

General

29 Can you tell me why you think you became a feminist?

Family

- 30 Tell me about your family
- ~ family history - location etc
 - ~ family size, composition
 - ~ parents marital status
 - ~ parents background
 - ~ parents occupations
 - ~ siblings occupations
 - ~ contact with wider family
- 31 What do your different family members think about feminism?
- 32 Can you think of a time when there was conflict around gender in your family? Can you tell me about it?
- 33 Was the conflict with that person an ongoing influence in the development of your feminism?
- 34 Did your relationship with your mother influence the development of your feminism? In what ways?
- 35 What is her response to your feminism now?
- 36 Did your relationship with your sister influence the development of your feminism? In what ways?
- 37 What is her response to your feminism now?
- 38 Did your relationship with your grandmother(s) influence the development of your feminism? In what ways?
- 39 Do you think your relationship with the men in your family influenced your feminism? How?
- 40 Were/are any of the members of your family interested or active in political movements/issues?

41 Do you think that this involvement influenced the development of your feminism in any ways? How?

Now

42 What is your role in your family?

43 Do you think that your feminism influences how you carry out this role?

44 Do you think your feminism causes any conflict in your family?

45 How do you deal with this?

46 Do you ever present your feminist views differently because you are with your family?
In what ways?

47 Do you ever bring your feminist understandings into negotiating family relations?

Friends

48 Did you identify as feminist while you were at school?

49 Tell me about the friends you had while you were at school.

50 Were any of your friends interested in feminism?

51 What were their family situations?

52 Do you think that your friends influenced you in relation to feminism? In what ways?

53 Did you talk about feminism or women's issues with your friends?

54 Was feminism ever an issue in your friendships?

55 Did your friends agree, disagree or not care about feminism?

56 How did you deal with this?

57 Did you have different experiences with your male and female friends?

58 Were (are) any of your friends critical of your feminism?

59 How did you deal with this?

60 Were any of your friends interested or active in other political movements/issues?

(These questions will be applied to varsity friends as well if the women became feminist at varsity)

Education

61 Tell me about your school.

62 Tell me what being a girl at your school was like.

63 Do you remember any differential treatment of girls and boys?

64 Do you remember any issues of gender or gender relations being raised by your school? (for example - sexual harassment)

65 Do you remember any programs that aimed to encourage girls being run at your school?

66 If yes: what did you think of these?

67 Were any of your teachers interested in feminism or issues of gender?

68 Did any of your teachers express negative attitudes about feminism or women's lib ideas?

69 Did you ever discuss feminist ideas with your teachers?

70 Do you remember any of your teachers introducing feminism into the syllabus?

71 Do you remember the 'Girls can do anything' campaign?

72 What did you think about it?

Media

73 Which media form(s) do you prefer? (television, magazines, films, books, video, radio or newspapers)

74 Which of these occupy more of your time? Why

75 Do you think the media presents women (and men) in a particular way? What?

- 76 How do you respond to this presentation?
- 77 Do you think the media presents or deals with issues of feminism or gender? How? In what ways?
- 78 Have you sought out specific forms of media because they have dealt with feminism or gender issues? What forms? Why?
- 79 Do you think that representations of feminism in the media has influenced your development as a feminist? How?

Work

- 80 Have you ever had a full-time or part-time job?
- 81 Tell me about this/these?
- 82 Did you ever talk about feminism at work?
- 83 Did you ever talk about feminism with your work mates outside of work?
- 84 How did you feel about this?
- 85 Do you think your feminism influences how you are at work? (in relation to the work task, your work mates, employers)

SECTION THREE

General

- 86 What do you see as the relationship between your feminist beliefs and the way you live your life?
- 87 How do you put your feminist beliefs into practice?
- 88 Do you do things that you may not agree with politically? What?
- 89 How do you negotiate this?
- 90 Have you ever felt uncomfortable about people knowing that you are feminist?

- 91 How have you negotiated this?
- 92 Have you ever purposely not discussed your feminism or challenged sexist attitudes or practices? When?
- 93 How do you negotiate these situations?
- 94 Do you feel different about being feminist in different social settings and around different people? Tell me about this.

Sexuality and Partners

- 95 Do you think there are any links between your sexual 'identity' and your position as a feminist?
- 96 Have you ever considered a different sexual 'identity'?
- 97 Did feminism have any influence on this consideration?
- 98 Do you think that your feminism influences your choice of partners?
- 99 Do you think feminism influences your relationships? How?
- 100 Does feminism influence your sexual practices?
 - ~ in relation to contraceptive choice
 - ~ controlling how often you have sexual contact
 - ~ who stays at whose house over night
- 101 Do you think your feminism causes any conflict in your relationships?
- 102 What form does this take?
- 103 How do you negotiate this conflict?
- 104 What do you think about men and feminism?
- 105 Do you think they have a place in the movement? What?
- 106 How do you feel about men calling themselves feminists?
- 107 Do you think your feelings about men's relationship to feminism influences how you negotiate your relationships?

Family

Current living arrangements

- 108 Can you tell me about your current living arrangements?
~ who living with, ages, gender etc
~ what do those you live with do
- 109 Do you think your feminism has influenced how you choose to live? How?
- 110 Has feminism influenced how you organise your home life? How?
- 111 What place does your feminism have in your home?
- 112 Do you ever present your feminist views differently because of those you are living with? In what ways?
- 113 Do you ever bring your feminist understandings into negotiating relationships at home?
- 114 Do you think your feminism causes any conflict in your home?
- 115 Can you give me an example?
- 116 How do you deal with this conflict?
- 117 Are the home chores divided among the different home members?
- 118 How do you do this? (Who has responsibility for what?)
~ housework
~ cooking
~ shopping
~ outside work
~ child care
- 119 Do you think that your feminism influences who does what in your household?

Friends

Varsity Friends (if different from friends from school)

- 120 Does feminism have any place in your friendships?
- 121 Do your different friends have different feelings about feminism to you?

- 121 How do you respond to this?
- 123 Do you have friends who are not feminist?
- 124 How do you deal with this?
- 125 Are any of your friends critical of your feminism?
- 126 How do you negotiate this?

Ethnicity

- 127 With what ethnic group do you identify?
- 128 What does this 'identity' mean to you?
- 129 What do you see as the relationship between your ethnic 'identity' and your feminism?
- 130 Do you think that your ethnic 'identity' influences your feminism and the reverse?
- 131 What do you see as the relationship between your ethnic 'identity' and your gender?
- 132 Do you place more importance on one 'identity' than the other?
- 133 Do you think that your ethnicity and the cultural practices that accompany it lead to you altering the presentation of your feminist beliefs?
- 134 How do you negotiate this?
- 135 Have you ever felt that your feminism has been inappropriate because of the cultural beliefs of your ethnic group?
- 136 Do you think there are conflicts between your ethnic 'identity' and your identity as a feminist?
- 137 How have you dealt with this?
- 138 Does your feminism help you to think through issues of ethnicity?
- 139 Have you ever felt that your feminism has been inappropriate because of the cultural beliefs of another ethnic group?
- 140 Does your feminism influence your approach to issues of racism?

Class

- 141 Do you see yourself as belonging to a class group? What?
- 142 Where do you see your class 'identity' stemming from - Your current situation or your family of origin?
- 143 If your family's class location is different from your current position - how do you deal with this?
- 144 Do you think there is any relationship between your class 'identity' and your feminism? What?
- 145 Do you think that your class 'identity' has influenced your feminism (and the reverse)?
- 146 Do you think your feminist beliefs have ever been inappropriate either in your own class group or in another class group? Tell me about this.
- 147 Do you think there are conflicts between your class 'identity' and your feminism?
- 148 How have you negotiated these?

Conclusion

- 149 Do you think that your feminist 'identity' has influenced the way you see yourself as a woman?
- 150 Do you think that your experiences as a woman have influenced your position as a feminist?
- 151 Do you think that your feminism has influenced your level of self-confidence?
- 152 Do you think that feminism has influenced the direction your life has taken so far?
- 153 Do you think that feminism has influenced your plans for the future - in terms of work, marriage, children and the home?

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