The Imperative to Succeed:

Women Tertiary Students' Negotiations of Higher Education and Intimate Partner Relationship Expectations

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Abstract

This study seeks to understand how women tertiary students negotiate their expectations of higher education and intimate partner relationships. It makes these explorations within postfeminist and neoliberal contexts which assume that gender equality has been fully achieved and that success is a matter of individual effort and merit. Narrative-discursive analysis was used to explore the narratives of eight women who were either current or recently graduated tertiary students in Aotearoa New Zealand. Participants occupied multiple standpoints and self-identifications, including Pākehā, Māori, and Pakistani; single, in a relationship and married; heterosexual and gay; middle and working classes. Neoliberal contexts shaped all of the women's discursive negotiations. They emphasised the psychological pressures they experienced as young women to succeed in multiple sociocultural terrains – academically, at work, and in relationships. Participants narrated and negotiated these pressures through two prominent discourses: the successful girls discourse (Ringrose, 2007); and a companionate relationship discourse (Blair, 2017). Through the successful girls discourse, the women positioned themselves as 'natural' high achievers for whom tertiary study was both a personal pleasure and a social obligation. Participants struggled to integrate discourses of post-feminist gender equality with the heteronormative life trajectories they felt were expected of them, which included marrying and having children. Through a companionate relationship discourse, the women attempted to ease some of the narrative tensions, such as by positioning themselves as receiving nurturance and care from their partners. However, the women were constrained by the ongoing imperative to succeed relationally and professionally. They deployed rational economic language to describe 'working' at their relationships, while lacking a discourse through which to talk about gendered emotional labour within intimate partner relationships. My analysis of the women's narratives emphasises the need for increased discursive resources to describe, recognise and resist otherwise still invisible gendered heteronormative performances which occur within intimate partner relationships, such as women's emotional labour.

Acknowledgements

"...I thought at last that it was time to roll up the crumpled skin of the day, with its arguments and its impressions and its anger and its laughter, and cast it into the hedge."

— Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929/2015, p. 18)

To the women who shared your stories with me – thank you for welcoming me into your narratives.

To my supervisors, Professor Mandy Morgan and Dr Clifford Van Ommen – thank you for all your support, curiosity, guidance, and humour.

And to my mother, my aunt, my late grandmother – perpetual thanks and love.

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CHAPTER 1: Introduction: Narrative beginnings

A room of one's own

First published in 1929, Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929/2015) set a memorable scene for English women's worth: a perfectly rolled lawn at Oxbridge College, which the anonymous narrator ("call me Mary Beton, Mary Seton, Mary Carmichael or by any name you please—it is not a matter of any importance" (p. 4)) crosses during her rambling walk through the campus. No sooner has she set foot on the lawn than she is chased off by a university Beadle, or usher. As Woolf writes,

> Instantly a man's figure rose to intercept me. Nor did I at first understand that the gesticulations of a curious-looking object, in a cut-away coat and evening shirt, were aimed at me. His face expressed horror and indignation. Instinct rather than reason came to my help; he was a Beadle; I was a woman. This was the turf; there was the path. Only the Fellows and Scholars are allowed here; the gravel is the place for me. (Woolf, 1929/2015, p. 5)

So Woolf begins her exploration of the conditions for women's fiction writing, or lack thereof, which she later delivered in lecture form at Cambridge University's two women's colleges, Newnham and Girton. Fictionalised though it is, Woolf's essay makes her point clear. Universities were contested grounds, where men held not only cultural and scholarly privileges, but material means. They were served better meals, held the keys to libraries, could stroll across the sacred turf all they liked. Crucially, they had money and a room of their own – the material conditions Woolf argued all women writers needed, too, if they were to challenge the reams of knowledge on which men had written women's aspirations, experiences, wants, and desires for centuries.

Ninety years after Woolf's essays were penned, women are no longer chased off university lawns. Women outnumber men in tertiary study participation. In alignment with other Western countries (Parvazian, Gill, & Chiera, 2017), 13% of women in Aotearoa New Zealand were enrolled in tertiary institutes, compared to 9% of men in 2017. Women in New Zealand also outnumber men in post-graduate participation, at 7% compared to 4% in 2017 (Ministry of Education, 2018).[1] Yet tertiary institutes and campuses are far from uncontested spaces. Within a postfeminist and posthumanist social landscape, the texts, knowledge bases, and orientations of Western universities still continue to privilege androcentric and Eurocentric points of view (Charteris, 2018), bound up as Western masculinity is with assumptions of rationality, scientific mindedness, and objective authority (Braidotti, 2000). Scaffolding from knowledge bases to economic security, or in Woolf's (1929/2015) sense, from libraries to lunchrooms, blunt disparities remain between men's and women's incomes, despite women's increased participation in tertiary education. The Ministry for Women's 2018 Annual Report showed that women in Aotearoa New Zealand earned 9.2% less than men in 2018, with an estimated 80% of this gender pay gap due to "conscious and unconscious bias against women, gender-based stereotypes, and different behaviours between men and women" (Ministry for Women, 2018, p. 18). The Ministry for Women (2017, 2018) do not provide a theoretical basis for what they term gendered bias, but describe it as an innocuous form of gender discrimination which influences significant workplace decisions about hiring, promotions, and salary negotiations, as well as daily workplace behaviours such as men's contributions being more highly valued in meetings, and men being offered more challenging tasks which accelerate their career progressions. The Ministry for Women's formulation of "different behaviours between men and women" (2018, p. 18) is similarly theoretically scant. Perhaps most significant amongst these 'behaviours' is that women more frequently require flexible working conditions than men, due to their high likelihood of being primary family caregivers. Thus, women's unpaid domestic labour operates within gendered and heteronormative family and work structures to systematically constrict women's incomes and career progressions.

[1] However, tertiary participation for both women and men fell significantly from 2007 to 2017, explained in part by the global financial crisis between 2007-2008, which increased unemployment in New Zealand and drove enrolments in tertiary education (Ministry of Education, 2018).

Intersecting disparities

In the post-colonial and multicultural context of Aotearoa New Zealand, gendered disparities in economic security intersect with race and class to most disadvantage women from minoritarian[2] communities. For example, Māori and Pacific Island mothers are particularly vulnerable to low wage employment (Ministry for Women, 2018), even as Māori and Pacific Island participation in tertiary education increased from 2007 to 2017 by 0.6 percentage points for Māori and 1.2 for Pacific Island peoples (Ministry of Education, 2018). In the Ministry of Women 2018 report, women made up 60% of minimum wage employees and were more likely to be unemployed or underemployed than men. High achieving women are still hitting glass ceilings, being unlikely to reach senior management and leadership positions in the private sector. For example, only 20% of board positions and 19% of "senior leadership positions in NZ Stock Exchange (NZX) listed companies" were held by women (Ministry for Women, 2018, p. 17). When women do reach high income positions, income disparity rises sharply, with women being paid 20% less than men. Substantive income differences between mothers and fathers reflect enduring gendered biases in how parenting and paid work is balanced, with the careers of mothers being permanently set back by maternity leave (Ministry for Women, 2018).

The economic disparities experienced by women do not occur within discrete 'public' spheres, but are embedded within broader social power relations which structure and affect women's wellbeing at all levels of their professional and personal lives (Gavey, 2005; Gill, Kelan, & Scharff, 2017; Hancock, 2017). Feminist research has shown the incredibly complex psychological and discursive challenges women are facing in the early 21st century, as their lives are shaped by popular narratives of liberal feminist gains and 'girl power' (Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2001). Girls are expected to be high achievers at school (Ringrose, 2007), an anticipation that continues through to adulthood, as women are expected to succeed in highly competitive academic and work settings (Baker, 2010; Walkerdine, 2003). Simultaneously, women are negotiating complex gendered expectations at home, such as in their experiences of desire (Brown, Schmidt, & Robertson, 2018; Dowling, 2017), heteronormative gender roles in their intimate partner relationships (Blair, 2017; Campbell,

[2] Minotorian as minority-becoming within intersectional locations, not as a binary minority to majority (Braidotti, 2002)

2017), and constructions of motherhood within societies that value paid employment as the basis of citizenship (Hays, 1996; Kahu & Morgan, 2010). Thus, the prevalence of women in tertiary institutes does not capture the gendered nuances of women's experiences of seeking higher education nor their transition to the workforce following graduation, as women attempt to interweave their academic and professional achievements with gendered expectations.

Social power relations in women's intimate partner relationships

Within the specific context of women's intimate partner relationships, gendered social power relations operate through many diffuse forms. These forms include the socially innocuous pressure on women in heterosexual relationships to perform the majority of domestic labour in the home and within the family[3], even as women have increasingly entered labour markets in the last decade and as men increasingly participate in unpaid caregiving. For example, a Department of Labour (2009) report found that while men's participation in unpaid childcare had "risen dramatically" since the 1970s, women had also increased the time they spent performing childcare; when these dual increases were accounted for, women were still spending more than double the time caring for children than their heterosexual partners, whilst regularly performing more housework (Department of Labour, 2009, p. 5). Even when men regularly participated in childcare, they were highly unlikely to be the primary caregiver, taking a secondary role (Department of Labour, 2009). A working paper by the New Zealand Treasury (Callister, 2007) explored longitudinal changes in gendered participation in paid and unpaid work. Based on statistics from the 2001 census[4], it found that of "partnered mothers with a child under five who had no formal qualifications," 47% participated in paid work. Of partnered mothers with "post-school qualifications," 64% participated in paid work (Callister, 2007, p. 5). The report did not consider the emotional labour performed by women in heterosexual relationships, though it did consider the emotional labour performed by women in professional contexts, noting that they were required to "sell" their emotional labour "often at a low price" (Callister, 2007, p. 18). This focus aligns with governmental moves to

[3] Termed "Double days," wherein women in heterosexual relationships came home from a full day of paid employment to carry out a second shift of domestic labour at home, consisting of childcare, cooking, cleaning, and so on (Wharton, 1994).

[4] I was not able to find reports using more recent statistics on gendered divisions in paid and unpaid labour in Aotearoa New Zealand, though I hesitate to claim that such reports do not exist somewhere.

increasingly construct and value women's labour through rational economic discourses (Kahu & Morgan, 2010), within a broader societal context which fails to acknowledge or value women's emotional, relational and domestic labour performed within heterosexual intimate partner relationships. Through a feminist lens, Fahs and Swank (2017) distinguish gendered 'surface acting' associated with workplace emotional labour ("where women behave in friendly and 'nice' ways even if they feel bored, angry, or frustrated") from the 'deep acting' performed by women in their intimate contexts, which involves women "try[ing] to convince themselves that they really are feeling the emotions required of them" (p. 47). Rational economic discourses tend to obscure women's emotional labour and their social contexts, "constructing women as rational individuals driven primarily by financial need" (Kahu & Morgan, 2010, p. 56).

Alongside these gendered pressures, women in Aotearoa New Zealand continue to experience a "silent" epidemic of intimate partner violence (IPV (Hancock, 2017, p. 2; Towns & Scott, 2013)). For example, the New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse data summary for 2017 reported that one in three New Zealand women have experienced physical and/or sexual violence in their lifetime. However, this figure rises to 55% when psychological and emotional abuse is included (New Zealand Family Violence Clearinghouse, 2017). Nor are women tertiary students protected from IPV. As early as 1991, Nicola Gavey highlighted through feminist psychological research the prevalence of sexual violence experienced by New Zealand university students. Of the 347 women students Gavey surveyed, 51.6% had experienced "some form of sexual victimization," while 25.3% reported having been raped (Gavey, 1991, p. 464). The majority of sexual violence occurred within women's heterosexual relationships. Twenty six years later, in response to inadequate efforts from successive New Zealand governments and tertiary institutes to address sexual violence on and off campus, Thursdays in Black (2017) surveyed 1,403 Aotearoa New Zealand tertiary students about their experiences of sexual violence. 81% of respondents thought that sexual violence is a problem in student communities (p. 19); and 48% of respondents had seen or heard another person acting in a sexually violent or harassing way (p. 18). Increasing focus on sexual violence in student communities in Aotearoa New Zealand (Stewart, 2019) informs continuing controversy over universities' lack of effort to address IPV amongst students and staff (Duff, 2019; MacManus & Mau, 2019). Although my research project does not focus specifically on IPV, the prevalence of IPV within Aotearoa academic spaces and women's

relationships more generally makes it a salient aspect of the wider sociocultural context in which my project lies.

The structure of the research project

Clearly, women in Aotearoa New Zealand still experience many challenges to their psychological, financial, physical, and relational wellbeing. The key focus of this study is how women negotiate gendered pressures and challenges in their *intersecting expectations* of higher education and intimate partner relationships. Central to the formation of my research questions are feminist conceptualisations of postfeminist sensibilities and contexts. McRobbie, in her media analysis of postfeminism, defines postfeminism as a set of discourses which "actively draw on and invoke feminism as that which can be taken into account in order to suggest that equality is achieved, in order to install a whole repertoire of meanings which emphasize that it is no longer needed, a spent force" (McRobbie, 2004, p. 4). I unpack postfeminism more fully in my literature review; here, I wish to note its relevance to women's discursive constructions of intimate partner relationships (Blair, 2017) and its influence on the naturalisation of gender-binary educational discourses which pit girls and boys against one another in measuring academic achievements (Ringrose, 2007). Other key concepts which I will discuss in my literature review include neoliberalism and heteronormativity. As I will argue, the scaffolding of postfeminist, neoliberal, and heteronormative discourses and ideologies within contemporary gendered discourses have an immense impact on girls' and women's expectations – of themselves and others – within both higher educational contexts and intimate partner relationships.

My literature review will begin by outlining these three 'big' concepts – neoliberalism, postfeminism, and heteronormativity – and will then turn to examining research on tertiary women students' relationship expectations. An exploration of the historical contingencies of women's access to tertiary education in Aotearoa New Zealand will follow, in order to trace the roots of gendered ideologies of education and women's roles in relationships and families in this country. I will then discuss my methodological positionings within feminist standpoint theory epistemologies and narrative-discursive analytical strategies. Ethical considerations will be discussed, through feminist research ethics

which emphasise relational practice. Methods will be described and made transparent, as I reflect on the processes of my project. The analysis section is split into two parts which explore the discursive constructions and negotiations of participants, through a combined narrative and discursive analysis of participants' stories. The first part focuses on participants' negotiations of the successful girls discourse; the second part on participants' use of the companionate relationship discourse. Throughout, I draw on Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* to elucidate and contextualise women's positions and negotiations within texts – the texts of the past, the discursive texts of the present day, and the embodied texts of women's lives.

Reflecting on my position in the research project

Now I shift into past tense: I came to the project in a somewhat similar position to the participants in my study. I am a self-identifying woman, a tertiary student, and I exist within the complex and oftentimes confusing (for me at least) terrain of postfeminist and neoliberal discourses. A New Zealand born Pākehā woman, I have had the privilege of being able to pursue higher education without experiencing significant sociocultural or material barriers, though I have experienced the isolation and disjunction of identifying as non-heterosexual in a cultural context where heteronormativity is everywhere and nowhere, entirely integrated into the fabric of families, relationships, and gender. Also reflexively noteworthy: I was not in a relationship when I began the study, which enabled me to occupy particular positions within the interviews and in my theorisation of the project; however, halfway through the study I did enter a relationship, a significant shift to my position which again enabled me to see from different angles and to ask different questions of the research I was undertaking. Throughout, I have attempted to be reflexive in my figuring and re-figuring of the project. Part of that includes shifting my original interests in accordance with my expanding understanding of concepts such as postfeminism and heteronormativity, and as my reading, writing, and deep immersion in the literature and participants' narratives took place. To quote Braun and Clarke in their reflections on reflexive thematic analysis, "qualitative research is about meaning and meaning-making, and viewing these as always context-bound, positioned and situated, and qualitative data analysis is about telling 'stories', about interpreting, and creating, not discovering and finding the 'truth'" (2019, p. 591). I do not attempt to make generalisations about women's experiences or expectations in the project, but rather focus on the meaning-

making of individual women within specific sociocultural locations. My own making of meaning is inseparable from this process, and hence I am also woven throughout this thesis, as every decision, justification and interpretation bears the mark of my own textual embodiment.

CHAPTER 2: Literature review

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism is a complex concept and has assumed multiple theoretical meanings as it has travelled through diverse temporal, political and geographical locations (Redden, Phelan, & Baker, 2020; Wilson, 2018). As a detailed discussion of neoliberalism is beyond the scope of this thesis, I have focussed on the basic ideological tenets of neoliberalism which are most relevant to my research questions. 'Neoliberalism' in its most rudimentary form refers to the Western economic, political, and cultural shifts toward free-market economies which began in the mid-1970s. The ideological basis of neoliberalism is classical liberalism and the Western belief in the supremacy of the individual and their right to personal freedom within democratic societies (Čakardić, 2017; Wilson, 2018). With neoliberalism, however, the locus of this symbolic freedom shifts from the individual to the marketplace itself, such that "widespread access to the opportunities of market society – rather than egalitarian outcomes – [is valued as] the new essence of social democracy" (Redden et al., 2020, p. 68). Along these lines, economic deregulation is purported to enable a marketplace which is value-neutral and driven by the needs of the global community rather than the state (Wilson, 2018). Contemporary outcomes of neoliberal economic interventions in countries such as Australia and New Zealand, however, show that neither hard-lined nor softer 'Third Way' neoliberal governmental policies have enabled equal participation to these markets nor met the welfare needs of society. Rather, the effects of neoliberal governance include ever-increasing wealth inequality and precarious access to housing, employment, health care, education and social welfare (Hodgetts & Stolte, 2017; Pickett & Wilkinson, 2015; Redden et al., 2020).

Ideologically, neoliberalism draws on complex and constantly shifting cultural resources to depict our social worlds as infinitely open and full of choices (Gill & Scharff, 2011). Conversely, the shadowy forms against which neoliberal societies compare themselves to are those deemed to be less free – for example, Middle Eastern societies (Gill, 2007; Scharff, 2012). While neoliberal discourses eschew the role of the state in producing functional modern societies, neoliberalism nevertheless depends upon democratic systems

and the Western, individual, post-industrial assumptions which underpin them (Čakardić, 2017; Wilson, 2018). Mirowski (2009) therefore argues that neoliberalism does not limit the state, but remakes the state according to its rational economic values. In Julie Wilson's (2018) analysis of neoliberalism from a cultural studies standpoint, competition – both in the market and between individuals – is a core feature of neoliberalism, by which its effects are naturalised. Competition is invoked as a positive means through which creative, efficient, and innovative solutions to the 'problems' of the modern social world can be developed (Wilson, 2018, p. 2). A similar normalisation of competition as a social good has occurred within schools and tertiary institutes, producing a constant need for students (and academics) to outperform their peers, with concomitant anxiety and insecurity lest they fail to do so (Ringrose, 2007; Roper, 2018; Walkerdine, 2003). Thus, the "historical project" (Louth & Potter, 2017a, p. 4) of neoliberalism with its ambiguous temporal starting and ending points discursively renders economic rationalism, meritocratic success, and individual autonomy as the conclusive means of ordering 'modern' life.

Much scholarship has focussed on how neoliberal ideologies inform and regulate subjectivities (e.g., Louth & Potter, 2017b; Martinsson & Reimers, 2017; Rutherford, 2018). Working from a Foucauldian position, Nikolas Rose (1996) theorises that neoliberalism operates through the internalisation of its authority and ideologies within its subjects. As Western citizens enmeshed within neoliberal ideologies of freedom (Louth & Potter, 2017a), we may come to focus so thoroughly on our autonomy that our attention shifts from the enduring inegalitarian structures in our societies to our individual efforts at self-improvement and success (Čakardić, 2017; Gill, 2007). Here, Rose's theorisation of psy-discourses is crucial to explaining how neoliberal ideals of freedom and competition intersect with "contemporary regimes of selfhood" (Rose, 1996, p. 20). Rose's (1996) use of 'psy' discourses refers to the discourses produced within the 'psychosciences' – especially psychology, psychiatry, and psychoanalysis, but also extending to psychotherapy, counselling, self-help books, and so on. As psy-discourses developed in the 19th and 20th centuries along with other dominant knowledge claims, they rendered 'human subjects' thinkable as discrete and interior beings. Psychological truth claims about subjectivity relied on two assumptions: firstly, that we have an essential and "unified 'personality', an 'identity' to be revealed, discovered, or worked on" (Rose, 1996, p. 39); and secondly, that through the interventions of psy-technologies, we can modify and improve upon ourselves. As psy-

discourses have intersected with neoliberal ideals of freedom and individual autonomy, increased fervour for self-improvement and modification have ensued, heightened by discourses of competition and productivity. Thus, Rose conceptualises neoliberal subjectivity as a performance or 'machination' of the self, in which freedom becomes not only a privilege but an obligation:

> The forms of freedom we inhabit today are intrinsically bound to a regime of subjectification in which subjects are not merely 'free to choose,' but *obliged to be free*, to understand and enact their lives in terms of choice under conditions that systematically limit the capacities of so many to shape their own destiny. Human beings must interpret their past, and dream their future, as outcomes of personal choices made or choices still to make yet within a narrow range of possibilities whose restrictions are hard to discern because they form the horizon of what is thinkable. (Rose, 1996, p. 17)

Women have featured heavily in neoliberal culture, as major beneficiaries of liberal expansionism. Emerging amidst the 1990s theme songs of 'girl power,' women were depicted as capitalising on the newly deregulated marketplace (Rutherford, 2018). Simultaneously, however, the economic mechanisms underpinning neoliberal systems continue to systematically marginalise and deprive social groups through the intersecting structures of gender, race, and class (Smele, Siew-Sarju, Chou, Breton, & Bernhardt, 2017). Feminist research in the United Kingdom has particularly focussed on how neoliberal ideals of freedom have intersected with the liberal feminist gains made from the 1970s to produce a complex and fractured narrative of 'achieved' gender equality, generally referred to as postfeminism (Ringrose, 2007; Walkerdine, 2003; Walkerdine et al., 2001). I discuss postfeminism in its own section, but here I wish to emphasise the significance of neoliberal ideals of freedom, choice, and self-improvement to the discursive construction of gendered expectations for girls and women in the early 21st century. For Jessica Ringrose, this construction rests on "a new seductive narrative about girls' educational and workplace success, where girls have become a 'metaphor' for social mobility and social change" (Ringrose, 2007, p. 472). This narrative relies upon the widespread promulgation of decontextualised and gender-binary measures of girls' and women's educational achievements, such as women's high rates of participation in tertiary education, which creates

a false representation of women's freedom and progress. Applying Rose's (1996) Foucauldian analysis of how neoliberal subjectivity is performed and reformed to the successful girls' narrative, it is possible to see how girls' and young women themselves become the arbiters of neoliberal and postfeminist ideologies. Proclaimed as now 'equal' to men and positioned within an apparently 'free' social terrain where success is narrated as the outcome of individual merit and hard work, neoliberal girls and women are, to return to Rose's quote, "*obliged to be free*, to understand and enact their lives in terms of choice" (1996, p. 17). Success is therefore positioned as a choice girls and women make for their lives (Čakardić, 2017). By choosing to work hard, having an inborn drive to succeed, and stretching their 'freedom' as far as it will go, girls and women will be rewarded by social and capital gains – or so the neoliberal narrative promises. Here, psy-discourses of limitless self-improvement may bolster the performance of neoliberal and postfeminist 'machinations of the self,' encouraging girls and women to see themselves as endlessly improvable. The story of women's success in the neoliberal era is therefore a highly suspicious one, criticised by feminist scholars for symbolizing women's empowerment through individual and capitalist rhetoric (Gill, 2007; Blair, 2017).

Postfeminism

Postfeminism emerges in a complex relationship with discourses of neoliberal success. It equates women's consumption with women's achievement of gender equality, positioning free choice as a feminist act (Čakardić, 2017). In doing so, postfeminism narrates a version of women's empowerment which repudiates the need for ongoing feminist political engagement. Rosalind Gill's (2007, 2008) research has substantially contributed to our understanding of postfeminism: she theorises that postfeminism is not a concept or idea, but a sensibility which is contingent upon our taking-for-granted the distillation of feminist ideals in our current society. And, as McRobbie (2004) argues, to take feminism for granted, we must have already developed a sense that feminism has passed away. Crucially, and aligning with Rose's (1996) theory of internalised neoliberal subjectivity, women themselves are likely to endorse this postfeminist narrative. For example, Baker's (2008) qualitative research with 55 young women in North Queensland, Australia showed that the neoliberal imperative of choice and the postfeminist narrative of achieved equality was readily used by the women participants as a moral interpretive lens through which they judged their own and other

women's life circumstances. By discursively emphasising the neoliberal narrative of limitless self-improvement, "disadvantage such as racism or sexual violence was consistently passed over and strength through adversity emphasised" in the women's narratives (Baker, 2008, p. 60). Even more pertinent to my own project was how the young women narrated gender equality as already or almost achieved: "In general, an unproblematic, progressive trajectory towards equality was imagined by the young women, regardless of class, young motherhood and race" (Baker, 2008, p. 56).

Demonstrating Ringrose's (2007) articulation of postfeminism as "complex representational terrain, temporal, political, theoretical (etc) where both backlash and destabilization result" (2007, p. 477), Christine Scharff's (2012) research with young German women showed that in tangent with believing in women's liberation, they held pervasive negative attitudes about feminism. Not only was feminism seen as a redundant and extreme movement, but it was explicitly associated with being a lesbian, hating men, and lacking femininity. More complex and destabilizing negotiations occurred in Calder-Dowe and Gavey's (2017) research on feminist identities in Aotearoa New Zealand. They interviewed 18 feminist-identifying teenagers in Auckland (15 women, 3 men) to understand how neoliberal ideologies of 'authentic selfhood' and feminist identifications intersected in their discursive positionings. Participants who took a feminist position described feminism as central to their 'true self' and identity, with authentic selfhood justifying the uptake of feminism. Feminist identifications also enabled teenagers to engage with "counter-normative feelings, actions, and desires" (Calder-Dowe & Gavey, 2017, p. 795) which expanded their trajectories for activism.

(Hetero)sex is at the centre of postfeminist sensibilities; so are photographic and digital images. The male gaze, established through centuries of European art, depicted women as the objects of male pleasure and the vessels of a submissive feminine sexuality (Berger, Blomberg, Fox, Dibb, & Hollis, 1972). Similar to androcentric scientific research, the male gaze also performed a "god trick" (Haraway, 2004, p. 88) whereby the person for whom the painting was produced, the onlooker or consumer, is located out of view. By standing beyond the reach of the canvas, the male gaze subverts its own situatedness, hence instilling heteronormativity as the universal, objective, godlike viewpoint. Gill's (2008) analysis of advertising images showed that women in the 2000s were increasingly depicted as the

observers and consumers of their own sexualised bodies, who looked upon themselves with an emboldened sense of their own sexuality. The image of the sexually liberated neoliberal woman thus promotes and capitalises on the idea that women are now equal partners with men (Gill, 2008; Gill & Scharff, 2011). Through the circulation and repetition of such images and discourses, girls and young women are growing up impelled to see themselves through a sexual lens, though not necessarily a feminist lens (Gill, 2008; Tolman, 2005). They are taught to ask: am I sexual enough, and in the right ways (Marx & Donaldson, 2015)? For Gill, the postfeminist sensibility rests upon taking for granted the internalisation of this question. Research on women's experiences of desire suggest that women must appear to be 'always up for it,' – sex, that is. They must be ready to take care of their partner's sexual needs, and to look as though they enjoy doing so, too, even when that sex is painful and degrading (Dowling, 2017). Simultaneously, however, they must also regulate their sexuality, ensuring that they are not seen as being too sexual, or in inappropriate ways (Pickens & Braun, 2018). Thus, as Gill (2007, 2008) argues, a mere twenty years of postfeminist history has not eliminated the visual regulations of heteronormativity. Women still look at themselves with a 'male in the head' (Holland, Ramazanoglu, Sharpe, & Thomson, 1998), critiquing their own and other women's appearances and performances of femininity even within a postfeminist milieu (Riley, Evans, & Mackiewicz, 2016).

Heteronormativity

Heteronormativity has its conceptual roots in the cross-disciplinary interweaving of post-structuralist (e.g., Butler, 1990/2006; Foucault, 1978/1981) feminist (e.g., Rich, 1980/2003; Rubin, 1993), and queer (e.g., Warner, 1991) scholarship. My use of heteronormativity in this research project is informed by feminist post-structuralist theories of how heterosexual 'norms' are produced and come to regulate society. Within such theorisations, heteronormativity depends upon the essentialist assumption that both sex and heterosexuality are pre-discursive biological qualities. In a post-structuralist move similar to those articulated earlier by Foucault (1978/1981) and later by Nikolas Rose (1996), Judith Butler (1990/2006, p. viii) in *Gender Trouble* sought to problematise, deregulate, and open up new possibilities for understanding how not only gender but sex are socially constructed categories. Written in response to what Butler described as "a pervasive heterosexual assumption in feminist literary theory" (p. viii) in the 1980s, she argued that sex is performed

through linguistic and theatrical acts which inscribe and reinscribe the 'body' as male/masculine or female/feminine. Thus, the social construction of sex/gender as an "interior essence" which operates within binary and regulated forms *generates* "an expectation which ends up producing the very phenomenon that it anticipates" (Butler, 1990/2006, p. xv). Through the naturalisation of sex comes the normalisation of gendered and sexual binaries, a process which relies on the assumption of an 'other' who is less than and lacks something of the normal subject's essential form. As Virginia Woolf succinctly wrote in *A Room of One's Own*, "Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its natural size" (1929/2015, p. 27).

Prior to Butler's (1990/2006) *Gender Trouble*, Adrienne Rich (1980/2003) had critiqued the unquestionable ontological status of heterosexuality in some of the feminist scholarship she was reading and responding to in the 1970s and 1980s. Writing from a lesbian feminist standpoint, Rich argued that the implicit naturalisation of heterosexuality relied upon the assumption of a "mythical/biological heterosexual inclination, a 'preference' or 'choice' which draws women to men" (Rich, 1980/2003, p. 17). The devaluing and exploitation of women's labour is a particular focus of Rich's (1980/2003) articulations of compulsory heterosexuality. For Rich, as heterosexuality is normalised it produces in turn the mechanisms by which labour within human societies can be divided between genders and made to look as though such divisions are in the 'natural' order of things. Thus, marriage and motherhood have historically been mandated as the "unpaid productions" of women within heterosexual family systems (Rich, 1980/2003, p. 19). Further still, as Western societies have moved from agrarian to industrialised and post-industrialised economies (Inglehart & Baker, 2000), and women have achieved increasing education and paid employment, they are still expected to perform the majority of unpaid labour within the home and the family (Department of Labour, 2009), and to be paid less for their labour outside of the home (Ministry for Women, 2017).

The "mythical/biological heterosexual inclination" (Rich, 1980/2003, p. 17) links to further feminist research on the discursive constructions of heterosexuality, such as Wendy Hollway's (1984) identification of the male sex drive and the have/hold discourses in heterosexual intimate partner relationships. As Hollway (1984) and other feminist researchers

(Farvid & Braun, 2006; Gavey, 2005; Pickens & Braun, 2018) have shown, the simultaneous construction in Western societies of men as biologically driven to seek sexual relationships with women and of women as asymmetrically driven to seek a man to 'have' and 'hold' in a committed, long-term relationship reinscribes societal norms of masculine dominance and feminine submission (Gavey, 2005). These norms in turn naturalise the power and control of men over women in heterosexual intimate partner relationships, such as in contexts of intimate partner violence (Hancock, 2017).

Relationship expectations and higher education

Tertiary institutions are culturally privileged sites of knowledge production and higher learning. In New Zealand and other western nations, women's access to these sites has been hard won through generations of feminist activism (Morris-Matthews, 2015). As discussed, women now outnumber men as tertiary graduates (Ministry for Women, 2018) and they are discursively positioned within neoliberal and postfeminist narratives as the nominal equals of men, no longer disadvantaged by gender inequality (Baker, 2008; Walkerdine et al., 2001). However, only limited research has been conducted on women tertiary students' negotiations of gendered intimate partner relationship expectations, and how their experiences of higher education influence these expectations and negotiations.

Implications from this limited research suggest that women are negotiating complex and at times precarious gendered and relational positions during their tertiary studies (Blair, 2017; Finn, 2015; Ford, 2012; Gamble & Nelson, 2016). For example, in a study based in Aotearoa New Zealand, Brown, Schmidt, and Robertson (2018) explored the discursive constructions of sexual pleasure by tertiary students, as part of a larger study of first year students' preparedness for living in university halls. Participants were men and women students, who all identified as heterosexual. Titled *"We're like the sex CPR dummies,"* heteronormative and neoliberal narratives of choice and individual agency prevailed in the negotiation of sexual desire between young men and women students, producing unequal gendered sexual relations. For men, the university halls represented a positive space where they could engage in new social and sexual experiences. Women, however, struggled to express and fulfil their sexual desires against the prevailing discursive prioritisation of men's

sexual needs. They were caught between a gendered double bind of not wanting to appear too sexual, whilst also drawing on neoliberal discourses of agency and free choice which positioned them as responsible for their own lack of sexual pleasure within relational encounters. For example, rather than identifying heteronormative constructs as the barriers to their sexual fulfilment, the women participants blamed themselves, stating that they needed to be more explicit in making their sexual needs known if they wanted to experience pleasure. Men's pleasure and coitus resulting in orgasm were prioritised over women's pleasure, self-stimulation, and non-orgasmic sexual experiences, as befits heteronormative sexual discourses.

Emphasising how "sexuality, gender and heterosexuality intersect in variable ways within and between different dimensions of the social" (Jackson, 2006, p. 106), Korobov and Thorne (2009) explored the discursive constructions of heteronormativity within young women's conversations. They found that even without prompting, compulsory romance narratives prevailed in the women's conversations with one another, suggesting that young women expend significant time and energy negotiating intimate partner relationship expectations during their time as tertiary students. Emotional caretaking was a prominent feature in the compulsory romance narratives. Korobov and Thorne describe emotional caretaking as "maintaining romantic harmony, initiating reconciliation and accepting blame for problems" within intimate partner relationships (2009, p. 54); they further link emotional caretaking to discourses of emotional labour and emphasised femininity, such as "the pleasing women discourse" (Phillips, 2000). In Phillips's conceptualisation of the pleasing women discourse, "Women are assumed to lack, or at least to ignore, their own desires. Instead they are urged to cherish the feminine 'virtues' of modesty, attractiveness, and sacrifice to others, particularly men" (2000, p. 39). Discourses of the pleasing woman, emphasised femininity, and emotional labour tend to cohere around the entrenched binary of masculinity as removed from the natural world, informed by cerebral and disembodied intelligence versus femininity as primitive, attached still to the dirt and the soil, more emotional and hence suited to subordinate nurturing roles (Hartsock, 2004). This construction of masculinity and femininity becomes particularly troublesome as young women in academic spaces are required to perform both emphasised femininity in their socialisations and achieve academic success within androcentric knowledge bases (Walkerdine et al., 2001).

Closest to my own research interests in how tertiary women students discursively construct their relationship expectations is Elizabeth Blair's (2017) study interviewing 29 undergraduate women students in the United States. Blair worked from the feminist premise that intimate partner relationships are sites where women directly experience the constraints and possibilities of social power relations. Specifically, she sought to understand how highly educated and high achieving women in academic contexts "construct meanings of intimate relationships and how these meanings are shaped by cultural logics and legacies of women's 'liberation'" (Blair, 2017, p. 672). She located her study within neoliberal and postfeminist contexts. Drawing on research of young girls' academic experiences (for example, Walkerdine, Lucey, & Melody, 2001; Gonick, 2006), she notes the incredible expectations placed on young women to succeed in neoliberal educational and socioeconomic contexts, as such success requires the negotiation of "massive contradictions in gendered expectations for behaviour and achievement" inherent to postfeminism (Blair, 2017, p. 675).

The women in Blair's study expressed complex and resistant feelings toward romantic relationships. The majority positioned their academic achievements and career goals as more central to their lives and identities than relationships, and critically resisted romantic notions of finding everlasting love or 'The One' (Blair, 2017; Burns, 2000). Rather, in a thoroughly neoliberal turn, participants engaged in two dominant "relationship logics." The first was an "independent relationship logic" which positioned relationships as distinct from and irrelevant to personal success; the second was a "companionate relationship logic" whereby intimate partner relationships were considered a mutual source of support and encouragement based primarily on friendship (Blair, 2017, p. 678). Within independent relationship logics, 'healthy' relationships were constructed through a model of women's emotional and financial independence from their partners. Reminiscent of androcentric research stances, independent relationship logics involved occupying a rational and detached perspective which eschewed women's traditionally submissive and nurturing feminine roles within relationships. Albeit constructed through discourses of women's liberation, this imperative of women's independence and success also tended to obscure the structural and gendered imbalances within the women's intimate partner relationships. For example, sometimes participants were so impelled to see themselves as autonomous that they framed relationships in utilitarian terms which limited their ability to express their frustrations with partners.

Alternatively, when participants engaged with companionate relationship logics, emphasis was placed on values such as equality and friendship. From this companionate standpoint, romantic narratives were resisted, positioned as immature, embarrassing and unrealistic. Although quite different in its ideological focus to the independent relationship logic, companionate logics did not reprieve participants of the need to monitor and regulate their emotional labour within relationships. Blair suggests that the women's internalised emotional regulation operates as "a disciplining force that regulates women's sexuality in new ways: women are positioned as individually responsible to strictly monitor not only their emotional expression, but also their emotional cognition" (2017, p. 681). Here, psy-discourses of cognitive control shaped women's internalised disciplinary tactics, as they drew on cognitive psychology's emphasis on self-improving mental computations in their attempts to resist gendered relationship expectations. Participants described the need to carefully monitor the sharing of resources within their relationships, lest as women they accidentally slip into subordinated roles, such as performing more housework than their male partners. The emotional labour required to protect equality within intimate partner relationships thus fell heavily and unequally on women's shoulders, even as they discursively positioned themselves as autonomous and independent women within egalitarian relationships.

As Blair argues, women's adoption of neoliberal, postfeminist relationship logics is no straight-forward task and requires significant psychological exertion. Contradictions in lived experiences and threats to relational equality were managed through "intensive self-management practices" (Blair, 2017, p. 686), which included the use of cost-to-benefit ratios, self-interrogation, and "vigilantly placing limits on [their] acts of care for [their] partner[s]" (2017, p. 684). Thus, participants' need to constantly regulate their relational practices shows the tenuity of women's 'success' in both private and public spheres. In Blair's reading, "gendered threats" continue to constrain women tertiary students, requiring further interrogation of postfeminist relationship narratives.

Conclusion: Technocultural expansions

> *The "eyes" made available in modern technological sciences shatter any idea of passive vision; these prosthetic devices show us that all eyes, including our own organic ones, are active perceptual systems, building in translations and specific ways of seeing, that is, ways of life.* (Haraway, 2004, p. 88)

While the literature review has primarily focussed on discourses and subjectivities, in concluding this section I (re)turn to sight and how sight is situated, processed through organic and digital "active perceptual systems" which frame the world in particular ways, through particular power relations (Haraway, 2004, p. 88). As discussed, media-based feminist research has elucidated some of the ways in which neoliberal, postfeminist women are visually constructed, such as in women's magazines and advertising campaigns (Farvid & Braun, 2006; Gill, 2008). Tracing the manufacturing of these gendered visual constructs back to their ontological sources seems to be a futile task: borne through androcentric eyes which seem to belong to no one, and hence become all the more authoritative for their ability to dodge being placed and named, the plethora of constructed images of ideal women and girls continues unabated, becoming naturalised as the way girls and women can and should appear.

Detached from the material and contextual sites of girls' and women's embodied existences, images of 'ideal women' circulate with ever-increasing rapidity, as discourses of neoliberal choice and postfeminist sexual agency intersect with the proliferation of "'eyes' made available in modern technological sciences" (Haraway, 2004, p. 88). Thus, the development of internet pornography (Lim, Agius, Carrotte, Vella, & Hellard, 2017), Instagram self-presentations (Baker & Walsh, 2018), smartphone dating apps (Thompson, 2018), and the hypersexualisation of women in popular media (Gamble & Nelson, 2016) increases the circulation and transmogrification of these images of ideal femininity. Shaped through a patriarchal lens, imaginary women are nevertheless depicted as choosing their gendered and sexual subjectivities, hence furthering the belief that acts of choice and consumption constitute women's achieved liberation (Čakardić, 2017).

Here, a film noir aesthetic has saturated my text: rain soaked, monochrome, set in some dubitable post-war period, the women characters can never escape the patriarchal gaze

which has constructed them. One familiar plot within a film noir is the death of the femme fatale who will not be compliant (Spicer, 2018); similarly, within a postfeminist setting, feminism itself seems to die in the reconstitution of ‘gender equality’ through a male gaze. So postfeminism stays wedded to androcentrism, just as the good girl marries her man in the satisfying end to a patriarchal film noir narrative (Spicer, 2018). As the reviewed literature has shown, neoliberal postfeminist womanhood is a highly regulated occupation. It is produced and defended by both men and women, occurring on the epoch of visual proliferations, and is deeply entrenched in heteronormative assumptions about masculinity, femininity, relationships, and family structures. In the following section, I turn to the historical contingencies of women’s access to higher education in Aotearoa New Zealand, to trace the ideologies through which women were positioned within academic and domestic spheres.

CHAPTER 3: Historical contingencies

Ideological histories of women's access to tertiary education in Aotearoa New Zealand

> *"...a woman writing thinks back through her mothers."*
> — Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own* (1929/2015, p. 70)

As I turn to the historical contingencies of women's educational and relational expectations in Aotearoa New Zealand, I also return to Virginia Woolf and *A Room of One's Own*. It is 1929 and Anon has changed locations, leaving Oxbridge to infiltrate another androcentric institution of her time – the British Museum. Attempting to trace the histories of women's fiction, our protagonist comes up shorthanded, however, as she faces the terror of women's absence *as writers* from the shelves of the Western canon. Here, she holds to her symbolic English mothers – Aphra Behn, Charlotte Brontë, Jane Austen, and other women who managed to inscribe their fiction, their existence, through paper and ink – in narrating her own standpoint as a woman writer in the early 20th century. For Woolf, a woman writing has no alternative *but* to think back through her mothers, as women have been excluded from and exploited by the fictions of their fathers. As she puts it:

> …almost without exception [women] are shown in their relation to men. It was strange to think that all the great women of fiction were, until Jane Austen's day, not only seen by the other sex, but seen only in relation to the other sex. And how small a part of a woman's life is that; and how little can a man know even of that when he observes it through the black or rosy spectacles which sex puts upon his nose. (Woolf, 1929/2015, p. 60)

On the margins of the British Empire, similar gendered and imperialist ideologies about women's essential nature were central to institutionalising constraints on women's education in Aotearoa New Zealand. As a full discussion of the historical contingencies of women's education is outside the scope of this thesis, I have chosen to focus on the ideological forces active during the first half of the 20th century, when the majority of New

Zealand universities were established. Throughout this time, women's historical access to tertiary education in New Zealand was fraught with ideological barriers, and was vehemently debated in newspaper articles, essays, political speeches, and lectures (Fry, 1985). 'Experts' treated it as both common-sense knowledge and scientific fact that women's inclinations were "one and simple," not "complex and many" (Woolf, 1933/2015, p. 43). Dr Frederick Batchelor exemplified this 'expert' colonial attitude against women's education. In his 1909 public address given in Dunedin, titled *"The Effect of Advanced Education of Women on the Vitality of the Race,"* Batchelor drew on biological discourses to position women as incapable of being other than wives, mothers, and womb-bearers:[5]

> Our present education system encourages and invites young women to enter a course of study for which Nature never intended them. … The average male (medical) student and sometimes the student below the average usually turns out a fairly useful and successful practitioner: the brilliant female student at best only attains mediocrity. (Batchelor, 1909, as cited in Morris Matthews, 2008, p. 77)

Many women, and some men, publicly disagreed. They drew on humanist and early feminist writing, such as Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792/2014), to argue that women were rational beings whose lack of access to higher education not only deprived women themselves of moral fulfilment, but their husbands of intelligent companionship. Dr Agnes Bennett evoked this public sentiment in her reply to Dr Batchelor, as she mocked his use of biological determinism in making political claims:

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[5] For comparative emphasis, I include gendered comments from Massey University's ex-Chancellor, Chris Kelly, about the ratio of men to women veterinarian students, made in 2016:

> "Women mature earlier than men, work hard and pass. Whereas men find out about booze and all sorts of crazy things during their first year [at university]. …When I went through vet school, many years ago, it was dominated by men. Today it's dominated by women. That's fine, but the problem is one woman graduate is equivalent to two-fifths of a full-time equivalent [male] vet throughout her life because she gets married and has a family, which is normal. So, though we're graduating a lot of vets, we're getting a high fallout rate later on." (As cited in Strongman, 2016, p. 1)

> Is woman to stifle the inborn yearnings of her intellect that she may be no more than a healthy animal to minister to and apparently compensate for the impaired vitality of the man? Can true progress possibly consist of a man of highly cultivated intellect pacing side by side with a woman who is no more than an intelligent vegetable? (Bennett, 1909, as cited in Matthews Morris, 2008, p. 78)

More was at stake in these discourses than women's access to tertiary institutes. There was growing public anxiety that women were breaching the boundaries of their domestic spheres, and in doing so, were threatening their own femininity and the wellbeing of their families and the nation (Middleton, 1988b; Morris Matthews, 2008). The essential feminine qualities of women appeared to be under attack. And while it was one thing for a woman of privileged class or exceptional scholarship to gain a university education, it was nonetheless taken for granted that she would eventually marry, retire from her professional work, and devote herself to family life (Morris Matthews, 2008). Families commonly funded tertiary education on the very premise that it would increase a daughter's marriageability (Middleton, 1988b). Multiple ideologies fed into these essentialist gender narratives. They included the Victorian image of the delicate moral sensibilities of middle-class women (Crozier-De Rosa, 2010); the colonial imperative to grow the nation through birthing and raising children (Chambers, 1986); the Church's debasement of women's sexuality (Morgan & De Vries, 2010); and the assumption and pseudoscientific attempts to prove that race and class, as well as gender, determined an individual's intelligence and worthiness of higher education (Conlin, 2018).

First graduates – unnatural women?

Kate Edger became the first woman to graduate from a New Zealand university in 1877, with a Bachelor of Arts in Latin and Mathematics; staggeringly, she also claimed the title for the first woman in the British Empire to earn a BA (Morris Matthews, 2008). It had taken some wit and guile for Edger to access education: Edger's father had negotiated with the headmaster of Auckland College and Grammar School for Kate to attend lessons in the boys' top class (there was not yet a girls' secondary school in Auckland). And when Edger sought a University Scholarship, she withheld her gender from the application form (Brookes, 2016). By the time she graduated in 1877, the University of New Zealand had decreed that

women were eligible candidates for undergraduate degrees. By 1920, 241 women had graduated from the University of Otago, 40% of whom went on to earn Master's degrees (Morris Matthews, 2008). The majority of these women did not have to withhold their gender as Kate Edger did, but they still faced significant barriers in accessing tertiary education. No wāhine Māori graduated from a New Zealand university until 1926 (Morris Matthews & Mane-Wheoki, 2014); fees for tuition and board were beyond the incomes of most colonial families; and scholarships were scarce – for example, only 27% of women who graduated from Otago University between 1878 and 1911 were scholarship students (Morris Matthews, 2008).

Even when women overcame these barriers, they faced vocal resistance from male faculty and students. This was especially the case in medicine and law, where women were left with no doubt that their aspirations toward these higher-status professions were maligned and considered unnatural. Only three women graduated in law and 25 women in medicine from the University of Otago between 1885 and 1920 (Morris Matthews, 2008). Emily Seideburg, the first woman to graduate with a medical degree from Otago in 1896, was cajoled and harassed by her fellow male medical students, who threw scraps of flesh at her during their dissection classes (Morris Matthews, 2008). Ethel Benjamin studied law at Otago and became New Zealand's first woman lawyer in 1897. Despite the Female Law Practitioners Act 1896 enabling Benjamin to establish her own legal practice in Dunedin after graduation, she was socially excluded by her legal peers (Morris Matthews, 2008). Otago medical professors Frederick Batchelor and Truby King fiercely resisted women entering their programme. King, who later became head psychiatrist at Seacliff Lunatic Asylum and founder of the Plunket Society, considered mental strain, or "The Evils of Cram," as dangerous to women's "healthy maternity" (King, 1897, p. 1).

The educational moderation preached by King and Batchelor linked directly to Victorian ideologies about women's delicate sensibilities still common in 20th century New Zealand (Fry, 1985). Ideologies of women's gendered delicacy was discursively linked to middle-class models of femininity, where wives were positioned as 'the angels of the house' and the loving subordinates of their husbands, in accordance with their confinement to domestic spheres (Crozier-De Rosa, 2010). Although incongruous with the hard physical labour and difficult pregnancies experienced by the majority of working-class colonial

Pākehā women and wāhine Māori, this ideology persisted in essentialising women as the passive feminine vessels of the family. According to King (1897), education in and of itself for women was unjustifiable, especially if cramming the female brain with knowledge risked impairing a woman's fertility and her future usefulness as a wife. Declining birth rates fed this anxiety over women's education (Morris Matthews, 2008). Medical and psychological spokesmen such as King brought an edge of scientific authority to wider debates over the colony's future. Women were therefore seen not only as the carriers of their families' future generations, but of the British Empire's aspirations to retain its global governance. Such imperatives to produce and thrive would be seen again in the wake of both the First and Second World Wars (Middleton, 1988a). A pamphlet from the New Zealand Army published in 1943 reveals how these concerns over gender, nationhood, and security entwined:

> '[F]or every New Zealander who thinks seriously about the future of his country, the population problem is of basic importance . . . . If, as is possible, the total population begins to decline within the next fifty years, then obviously the future of New Zealand as a nation is in jeopardy." (New Zealand Army, as cited in Middleton, 1988, p. 74-75)

Even highly educated New Zealand women such as Edger and Seideburg endorsed the view that women were best suited to marriage and motherhood. Edger had married in 1890, and through private tutoring, earned the bulk of her family's income (Hughes, 1993). In her 1923 article *'The first girl graduates,'* Edger discussed whether women's higher education had been worthwhile. Tellingly, she wrote: 'It is too soon yet for a complete answer to be given to this question, but thousands of university women are proving by their lives that it has not unfitted them from home-making, the noblest sphere of women's work' (Edger, as cited in Hughes, 1993, p. 1).

Feminine vocations

Ideologies about women's inborn maternal and nurturing instincts meant they were especially suited to meet the colony's need for school teachers (Fry, 1985). In the 1880s, this need was so high that young women were recruited to teaching roles whilst still pupils at high

school. The “pupil-teacher apprenticeship system” paid girls £20 per annum for their combined study and work, for up to four years (Morris Matthews, 2008, p. 15). Between 1878 and 1920, three of every four women who graduated through the University of New Zealand went on to teach at secondary school (Morris Matthews, 2008). Although teacher training colleges had replaced pupil-teacher schemes by the 1920s, the scheme had laid the groundwork for important elements of women’s study in New Zealand, including part-time and distance study.

Māori women experienced manifold intersections of racial, classist, gendered, and religious subordinations, through discriminatory colonial state-prescribed education in Aotearoa (Pere, 1988). Although Māori had extensive knowledge-bases and iwi-specific modes of passing mātauranga from one generation to the next (Pere, 1988), colonial discourses positioned Māoridom in general as uncivilised and uneducated. In complex responses to colonisation, some Māori encouraged their tamariki to learn English and to read and write, hoping that it would better position them within the rapidly expanding British New Zealand political and economic landscape (Morgan, Coombes, Neill-Weston, & Weatherley, 2011). However, the 1880 Native Schools Code, developed by the colonial government in partnership with the Anglican and Catholic churches, formally encoded education as an assimilative mechanism. Māori tamariki were to learn English and be inculcated with British belief systems, skills, and customs by attending purpose-built ‘native’ schools (Morris Matthews, 2008). For Māori girls deemed more intelligent than their peers, limited scholarships were available to attend the church-run Māori boarding schools. The curriculum at these boarding schools was more classical – perhaps including arithmetic, military drill, and Latin alongside the compulsory English – though kōtiro were required to participate in the day-to-day domestic labour of the school, considered in itself a key subject for Māori girls.

Figure 1:[6] Maori girls during a cookery class, Hukarere Girls' School, Napier. Ref: 1/2-048104-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. /records/22539095

Within institutions of educational assimilation, Māori girls were seen as particularly useful carriers of knowledge. As the future wives and mothers of 'the Māori race,' assimilationists took for granted that ngā kōtiro would return to life at the pā after finishing primary school and distribute what they had learned to their hapū and whānau, especially their future tamariki and mokopuna (Morris Matthews, 2008; Pere, 1988). Christian missionaries were also anxious to save the souls of Māori women. The relationships between some early British traders and Māori women incited missionaries to view Māori women (though not, incidentally, settler men) as inherently promiscuous. Wāhine Māori were considered tarnished by Eve's original sin, like all women (Jenkins & Morris Matthews, 1998). Thus, education served two mutual purposes for the colonisers: to soften Māori to British rule, making them 'productive' and 'healthy' citizens of the nation; and to reform Māori girls in the image of the modest and immaculate Virgin Mary. Educational assimilation

[6] No date available

in Aotearoa served to weaken the tino rangatiratanga or political self-determination of Māori and systematically isolate Māori tamariki from their own traditional knowledge bases. By 1940 only 33% of Māori students continued on to secondary school, compared to 63% of all students in New Zealand (Fry, 1985). And whereas Kate Edger had completed her BA in 1877, it would be almost another fifty years until the first Māori woman graduated with a degree from a New Zealand university. This was Bessie Wenerau Grace, of Ngāti Tūwharetoa descent (Appendix I).

Figure 2:[7] Pupils displaying their work outside the Kawhia Native School. Ref: 1/2-038443-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. /records/22879194

Women in the academy

With tertiary institutes overwhelmingly staffed and administrated by men, there were few opportunities for women to enact change from within (Middleton, 1988b). However, as ideological and political mandates shifted, women graduates were increasingly hired as academic staff to fill gendered (and later, cultural) teaching roles. In 1911, Winifred Lily

[7] No date available

Boys-Smith was recruited from England to implement a home science and domestic art programme at Otago University. She became the first woman professor in New Zealand, however, her employment was less a reflection of improving social attitudes towards women's education and employment than an attempt to funnel women students away from traditional science subjects. Dr Batchelor and Dr King were the key drivers of the new School of Home Science at Otago, which aimed to "provide a thoroughly scientific education for women, in the principles underlying the conduct and organization of home life" (Syllabus of classes for the degree & diploma in home science, c1911; as cited in Collins, 2014, p. 1). Men staff members from Otago's medical school taught the "basic science courses … including physics, inorganic chemistry, bacteriology, biology and physiology and public health," while Winifred Lily Boys-Smith and her female assistant, Gertrude, taught "household business affairs, applied chemistry, practical cookery, needlework, and hygiene" (Collins, 2014, p. 1). In this way, academic institutions regulated gendered power relations not only through the knowledge it produced and taught, but through the people it assigned to teach it.

Figure 3:[8] Demonstration kitchen for Home Science Extension classes at Otago University, and Emily Carpenter. New Zealand Free Lance: Photographic prints and negatives. Ref: PAColl-6203-18. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. /records/23195630

[8] No date available

The establishment of New Zealand's first tertiary education institutes also intersected with the burgeoning development of psychology and psy-discourses (Rose, 1996) in Western countries. Initially positioned as a subcategory of Philosophy at the University of Otago, psychology was not formally recognised as its own discipline in New Zealand until the 1960s (Jackson, 1998). By then, psychological researchers in Aotearoa New Zealand had long attempted to distinguish psychology as a scientific subject that was based on empirical and quantifiable data, not metaphysics. The institutional shift away from philosophy reflected psychology's preoccupation with mind-body separatism (Jackson, 1998), a binary grounded in gendered formations of 'the mind' as masculine, abstract, and unencumbered by the materiality of feminine embodiment and emotion (e.g., Hartsock, 2004). Psychology was also ingrained with ethnocentric knowledge claims, including the Western scientific assumption that 'legitimate' knowledge is based on objective and apolitical research. Such metatheoretical assumptions served to position feminist and Māori critiques of psychology on the disciplinary margins (Morgan et al., 2011).

From the 1950s and 1960s, psychology and psy-discourses reached much wider public circulation in Aotearoa New Zealand, as the discipline's knowledge claims about motherhood and normative development intersected with growing public anxiety about changes to the post-war family (May, 1988; Ritchie, 1988). The gradual shift of women into paid employment outside of the home after the end of the Second World War was discursively positioned as the cause of 'adolescent delinquency' (May, 1988). Working mothers in particular experienced increased scrutiny of their mothering practices, institutionalised through psy-discourses, medical and psychological practices, and organisations such as the Plunket Society. Here, the ghost of Dr Truby King appears again, as the androcentric 'expert' against whose authority knowledge claims were made about women's bodies, minds, and mothering practices.

Figure 4: Sir Frederic Truby King (right) at Karitane Products, Wellington, 1933. S P Andrew Ltd: Portrait negatives. Ref: 1/1-018720-F. Alexander Turnbull Library, Wellington, New Zealand. /records/22507524

Through the Plunket Society, King's discursive legacies were reproduced and institutionalised in the widespread publication and dissemination in Aotearoa New Zealand of *Mothercraft*, written by King's daughter, Mary Truby King. Normative development was linked to gender, and as Mary Truby King wrote, "The surest way to recognise departures from the normal in babies and children is to have a thorough understanding of what **is** normal" (King, 1941, pp. 161, bold in original). In what now sounds like a comical misrepresentation of motherhood, a 'real' Truby King baby was described as "a joy from morning till night to himself and all the household… The mother of such a baby is not

overworked or worried, simply because she knows that by following the laws of nature, combined with common sense, baby will not do otherwise than thrive" (King, 1941, pp. 4-5). Here, psy-discourses of common sense and natural biological laws served to normalise and make indiscernible the intersection of gender, race, and class in the production of psychological knowledge. White middle-class men in lab coats symbolised legitimacy in Aotearoa New Zealand's emergent psychological discipline, in which the voices of women, especially those from Māori and working-class standpoints, were silenced.

By the late 1970s and early 1980s, multiple protest movements – including Ngā Tamatoa, women's liberation, lesbian-gay, and disability movements – had created political pressure for 'equity' in New Zealand society (Irwin, 1992). Equity was principally defined in relation to Te Tiriti o Waitangi and "equal employment opportunities," though in practice neither bicultural nor equity imperatives were given the funding required to seriously challenge androcentrism and ethnocentrism in New Zealand's higher education institutes (Irwin, 1992, p. 55). My review of the historical contingencies of women's educational and relational expectations ends here, on the horizon of neoliberal interventions in Aotearoa New Zealand. In the late 1980s, the Fourth Labour Government initiated a wave of educational reforms and established the Educational Review Office to audit educational providers' equity standards. It also implemented drastic neoliberal economic policies under the mantle of Roger Douglas, which served to erode welfare spending and increase private debt from higher education (Redden et al., 2020). Thus, even as equity in education seemed to momentarily create space for women's voices to be heard, such space was quickly overtaken by neoliberal imperatives of free market competition. I turn now to my methodological considerations, as they were informed by both the historical contingencies of and feminist scholarship on women's voices.

CHAPTER 4: Methodology

Feminist standpoint theory: Epistemological assumptions

> *"There is no unmediated photograph or passive camera obscura in scientific accounts of bodies and machines; there are only highly specific visual possibilities, each with a wonderfully detailed, active, partial way of organising worlds. All these pictures of the world should not be allegories of infinite mobility and interchangeability, but of elaborate specificity and difference and the loving care people might take to learn how to see faithfully from another's point of view..."* (Haraway, 2004, p. 88)

Feminist standpoint theory begins from the ontological assumption that knowledge is situated. Knowledge is situated because it is embodied, both within human subjects and the larger "radical historical specificities" in which knowledge claims are made (Haraway, 2004, p. 85). Emerging from feminist theoretical scholarship in the 1970s and 1980s, feminist standpoint theory challenged the dominant scientific assumption that to be valid, our understandings of the world must be neutral and objective. Feminist theorists argued that by distancing and even erasing the knower(s) from the knowledge they produce, Western science had performed a "god trick" as Donna Haraway put it (2004, p. 88). Rather, Haraway argued for a "politics and epistemologies of location, positioning, and situating, where *partiality* and not universality is the condition of being heard to make rational knowledge claims" (Haraway, 2004, p. 92; my italics). According to feminist standpoint theory, objective knowledge becomes tangible when we acknowledge our situatedness – the very ocular perspectives from which we perceive the world and make it meaningful (Haraway, 2004). Subordinated social groups occupy dominated situations; the knowledge they produce will therefore be distinct from and politically critical of the knowledge claims of majority groups (Harding, 2004, p. 7). Standpoints are thus more than perspectives: they are achievements, won through both scientific and political struggle (Hartsock, 2004).

For several generations of feminist psychological research, standpoint theory has provided an ontological and epistemological framework for researching women's experiences *from* the perspectives of women (Harding, 2014; Hare-Mustin & Marecek, 1988; Henwood & Pidgeon, 1995). Such research has driven and circulated women's knowledge into

androcentric psychological knowledge bases, whilst also challenging the value-neutral and universal research assumptions of W.E.I.R.D.[9] (Henrich et al., 2010) knowledge practices and institutions. For these reasons, I have chosen feminist standpoint theory as the epistemological basis of this thesis. It legitimates women tertiary students' relationship expectations as knowledge forms in their own rights, and enables me to analyse the broader gendered narratives which inform these expectations. Herein lies a recognition of the diversity of women's situations and the intersecting oppressions of gender, race, and class (Salem, 2016; Smele et al., 2017). Standpoint theory has been criticised by Black, Third World, and indigenous feminists for positioning Western, middle-class women as the central claimants of 'women's knowledge,' effectively obscuring and reinstating the intersecting discriminations experienced by women outside of the mainstream (Salem, 2016). Far from weakening standpoint theory, these criticisms have enriched its theoretical bases, demanding an ongoing interrogation of the unequal power relations which are enacted between women of different classes, races, ethnicities, sexualities, abilities, and so on. Increasing literature also focusses on the multiplicity and heterogeneity of women's standpoints, even within similar cultural and material locations, such as Tess Moeke-Maxwell's theorisation of the 'third space' negotiations made by biracial Māori women in Aotearoa New Zealand.

Narrative-discursive analysis

Narrative-discursive analytical strategies and feminist standpoint epistemologies both emphasise the "radical historical contingencies" (Haraway, 2004, p. 85) of knowledge claims. Similarly, they both value women's perspectives and positions in the seeing and speaking of knowledge. The narrative-analysis analytic strategy was developed by Stephanie Taylor and Karen Littleton (2006) to incorporate narrative analysis theories and methods (e.g. Mischler, 1999) into the discourse analysis methodologies developed within social psychology in the 1980s and 1990s (e.g. Potter & Wetherell, 1987). It is specifically suited to analysing narratives constructed within interviews and seeks to understand how participants' use of discursive resources enables and constrains their identity work throughout their narratives.

[9] Western, Educated, Industrialised, Rich, and Democratic (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010)

I used a narrative-discursive method as it suited my research aims of understanding the complex discursive, biographical, psychological, and narrative processes by which participants constructed and negotiated their expectations of higher education and intimate partner relationships. It also suited my use of conversational interviews. However, I deviated from Taylor and Littleton's (2006) theorisation of narrative-discourse analysis in two distinct ways. Firstly, I moved away from their emphasis on inductive, 'bottom up' data analysis. This emphasis on approaching data from a theoretically neutral position links back to the influence of ethnographic methodologies on narrative-discursive analytical strategies (Taylor & Littleton, 2006). In my first round of coding I coded as many items and themes within the data that I could recognise as meaningful from my own limited standpoint, regardless of whether it matched my theoretical interests or not. However, I did not consider nor do I claim this to be an inductive or theoretically neutral approach. To do so would be to deny my own deep and personal immersion in the research project, occurring after several months of thinking, reading, and writing about the topic. I could not plausibly bracket out that immersion when it came to coding the data, identifying discursive resources or interpreting participants' biographical work within their narratives. Claims to a neutral analytical process also contradict feminist standpoint theoretical emphases on situated and embodied knowledges, which rejects theorisations of objectivity as a "view from above, from nowhere, from simplicity" (Haraway, 2004, p. 92).

Secondly, I moved away from Taylor and Littleton's (2006) conceptualisation of discursive resources as 'interpretative repertoires' as described within conversational analysis (Wetherell, 1998). To quote Taylor and Littleton, interpretative repertoires consist of "a common language which includes accrued ideas and associations. These pre-exist any particular occasion of talk and can be understood as resources for it" (2006, p. 26). Instead, I drew on Foucauldian theorisations of discursive resources as not merely descriptions of the world, but as categorisations which "bring phenomena into sight" (Parker, 1990, p. 191). Specifically, I used Ian Parker's post-structuralist informed definition of a discourse as "a system of statements which constructs an object" (1990, p. 191) to define and identify the discourses at work in my study. As Parker argues, such discourses are not discoverable, they do not emerge from pre-existing locations, but are "at work," in fragments, and may cohere within texts, insofar as texts are embodied or "deliminated tissues of meaning reproduced in any form" (Parker, 1990, p. 193). As emphasised by Braun and Clarke (2019) in their

reflections on reflexive thematic analysis, this very act of *bringing phenomena into sight* within qualitative research is always at the behest of the researcher(s): we construct the stories we tell about the data/narratives/stories we have collected and analysed (Mischler, 1999). The texts in my study are the spoken, shifting, changeable narratives co-constructed by each of the women participants and myself, transcribed into digital texts, rendered down into coded text, reformulated into discursive themes, dispersed, gathered and recalibrated on the pages (another text) of my drafted analysis, and shifted about again in accordance with feedback from my supervisors.

By drawing on Foucault's (1975/2003, 1979) conceptualisation of discourses I was able to analyse the social power relations at work in the discursive strategies of my participants. This occurred as a systematic process, throughout my journey of doing the thesis, and was informed by my prior immersion in feminist post-structural psychological research (Gavey, 1989, 2005; Morgan, 2005) during my Honour's research project (Murphy, 2017). These influences in turn, particularly the feminist standpoint and feminist post-structural emphasis on the importance of accounting for historical constituencies and genealogies, and of knowing the histories around which discourses have come into use and coherence, informed my decision to research and write a section on the historical ideologies informing women's access to tertiary education in Aotearoa New Zealand. To quote Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*, "A woman writing thinks back through her mothers" – so as I wrote I was thinking back through my own mothers, known and unknown, to "locate discourse and reflection historically" as part of my reflexive process (Parker, 1990, p. 190). Finally, I tried to follow Eliot Mischler's (1999) example in *Storylines: Craftartists' Narratives of Identity* by always making visible my own hand in the crafting of my narrative interpretations.

Research questions

In this research project, I ask:

1. How do women tertiary students negotiate heteronormative, neoliberal, postfeminist ideologies in their intimate partner relationship expectations?
2. How do their intimate partner relationship expectations intersect with women's experiences of higher education?

Ethical considerations

Feminist research ethics

Feminist discussions of theoretical and applied research ethics formed the basis of my ethical strategies. In particular, Hyden's (2013, p. 13) conceptualisation of teller-focussed interviews helped me to consider how ethical values were negotiated within the "relational practice" of interviewing women participants. Feminist ethical theorisations challenge the Western, androcentric construction of justice and ethics as based on universal and abstract principles which can be applied to any situation (Edwards & Mauthner, 2014). In comparison, feminist ethics emphasise the grounding of ethical practice and social justice within specific and relational contexts, as the sites of women's achieved standpoints (Harding, 2004). Much feminist scholarship has engaged with interviewing methods, whereby the hearing and gathering of women's stories occurs within a deeper framework of valuing women's agency and wellbeing. For example, Jean Baker Miller (1976/1986) in her classic feminist text *Toward a New Psychology of Women* argued that feminist interviewing involves zest, or energy; empowerment for action; increased knowledge and self-esteem; and the desire for further connection.

As Black, Third World, indigenous and queer feminists have further argued, feminist research must acknowledge and attend to the intersection of gender with race, class and other "multiple ax[es] of differentiation," both within feminism and beyond (Brah & Phoenix, 2004, p. 75; Hill Collins, 2002; Salem, 2016; Simmonds, 2011). Writing from her position as a Black African-American feminist, Patricia Hill Collins (2002) has argued for an ethics of care which incorporates emotions, empathy, and accountability into social science research. For Hill Collins, it is through connection and dialogue that knowledge is deemed valid by the communities with whom it has been produced, rather than knowledge being validated through reference to abstract and decontextualized principles of 'good science.' In an Aotearoa New Zealand context, Hine Waitere and Patricia Johnston (2009) wrote about the immense difficulties they had experienced being 'heard' as Māori women researchers, within feminist and non-feminist academic circles. As Waitere and Johnston write, "feminism can include Māori women, but it cannot account for us" (2009, p. 26). Thus, feminist ethics within Aotearoa New Zealand postcolonial research contexts involves making the space to hear, not

simply listen to, Māori women's voices, as such space entails respect for mana wāhine, or the dignity of being a Māori woman. In this way, Māori women are less constrained in their efforts at reclaiming and redefining themselves, in their differences and commonalities (Moeke-Maxwell, 2008; Waitere & Johnston, 2009, p. 27).

Establishing a relationally safe space

Hydén's teller-focussed interviewing methodology is based on her many years of researching men's intimate partner violence against women, as it involved successive and expansive interviews with men, women, and children. Like Hill Collins (2002), Hydén stresses the centrality of dialogue and relationships in research interviews. She describes interview exchanges as based on 'relational practice' where trust, respect, and the establishment of a "relationally safe space" (Hydén, 2013, p. 5) is vital to enabling women who have been subjugated to abuse within their relationships and low status positions in broader society to speak with agency about their experiences. Although I was not researching intimate partner abuse in my project, I was still asking women participants to share highly personal and vulnerable stories with me. Here, my reliance on trusted intermediary people to circulate my information sheet to women who they knew and thought might be interested in the project helped to establish trust and relational practice (Hydén, 2013) within the project, even before I had met potential participants.

Resisting power relations

As Hydén (2013) argues, relationally safe spaces are only possible where the institutionalised power differences between interviewer and interviewee(s) are resisted and not performed. I attempted to mitigate these power differences in numerous ways. For example, some participants appeared eager to "provide" me with "what" I needed for the study, which constrained their ability to initiate and tell stories on their own terms. I responded by emphasising the importance of participants' own perspectives, thoughts, and feelings to the research project, helping to reposition participants as central storytelling agents within the project. At other times, participants struggled to articulate their expectations for intimate partner relationships. I acknowledged the difficulty of this task and tentatively

suggested different angles by which we could explore and talk about participants' relationship expectations. In doing so, I was supporting participants to articulate perhaps for the first time their experiences and expectations of relationships, potentially helping to close the gap between their lived experiences and spoken knowledge. In doing so, however, I was also mindful to give participants space and silence to reflect upon, evaluate, and rephrase their words, as suggested by Hydén (2013) as a means to emphasise participants' agency and autonomy.

Informed consent and confidentiality

I approached consent as an ongoing process, which was achieved in dialogue between myself and participants throughout the project. As Hydén writes, consent does not "start and finish with the consent form" (2013, p. 7), nor is it possible for a teller-focussed interviewer to inform participants about every possible discursive and emotional turn that may occur during the interview. Thus, in addition to gaining informed consent from participants before undertaking any interviews, I was also prepared to engage with participants about unexpected issues if they came about during or after the interviews, in consultation with my supervisors and cultural advisors. Intertwining with consent and trust was confidentiality, as confidentiality folds back to the precarious position women have occupied in their relationships and broader society, where telling their stories comes with the risk of social sanctions. I related in full detail the steps I would take to keep participants' involvement in the project private (Appendix II). I was also cautious in my selection of excerpts to include in the final analysis, in order to avoid any attempts from readers to identify participants in the project.

Bicultural considerations

(Post)colonial injustices committed against Māori communities in Aotearoa New Zealand formed the basis of my reflective bicultural considerations. Particularly, I am mindful of how these injustices have been institutionalised and effected through educational and research contexts, to further marginalise, silence, and deprive Māori women and Māori communities (Morgan et al., 2011; Waitere & Johnston, 2009). Here, Te Tiriti o Waitangi implications extend well beyond Pākehā emphases on the principles of protection,

participation, and partnership, positioning tino rangatiratanga at the centre of bicultural research ethics. Tino rangatiratanga, or Māori sovereignty and self-determination, insists on the equal sharing of political power between Māori and the Crown, in which Māori autonomy is fully exercised (Smith, 2012). Institutionalised understandings of biculturalism in New Zealand (for example, *The Code of Ethics for Psychologists Working in Aotearoa/New Zealand* (New Zealand Psychologists Board, 2012)) tend to emphasise entry-level requirements for psychologists working with Māori, such as through principles of non-discrimination and cultural safety. Rarely is tino rangatiratanga explicitly included.[10] Thus, Māori remain positioned as cultural 'others' within dominant Western knowledge institutions, with the political agency of tangata whenua still not actively acknowledged (Morgan et al., 2011).

I discussed tino rangatiratanga with Patricia Tepania, my kaitiaki at Te Wananga o Aotearoa, who agreed to be my Māori advisor for the project (Appendix II). As Patricia related, Māori self-determination involves complex relational practices woven through whānau, hapū, and iwi contexts. Tino rangatiratanga in my project therefore needed to consider both the overarching political self-determination of Māori, as well as my whakawhanaungatanga (process of building *equal* relationships) with research participants and local Māori communities. Although my research does not specifically target Māori participants, it is embedded within historical and contemporary terrains of imperialist and patriarchal ideologies, as these ideologies intersect with women's expectations of higher education and intimate partner relationships. Hence, I needed to reflect upon and critically consider the effect of colonisation in my research project, as emphasised in the historical contingencies section.

In reflecting on kaupapa Māori research principles outlined in Linda Tuhiwai Smith's *Decolonizing Methodologies* (2012), I also discussed with Patricia the relevance of my research to Māori communities and Māori women tertiary students; how my research questions and ethical considerations engaged with mātauranga Māori; and how I would offer cultural support to Māori participants if they were included in my sample. Here, Patricia

[10] For example, tino rangatiratanga is absent from both *The Code of Ethics for Psychologists Working in Aotearoa/New Zealand* (2012) and Massey University's *Code of Ethical Conduct for Research, Teaching and Evaluations Involving Human Participants* (2017).

helped me to reframe some of my ethical considerations, such as how I regarded koha. Although my provision of kai and material gifts, such as grocery vouchers, was an important act of koha in acknowledging participants' engagement in the project, Patricia also emphasised that the women's stories were koha, which they were bestowing on me in relational trust. Thus, Māori ethical considerations often intersected with feminist research ethics, such as in the emphasis on relationships and care. Patricia was available for ongoing consultation throughout my project, for me to discuss issues relevant to Te Ao Māori and Tiriti o Waitangi as they developed from my literature review and interviews.

Human Ethics Committee application

My project was peer reviewed by the Hearth research cluster at the School of Psychology, Massey University and was deemed low risk. Further peer review was gained through my full application to the Massey University Human Ethics Committee. Minimal changes to my application were required, with feedback emphasising the need to make explicit how I would support participants if they experienced emotional distress as a result of telling their stories, as detailed in the Information Sheet (Appendix II). In accordance with the emotional and empathetic connections with underlie feminist relationality (Hill Collins, 2002), I was sensitive to indications that participants were experiencing intense emotions as they told their stories. If participants appeared distressed, I was prepared to offer support, such as by offering to pause the interview or referring participants to the contact details of local support agencies.

Method

Sampling

Participants were required to be self-identifying women over the age of 18, current or recently graduated tertiary students, proficient in English, and located in the Palmerston North area. Transwomen were welcome to participate in the project, hence the emphasis on self-identifying women. Participants were not required to be in (or have previously been in) an intimate partner relationship. Eight women took part in the research. The standpoint

diversity of participants occurred spontaneously: as I was not specifically researching how culture influenced women's constructions of higher education or intimate partner relationships, I did not explicitly seek culturally diverse participants. In accordance with this decision, I did not ask participants to identify themselves as belonging to any particular cultural groups during the interviews. However, most participants spontaneously located themselves within cultural positions in the course of discussing their tertiary studies and relationship expectations. For some participants, culture was expressed as being immensely relevant to their experience of higher education and their formation of relationship expectations; this was especially the case when participants located themselves outside of Pākehā, Western, and/or heterosexual groups. The significance of these situations and positions for participants formed in turn a significant part of the analysis, emerging from participants' narratives and becoming part of the larger story of the analysis.

Recruitment

Participants were recruited through purposeful snowball sampling (Woodley & Lockard, 2016). Trusted intermediary contacts from within my own social networks were asked to circulate my information sheet amongst women whom they knew and who they thought might be interested in taking part in the research. These intermediary contact people were from my network of student colleagues, with whom I had established trust and whakawhanaunga through previous academic and volunteer work. The Information Sheet (Appendix II) contained my contact details, and potential participants were asked to contact me directly if they wished to take part in the research or if they had further questions to ask, with participation explicitly emphasised as voluntary and free from pressure or coercion. Intermediary contact persons were not informed of who made contact with me or who agreed to participate in the project.

Participants were invited to take part in a single one-on-one interview, with only myself present, in either of two safe, private, and local locations: private discussion rooms at either Massey University library, Manawatū, or the City Library, Palmerston North. Reflecting on the need for he kanohi kitea, or transparency, as the researcher, I offered to meet with participants prior to interviews, to discuss the research procedures and purposes and to obtain written informed consent. However, all of the participants expressed a

preference to meet just once, to discuss the project and carry out the interview directly afterwards in the same session. Thus, when I met with participants, I scheduled half an hour before the interviews for meeting them, buying them tea, coffee, and or snacks, discussing the project, detailing their rights as participants, and obtaining written informed consent. We then undertook the interviews. After interviewing eight participants, no further women expressed interest in participating in the project, and as I had reached a point of saturation within the stories gathered, I ended recruitment.

Interviews

Interviews were semi-structured and conversational. This approach was chosen both for the richness of stories or data which conversational interviews enable (DeVault & Gross, 2012) and the need for whakarongo or listening in my own role as researcher, whereby I listen first and speak second. An interview schedule (Appendix II) was used to open the conversation, but it was hoped that participants' own contributions would direct the interviews. This did not always happen. For example, one participant was experiencing nerves at the beginning of the interview, and she seemed to find it comforting to refer back to the interview schedule, even briefly. Where participants did not spontaneously begin to tell me their stories, I needed to be more directive and ask participants about their various experiences, how they found meaning in particular events or exchanges, and how they felt about the expectations they were describing. Other participants shared their experiences and stories very openly and freely, and in these interviews I was able to more substantially occupy the role of listener, using minimal encouragers such as 'mm' and 'yeah,' and occasionally asking participants to unpack or clarify their meaning for me when I was unsure I had understood them clearly. Interviews were on average an hour long.

I found the interviews emotionally and intellectually demanding: at times I felt acutely aware of all the responsibilities I needed to manage as a student researcher, to ensure that participants felt at ease and were comfortable with interview procedures, to double check that my digital recorder was positioned correctly and was indeed recording (!), to closely attending to the nuances of participants' stories and picking up on conversational threads which seemed to contain a great deal of meaning but which participants themselves had left unarticulated. I became more confident as interviews continued, in part because of feedback

and guidance provided by my supervisors, who in turn directed me to several key papers, particularly Karl Tomm's three-part series of journal articles on interventive interviewing (Tomm, 1987a, 1987b, 1988). I learned to engage participants through relational strategies such as circular questioning, which involved continual and circular attention to the nuances of participants' stories (Tomm, 1987a), and expansive questioning, whereby I employed simple requests of participants to 'Tell me more about [that], if you can…' (Hydén, 2013). In this way, interviews quickly became expansive, including rich and detailed narratives. At the end of the interviews, participants frequently expressed their enjoyment of the process and our relational engagement.

Transcription

I transcribed all interviews into Word documents. I included pauses, laughter, interruptions, hesitations, as well as my own questions and comments in the transcripts, to retain as much of the richness and contextual detail of the interviews as possible. However, much of this detail was untransferable and remained within my sensory memories of the interviews (tone of voice, posture, physical gestures, and so on) and was vital to my interpretation of participants' stories during the analysis. As I did not theoretically assume that I could exhaustively represent every detail of the interviews, and as I was seeking to understand the broader discursive and narrative meaning-makings of participants rather than minute conversational exchanges, I used a "lean" transcription style designed to enable "rich interpretations" (Bloom, cited in Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999, p. 69). As Lapadat and Lindsay (1999) note in their discussion of transcription, transcription is a matter of theoretical alignment and is an initial stage of analysis within qualitative research. Although time consuming, transcription enabled me to be deeply immersed in participants' spoken stories and to be mindful of what is invariably lost when stories are transcribed to written documents. In Table 1 (Appendix I), I have included a brief guide to my transcription notations (Lapadat & Lindsay, 1999).

To respect participant autonomy and to promote transparency in the research, transcribed interviews were returned to the participants to read, request changes to, and release for the use in published reports by signing the Transcript Release form (Appendix II). Most participants requested to read their transcripts and then released them. Other participants

preferred to sign the release form without reading their transcripts. One participant did not respond to my efforts to contact her regarding her transcribed interview, and as a result did not sign the release form. I included her stories in my analysis, but no excerpts from her transcript will be included in published reports, including this thesis.

Analytical processes

After transcription was complete, I began to code my interviews into Excel sheets. I coded broadly and extensively, coding the content, references, meanings, and affective responses that I recognised as meaningful from my limited standpoint, regardless of whether these codes seemed relevant to my research questions or not. I also coded my own responses and comments in the interview. As discussed in the narrative-discursive analysis section, I do not claim that my process was 'inductive' in the sense that Taylor and Littleton (2006) suggest. After each interview was coded, I copied all of the codes into a combined code list, also in Excel. As I copied and pasted each new batch of codes into this code list, I also intuitively began to cluster codes based on what seemed to be shared meanings. By the time I had finished coding, I had an extensive list of codes that cohered and grouped together in some places, diverged in other places, and which represented a plethora of narrative and discursive meanings. I spent significant time collating the codes, regrouping them, and double-checking them against the transcripts to ensure that where patterns were developing, they accurately represented what I had interpreted to be participants' meanings. Following this process, I began my initial stage of reviewing the codes. I used mind maps to make this process more visual and intuitive (Appendix I), as I attempted to 'drill down' into themes and discourses while keeping a broad peripheral view for singular codes and moments of meaning-making which held absolute significance.

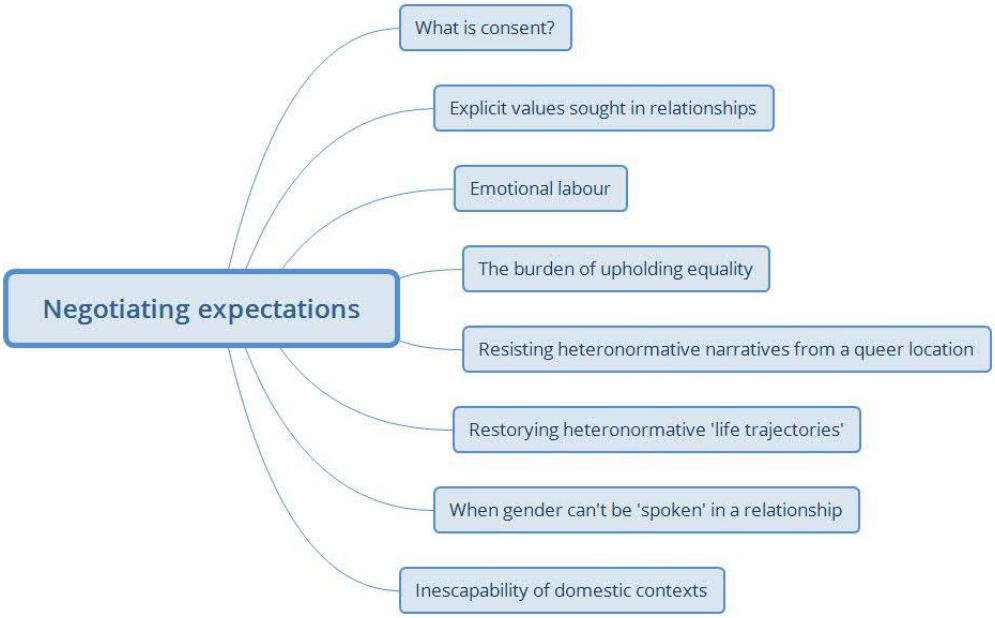

Figure 5: Negotiating expectations descriptive category

Initially, the codes clustered into four groups: relationship discourses (Figure 5; Appendix I); negotiating relationship expectations (Figure 6); gendered and heteronormative educational contexts (Figure 7, Appendix I); and generational tensions (Figure 8, Appendix I). As I reflected on these clusters, I saw that they constituted descriptive categories (Braun & Clarke, 2019), not discourses themselves. Thus, I had to further interrogate these descriptive categories to identify the discourses through which women were enabled and constrained in their narratives. Here, I moved to two early iterations of discourses: creating a successful life (Figure 9, Appendix I); and negotiating relationship expectations (Figure 10, Appendix I). From these discursive sketches, I returned to my literature review and also searched further afield for feminist research which would deepen my understanding of how these discursive threads were coming together and operating as gendered discourses within the women's narratives. Through this process I was able to "[tell] a story about the 'so what' of the data" (Braun & Clarke, 2019, p. 109) as it pertained to the women participants' standpoints within neoliberal, postfeminist, and heteronormative contexts.

CHAPTER 5: Analysis Part I: "I always have to do well, otherwise I will fail": The pressure to succeed as a young woman - academically, at work, and in a relationship

The successful girls discourse

> "*I always enjoyed the actual learning, but I think there was pressure from myself, expectations from the school, which put high value on academic excellence, and like in a way, family and friends as well, sort of would be like, 'Mabel, she always does well,' so in my head I was like, 'I always have to do well, otherwise I will fail...' (laughs).*" Mabel

After introducing myself and my interest in the topic, the first invitation I made to participants was to "tell me a little bit about [themselves]". Perhaps reflecting my own orientation to educational markers of identity, I added examples of descriptive details which seemed relevant to the project, such as what participants were studying, how far into their degree they were, and so on. Participants responded in kind, introducing themselves through reference to their ages, their majors, the tertiary institutes they were currently attending or had attended in the past, and their plans for work after graduating. Following these basic introductions, participants often shared without prompting their concerns and anxieties about the future. Such anxieties centred on participants' success in their studies and their later employability as professionals, but as the interviews deepened, these concerns extended to notions of relational success and the implications of negotiating careers with intimate partner relationships and family lives. Participants were grappling both in the immediate exchange of the interview and in their daily lives with the societal expectations and pressures to succeed as young, highly educated women living in post-industrial societies.

Mabel's introduction typifies the educational and social pressures expressed by participants when they began to narrate their academic journeys. The transcript of the interview begins with me asking Mabel to tell me about her "path to uni and that sort of thing."

Mabel: Oh, that's fun. Okay. Um, soo. I guess I'll kinda take it back to high school. It's in a way, um, I had a, like, big existential realisation at like the end of my high school that I was taking a lot of subjects because I thought I should do them rather than me actually wanting to do them (laughs). So, in like my last year at high school I pretty much took mostly sciences, English, maths, and media studies. … And then randomly took accounting in Year 13 because I thought that might be useful. Um (laughs).

Leola: Useful how?

Mabel: I don't know. Cos I had really no clue what I wanted to do at that point. I knew what I enjoyed, but I didn't know where I could go with it. Um, I think there was so much pressure from schools to be like, 'You should go to university,' rather than showing people like all these other options. So like after Year 13 I had like a lot of like social and like academic realisations and I'm like, 'I'm just gonna work for a year. I just need time to take out and reevaluate my life.'

In my reading of Mabel's narrative, the central theme is Mabel's existential realisation borne by the indirect and amorphous pressure she feels to succeed. Success in this context is not only academic, but scaffolds to the neoliberal pressure on Mabel to position herself advantageously in the workplace after graduation. The imperative of choice – and choosing well – feeds into this construction of success. Within a neoliberal, postfeminist discourse of success, girls and women are positioned as the creators of their own success, and like Mabel, it is their ability to make the *right* choices which will decide how well they fare in the deregulated labour market (Gill, 2007; Walkerdine, 2003). That Mabel was having to engage with such weighty decisions and emotional turmoil at seventeen speaks to the pressure of neoliberal individualising discourses to know what you "want to do," to understand where you can "go with it," and to pursue those goals without deviation.

Participants' references to attending tertiary institutes, achieving degrees, and securing desirable employment after graduation centre on what Jessica Ringrose has called the "successful girls" discourse (2007). Primarily based on research in the UK, the successful girls discourse refers to the educational shift in Western countries whereby girls are positioned as the central beneficiaries of liberal feminist gains in modern education. Bolstered through limited government testing of gender-only academic achievement, girls' success in educational contexts is simultaneously celebrated, taken-for-granted, and lampooned, while boys' lack of success is attributed to an imbalance of gendered educational resources and an

underlying crisis of masculinity (Walkerdine, 2003). The successful girls discourse has not been extensively researched within an Aotearoa New Zealand context, though there are suggestions of a successful girls vs failing boys discourse in New Zealand news media (e.g. Collins, 2018; Edmunds, 2012; Laws, 2009). As Ringrose argues, the successful girls vs failing boys discourse obscures "how issues of equality for boys and girls in school are much wider than gendered achievement, and how achievement is related to issues of class, race, ethnicity, religion, citizenship and space/location of schools, as well as to gender" (Ringrose, 2007, p. 473). In Aotearoa New Zealand, (post)colonisation and its enduring legacy in educational outcomes for Māori and Pākehā is at the front of any such contextual considerations.

As Walkerdine et al. (2001) explored in *Growing Up Girl,* their longitudinal study of working-class and middle-class girls' psychosocial experiences of education in the UK, the successful girls discourse also places immense psychological pressure on young women. Middle-class girls experienced a different type of pressure to working-class girls. Having grown up in moderately affluent families, with parents and grandparents who had had the privileges of higher education and professional employment, and being socially embedded within cultures which assumed the popular post-feminist narratives of girl power and gender equality, it was unthinkable for middle-class girls in Walkerdine et al.'s (2001) study to be any less 'successful' than their peers and family. Anxiety, depression, and an eventual feeling of emptiness sometimes accompanied these young women as they reached their otherwise highly successful adulthoods. Working-class girls who achieved higher education faced quite different psychological pressures – a sense of being socially isolated and out of place at tertiary institutions, while their working-class families feared the cultural loss of their daughters through the upward mobility offered by higher education. In an Australian study, Baker (2010) similarly found that young women in regional Australia experienced "new burdens and anxieties" (p. 1) within post-feminist educational contexts, where the successful girls discourse positioned them as the inheritors of equal opportunities or even disproportionate advantages in comparison to 'failing boys' and young men.

Like in Mabel's narrative, Alex and Daisy emphasise how the pressure to succeed culminated at the end of high school:

Alex: ...Like you have to know [what you're going to do]. You know that last year of high school, everyone's like 'What are you doing next year? What are you doing next year?' It's the only thing anyone asks you. It's not even a 'How are you?' first. You know? It's like 'Hey. What are you doing next year?' (both laugh). And you're like, 'I don't know...? Freaking out.' ... You get really sick of that question, you don't want to think about it anymore. It's a lot for a seventeen year old, to know what they're going to do with the rest of their life.

Daisy: ...I feel like school puts a lot of pressure on like people to know what they want to do, soon as they come out of school. And like [the school] always encourage you to go straight to uni, not have a gap year. ... And kind of, if you didn't know what you wanted to do, they kind of just forgot about you. ... There's a big pressure on having a degree, I think. Yeah.

For Alex and Daisy, the discourse of knowing what you "want to do" is circulated within the education system and school community. It serves to normalise the escalating pressure on young people to adopt and strive toward neoliberal agendas. University degrees become symbolised as the next tangible level of success, and assumes a developmental trajectory in which choosing a career path in itself constitutes a life script.

Sajida: ... I'm, I belong to an educated family in [City], which is one of the economic hubs of Pakistan. ... I've always grown up with [professional] working women, and it is not an expectation to be married until at least you have got your Master's degree… So it was a certain level of expectation that to achieve independence I have to be well educated myself. ... And in order to be successful, actually, you have to be independent.

Sajida, a PhD student from Pakistan who had been living in Aotearoa New Zealand for four years at the time of the interview, speaks from the standpoint of growing up in a highly educated family of women in Pakistan. In her context, having a Master's degree is a minimum prerequisite to becoming married, and is tied to women being able to achieve economic independence and hence "success" in the emergent liberal feminist context of her family and class contexts. Marriage is still non-negotiable in Sajida's account, as will be discussed later; however, women's education is discursively constructed through rational economic language which intertwines with neoliberal discourses of individual achievement and success.

Early internalisations of gendered success and heteronormativity at school

> "*I think because I've always sort of succeeded academically people thought 'Oh, she'll do this, she'll do that,' and in my head I think I took that in as 'I should do this, I should do that,' rather than like forging my own path..."* Mabel

For Mabel, the pressure to succeed academically intersected with the pressure to perform gendered roles within heteronormative school systems. At the time of our interview, Mabel had recently graduated from university. She spoke positively about her university experience and was enjoying working in her first professional job. However, when narrating her educational journey and how it intersected with gendered relationship expectations, Mabel went back to her kindergarten and early primary school years to capture the nuances of her experiences. Mabel was born and grew up in the United Kingdom, emigrating to New Zealand before she began high school. In one of her recollections, she spoke about playtime within the school grounds and how misaligned gendered expectations made her feel even as young child.

> *Mabel: I remember phrases there-, being sayings [from the teachers], like, 'That's not very lady-like,' to like, some of my friends. And of course we were only about six or seven (laughs).*
>
> *Leola: Oh! Tell me about that.*
>
> *Mabel: Um. There was like, um, I remember getting to the play, in like, the play area, um, which wasn't hugely big, but it was nice for us to run around, and like, we had quite a smart school uniform, um, especially for like little kids … And like, some girls would run around really fast and like, they would like lift up their like skirts … To run faster. And it wasn't all the teachers, but it was certain older more traditional teachers that would say that. And I'd kind of look at them like, 'They're playing!' (laughs).*
>
> *…I was a bit of a tomboy really, I didn't like kiss-chase or anything else, like 'Eww, no' (both laugh). Not for me! Whereas some of the other girls who were my friends were like, 'Errr, nooooo' (playful sounding). Whereas I was like 'No' (serious sounding). And that was like an expectation in itself, that you'd want to play kiss-chase.*

Mabel is describing some of the socialisation processes by which gendered, heteronormative standards of 'play' for boys and girls is learned at primary school. Mabel

sees this as coming from multiple directions. Gendered comments towards girls who were being too robust in their play suggest a prevailing view of young girls' bodies and behaviour as already at risk of inappropriate sexualisation and promiscuity. Mabel appears at the margins of these socialisation processes, defending children's rights to participate in ungendered play. Yet the children themselves mimic and enforce these heteronormative standards, too. Thus, school operates as a central context in the early performance and inscription of sex and gender roles (Walkerdine et al., 2001). Reviewing the intersection of gender and media in New Zealand education, Panteá Farvid (2018) emphasises the need to challenge and dismantle gender binaries *through* the school system, including teaching children and young people to critically question representations of gender roles.

The formation of heterosexual norms is especially evident in Mabel's narration of the game "kiss-chase," which involves a playful decree that being kissed is unpleasant yet desirable:

> *Leola: … So, I've never heard of [kiss-chase], but I'm guessing they probably do it here at primary school. So is it like being chased by a boy? [Mabel: Yeah-] And a girl being chased by a boy?*
>
> *Mabel: Yeah. And then they'd reverse it, though. … It was just like a really innocent thing, but it just felt really weird to me, so I like never participated. And I was just like 'This is too weird,' (laughs). Even as a little one. … I was like, 'I'm just gonna hang out with my friends, and be' (laughs). Yeah, it was very interesting cos it was like, I think, expected that most people would join in?*
>
> *And like it wasn't something that we were encouraged to do, it just kind of happened. But I, like, retracted immediately, and like 'No, I'm not comfortable with this. I'm gonna go have fun with some other friends.' And I would naturally like go towards the boys who weren't involved, and like wanted to do something else. So they, sometimes they were like 'Ohh, you're a tomboy.'*
>
> *Leola: So, because you didn't partake in the kiss-chase game, you had it suggested that you were a tomboy?*
>
> *Mabel: Yeah. By my other, like, classmates. Not by teachers or anything. Um, but, I would, I, I didn't find that an insult … Cos I always just liked to play (laughs). But not that kind of game. It was just, like, for me it was like, 'Mm, no, not playing.'*
>
> *…It was kind of weird cos it wasn't like it was actively stopped or anything. But, oh. You don't really think about that when you're little, but reflecting on it now I*

> *can see, oh, there were really kind of problems with that (laughs). Consent, like. All that sort of jazz.*

The fun and romanticism of kiss-chase itself appears to be based on dominating and chasing down another girl or boy against their will, echoing feminist theorisations of how heteronormative sexuality has historically been constituted through romantic discourses of masculine dominance and feminine submission (Gavey, 2005). Mabel draws on contemporary discourses of sexual and relational consent to frame kiss-chase as particularly troubling from her standpoint as a young woman. Part of the moral difficulty for Mabel in her re-telling of these experiences is that supervising adults did not intervene. As she notes, the normalisation of kiss-chase functioned through its indirectness and its performance as innocent children's play. Mabel uses laughter to minimise the consequences she experienced for refusing to play kiss-chase: she is labelled a tom boy, a title she happily accepts but recognises was intended as an insult against her.

Mabel experiences significant academic pressure as school continues. Praised by her family members, peers, and teachers, Mabel came to associate her worth and identity with academic achievement. She then had to monitor her performance at school and maintain her high standards all of the time, lest she slip, "fail," and experience a disruption of her identity:

> *Mabel: I think cos I, I got like an academic award and like a social award right at the end of my last year at the primary school, which was actually in [City], um, and like that had never happened before, and like everyone was really happy for me.*
>
> *And I was really happy, but I think then that sort of established pressure in my head, like, 'I have this to live up to,' and like everyone asks you what school you came from and then my friends would be like, 'Ohhh, she got dux! Blah, blah, blah!' (laughs).*
>
> *And they're sort of like 'That's cool,' but I don't want everyone to know me just for my merits. But I think other people would reinforce that value, but I think in a way then I thought 'Oh, I should value that highly as well,' but at the expense of other things. Probably wasn't the healthiest thing that happened (laughs)…*

Mabel's experiences fit within Foucault's (1979) theory of how disciplinary power becomes enacted within the modern subject. Foucault uses the example of a Panopticon guard tower in *Discipline and Punish* (1979) to show how the constant threat of being observed, yet not knowing whether or not you *are* being observed, instils within the subject a need to

constantly surveil and scrutinise their behaviour, in effect becoming their own prison guard. Occurring within a post-feminist and neoliberal educational context in the mid- to late-2000s, Mabel's experiences also fit Nicholas Rose's (1996) theory of how neoliberal subjectivity is internalised through the proliferation and influence of psy-discourses. To recap Rose's (1996) argument: as psy- (especially psychological) discourses of individual agency, choice, and self-improvement reach ever wider consumption, we increasingly conceive of ourselves as free to invent ourselves, and so act upon ourselves in accordance with what we believe are our "internal truth[s]" (Rose, 1996, p. 92). Part of Mabel's internal truth was her love of leaning, upon which she acted to improve herself academically:

> *Mabel: ...I always enjoyed the actual learning, but I think there was pressure from myself, expectations from the school, which put high value on academic excellence, and like in a way, family and friends as well, sort of would be like, 'Mabel, she always does well,' so in my head I was like, 'I always have to do well, otherwise I will fail...' (laughs).*
>
> *... I think that's like, what started me to be like 'I should do this, because it will meet the expectation,' rather than 'I should do this because I want to do it and shouldn't really worry about, the thing...' Cos I always loved learning, but I thought, oh, maybe I should do this because, blah blah blah. Lots of internalized pressure (laughs).*

Mabel came to believe that she had to continually maintain her initial success, and eventually, in trying to achieve this goal, what had brought her joy – learning – became a source of stress. Despite her efforts as a twelve-year-old to resist the successful girls discourse, Mabel's success comes to be taken for granted, in the paradoxical sense that Ringrose (2007) has identified within the successful girls discourse. Even as Mabel's success is celebrated, it occurs within a discursive framework where the only alternative to success is failure, thus producing an internalised psychological pressure which Mabel describes as "not the healthiest thing." In this way, the successful girls discourse operates within a narrow binary of success vs failure, where a lack of discursive alternatives serves to punitively regulate girls' learning and behaviour.

On being (and not being) an "academic kid"

Participants deployed other strategies to negotiate the successful girls discourse. For Alex and Daisy, the imperative to be successful *academically* was experienced in different

ways, as it intersected with each participant's differing location within their heteronormative educational contexts. Alex, similar to Mabel, identified herself as an "academic kid," yet having grown up in a rural New Zealand town with limited educational opportunities and slowly coming to realise she was not heterosexual significantly altered her negotiations of this academic pressure. Daisy experienced another side of the successful girls discourse, perceiving herself as not "the smartest" and struggling to have her tertiary studies in Beauty Therapy be taken seriously by high school teachers, while coming to terms with her breakup with boyfriend Zach[11]. The following analysis explores these participants' discursive strategies in relation to their later development of gendered and relational expectations.

Alex was completing her Master's degree at the time of our interview. She was going to begin her doctoral degree the following year. She was excited about the next stage of her tertiary journey and acknowledged the long-term commitment it had required to reach this point: *"Oh, I mean, by the time I finish my [doctoral degree] I'll have been [at University] for nine years. And it's, it's a lot. Definitely weeks, months that you're just like, 'Ohhh. Why am I still here?' But (laughs), um. Yeah, I think the long-term values and goals and everything really outweigh it."* Of the participants, Alex used humour the most frequently to frame her narrative. Alex's humour was playful, creative, and often helped her to convey multiple and divergent feelings and meanings within a single response. However, her humour could also be strongly self-deprecating, to the extent that I often had to check my understanding of Alex's meaning – is she making serious statements in a playful tone, for example? Is it appropriate for me to be laughing along with her, even if what she is saying is not only funny but evokes in me feelings of deep sadness? Many of the nuances of Alex's humour do not translate to the transcript – her tone, facial expression, posture, and so on. My interview with Alex began as it had with other participants, with me asking her to tell me "a little bit about [her]self" and her "journey to tertiary studies."

Alex: …Yeah, I failed Level 3, but I got UE. So, that was good. So it took me the first half of the like year after high school to sort myself out. And so then in 2014, semester two I started, at [University].

Leola: Okay. So, um, did you grow up in [Smalltown], was that your hometown?

Alex: Yeah, yep. Since I was born.

[11] Pseudonym

Leola: And (pause) just walk me through a little bit more, tell me more about the period in between finishing high school and not being sure if you wanted to go to uni.

Alex: Um, yeah. So like, I think it was sort of expected, cos I was one of those, um, academic kids. That I would always kind of go to uni. And then in my last year I kinda got a bit down, got a bit angsty (laughs). Um. And was not going to go anymore, and ra ra ra. Failed Level 3 and didn't want to do any of that.

But really I was just a bit unwell and needed to um sort my head out a bit. So it just took me a solid five, six months of just like working and (pause) getting back on my feet and all that, so.

Yeah. Then I started. It was like I just had to go back to the, like, original expectations (laughs). I just took a year off.

In Alex's narrative, there was never any real question of whether or not she would go to university. It was always assumed that she would seek higher education and a professional career because she was recognised as an "academic kid." Much of Alex's transcript will hang on this identification with being academic, just as many of her negotiations around her choices and decisions would refer back to her understanding of what 'being academic' means and the particular sociocultural positions it enables and constrains for women.

Alex: I don't think I saw myself as [an academic student]? But everyone else, like my teachers and my parents and stuff definitely saw me as one. Especially in primary school, early high school. Then I went away on exchange, so I was just off the radar anyway (laughs). Then in my last year I was not an academic student, I was just a (pause)... truant.

Here, Alex's understanding of being academic is simultaneously framed as an inherent personal quality and a position within a social structure which changes according to one's performance and location. Alex's statement that she did not see herself as an academic kid adds additional meaning to her earlier, deceptively simple statement that she was "always" expected to go to university. Like Mabel, Alex has experienced this expectation since primary school and has attempted to resist the exterior labels and internal pressures of the successful girls discourse. She notes that in her final year she was also a "truant" and laughs, with an ease that is perhaps enabled by her current position as a highly educated and successful young woman. She can look back on these earlier misadventures as youthful learning experiences, not as barriers to her current life aspirations. Alex adopts developmental educational discourses to talk about her learning experiences at high school:

Alex: But um. (long pause). I don't know. I just found high school very boring, I think. It got quite limited, quite quickly... I just kinda cruised along. I wasn't like one of those 'I am academic!' [students], you know? I just did my work, got the grades, didn't have to kinda think too much about anything (laughs). It was alright.

Alex implicitly positions herself as an intellectually gifted teenager who had outpaced her peers and was left without an adequate educational framework to keep her engaged and motivated. She distinguishes herself from those students who may have achieved highly, but had to work hard for it. Identity work is being performed by Alex in these passages and what seems to be at stake is her position as a student who is intellectually gifted and so doesn't have to exert a great deal of effort or "think too much about anything" to achieve successful results. Such a position is historically assigned to men and male students, and goes against the successful girls discourse, wherein girls' academic performance is linked to their conscientiousness, hard work and post-feminist privileges, rather than their inherent intelligence (Ringrose, 2007). As will be explored later in the analysis, Alex is cautiously stepping onto contentious gendered terrain – the sacred intellectual lawn which women were ushered off in Virginia Woolf's time (Woolf, 1929/2015).

Daisy, in comparison, experienced the exteriority of *not* being considered an academically successful girl during her time at high school. When we met for her interview, Daisy was in her second year of a diploma in Beauty Therapy and was also working part-time at a hair salon. She was nineteen and had recently come out of a relationship with her boyfriend of two years, Zach. Her emotional and discursive negotiation of this unexpected and on her part unwanted break up was a constant thread throughout our interview to which Daisy returned often and from shifting social locations. The transcript starts with me exploring Daisy's feelings about not having enjoyed school.

Leola: And you mentioned not being much of a school person, or…?

Daisy: Yeah, nah. I knew that school wasn't really for me. I suppose I wasn't really the smartest. … But I guess we just had a real close group of friends and like they were all staying for Year 13, so I guess I just decided to stick it out for another year, I guess, what's a year. [Deleted: talks about friendship group].

Leola: And you mentioned not being the smartest person – that's, isn't that maybe just a belief that you hold…?

Daisy: Umm. I, well –

Leola: I mean, how, how do you define yourself like that?

Daisy: I feel (pause) like, I feel like I'm smart in what I do, but like, in, I'm not like – I just wasn't at school to write essays, and stuff like that. It just wasn't me. Like I'll do them for my assignments and everything, but yeah. It's not like a passion of mine (laughs).

Leola: Oh, okay. So it's not a passion of yours and – so, yeah, we could almost describe that in other terms, couldn't we? Cos it's like… Finding your passions. And school didn't necessarily provide those?

Daisy: Yeah, I feel like the school's more like, targeted at, like, your normal commerce degree, or stuff like that. They never really kind of gave me the option, like, other options...

My own engagement with the successful girls discourse is evident in this section of the transcript. I am surprised and concerned when Daisy describes herself as not "the smartest." I ask, or rather suggest, that this is "maybe just a belief that [Daisy holds]…?" This reflects my own feminist imperative to encourage girls and young women to recognise their strengths and abilities. It also, however, speaks to my familiarity and comfort with the successful girls discourse. Like Alex, Daisy is grappling with the meanings surrounding intelligence and academic performance, but from an alternate position. By rephrasing her school experiences as lacking in passion and enjoyment, Daisy not only lessens my errant concern, but engages a discursive strategy which she uses frequently throughout the rest of the interview. It is the discourse of "knowing what you want to do," whereby having an understanding of your "passions" and pursuing them through a trajectory of education, training, and work positions women as successful neoliberal adults, who are certain of both their individual 'internal truths' (Rose, 1996) and their concomitant career pathways.

Daisy: They never really like… encouraged me to [seek options other than university]? And like I suppose some of my teachers were like 'Beauty? Like, really?' Like they kind of don't understand what's involved… And, yeah. It's actually really full on. And like, it's frustrating when people say 'Oh, it's just like hair and makeup,' and stuff like that. But like, there's science behind. Yeah. If people read the assignments we did, like, they would then understand. Which is frustrating, but. Yeah. I guess every beauty therapist gets that (laughs).

Although Daisy finds a meaningful position outside of the narrow academic understanding of success through her work and study in Beauty Therapy, this does not reprieve her from the social pressures of the successful girls discourse. Within gendered conceptualisations of academic success, Beauty Therapy as a subject and professional field is

excluded, positioning Daisy herself as less academic than her peers. Daisy's struggle to have her studies taken seriously links to the gendering of the beauty industry more generally, whereby the depiction of beauty therapy as inherently feminine lowers its academic and social value (Black, 2004; Bredlöv, 2017). As Paula Black (2004) has further argued, the positioning and devaluing of beauty therapy as trivial relates to the discursive construction of femininity as bound to the body and nature, serving as the binary 'other' to masculinity and its association with rational, cerebral, disembodied intelligence. By emphasising the science behind beauty therapy and the intensity of her studies, Daisy pushes back against the devaluing of beauty therapy and her own position outside of the successful girls discourse. This narrative move scaffolds to Sandra Harding's (2004) conceptualisation of feminist standpoint knowledge as a successor science and political achievement, wherein Daisy achieves her standpoint in part through emphasising the scientific aspects of Beauty Therapy, as "science and politics turn out to be internally linked" (Haraway, 2004, p. 9).

Successful girls, education and class

Participants in my project spoke from less formalised class boundaries than the girls and women in Walkerdine et al.'s (2001) study, which was expected given New Zealand's less formal class system (Crothers, 2014). However, material and social differences still significantly affected participants' framing of educational and relationship expectations. Class was most evident in the transcripts of two participants who positioned themselves within distinct cultural locations: Anahera, a Māori woman who had grown up in financial precarity and who had experienced immense financial challenges in accessing tertiary education; and Sajida, who was acutely aware of her privileges as an international PhD student in comparison to the majority of women in her home country, who had no access to formal education. Both Anahera and Sajida were married, and as will be explored, the social and material implications of marriage also influenced both women's experiences of higher education.

At the time of our interview, Anahera had graduated from a tertiary wānanga and was employed as a social worker, a position which enabled her to engage social justice discourses in her negotiations of educational and relational expectations. She had recently married her long-term partner and was the mother to a young boy. The main theme to which she returned

often in the interview was that of financial precarity: both her lived experiences of poverty and the poverty she saw on a daily basis in her job working with vulnerable women. The transcript begins with Anahera describing her tertiary studies:

> *Anahera: …through the study, there was some very, there were some challenges. Especially in regards to finances and everything like that. Well, finances were the biggest part, because I had to do my [unpaid] placement [during the final year of the degree], and that meant I couldn't work.*
>
> *So I couldn't have any money around that time. I, I even went to the point of having to, I tried to apply through my Kiwisaver for Hardship. But because of my, my partner's income, they wouldn't even look at me. …So I had to do my study as well as make sure that my son was okay, and everything like that…*
>
> *Nowadays, I do, I think about it and I am like, 'I don't know how I actually succeeded.' Sometimes. Cos of the financial stressors and everything. Cos it, it's real hard, actually…*

Anahera's narrative of academic and professional success is one of survival. To paraphrase Anahera's description of this time: after supporting herself through the first three years of her degree by working while also studying and caring for her son, Anahera had to give up her part-time job to complete the fourth year of her degree. She had been separated from her partner for two years prior to this, during which time they lived apart. However, having recently re-entered a relationship with her partner at the time she requested financial aid to complete her degree, Anahera was denied a student allowance. Her partner's income was deemed too high, even though they were still living separately, after Anahera left him because of his emotional and financial abuse (as will be discussed later). Thus, Anahera's experience of higher education intersected directly with her financial precarity and her status as a woman in an intimate partner relationship. Within legal and bureaucratic frameworks, Anahera was positioned as financially dependent on her partner, a function of heteronormative political structures which have marginalised women and their labour (Hays, 1996; Rich, 1980/2003). Thus, punitive welfare regulations threatened both Anahera's ability to finish her tertiary studies and her independence and wellbeing in the two years following her experiences of intimate partner violence. Anahera draws on gendered constructs of maternal protection in narrating how she and her family survived this period of hardship:

Anahera: I ended up having to, you know, build up the courage to go into like foodbanks and stuff like that, just to get canned food and things like that. So it was really hard financially. And that was the biggest part about it, because I, if anything, cos I knew my husband wouldn't go inside a foodbank to go get food (laughs). Cos of his ego. Um. But I had to do that, just to make sure that I knew my family were able to survive.

Materialising in these circumstances, Anahera constructed her expectations of higher education within a broader social justice framework, where education and learning can have a transformative effect on women's lives and standpoints. She emphasised not only the professional credentials she had earned through her degree, but the reflexive self-learning she had engaged in:

Anahera: ...I put it down to my social work degree, as to why I'm much more, I don't know, self-aware. And, and, and probably more confident in working in this realm, than before. Cos I was not the way that I am now. I was very much, I would call myself, back in the day, a doormat. I was 'Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes.' And 'Okay, what can I do for you?' kind of thing, whereas now I'm like, 'Nope.' (both laugh). And, and it, it's, ah, it's amazing how powerful saying no is!

Anahera's description of herself as lacking in confidence prior to undertaking tertiary study linked back to her childhood experiences. Again, Anahera's sociocultural and material conditions shaped her narrative of school: both of her parents were musicians, who had sporadic incomes and at times relied on welfare support. Anahera and her siblings travelled often with her parents, as they went from gig to gig. Markers of class separated Anahera, such that material differences, such as the type of calculator she brought to school, positioned her socially and academically within the classroom:

Anahera: Cos my mum and dad were both on benefits, so, we didn't have the best of things, we just had necessities. So when people used to go and come to school with all their, like, real flash scientific (laughs) fricken calculators, I'm coming to school with, you know, just one of the normal ones. So it was (long pause), I don't know, I think if anything, because of the fact that we didn't have as much as everyone else, [it] just made things a little bit harder.

As class intersected with race, Anahera experienced discrimination at school, which was pronounced when she lived in Australia:

Anahera: I was brought up over in Australia, from when I was little up until the age of ten. ...I was treated like I was an Aboriginal, too. Because I was a little bit darker of colour… Like I can remember times when I was getting told off just by sitting by some, um, Pākehā folk. And I'm like, 'Um, well how am I supposed to learn?'

Educational curriculum influenced Anahera's engagement with school subjects. Through a constricted Pākehā curriculum which emphasised the centrality of English, Maths, and Science to intelligence and academic performance (Fry, 1985), Anahera came to perceive of herself as on the margins of the school system. She draws on discourses of practical versus abstract learning to explain her lack of engagement with maths and science:

Anahera: I was more of a practical person? I wanted to do stuff with my hands, instead of sitting there writing in a book. And that's, for me, what maths was… I was, like, 'Nrghhh. Where am I gonna use algebra?'

It was always the art, um, like, creative stuff. … So I always enjoyed those kind of things. Only cos I felt it was more around, like, self-expression kind of stuff, than 'You need to do this and do that,' kind of stuff. It was more practical. 'I can use a paintbrush, I can use a camera.'

It was performative and visual subjects that Anahera most enjoyed, as these subjects aligned with her understanding of creativity and self-expression. However, halfway through high school Anahera was forced to leave, as her education intersected with her newly formed relationship with her partner:

Anahera: I ended up having to leave high school, cos I got with my partner (laughs). Um. And cos he was linked to, well, he wasn't affiliated, he just associated himself with, um, people who were in [gang]. And, yeah, that... [gang] ended up getting wind that I was with him, and wanted to take me out.

Yeah, well, because my partner, he's a bit older than what I am. … So it did, yeah, it caused a bit of a ruckus up there. And cos I was, I used to go to school with his [relative], so she hated my guts. And got the [gang] to try and, yeah... Intimidate me. And it worked, cos I didn't go back to school.

Ahahera's narrative of having to leave school abruptly after being threatened by gang members reflects the complex matrices through which gangs have become interwoven with

communities in Aotearoa New Zealand (Gilbert, 2013). The socioeconomic deprivation experienced within many New Zealand communities link to the presence and development of gang relations and affiliations (Radak, 2016), as gangs increasingly and paradoxically enter the public sphere not only as criminal organisations, but as community partners in efforts to protect tamariki, such as by providing school lunches (Cronin, 2014). Anahera makes narrative sense of the gang threats through her broader embedment within communities which are socioeconomically precarious and connected to gangs, connections which extend to her partner and her fellow high school students. As whānau members disapprove of their relationship, the gang operates to regulate and enforce consequences against Anahera. The gendering of violence is implicit here: as a teenager and young woman, Anahera is positioned as the target for the gang's retributive actions, even though her partner is older than her and directly affiliated with the gang. This is in line with gendered constructions of women as subordinate to their partners, even as they bear the discursive burden of relational successes and failures (Campbell, 2017).

Such narrative turns were formative in Anahera's articulation of education as transformative to women's lives during the interview. For Anahera, education occurred beyond classrooms and wānanga, such as in the trainings and resources provided by social service agencies. She constructs education – both formal and informal – as deeply meaningful to her identity as a social worker. Education has been not only the means by which she has transformed her own circumstances, but by which she supports and advocates for women in other fraught positions. Psy-discourses still appear in the edges of Anahera's narrative: for example, in her description of helping women to "better themselves," she is influenced by discourses of self-improvement and individual agency, as these discourses implicitly position women as responsible for their own circumstances. In doing so, however, Anahera seems to be negotiating a 'third space' between colonial and indigenous terrains, as they intersect in Māori women's identity positionings (Moeke-Maxwell, 2008):

> *Anahera: But I think also with my life experience and stuff … it sort of made sense to be where I am? …I wanted to try and inspire some of the women who, who I'd come across, because a lot of them lose that, the spark to want to keep going on and, and bettering themselves. …So that they know that there is a pathway to be able to get back to being who they were… I'm able to be able to be a part of*

that, you know, always walking beside them as a support, to help them better themselves.

Anahera's conceptualisation of her identity pivots to her sense of success, which is not delimited to linear educational and career achievements, but has developed in spite of significant financial, social, and relational precarities. Anahera's success is grounded in her daily achievement of paying rent, managing to feed her tamaiti, and supporting other women to rebuild their lives. Hers is less an individualistic form of success, based on neoliberal ideologies of individual merit and choice, but more of a communitarian success, formed through an intersecting web of class and cultural relationships. Anahera's narrative demonstrates the limitations of the singular 'successful girls' discourse as it circulates within broader society and is described in feminist research. As Hughes (2002) has argued, if we are to challenge the neoliberal and postfeminist discourses of 'the' successful girl and woman, we need multiple and divergent accounts of women's success, as success intersects with gender, race, class, and other markers of differences.

In what appears to be a radically different sociocultural position to Anahera, Sajida came from a family of highly educated women in Pakistan. Exemplifying the neoliberal ideal of inexhaustible energy and motivation, at the time of our interview Sajida was working thirty hours a week in a professional job whilst also undertaking her PhD studies fulltime. Drawing on developmental discourses where upbringing and parental behaviours are privileged as the defining influences on children's life trajectories, Sajida emphasised how her family's attitudes and expectations shaped her work ethic and understanding of education:

Sajida: …women have been very ambitious in my family, like always. And so that has, that has naturally, I think, um, [come] into me as well. Um. My mum is a doctor, she is a single parent, ah, she's looking after a sister back home who's also working [in a demanding career].

Leola: …And you mentioned that there was a kind of a rule that you wouldn't get married until you'd done your Masters? …Just explain to me a little bit how that was discussed in your family and...

Sajida: It wasn't discussed, actually. Actually I've been, um, I would say a very, um, I was been, I have always been a studious person, like I, I've always had that thirst for knowledge. And you know, always wanted to do something. Marriage was, marriage was not really the only thing we were living for, if you know what

> *I mean? Like, it was one of the key components, um, moving forward, because we come from a country where there, I'm a Muslim myself. So in a Muslim family women are supposed to be getting married, shifted to their, um, husband's home, and then, ah, caring with their life from thereon. So it was a certain level of expectation that to achieve independence I have to be well educat[ed] myself.*

Sajida takes a liberal feminist position in these explications. Highly educated men are absent from her narrative; rather, she focuses on the women in her family, eight of whom had achieved PhDs, as she noted elsewhere in the interview. Similar to Mabel, Sajida's thirst for knowledge forms part of her internal truth (Rose, 1996), upon which she has acted rigorously to improve herself. However, within her Pakistan Muslim community, education is framed as a highly significant but not ultimate marker of a woman's success. Rather, being married and having children are the imperatives for women:

> *Sajida: ...people usually do ask 'When are you getting married?' That's the first question that people usually ask if you, um, if you're in Pakistan. And the next question is 'When are you having your first child?' And then 'When are you having you having your second child?' So it's a lot of, um, prestige is attached to women being married and being able to raise and bear children.*
>
> *Sajida: ...some time ago, um, women [in Pakistan] did not have the capacity to file their own divorce. ... If they want to get a divorce, just because they are living in unhappy relationships, that was, that was something that we thought had a very negative cultural stigma attached to it. Like, 'Oh, you are a divorcee, so you actually are unsuccessful. You are a failure. You're a loser.' That kind of thing.*

Sajida narrates her experience of living in Aotearoa New Zealand as having reprieved her of the burden to perform the labour expected of married women in Pakistan – not only for their husbands, but for their husband's extended family. Although still married and required to care for her husband, Sajida's construction of women's roles within intimate partner relationships is interwoven with neoliberal, postfeminist discourses of freedom and choice:

> *Sajida: I think this country and this type of environment has given, can, is very conducive to women's success and, you know, women can really, women are really, mm, just another human being who can do whatever they want. And I just love this. I love the degree of freedom that women have and, you know, even freedom of speech, freedom to exercise their rights. And I think I've been really impressed by everything.*

Sajida: …I see [in New Zealand] women are literally, um, yeah. Just doing what they want to do, and if they, if they are in an unhappy relationship then what's the point of carrying it, yeah, with them?

In the above excerpts, Sajida's shifting constructions of women's liberation and rights is strongly tied to ideologies of success. However, women do not succeed so much *as women,* but as "just another human being." Thus, the intersection of liberal and neoliberal conceptualisations of women's educational and relational expectations in Sajida's account coheres around a humanistic narrative of de-gendered and universal personhood. Financial imperatives to gain economic security bear down on her narrative, as she positions both herself and other women as vulnerable to shifting labour markets and family responsibilities:

Sajida: …lack of education means lack of good occupation and employment, which means less income or no income at all. So [some of her friends' parents] have fought against the system to make, um, their children, um, well educated. And, you know, um, just to go around and, you know, defy the odds and everything. Um. And these women have been successful as well. Like sometimes I think about my friends and I think, 'Actually, I am not that deserving, I think my, some of my friends should have been in my place.' But just because, you know, they did not have the resources to come this far, um, they are now limited with family. And, like, with family and children. Yeah.

Throughout the interview, Sajida described herself as immensely privileged in comparison to the majority of women in Pakistan. Thus, Sajida's success is not individualised or isolated from the sociocultural contexts of girls and women in Pakistan, even as she spoke through degendered humanistic discourses of women's success. She spent significant time and care articulating the sense of guilt and responsibility she felt toward women who were facing economic and social precarity in Pakistan. In making these negotiations, she positioned herself as successful by chance and circumstance, not choice or hard work as emphasised in neoliberal, postfeminist discourses:

Sajida: I feel very privileged. I think I'm, I'm, I'm really, ah, one of the chosen few in my country, you know, who've got to this point, that I can do what I want. Um. And I really feel bad about those women, and I, I've, I wish I could do something for them to be able to, ah, raise themselves.

> *…I just feel that I'm a little helpless… There are lots of problems back home that women are facing, just because of this male dominance. And, yeah. It's just, yeah. It's still a long way to go. Yeah. And it's different from city to city. …There is always that one part of the country that's bleeding.*

Sajida's conceptualisation of women's precarity thus materialised in overt concerns about being able to provide financially for her family. In this context, education became hugely important to Sajida's aspiration to achieve "independence" not only from gendered constraints, but from economic and emotional insecurity:

> *Leola: When you use the word 'independent,' do you mean financially, in other ways?*
>
> *Sajida: Financially independent, yes. And also emotionally. Like, um, being able to pick yourself if you go down. Yeah. …Like I know my mum has been raised by her parents and how, how much confidence that gives to a woman, when she is educated. When she knows what she is doing, when she is in a reasonably good job, and she is working her way, that she can afford her house, she can raise her children. And so, you know, God forbid, but in case I face the same situation, at least I'll know what I need to be doing. So yeah, I would say financial independence 80%, but also emotional support.*

Here, Sajida drew on rational economic language, familiar to her both through neoliberal discourses and her studies in Finance, to convey the exact terms in which she framed independence. Her experience of growing up with an independent mother who was able to provide for her family after the unexpected passing of Sajida's father – through her work as a doctor, not by remarrying as was expected by her local community – is central to Sajida's formation of her own standpoint as a highly educated woman who will not be dependent on men for her own or her family's economic security. Thus, Sajida is explicitly challenging the position of men as providers within heteronormative families, as she narrates her success through the imperative to be independent, both financially and emotionally, as a migrant woman in a neoliberal world.

Heteronormative relationship trajectories

> *"It would have been quite good and like acceptable and nice for me to do high school, do my undergrad, do my teacher training, become a teacher, marry a guy, have kids, boom boom…"* Alex

Often intersecting directly with participants' experiences of the successful girls discourse was an expectation that their adulthoods would follow a heteronormative relationship trajectory. Such trajectories were also strongly entwined with participants' narratives of seeking higher education, with university and tertiary degrees forming a developmental step along the pathway to becoming successful (heterosexual) adult women. Sometimes, these heteronormative assumptions were explicitly challenged, as in Alex's transcript, where she narrated her experience of coming to identify as a "gay girl" during her undergraduate degree, while living in an "extremely straight" university campus environment. For others, heteronormative trajectories were so taken for granted that they surfaced as assumptions in speech, with participants' positioning themselves automatically and without explication as heterosexual girlfriends, partners, and/or wives, whether in their current relationships or in their talk about the future. The following brief excerpt from Daisy's interview shows this configuration. We have been talking about her work following graduation, which Daisy is excited about. She anticipates working on cruise ships as a beauty therapist, which will allow her to travel whilst also save money for the future.

> Daisy: *...I want to do cruise ships and stuff, because I've got my international certificate now. So, yeah, I'd love to travel with [my diploma], um. I guess once I'm older and I've got kids I can do it from home, like. I can start up my own business. But yeah. I feel like there's just so many options (pause) now that I've actually found something that I like. (laughs).*

Within this narrative trajectory, Daisy automatically shifts into a futuristic terrain where her position as a mother within a heteronormative family structure is entirely taken for granted. Daisy's spoken omission of an intimate partner relationship in this context can be read as an assumed presence, not absence, of heterosexual partnership in her life. Having found what she wants to do, albeit outside of a traditional academic pathway, Daisy is able to narrate a congruent future for herself wherein not only does she engage in personally fulfilling work, but she can be flexible and organise her employment around her children's

needs. Here, the successful girls discourse has been superseded by the successful women discourse (Kahu & Morgan, 2010), even in the aftermath of Daisy's recent and confusing breakup. The discourse of successful women initially emerged during Hays's (1996) exploration of women's negotiations of motherhood and paid employment in the United States in the 1990s. The discourse draws on neoliberal ideals of rational agency and individual success to position women in the dual and often untenable positions of high achievers at work and intensive mothers at home. In an Aotearoa New Zealand context, Kahu and Morgan (2010) further explored women's strategic negotiations of the intensive mothering and successful women discourses. Women in their study experienced significant pressure to succeed within these dual roles, as rational economic discourses positioned paid employment outside of the home as the basis of citizenship and of high social worth, while the intensive mother discourse reinscribed childcare as the gendered domain of women, wherein mothers are expected to devote significant emotional and financial resources to their children. As Kahu and Morgan (2010) showed, women used multiple strategies to reduce the tension resulting from these intersecting discourses: significantly, they constructed motherhood as a job, thus attributing the high social status of paid employment to motherhood whilst resisting motherhood's devaluation.

Marie in particular resisted the heteronormative life trajectories bound up with the successful women discourse. In her mid-twenties at the time of our interview, she was in the first year of her doctoral degree. She had completed five years of undergraduate and postgraduate study and had another two to three years of doctoral studies ahead of her, perhaps her most intense yet. She was feeling the weight of that pressure, and, at least within the context of the interview, connected it to the gendered relationship expectations of her generation. Single and "career driven," Marie positioned herself as a hard-working young woman, whose personal success and aspirations would potentially conflict with the roles expected of her in an intimate partner relationship. The transcript begins after I have asked Marie if she had had *"…any expectations of an intimate partner relationship – what it looked like, what [she] sort of thought was a normal – um, before [she] started uni. And how those might have changed since [she's] been at uni?"* In what became a narrative pattern across the interview set, Marie selects high school as the starting point when forming a response to these questions.

Marie: Um, probably when I was at high school (pause) I think I had more in my head of those kind of typical gender roles that you think of, where like, the man is the income earner and like, the woman stays at home and has children, yada yada.

But I think as I've gone through uni I've kind of become a lot more career driven and I've decided actually, I don't want to be that person who stays at home. I want to have my own career, and you know? Like, it doesn't matter to me if I earn more than my partner, so. Yeah (laughs).

Leola: … where do you think that idea of the gender roles came from?

Marie: I think it was probably with a lot of my friends. You know, they often talked about, 'Oh, you know, you've got to marry into, erm, money, and like, you know.' (both laugh). When you're, when you're kids in school and stuff…

Um, yeah, so I think it probably did come from that. And then also, like, tv shows – it's portrayed a lot on that, and movies, yeah. It's how it's often portrayed that, you know, women stay at home and raise the children, and men go and earn money.

Marie frames the pressure to succeed in her study and work as self-determined, aligning with the neoliberal construction of success as contingent upon making the right choices. However, Marie also speaks with concern about the dual pressure to perform successful heteronormative femininity in her relationships with others. In their analysis of young single women's negotiations of femininity, Pickens and Braun (2018, p. 432) identified 'desirable femininity' occurring within an intersection of traditional feminine modalities (including motherhood, domestic positioning, as well as being agreeable, passive, and selfless) with neoliberal discourses of independence and autonomy. From this intersection, a paradoxical "new femininity" (Pickens & Braun, 2018, p. 433) emerged wherein single women had to appear beautiful and sexy, perform acquiescence to men's superiority and control, and appear happy as single women whilst simultaneously anticipating and valuing long-term, monogamous relationships with men. For Marie, successful femininity is entangled with traditional gender roles within a nuclear family, and pertains to basic economies of gender, such as who earns the majority of the household income and who "stays at home and has children." Many of Marie's negotiations of gender roles within her relationship expectations centre on this polarity between external and internal labour, as they circulate around gendered norms of masculine and feminine production. Marie cites her parents and grandparents, as well as the media, as formative in these expectations:

Marie: [Her grandparents] are like, 'Oh, you know, when, when are you getting married?' And I'm like, 'I don't even have a boyfriend at the moment, so' (both laugh). 'Probably not any time soon.' ... Well I suppose for them, like, ah-um, they got married pretty young, so like 18, 19, 20. And I'm now like, nearly 25. And so they're a bit like 'Oh, you're getting a bit old!' (both laugh). Which doesn't make me feel great."

Marie: ...like my mum does a lot more of the cleaning than my dad and I think that's mostly because he's at work, and so, like mum has more time on her hands to do those things. Um, so I think [Marie's understanding of gender roles] probably comes from that. It, yeah, and it – again, it's portrayed in the media as well, that that's just, kind of, the way things are. Um, yeah, and you like, you even hear about women who do have these like amazing careers and they're still having to do the, like, looking after the children and the cleaning, the cooking, all of that. So I don't know how they do it, but.

Here, the generational impingements on Marie's relationship expectations are evident. In an almost comical sense, Marie's quotation of her grandparents' comments demonstrates the persistence of historical ideologies around women's marriageability. Despite Marie's extensive achievements in the external, neoliberal world, internal pressures circulate within her extended family, informing Marie's expectations of how she can succeed in both career and relational contexts. Gendered expectations are similarly evident in Marie's references to her parents, whom she describes as following a traditional heteronormative model of labour division. Marie herself reinforces these labour divisions, as she positions her parents in the binary roles of male breadwinner and female housekeeper. As she returns to her own position within the heteronormative societal matrix, Marie invokes with incredulity the image of ideal womanhood promoted by postfeminist discourses – that of the superwoman, who seamlessly manages her career, motherhood, and housekeeping (Hays, 1996). Here, the intertwining of the successful girls and successful women discourses in Marie's account link to the gender expectations of women voiced by Sajida:

Sajida: I think it all comes down to economic pressures. Yeah. That's why they're not having work-life balance, they have pressures to raise children, and then they are raising children, um, while they are working? And it's such a, like, ah, it's too much that a human can take. ...I've been told here also, by a lot of Pakistani women, that 'Oh, I know a person who raised two children while she was doing her PhD, so why can't you?'

Whereas Sajida more explicitly draws on economic rational discourses to narrate the pressure on women to succeed in both public and private life, Marie frames her resistance of heteronormative trajectories through neoliberal discourses of choice. In the following excerpt Marie describes her hesitancy toward the "certain pathway" that women are expected to take in a heteronormative relationship. Again, she links her concerns to the pressure to perform successful femininity:

> *Marie: And people expect you to do, like, a certain pathway. So, you meet someone, you get married, then you have children. So, like, I think you're expected to just follow this direct path, but… That's not necessarily what I want to do?*
>
> *So, um. Yeah, it is really, really hard to (pause)... I think there is more pressure on you as a woman to go down that path. And especially the children thing. Like, there's a massive pressure on you to have children, and if that's not something you want, it's, um…*
>
> *It's quite hard to actually say that to people, especially when they, like, ask you, 'Oh,' like, you know, 'How many children do you want?' (both laugh). And it's like… 'Maybe none. I don't know.' Like. Yeah.*

For Marie, divergence from this expected trajectory requires that she negotiate and explain her life decisions to others, through discursive performances. It is assumed by others in Marie's social circles that she *will* want children, it is just a question of how many. Like Daisy's future imaginings, being in a relationship is so taken for granted in the questions Marie is asked that partnership is not mentioned. In the following excerpt, Marie expands on these gendered negotiations, linking them to biological discourses about women's fertility and the social pressure for women be securely positioned in a heteronormative relationship by a particular age. I have just asked her whether she feels there is a pressure to be looking for a partner, as a woman; and what ideals and values she would look for in an intimate partner relationship, *if* she is looking.

> *Marie: …I feel like there is kind of a pressure, especially as you get older, like, as a woman especially, you're like, 'Oh, you know, the clock is ticking' (both laugh). But I, yeah. So I think in some ways there is a little bit of pressure. Um. I try not to like focus on that too much, but yeah.*
>
> *Um. And then I think ideal-wise and how you'd negotiate things [in a relationship], there's a lot of things that I know that I wouldn't be prepared to compromise on. Like there's certain things I want to achieve and I think finding*

someone who also feels (pause) you know, would be happy to go along with that – it's quite hard.

Um. Yeah, so. In that respect (pause). Yeah, I don't know how (laughs) I can negotiate on some things, but not on others (laughs).

Having one's own biological children, and doing so within a limited fertility timeframe, is discursively privileged in Marie's account of women's gender identities. Being a woman is entirely associated with the traditional heteronormative assumptions of marriage and childbirth, and Marie resists these discourses even as she has internalised them. Multiple discourses are conflicting in Marie's account, enacting constraints on how she visualises her future. Holding to her position as a successful young woman, Marie locates her trouble not in the discourses themselves, but it in the practical challenge of finding a partner who will support her aspirations to live beyond the heteronormative trajectories she is constrained by.

Demonstrating what Stevi Jackson calls "the double-sided social regulation" (2006, p. 105) of heteronormativity, Alex emphasised the internalised pressure she had experienced to envision her future within a heteronormative model, even as she came to identify as gay. Alex's narration of this shift in her sexuality and identity was intertwined with her conceptualisations of academic success:

Leola: Just to go back a little bit, you said that you felt bad for saying that you're probably too smart [to have been satisfied working as a primary school teacher]? Just unpack that a little bit for me.

Alex: Well I think teaching, primary teaching, is a ridiculously hard job. And like, it takes a lot as a person. And you've still got to be a smart person to be a teacher. Um, so I don't want to take away from like, how valuable and difficult that job is. But I just academically wanted to do more than that.

Leola: Do you think it's hard to, maybe as a woman, hard to acknowledge that, 'Yeah, I'm driven and I'm intellectual'?

Alex: Yeah (laughs). I think, yeah. It would have been quite good and like acceptable and nice for me to do highschool, do my undergrad, do my teacher training, become a teacher, marry a guy, have kids, boom boom...I was like, 'Mmm, mmm, I'm feeling a little bit more... (pause), feeling a bit controversial today.' Nah (laughs).

Um. I just wanted to... Yeah, I don't know if I have a problem with saying, 'Yeah, I feel too smart to do that.' I don't know. I just felt like if I was pulling

these grades, that I could do more than teach, even though I thought teaching was so important, and I still do.

Um. I've always felt very conflicted about how to phrase that. ...I don't think I'm too good for teaching, I just think I'm too academic. It's not even about smart. It's just academic.

Embedded within Alex's negotiations of academic and intellectual aspirations are historical configurations of women's gendered life scripts. Alex takes care to not position teaching as less socially important or intellectually demanding than other professions, even as she draws on discourses of intellectual drive to justify her decision to not become a primary school teacher. In my reading of Alex's narrative, the discursive conflict lies in the historical positioning in Aotearoa New Zealand of teaching as the gendered terrain of women (Morris Matthews, 2008), as discussed in the historical contingencies section. The gendered and imperialist ideologies which constructed women as biologically suited to teaching through their 'natural' maternal and nurturing instincts shimmers in Alex's mention of how good and acceptable and nice it would have been for her to have become a teacher. Becoming a teacher, however, falls within the heteronormative developmental trajectory which included marriage – to a man, not another woman – and motherhood. Alex expands on this heteronormative imperative more explicitly when discussing the emergence of her attraction to women within a dearth of social resources from which she could make sense of her experiences:

Alex: ...you've got no, like, family to draw on. You don't really have any peer stuff to draw on, unless you go out and seek those peers. Um.

Leola: And the institutions aren't providing [LGBTQ resources].

Alex: ...not in a way that really makes sense to anyone. You know? They might be like, 'We are friendly to all LGBTQIA.' And I'm like, 'Well cool. But like, do you actually know any [resources], can you guide me anywhere?'

Leola: 'Can we talk about relationships,' or...

Alex: Yeah, like, 'Without your giant heteronormative assumptions popping up? No, we cannot.' Like (both laugh). And then you have your own heteronormative assumptions, from your upbringing in a straight family…

It's like you kinda think that, 'Oh, I'm gay. My heteronormative assumptions are gone!' Like, you know? (laughs). It took me the longest time to realise that I am gay meant that I would not end up with a guy and stuff. You know? Like there was, there was a good period of time where I was like, 'Yeah, I don't like guys,' but then if I'd like, imagine my future, it was with a guy. I was like, 'No, no (laughs). That's not going to work.' Um.

As Jackson (2006) argues, gender, sexuality, and heteronormativity rest upon institutionalised norms which through their intersection legitimise some forms of relationships but not others. Alex describes how this legitimisation of heterosexuality at the macro and micro levels operates to obscure homosexual and non-heterosexual relationships and identities. As significant as the realisation that she was gay, Alex had to dismantle her own internalised heteronormative relationship expectations in order to visualise a future which did not include marriage to a man.

The equality baseline

Within a successful girls versus failing boys discourse, gender becomes an oscillating comparative measure, based on an "abstract and dislocated ideal of equality" (Ringrose, 2007, p. 473). As Ringrose argues, more focus needs to be paid to the richly nuanced post-feminist contexts in which these discourses are operating, to understand how truth claims about masculinity and femininity intersect with "neoliberal discourses of educational equality" (Ringrose, 2007, p. 471). In my study, some participants who drew on the successful girls discourse also depended on decontextualising the concept of equality, speaking of equality as a historical inheritance which had already been achieved and hence was a baseline in their relationships and relationship expectations. Berry was one such participant. At the time of our interview, Berry was completing her Master's degree in psychology. She was in a long-term relationship with her partner, Tom[12], who was also a university student. Like me, Berry was hoping to gain registration as a psychologist at the end of her postgraduate study. I had learned this from our small talk prior to the interview starting and so we had established rapport over the complicated educational pathways we were both navigating to reach the definitive 'end' points of our postgraduate degrees. Berry implicitly drew on successful girls discourses in narrating her journey toward this point. Her transcript begins with her introduction of this journey:

> *Berry: Okay, um, so. I (pause) took a year off school, did a gap year, went travelling. And then I came to [University] to do pre-vet. And then I didn't make it into pre-vet, ah, I didn't make it into vet. Um, so I decided to try again. And someone*

[12] Pseudonym

> *told me that psychology's an easy paper to get good grades in. … So I was like, okay, I'll try it out, and then I ended up loving it. I enjoyed it so much and I was like, 'Nah, I'm not going to go back,' so. Yeah. So I've been studying full-time since then. … [She's doing a] Master of Science now. And then, um, next year I'm going to Christchurch to [seek professional registration].*

Berry frames her initial decision to study psychology as a rebound from veterinarian school, using self-deprecating humour to ease the pressure she experienced to achieve high grades. Her emphasis on her love of psychology provides narrative congruence to her decision to pursue Master's research and psychological registration in the future. Although Berry's narrative fits relatively easily with the successful girls discourse, she struggled to specify her relationship expectations in the interview. This was especially the case when responding to my questions about gendered expectations in intimate partner relationships. The following excerpt begins with me asking Berry about any gendered relational pressures she felt as a woman.

> *Leola: Um, do you feel pressured to be in a relationship?*
>
> *Berry: No.*
>
> *Leola: Okay. Cool. (both laugh). Are there any roles you feel pressured to take up within a relationship because you are a woman?*
>
> *Berry: No. No. Nope, my partner's, well, yeah, I suppose my own beliefs kind of shaped that, in the sense that I've always been like, 'Nah, men and women are equal, I'm not going to put up with (pause) being put in a box.' But, luckily I did find a partner who was very respectful and, and, um, supportive, and that kind of thing. So, we do (pause) well, I suppose we expect things of each other, but not because we're men and women? … So, oh, maybe it's just (pause) kind of sub-conscious, but I don't think so? (laughs)*
>
> *Leola: So you're kinda going beyond the gendered binary of, like, men do these jobs or women fill these roles?*
>
> *Mabel: I suppose sometimes we unconsciously do that (laughs). … You know, like, um, if something goes wrong with my car I'll be like, 'Ohh, where's Tom, I'll ask him, cos I don't know' (both laugh).*

Berry responded with such a firm negation to my questions about gendered relational pressures that we both laughed in response, perhaps to ease any tension. The lack of texture and detail in these responses can partly be explained by my use of closed questions and my hesitancy to ask Berry for further clarification. However, Berry's discursive task is tenuous,

as she tries to account for her lived experiences within the achieved-equality assumptions of postfeminist and successful girls discourses. Berry draws on neoliberal discourses of individual responsibility and agency to assert that individual beliefs enabled her positive, ungendered experiences as a woman. However, her reference to luck suggests that even with a strong personal belief in gender equality, it was only by happy coincidence that she has been able to enact these beliefs within a respectful and supportive relationship. Berry's turn to discourses of unconscious drives enables her to make sense of hers and Tom's occasional gendered expectations of one another, even as they consciously relate through a post-gendered mindset. Berry's reticence to acknowledge any gendered pressure she experiences as a woman contrasts remarkably with her willingness to talk about the gendered pressures Tom has experienced as a man.

Leola: …do you feel that your partner – there's expectations on him, is he a man, identifies as a man…[?]

Berry: Yes. Absolutely. Yes.

Leola: So then there's kind of like expectations on him, to have to be that way…

Berry: Yes, yeah. There's um, great expectation with, um, like emotions – showing emotions. I think with his family sometimes that is tricky. Umm, and, and having the job, and being breadwinner. I think there is, especially from his side of the family, there's quite an expectation from him. Um, which I think is (pause) quite damaging, but. I think a lot of it's quite damaging. But he, he's getting better. I think he realises that I don't have those expectations of him, um, which I think helps. I hope (laughs).

…He, um, came into our relationship with those beliefs and I kind of just, had to, sit him down and be like, 'I don't care about that. You know, it's not important to me. Yeah, it's not something you need to stress about or, or work yourself up about.' Um, so slowly but surely he's… getting… wouldn't say better, but (laughs). He's getting a little bit easier on himself.

Constructing her response through psychological discourses of nature vs. nurture and developmental normalcy, Berry narrates the difficulties Tom has experienced as a young man growing up in a family which models traditional gender roles. Here, the gendered division of labour referred to by Marie and Sajida in regard to women's roles within relationships is flipped on its binary side. Tom's struggles centre on the expectation that men fill the provider role within heteronormative family structures, by providing materially through paid employment and income, while maintaining a stoic and strong exterior which is not

vulnerable to emotions (Campbell, 2017). In my reading of this excerpt, Berry is performing significant emotional labour in her efforts to reprieve Tom of the pressure to perform masculinity successfully. Even though the emotional work Berry is exerting within this relational context is gendered and linked to discourses of women's nurturance, an absent discourse of emotional labour inhibits Berry's ability to speaking consciously and without defensiveness about these more nuanced gendered performances in her relationship.

CHAPTER 6: Analysis Part II: "I guess it's just the comfort of having someone": Companionate relationship discourses

The companionate relationship discourse

The second significant discourse participants deployed when speaking about their higher education and relationship expectations was the companionate relationship discourse. Identified as a "relationship companionate logic" by Elizabeth Blair (2017, p. 678), for the purposes of my analysis I have replaced "logic" with "discourse" to emphasise participants' *discursive* constructions of relationship expectations over what might be inferred to be their cognitive functions. In Blair's study, companionate relationship logics cohered around ideals of friendship, mutuality, and egalitarianism (2017, p. 681). Intimate partner relationships were likened to "mutually rewarding" connections, based on principles of friendship and shared values (Blair, 2017, p. 682). Similar tenets were associated with intimate partner companionship in my own study. Sharing important values with their partner, being able to communicate well and compromise in order to meet one another's needs when necessary, and treating one another with respect were significant features of the companionate discourse that participants employed. The companionate discourse sometimes also involved resituating men into traditionally feminine roles of caregiving and nurturance, such that heterosexual women participants could positively narrate the care they received from their partners. Thus, the companionate discourse enabled some participants to deregulate gender in their relationship expectations, even when they were hesitant to acknowledge the influence of gender at all in their lived experiences.

Where the companionship discourse converged with the successful girls discourse, emphasis on both giving and receiving not only companionship but care and nurturance enabled participants to construct intimate partner relationships as 'healthy' and conducive to their personal and relational success, thus not threatening their positions as highly successful young women. Participants positively expressed the sense of comfort, companionship, and support which they received (or expected to receive) from an intimate partner relationship. For some participants, these companionate features were narrated as the foundation of their relationship, by which partners provided support during times of academic stress. Below,

Berry's description of how she balances her study with her relationship demonstrates this function of the companionate discourse:

> *Berry: Most of the time [Tom] is very, very supportive. Like, if I feel comfortable saying to him, um, 'I know we were gonna meet up today, but I'm really, I am stressed,' he's really good about that. He'll, he's very understanding. And because we live together it's a bit easier. But I can say to him, um, 'I'm really, really stressed out, do you mind making dinner?' and he'll be like 'I don't mind, it's okay, you, you study, I've got this.' That kind of thing. Which is really lovely. Um (pause). Yeah, so in that case we're, we're quite, quite lucky.*

Berry draws strongly on a companionate relationship discourse in describing how she communicates her needs to her partner Tom. In these depictions, Berry positions herself as the receiver of care during times of stress, as this involves an implied renegotiation of heteronormative gender positions. As elsewhere in her interview, however, Berry shadows her positive assertions with hesitancies, contradictions and references to luck. It is unclear in which 'case' Berry considers herself and her partner to be lucky. Does she mean that her living arrangement with Tom is fortuitous in making it easier for them to rearrange their scheduled time together, without forfeiting their regular contact? Or is she claiming that their relationship itself is lucky for being based on mutual support and companionship, echoing a belief that such an arrangement is a rarity within heteronormative relationships, and hence returning to her comment earlier in the interview that *"luckily [she] did find a partner who was very respectful and, and, um, supportive"*? Although I did not pick up on these subtleties during the interview and ask for clarification, Berry's contradictions speak to the difficulty she is experiencing in telling a positive post-feminist narrative of her relationship expectations. Rather than narrating Tom's nurturance as an ordinary and unremarkable part of their relationship, where both partners provide material and emotional support for each other, Berry's gratitude to her partner emphasises the exceptionalism of that support, within a heteronormative framework. Thus, even as she is able to somewhat integrate the successful girls and companionate discourses to emphasise the positive aspects of her relationship in connection to her studies, gender continually shadows and fractures Berry's narrative.

The comfort of having someone: Privileging heteronormative companionship

Other ideologies were at play in participants' use of companionate relationship discourses. Daisy, for instance, privileges the notion of a romantic relationship in itself, as a symbol of companionship and support, sometimes in contradiction to the actual interactions she described between herself and her ex-boyfriend. In the following excerpts, Daisy narrates her initial feelings about her break-up with Zach and how it left her missing the comfort and companionship enabled by a relationship.

> *Daisy: I guess we, I didn't see it coming – breaking up. Um. Kind of came as a shock. But I guess it's for the better now. Um. Yeah, it was kind of nice just to have that someone, like, who's always there. Um, where now it's just like, mum and dad, you know? (laughs). Like it's just not the same, I guess. Yeah. You kind of just miss, I guess it's just the comfort of having someone. Rather than, yeah. If that makes sense.*
>
> *Daisy: …it's hard, like, with friends with, in relationships, it's kind of like 'Oh well they've got them, like, I don't really have anyone.' Yeah, like, you're always going to have your friends, but it's just not the same as having, as being in a relationship I guess.*

Still adjusting to being newly single, Daisy is attempting to find silver-linings amidst the emotional turmoil of her breakup. She attempts to frame the process of breaking up as meaningful and positive, albeit painful. As she is processing her feelings in the interview, Daisy comes to a significant distinction: it is not so much Zach whom she misses, rather it is the comfort and security which came from being in a committed relationship which she is yearning for. In making these discursive negotiations, Daisy privileges the companionship constituted within an intimate partner relationship to the companionship she receives from her family and friends. Friend and familial support are constituted as inferior to the comfort and companionship received from an intimate partner relationship. Wanting to expand her meaning further, I ask Daisy "*How did that make you feel [being in a relationship], compared to now with your family support rather than having a, a partner as well?"* She replies:

> *Daisy: Um, I guess you'd talk to [your partner] more about stuff, than like your family. (laughs). Stuff you wouldn't tell your family. It was just nice to have someone there, to always talk to, just about random stuff, like I suppose it's just*

that sense of not having (pause) anyone. And like I do get bored easily, so it's kind of like… Oh, I've got nothing to do now, kind of thing (laughs).

As she describes her relationship expectations through a companionate discourse, Daisy is also describing the privileges which are available within a secure, long-term heteronormative relationship (Jackson, 2006). She refences the interpersonal benefits available within an intimate partner relationship, such as intimate conversation. However, implicit references to the broader social benefits for women of being in a relationship are also threaded through her narrative. Such benefits include feeling safe and validated while out in the world together, socialising and enjoying different activities, and coheres around the discourse of women's vulnerability and men's protective roles (Campbell, 2017). In the absence of this validation and companionship, Daisy frames her singleness as a deficit. The heteronormative privileges which Daisy is describing are not only material and legal (Rich, 1980/2003), but are also social, and are linked to historical discourses and practices of valuing married unions over short-term and/or 'casual' unions between men and women (Pickens & Braun, 2018). They contrast strongly with the social stigmas Marie describes when talking about her own position as a single, albeit highly successful, young woman. The transcript begins with me asking Marie if she has felt any pressure to be in a relationship as a woman.

Marie: Yeah, yeah. So, um. Yeah. There's a lot – I feel like there's a lot of pressure, um, on women to be in a relationship and (pause) yeah.

Leola: Do you think there's the same pressure as on men? Or in different ways?

Marie: Umm (pause). I think it's – mmm – I think it's maybe in different ways. So, I think sometimes the (pause) although sometimes, like, single men are kind of almost idealised, I feel. It's kind of like they're living this ultimate lifestyle as a bachelor, whereas a single woman it's like, 'What's wrong with you?' (laughs) 'Why aren't you married?' So, um. But then in other ways I think sometimes for men (pause) maybe, um, I'm trying to find the right word. I think they get a little bit of that pressure as well, where you know, by a certain point it's like 'When are you – why haven't you settled down yet?' Um. Yeah, but I don't think it's the same as for women. But that – maybe that's just my bias, but (laughs).

As Marie notes, there are double standards for how single men and single women are socially positioned by a companionate discourse. Single men have their single status and their existence outside of a companionate relationship validated, in line with the social valuing of

men's sexual freedom and desire, as part of a 'healthy' masculinity (Pickens & Braun, 2018). Single women, in comparison, are depicted as deficient and abnormal, even when they have spent years of their lives working towards educational and career achievements. As showed by Pickens and Braun's (2018) research with 21 young women in Aotearoa New Zealand, the pressure to engage in "heterosexual coupling" is significant and only increases as women pass their mid-twenties (p. 443). 'Failure' to couple successfully by a certain age required women in Pickens and Braun's study to perform the next best option – appearing happy and confident in their singlehood, so as not to appear desperate or lonely. Contrasting again with both Daisy and Marie's narratives of companionate relationships, Alex described the lack of safety and privilege inherent in non-heterosexual relationships:

> *Alex: I think had I been living in Wellington or Auckland, that might be a different story. But I don't remember seeing a girl with a girl [in public], till after I'd (pause) sorted myself out. And I still, other than like, guys I know personally who are my friends and who are comfortable to be around me, I, like, I don't think in Palmy [Palmerston North] I've ever seen two guys together [as a couple].*
>
> *But I don't remember seeing a girl with a girl, till after I'd (pause) sorted myself out. And I still, other than like, guys I know personally who are my friends and who are comfortable to be around me, I, like, I don't think in Palmy I've ever seen two guys together. Like in a public space.*
>
> *Like, absolutely, in like a private space, with my friends, one of my friends, he's got a boyfriend and they're like, very couple-y when we're just hanging. And then we walk outside the house and it just looks like we're just a group of friends, you know? There's a very definite shift.*

Alex's narrative aligns with research on LGBTQ persons' experiences of feeling unsafe in everyday heteronormative spaces (Stults, Kupprat, Krause, Kapadia, & Halkitis, 2017). This lack of safety scaffolds to the institutionalised heteronormativity discussed by Rich (1980/2003), as it involves the physical, legal, psychological, and material suppression of non-heterosexual forms of companionship. Here, gender intersects with non-heterosexuality in Alex's narrative to position her male friend and his boyfriend as even more vulnerable to heteronormative attacks than two women together in public. A similar institutionalisation of compulsory heteronormativity was evident in the women's narratives of sexual education provided by their high schools:

Marie: I went to an all-girls school… So relationships just weren't really talked about and, and I wonder how much it has to do with the fact that it was an all-girls school that, you know, like, they didn't have to deal with boys and girls together. So they kind of thought, 'Oh, we don't need to talk about those things.' I don't know.

Mabel: …that initial school was a same sex school, all girls. Um. Like, I think in a way they kind of put a limit on certain things. Cos they were like 'There's no boys here, it won't be an issue for lots of students to be in a relationship' (laughs).

Alex: I remember nothing of [sexual education class], other than blowing up condoms, like they were balloons. …Don't get pregnant, don't get an STI. Condom. Off you, off you go (laughs). …And then the LGBT stuff, oh my god. Poor queer kids (both laugh). They're just sitting there, with these condom balloons, like... (pause).

Within Marie and Mabel's narratives, heteronormativity operates not only through peer networks, but through the curriculum of the school. Without the physical presence of boys and young men in Marie and Mabel's all-girls schools, there is less emphasis on sexual education, evidencing the crude discursive connection between biological heterosex and institutionalised heteronormativity. Biological heterosex is emphasised again in Alex's memories of "blowing up condoms," as sexual education was wholly focussed on the implications of penetrative sex, rendering emotional engagement, relationships, non-penetrative sex, and non-heterosexual sex and relationships as invisible.

Narrating companionate relationships through work and investment

"…Actually it took me, like, a year of being with him before I, kind of, realised… okay, this, you know, like, you've actually gotta work at it, it's not just gonna happen." Berry

Across participants' narratives, discourses about companionate relationships were interspersed with rational economic language, resulting in long-term, committed relationships being described not only as the ultimate sources of companionship in women's lives, but as projects in and of themselves. Thus, companionate relationships were likened to investments which required hard work, time, effort, and money in order to succeed. Unlike in Blair's

(2017) study, the use of rational economic language in this way did not position participants as independent from or emotionally distant to their partners. Rather, it often operated to substantiate the significance of relationships in participants' narratives, concretely and affectively. Just as the successful girls discourse framed academic achievements as demanding but necessary and fulfilling components of young women's lives, the combination of companionate relationship discourses and rational economic language positioned women as the *earners* of their own relational success, who, with mutual effort from their partners, would be rewarded in due time with a happy relationship. This construction of earned relationships sometimes involved the subtle rejection of heteronormative romantic discourses about women finding 'the one' (Farvid & Braun, 2006) or of feminine submission and masculine dominance (Gavey, 2005). Berry articulates and reflects upon this construction directly. The transcript begins after I have asked her how her relationship expectations had changed since starting university.

> Berry: *Yes. I, um, (laughs), I pretty much had the movie expectation of a partner, you know. Like, the person, you meet them, and like, instantly it's just, your partner, they understand everything and they are perfect. Ah, and then I got to uni and um, and I got to uni and I met my partner and obviously it's not like that at all. Cos you've gotta make sacrifices and (pause) sometimes they irritate you (laughs). Um, so yeah. But actually it took me, like, a year of being with him before I, kind of, realised… okay, this, you know, like, you've actually gotta work at it, it's not just gonna happen.*
>
> *…like, all, my whole family just kind of promoted this idea of, like, 'the one.'*
>
> *Leola: The one.*
>
> *Berry: The one. Yeah. With, well, unintentionally. But like, it was just, ughh. And then I got to uni and it all fell apart (both laugh).*

Berry portrays her younger self as naïve and impressionable in her uncritical acceptance of the romantic discourse of 'the one.' 'The One' depicts women as in search of an ultimate romantic companion – the one, their man – with whom they can have a long-term, loving, and committed relationship. For example, in their media analysis of women's magazines, Farvid and Braun (2006, p. 299) found that discursive constructions of 'the one' cohered around gendered ideologies of women needing to find and keep a man, as this positioned women subordinately within heteronormative relationships. Berry draws on work ethics to dispel her prior belief in a perfect and effortless relationship with 'The One.' She

constructs her relationship expectations around the companionate values of sacrifice, work, and tolerance. Yet Berry is not free from the heteronormative imperative to enact romantic scripts (Korobov & Thorne, 2009) or work harder with her partner to be successful within her relationship (Burns, 2000). In the following excerpt, Berry expresses her concerns about not putting enough effort into her relationship.

> *Berry: It's, the effort is really… That's the part we're not so good at (laughs). Finding time, and, and putting in effort and that kind of thing. You get lazy (laughs). …We don't really go out and do things. And when we spend time together, um, sometimes we don't spend quality time together. Um, so we'll like, sit and just play on our phones next to each other, which is not really spending time together (laughs). Um, yeah, but (pause) we're just lazy (both laugh).*

Berry again emphasises a discourse of neoliberal work ethics to describe her relationship as needing time and effort in order to be successful. Although she and Tom spend time together in a companionate sense, Berry expresses anxiety that they are "lazy" and do not "go out and do things" as a couple as often as they should. Here, it seems that Berry is both expressing dissatisfaction with some elements of her relationship arrangement, whilst also comparing her relationship to heteronormative expectations around dating and happy coupling (Korobov & Thorne, 2009). Social media was critically cited by participants as producing harmful gendered and sexual discourses and as unrealistically representing relationships:

> *Alex: …2015, this app called YikYak… was really big in all the unis in New Zealand. And it was this anonymous thing, you could post whatever you wanted, people up or down voted, and things would take off, or disappear if they got too many downvotes. And there was quite a bit of... not so much homophobia, but some definite biphobia going around… The, the big [biphobic] discourse was definitely the, like, 'Pick a side' thing. 'Attention-seeking, fake, pick a side,' you know.*
>
> *Daisy: …this girl I knew, her and her boyfriend always post pictures together, like, always saying like 'the happiest couple.' But like, they never were, they were always fighting, she's always come crying to me. It's like, you just, it's kind of like a fake relationship you're putting on, yeah. Just like, for people to be like, 'Ohh, I want that.' But it, really it's not like that at all. So I, I guess it's kinda, not a fake relationship, but seems fake from someone who knows the more inside perspective. Yeah.*

Daisy's critical engagement with her friend's use of social media to present a fake-happy representation of her relationship coincides with Daisy's own investment in the notion of a perfect relationship and finding 'the one.' Daisy, in comparison to Berry, does not outright reject the discourse of 'The One' but incorporates it with the companionate discourse when talking about the pros and cons of her previous relationship.

> *Daisy: I guess we were just both real easy going, probably too easy going? That's probably why it didn't work. Um, but yeah. We, I suppose we just had like, real similar personalities and like just got along real easily. Um, so, yeah. Always, like, both always keen to do something, like, both get quite bored quite easily, so there was always like something to do.*
>
> *…Um, and like, both of our families got along real well as well, so it was (pause) just easy. Yeah. Like, we didn't even have to try or anything? It was just, came naturally. …It was just, kind of effortless.*
>
> *… So, yeah, I guess I've always like kind of, visioned what I wanted in a guy, or like, how I want my life to be and stuff. I suppose everyone does that. Um, but yeah, I guess with him it was like, 'Oh, this is how I visioned my life and how I wanted it to be.' So like, when it did end it was kind of like a shock, like, 'Oh, I'm never gonna find someone like that again,' kind of thing. Yeah.*

Daisy draws on psychological discourses of personality types and shared familial backgrounds in her explanation of how everything came together naturally and effortlessly at the start of her relationship with Zach, as befits narratives of finding 'the one.' Here and throughout the interview, Daisy was hunting for a logical explanation for why her relationship ended, driven in large part by Zach not having given her a reason for his decision to break up with her. Following this urge, Daisy shifts from a discourse of ease within a relationship to a discourse of needing to work at a relationship to make it succeed, which helps her to organise her confusing emotions and establish a way forward as a single woman. The following two excerpts further trace Daisy's narrative oscillations between the ideologies of ease and effort in relationships:

> *Leola: …do you think that a perfect relationship is possible?*
>
> *Daisy: Yeah, definitely. Like, everyone's going to have fights about stuff and that, but yeah, I think, I think so. I guess people grow apart, but, I think that's just with time, like. But I think starting off, yeah, it can be perfect.*

Leola: [And Zach's] wrapping up disrespect, in a way that you'd use humour to try to suggest it's not actual disrespect, but, clearly it made you feel, not great?

Daisy: Yeah, yeah. Yeah. I think looking back at it now, it doesn't make me feel great. But at the time it kind of didn't bother me. And, I guess cos we were so, like, joking and like stuff, I didn't really think much of it. And it, like, he didn't think much of it if I said something either.

But now it's kind of like, 'Oh, well, I guess I could've been nicer, or he could've been nicer, or I could've tried a bit more, or...' You know? You just start doubting everything you did. Like, you kind of, 'Oh, I wish I did this with him, or I wish I tried harder, or I wish I was nicer in this situation,' stuff. Yeah. I just think a lot of doubt plays in your mind when a relationship ends.

The doubts playing in Daisy's mind appear to be linked to discourses of emphasised femininity (Campbell, 2017; Pickens & Braun, 2018), which mandate that within intimate partner relationships women work hard to nurture and support their partners, not only in carrying out domestic chores but in their emotional labour. In this sense, Daisy is suggesting that if she had tried harder or been nicer to Zach, their relationship might not have ended. Daisy's internal negotiations emphasise how much women's emotional labour and performances of femininity are discursively linked to relational successes and failures. The keenness of Daisy's loss is evident in how she links Zach to what she had *"visioned [she] wanted in a guy,"* even as she holds to her belief in a perfect relationship. She appears in an interim space, somewhere between acknowledging that her previous relationship was not as easy as she initially believed, while defending her hopes of finding happiness and companionship in a future relationship.

The support and burden of companionship

"Yeah, the idea of success in [Pakistan] is still a woman having (pause) two, three children and a husband. I think the quality of relationship is not, ah, yeah, is not something that's prioritized or given importance to. I think it's just the, it's just the label that 'Okay, she is married, so she has (pause) somebody with her, living and sleeping with her, and she's able to produce children and that's why, that's how she is living a successful life.'" Sajida

Participants who were in their early thirties were more direct in describing intimate partner companionship as both a source of support and a burden. Burdens were complex and diverse, ranging from helping partners to maintain their physical wellbeing, to negotiating complex financial responsibilities, to performing gendered roles with a partner's extended family, to providing multiple levels of emotional support. Sajida was enabled and constrained in complex ways by the intersection of companionate relationship and successful women discourses. As she told her narrative journey of becoming both a highly educated and married woman, she assumed multiple identity positions. She was at once a successful woman, a wife, a daughter to a highly successful and independent mother, a daughter-in-law, and a future mother. Although she notes that her marriage benefits her through the companionship it provides, she also feels the weight of that companionship, occurring as it does within the absolute bind of her situation – that culturally and religiously there was no other socially sanctioned option for her than to marry with the expectation that she would have "two, three children" in the future.

The following transcript begins after I have asked Sajida to describe for me how she relates to the expectation in her culture that women must marry. She responds by drawing on examples from her marriage:

Sajida: *I feel okay. I think I've, um, ... It's good for having companionship, but I would still say that it's quite a burden, it's quite a responsibility in itself to be able to think about another person, make sure that he's being okay, he's being fed properly, that he gets as much sleep as I do, and especially when, um, such demanding careers. Like, a doctorate and plus I'm working as well. So it, yeah, it, it takes a toll on me as well.*

I wouldn't say it's, um, it's one hundred percent all the time. But on the positive side, it is, it is such a support. Like, yeah. Knowing that there is someone who [I] can go to and, um, comfort yourself, just by talking to those persons.

But it also depends on the person as well. Like the person has to be really, very understanding of your challenges. Um. I have not married to a very, very educated person, I would say. Um, but he's very compassionate and I think that's what matters at the end of the day. He's very compassionate. He understands my challenges and he's, he's able to understand what I'm going through. Um. Time and again. And so he's very compassionate and he's always very comforting, and I think it, that works, it very [much] works. Yeah. Mm.

Within her marriage, Sajida occupies a more highly educated position than her husband, a status which enables Sajida significant agency in the negotiation of marital decisions. Sajida frames her marriage through a discourse of companionship, positioning herself as both a giver and a receiver of support. In utilising a companionate discourse, she is able to speak of the burden and responsibility which comes from marriage, which involves an intersection of economic, domestic, and emotional labour. Again, Sajida spoke through a discourse of liberal feminism rather than post-feminism when discussing her role as a highly educated woman and wife. Having grown up in a country where gender roles are highly regulated and readily articulated, she did not hesitate to speak about gender or its role within an intimate partner relationship, unlike the young Pākehā women in my study. As she clarifies in the excerpt below, it was her responsibility as a highly educated and privileged woman in Pakistan to choose a husband who would meet her expectations.

> *Sajida: Yeah. If I had an issue with the traditional view of employment, I would not perhaps have married him, because he was not a doctor, not an engineer, not a teacher at that time. Yeah. My reasons for marrying him were different. …my decision could have been better as well. My sister tells me that. That I was capable of getting another, a better man. But I think he's very compassionate and very loving and very friendly, and I think I can still, you know, I can keep him. It's not a problem.*

There is a mix of rational economic, companionate, and successful woman discourses within Sajida's narrative at this point. It indicates the complicated social positioning Sajida is performing, both in her marriage and in her higher education journey, to tell a personally meaningful, socially acceptable, and culturally adaptable biographical narrative. She is confident speaking about her responsibility in choosing a husband and she privileges companionship and companionate relationship values over other discourses in explaining this choice. There are no traces of romantic discourses about finding 'The One' or 'Mr Right' (Pickens & Braun, 2018) in Sajida's narrative. Similarly regarding motherhood, she speaks in clear economical terms about the imperative to be able to provide materially for any children she might have:

Sajida: Um. I would want to go and work first, before I... Yeah. Before I, um, am raising any children, start raising any children. Um. It's just that I feel it's not really, um, mm. Yeah, I just feel like I'm, I, I'll be very nervous if I'm unable to provide (pause) means for them. I'd be really very nervous, and that would be just my thing.

And I also think that people are there for just some time. They will congratulate you, they will shower you with gifts, and blessings, and they'll go home, but the real trauma that you will face – raising another person. I know that it's such a, a, it's an enjoyable, it must have been an enjoyable experience for people.

But I still think I'm not ready for it. … So it has to be [me] who's making that decision, because I think I am, I'll be the first, the only one who's getting the most affected by it. Yeah.

Sajida positions herself as most vulnerable to and affected by the implications of parenthood, and from this position gives herself full agency in deciding when she and her husband will try for children. Here, Sajida's use of a companionate relationship does not extend to positioning her husband as a primary caregiver to their potential children. She draws on rational economic discourses, materialised through witnessing the financial precarity of women in Pakistan, to express her anxiety about having children at the present time. She is withstanding the gendered pressure to become a mother, even as that pressure continues to accumulate from her in-laws and within her Pakistani community in New Zealand.

Anahera also emphasised companionate values in her relationship expectations, with the key distinction that her narrative highlighted how companionate discourses can enable and normalise intimate partner violence (IPV). For Anahera, emotional and financial abuse was often enacted through her husband's regulation of heteronormative gender roles through a companionate matrix. In the following excerpt, Anahera describes the coercive control (e.g., Hancock, 2017) her husband would use against her, prior to their two year separation during which time he sought help for his behaviour:

Anahera: …When I was with him prior to that, like, before, I wasn't allowed to do anything, without him being like, (makes grumpy sounding voice) 'And what time you gonna be home? And then what time...' Like, I was always questioned and I, I had to, like, give down to the very last minute around, like, accounts of what I was doing, who I was going out with, how long I was going to be there, um, how much money I'd spent…

Anahera's way of making sense of her husband's control and abuse is to connect it to the familial domestic abuse he had grown up with. She uses developmental discourses to emphasise the normalisation of abuse in her husband's family and how this abuse cohered around gender roles, especially in regard to domestic labour:

> *Anahera: …in the past, I was expected to do the mother thing, I was expected to make sure that there was food on the table [for her husband]. …And it's where that power and control slipped into our relationship, before. …So I was working during the day. And then, having to come home, make sure that our son was showered and bathed and fed. And then put him to bed and then do my own, um, routine, before I go to bed, to go to work the next day, too. And that was, it was an expected kind of thing, then.*
>
> *…that's probably where I got tired and I was like, (lowers voice), 'Fuck this.' (both laugh). 'You can, you can clean that out.' But that's where, for me, cos of that, and I, I probably do put it down to the fact that, because of his upbringing, it's what he was used to, too. Because I know that in his family life, like, he used to talk to me about it, how his mum was expected to make sure that there was tea on the table for the family and stuff. And that's what he was used to.*
>
> *And I said, 'Well, in my family... (laughs). In my family, my mum <u>and</u> my dad both cooked, not <u>just</u> my mother.' …But then it eventually ended up being that way [like in her husband's family].*

This was the version of companionship which prevailed in the first years of Anahera's relationship. In her narrative, companionate values of caring for one's partner such as by providing meals are linked to gendered expectations of women's labour within domestic spheres, becoming abuse when that labour is taken for granted and performed through compulsion. Anahera's story of IPV enacted through companionate and domestic gendered discourses connects to emergent feminist scholarship on the nuanced forms of financial abuse within intimate partner relationships. For example, through an intersectional lens, Sundai Anitha (2019) conducted 41 life-history interviews with South Asian women from the UK and India. She found that gender intersected with race and class to position the women participants as subordinate to their men partners and vulnerable to exploitative labour arrangements within their homes. In response to her findings, Anitha argues for a broader conceptualisation of 'economic abuse' in IPV literature which considers the control and abuse of women's domestic labour, as such labour intersects with financial precarity.

Reminiscent of the historical contingencies through which women were discursively positioned in primary domestic roles, there is minimal distinction between the roles of mother and wife in Anahera's narrative of her husband's relationship expectations. Rather, the gendered inscription of being a woman is enough to position Anahera as both the romantic partner and motherly provider to her partner, with the neoliberal implication that she is expected to manage 'double days' of paid and unpaid labour. Anahera does not link her experience of IPV to her position as a Māori woman within the postcolonial context of Aotearoa New Zealand, which may reflect her complex negotiations and resistances of "national bicultural" ideologies that impose essentialist and homogenous cultural identities upon Māori women (Moeke-Maxwell, 2005, p. 497). Wilson, Jackson, and Herd's (2016) research with Māori women on their conceptualisations of safety in the wake of IPV showed that racism and cultural discrimination in the workplace and broader society undercut many of the Māori women's narratives of surviving IPV, demonstrating the intersection of gendered violence with race, class, and labour. In addition to forming strategies for staying safe in their whānau and intimate partner contexts, participants described multiple strategies they employed, such as being hypervigilant when in public, to stay safe as Māori women negotiating everyday racism in postcolonial Aotearoa New Zealand.

Narrating her decision to re-enter her relationship with her partner, to whom she had been married for a year at the time of the interview, Anahera emphasised the importance of both her own education through her social work degree and her partner's education about domestic violence in challenging and redressing the "power and control" that had "slowly but surely slipped into the folds" of their relationship:

> *Anahera: …it took us being apart for a bit for him to get his own help. Because he knew he had to, he knew he had demons, I'll say demons. But (pause)… he got help for it. So he went and got counselling. He went and got, um, he had anger management. Um, he did domestic violence, um, education, and stuff. So these are all things that happened in the couple of years that we weren't together. And it changed the man who he is today. He's a totally different man to what he used to be like.*

Here, Anahera positions her husband as responsible for seeking his own help, a change that took place by his own impetus during their two-year separation. She does not perform the emotional labour of attempting to change his behaviour or mindset, nor does she position herself as responsible for upholding his non-violent behaviour in the future. In doing so, she engages with social justice discourses to challenge the hitherto gendered expectations within her own relationship and broader society that women emotionally, sexually, and domestically take care of their men partners within companionate relationships.

The imperceptibility of emotional labour

Companionate relational labour was difficult to articulate for many participants. In the absence of a discourse which conveyed the gendered emotional labour performed in intimate partner relationships by women, participants regularly fell back on examples of domestic and financial negotiations to narrate their relationship expectations. As in Blair's (2017) study, the women in my study described needing to perform emotional labour within their relationships to ensure that equal distribution of relationship responsibilities, such as the housework and finances, was maintained. Even as participants described this emotional labour, they often spoke in contradictory language about the equality and balance which informed their relationship expectations. Thus, a curiously double-sided discourse occurred – one that spoke, on the one hand, of the emotional labour required of women to uphold equality in their relationships, and on the other hand that left unarticulated or even denied the presence of unequal gendered labour between men and women in relationships. Such denials were present in both heterosexual and queer participants, and in those who were single and partnered. As I will argue, participants had trouble narrating their stories of emotional labour because there are not the discourses available to identify and speak of this form of labour, especially within intimate partner relationships.

For Daisy, emotional labour included apologising for the sake of it, in order to move on from an argument with her partner Zach, while he stubbornly held to his position and would not initiate reconciliation – a form of maintaining gendered control (Towns & Scott, 2013). Even as I ask Daisy if she believed such behaviour was associated with gender, she refuses to accept this possibility:

Leola: ...you've mentioned saying sorry [to your partner] just to make sure the argument was brushed over. Do you think that's tied to gender or not?

Daisy: No, I think that comes under personality types. Like I know one of my friends, she wouldn't just do it for the sake of it, but her boyfriend would just do it for the sake of just moving on. Yeah. I don't think it's gender related, I think it all comes under your personality. And yeah, [Zach] was quite (pause) not a show off, I guess, but quite, yeah, liked the attention and stuff. Where I probably like, yeah everyone likes the attention but I probably just didn't care as much as he did. Yeah. So yeah I think it just comes down to personality.

Leola: Yeah. And what about, like, the relationships of your friends around you. Do you think that there's any, um, gendered stuff there that some of your girl friends might experience more because they're women, or-

Daisy: Um. I guess the guy's always gonna be protective. I guess. But then, like, the girl can be too. Yeah, I don't really think anything comes down to the gender. I think it's more, like, their values, I guess, and what they want from the relationship. Yeah. Um, yeah, like a friend I know, she, she overthinks heaps, so then- But then I think, like, her boyfriend knows that and kinda, what's the word, like, balances her out. Like, reassuring and stuff – there's nothing to worry about. Where she just naturally overthinks everything. Um, so I guess that can play a part. Yeah, but again that comes down to personality. And like the way you were brought up I guess.

Daisy negates my question about the performance of gender roles within her relationship and uses psy-discourses of personality types and family upbringing to explain the occurrence of certain behaviours between partners. She makes this negation three times, leaving no doubt about her repudiation of the influence of gender. Daisy uses the example of a male partner performing emotional labour within her friend's heterosexual relationship to assert that gender is an illusory concept. However, in denying gender, Daisy cannot help but reference and reinscribe gender, as she implicitly suggests that nurturance and reassurance from men is extraordinary, because of their gender. Daisy's use of psy-discourses throughout the interview thus served to individualise and depoliticise her talk about relationship troubles. The discursive use of personality types and upbringing to explain the different roles between men and women within intimate partner relationships effectively obscures structural gendered imbalances, hence allowing them to remain imperceptible through their ordinariness. Such a denial seems in itself to require an exertion of labour, psychologically and emotionally, performed in order to keep the peace in a relationship.

From a non-heterosexual standpoint, Alex emphasised the emotional labour which occurs individually, within a person, and collaboratively, within a relationship, when people are first coming to terms with being outside of a heterosexual norm:

> *Alex: I think if you're gay, same-sex relationship, whatever, um, you don't, if you don't come out early, you don't realise till you're nineteen and you don't get into a relationship till you're twenty. You're doing all that foundation [reflective] work really behind. And you run into a lot of weird issues, because you and the person you're with are both kinda... You might be completely mature in every other way, you might be like a really mature, emotionally mature, like, person. But you've never encountered any of these issues or situations or feelings. And you're just, people don't know what to with it. And you end up in some really weird situations.*

Alex draws on psychological discourses to situate non-heterosexual identity work within a delayed developmental trajectory. In this context, heteronormativity positions non-heterosexual people far behind their straight peers in understanding themselves and their relationship expectations. Within Alex's narrative, initial queer relationships thus involve an enormous amount of emotional labour, as it oscillates not only between gender roles but sexual identities.

> *Alex: ...So like, if you're asking me my expectations for like, someone I want to be in a relationship with or something, is like, 'Do you know, like, yourself quite well?' Which definitely, like, past relationships I've been in since coming out, um, people I've been with haven't known themselves well. So it's kinda like dating a sixteen year old. You know, sixteen year olds are still doing their identity – I mean, everyone is, but – it's a very tumultuous stage of identity development, right? And um, it's really happening! And you're like, twenty, or twenty-one, twenty-two, and you're like, 'Phew. Like, can we kinda skip to the part where you know who you are?' (both laugh). Cos I'm expecting that, when you're in your twenties, that you have a fair sense of who you are.*

In my reading of Alex's narrative, it is ironic that in order to articulate and claim a delayed developmental trajectory from LGBTQ standpoints, it becomes necessary to assume a background process of normal, universal, and steadily developing heterosexual identity and relational maturity. Similarly, Alex's sense that identity should be firmly fixed by your early-

to mid-twenties belies the complex and contextual identity negotiations performed within heteronormative societies (Taylor, 2015). However, Alex's imperative is protective and driven by her need to secure safe emotional footing within any future relationships she enters:

> *Alex: I guess being in a relationship with someone who's secure in themselves could be like a general, no matter what your sexual orientation. But I think it's very, um, it becomes very salient in like a same-sex relationship. Or if someone's only just coming to terms with their sexuality, but they happen to be with you. And you are fine with your sexuality, but then you're like doubting your own sexuality, and stuff, cos it's all getting very messy and like, 'Ohh, am I not okay?*

As Alex further narrates, the negotiation of gender roles in her "horrendous" previous relationship was continually fraught with heteronormative negotiations and concomitant emotional work. Although she was highly articulate about heteronormativity and the invisibility of LGBTQ relationships in society, Alex nevertheless struggled to connect her lived experiences with gender. In this way, emotional labour also became imperceptible within her account. For example, Alex narrates how the heteronormative positioning of queer relationships along societal margins can impel within her the need to excuse and empathise with hurtful behaviour from a same-sex partner:

> Alex: *[Alex can be] a bit too understanding, if that makes sense? And I'm like, 'Oh yeah, like, coming out or like questioning your sexuality identity is really, really rough, you know.' Like I'm not gonna be blaming you for (laughs) all of this stuff. But I mean, at some point I should probably be like, 'No, this is not really right for me. So (makes a running away sound).'*

As Alex expands further on her narrative of her recently ended relationship, she identifies how gender can operate pervasively within queer relationships:

> *Alex: I looked more androgynous, I suppose, and she was very feminine. And very, um, holding on to that [femininity], I don't know. This is the [ex-partner] with the big sexuality crisis. There was a lot going on (laughs). Um. But I was definitely expected to be a bit more of like, the masculine one. And I was like, 'Well, no. It's, I'm not really here to have a masculine energy in here,' you know? …It made me quite uncomfortable. And I never really said anything, cos I don't think the intention was there, to make me feel like that? I think this was just a girl very used to being with guys.*

Alex: … Being with someone who is very like, (taps table) 'I am femme.' I'm like, 'Okay. Cool.' Um, but I think the (taps table multiple times) 'I am femme, I am femme, I am femme, I am femme,' made it mean that I had to not be that? I wasn't allowed to be as feminine, because she was the feminine one…

Here as in heterosexual relationships, the binary between masculinity and femininity operates to position Alex in a compulsory masculine role. Negotiating this gendered expectation in turn requires her to expend significant emotional labour. Alex does not define her experience through a narrative of emotional abuse, but rather through sexual confusion. However, her experiences echo research on IPV in LGBTQ relationships, which suggest that 'identity abuse' is one of the most prevalent forms of control in non-heterosexual relationships (Woulfe & Goodman, 2020). Identity abuse is defined by Woulfe and Goodman as "tactics directly target[ting] a sense of pride in one's identity. Identity abuse emphasizes LGBTQ survivors' marginalized position and denigrates an aspect of their identity that is already threatened by internalized, interpersonal, cultural, and structural heterosexism and gender oppression" (2020, p. 101). Again evidencing the persistence of heteronormative binaries, Alex seems to fall into a discursive void when trying to narrate her understanding of gender distinct from sexuality:

Alex: I'm not, I'm not typically masculine or typically feminine, I'm just, I'm good at what I'm good at, and that's... whatever. If you're going by like, gender roles and like what should be done in a relationship or a household or whatever, I'm not, I'm just not very good at anything, really (both laugh). Sounded bad (laughs). I'm not gonna cook your dinner, but I'm also incapable of fixing the car.

Alex: ...people get into their kinda very niche identities of like, ah, gay or bi or whatever. But they're also like 'femme,' or 'butch,' or da da da. I've never felt the need to like really go any further than, 'I'm interested in girls, not guys. That's all. Just... letting you know.' ...I just dress however I want when I wake up and wander out the house (laughs).

Although delivered comically, Alex's identification of herself as "not very good at anything" is part of her resistance of heteronormative gendered binaries through renunciations of both feminine and masculine roles. Although potentially deregulatory, Alex's approach of distinguishing her sexuality from her gender does not make emotional labour within intimate

partner relationships, whether straight, queer, or otherwise, any easier to discern. Rather, I wonder what becomes of gendered expectations when non-gendered sexuality becomes the basis of one's negotiations within a heteronormative relationship. What happens when we lose the threads of visible performativity by which we can grasp and describe emotional labour, as emotional labour is formed through the discursive categorisations of both sex and gender as biological, not political, standpoints?

Implicit emotional labour was particularly evident in participants' difficulty to articulate their negotiations of relational consent. When I asked participants about their expectations of consent in intimate partner relationships, I emphasised that I considered consent as including sexual consent but also extending into other relational terrains:

> *Leola: And in terms of, like, consent, how do you think that fits in to consenting to roles in relationships?*
>
> *Marie: Yeah. I think (pause) I think you'd really have to sit down and talk about that, because that's such a… I think it's, um, almost like a given that that's how things work. So you'd actually have to physically sit down and talk about those things. Um. Which is probably quite a weird conversation to have (laughs). …I imagine there'd probably be arguments (starts laughing), that side of things a lot.*

Marie's narrative of consent anticipates problematic arguments and exchanges. Her emotional labour in initiating and enabling conversations about consent is implicit, as she expects a confrontational response from a future partner. For Daisy, discussing consent to gender roles within an intimate partner relationship seems so difficult that she states she would rather skip the whole process:

> *Daisy: …I don't know [how she would negotiate roles], I think I'm quite, not stuck in my ways but I like things how I like them. So I guess I would kinda just put up with it and like, cos I, I'd rather do [domestic labour] myself than have someone else do it and me not like it. Cos then I'd just redo it. …But I guess, yeah, that comes under like, respect, as well. Like, if they're not pulling their weight I guess then it's (pause) yeah. Mm. I'd probably, I don't know, I'd probably just talk to them I guess. But that doesn't always change things. So.*

Here, Daisy seems to be implicitly comparing the emotional labour involved in asking a partner to contribute to domestic chores with the physical labour of simply doing the chores

herself. Like Marie, Daisy anticipates resistance in her anticipation of negotiating consent. Daisy turns to companionate relationship logics of compromise to ease the narrative tension involved in making such negotiations within the context of a heteronormative partnership:

> *Daisy: …I guess just talking, like, I guess making, not rules as such, but, yeah. …Compromise, I guess. Yeah. Like you've gotta give and take some. I guess you can't really, like, pick on all the small stuff all the time. Yeah, probably just, yeah, compromise. I guess. I wouldn't know how I'd do that, but (laughs). Because I'm not really being put in that situation, but yeah.*

Daisy positions herself as flexible and compromising, not rule-bound and demanding, evidencing the postfeminist imperative to move away from feminist interrogations of gendered power relations. She locates herself within the more comfortable and depoliticised discourse of companionate egalitarianism, where 'give and take' is rinsed of its gendered implications, hence reinscribing in even more invisible forms the emotional labour performed within heteronormative and postfeminist relational contexts.

CHAPTER 7: Discussion and Conclusion

> *The science question in feminism is about … the joining of partial views and halting voices into a collective subject position that promises a vision of the means of ongoing finite embodiment, of living within limits and contradictions – of views from somewhere.* (Haraway, 2004, p. 93)

In this research project, I have encountered many partial views and halting voices, including my own. Women's voices – ironic, echoing, solitary, collective – were at the centre of my formulation of the project, as I hoped to understand how women were "living within [the] limits and contradictions" (Haraway, 2004, p. 93) of the early 21st century, specifically in the gendered intersection of higher education and intimate partner relationships. I had two central questions on which I focussed my research: firstly, I wanted to understand how women tertiary students were negotiating heteronormative, neoliberal, postfeminist ideologies in their expectations of intimate partner relationships; secondly, I was curious as to how these relationship expectations intersected with women's experiences of higher education. Despite this initial distinction between education and relationships, the two came together synchronically as my research developed, through the long reach of heteronormativity into virtually all of the spaces the women occupied.

To revisit the details of my project: I interviewed eight self-identifying women who were current or recently graduated tertiary students about their relationship expectations. By chance, these women came from a mix of different academic, class, and cultural locations, expanding the partial views from which I narrated my analysis. I recruited the women through trusted intermediary contact people, as befitted feminist ethical emphases on relational practice in academic research. Epistemologically, I drew on feminist standpoint theories of situated knowledges to analyse the narrative and discursive functions of the women's transcribed stories. I did not 'land' in these theoretical positions straightforwardly, but reached them through months of reading, thinking and writing about women's experiences in higher education, intimate partner relationships, and the broader matrices of gendered power relations, as they intersected with my own lived experiences of heteronormativity. My initial findings from the literature review emphasised the shifting and uneven ground on which I was theorising my project: increasing economic disparity and deregulated, globalised labour

markets interlocked with celebratory and critical narratives of women's post-liberation achievements, creating a film-noir setting for my project. As in the grey-toned aesthetics of a film noir, a sense of dreaminess and unreality seemed to thickly coat the post-feminist narratives I was reading, belying the brutal gendered depictions of women within the plots. Rather than the pessimism inherent to film noir, however, neoliberal and postfeminist narratives performed a reverse trick, obscuring the actual pessimism of our social times with an individualist rhetoric of unlimited choice and possibility. Thus, what emerged from my initial readings and writings was the image of an ideal woman, too perfect to possibly exist in an "ongoing finite embodiment" (Haraway, 2004, p. 93), yet held up as the example to which girls and young women should strive toward in the early 21st century. This ideal image linked to the overarching theme in the women's accounts – the imperative to succeed.

Impelled to be achievers not only in school but in their future careers, intimate partner relationships, families, and communities, the successful girls discourse pervaded the women's accounts. In my reading of the women's narratives, success seemed to be in part a definable object (and objective) attached to a more deeply buried and hence imperceptible structure – that of heteronormativity and the gendered imperative for women to 'succeed' in their performances *as women* within historically contingent patriarchal systems. Here, my tracing of the contemporary women's narratives of higher education and intimate partner relationship expectations invariably echoed women's voices from the 'hearable past,' particularly in the colonial context of Aotearoa New Zealand. The women's narratives of success were radically different yet shockingly similar to those of their mothers' and grandmothers' generations, aligning with the partial, fractured, and multi-levelled nature of women's liberation and progress as theorised by feminist researchers (Gill & Scharff, 2011). Class, ethnicity, nationality, religion, and sexuality also intersected with gender in the women's narratives, making visible the heterogeneity of women's expectations of higher education and intimate partner relationships.

The women in my study used multiple strategies to resist and reform the gendered imperative to succeed. Here, companionate relationship discourses become prominent in the women's efforts to narrate their relationship expectations through a postfeminist lens of achieved gender equality. By discursively constructing intimate partner relationships as mutually rewarding forms of intimate companionship, based on egalitarianism, shared values,

respect, and friendship, participants were able in some cases to incorporate their higher education and relationship expectations into narratives of "partners[hip] for success," as in Blair's study (2017, p. 671). In some cases, participants were able to deregulate gender roles and challenge heterosexist romantic narratives of masculine dominance and feminine submission, by positioning themselves as the recipients of care and nurturance from their men partners, especially during times of academic stress. This was achieved within "limits and contradictions," however (Haraway, 2004, p. 93). As companionate discourses fed back into heteronormative regulations of gendered performances, a further film noir 'loop' occurred wherein women's lived experiences of inequality in relationships were rendered imperceptible by oneiric postfeminist rhetoric. So pervasive was postfeminism in the women's narratives that gender in some cases became unspeakable, signifying a forbidden attack on the rights of boys and men, as linked to the educational binary of successful girls and failing boys. From another standpoint, companionate discourses operated to normalise coercive control within a relationship, such that gendered divisions within the home were abusively perpetuated through ideologies of domestic care and companionship.

Emotional labour was a thread to which I returned often in trying to make sense of the complex narrative positionings performed by the women. An absent discourse of emotional labour became apparent through the analysis, whereby participants struggled to recognise and name (or name and *then* recognise?) the gendered emotional work they were doing or anticipated doing within intimate partner relationships. I experienced a similar 'lag' in my ability to read and articulate gendered emotional labour during the project. It was through several discussions with my supervisors and reading additional feminist scholarship on the gendering of labour within heteronormative systems that I began to 'hear' how emotional labour was being expressed and 'see' how it was being performed, both within participants' narratives and broader assumptions in social science research. Thus, I was able to connect the intimate emotional labour women were performing in their relationships to the broader exploitation of women's labour in educational and employment settings. I argue that the development of discursive tools and frameworks through which we can gain articulacy about emotional labour is crucial to challenging and restructuring heteronormative gendered imbalances.

Psy-discourses, especially psychological discourses of 'normal' development, figured heavily in the women's narratives, usually with the effect of explaining (away) the gendered difficulties inherent within women's negotiations of higher education and intimate partner relationship expectations. Personality types, family upbringing, nature vs nurture, sexual and emotional maturity, and intelligence appeared not only at the edges of the narratives, but in the women's formulations of themselves and their subjectivities. Nikolas Rose's (1996) Foucauldian theorisation of neoliberal subjectivity, which is achieved through believing in one's inner truths and then acting on those truths in order to bring about a performance of unified selfhood, was evident in the women's explications of success. Success needed to be supported not only through postfeminist rhetoric, but through the internalisation of the pressure to succeed, as that pressure tended to be shaped by androcentric ways of seeing and claiming truths about the world. Aligning with Hughes (2002) argument that narratives of women 'making it' cohere around traditional male career trajectories, such that women who make it tend to do so on men's terms, not their own, the women in my study were constrained by a single and binary narrative of success. This narrative tended to follow a linear trajectory of being a successful girl at school, gaining a tertiary degree, transitioning to professional work, meeting a suitable partner, marrying, and having children. For some women, the only alternative to this narrative of success was failure. Thus, the research project has identified the need for more expansive understandings of and challenges to what success means, from women's many standpoints.

Reflecting methodologically on the project, I circle back to the importance of relationships and relational practice (Hydén, 2013). Here, circle works as both a verb and noun. As a verb, it references the methodological process of interweaving the women's narratives into a cohesive whole (I imagine the circular motion of my grandmother's hands, other grandmothers' hands, crocheting and weaving), whilst trying to retain the distinctions and contradictions between those narratives. In arranging these distinctions, Patricia Hill Collins's theorisation of collective subjectivity within African-American women's arts was particularly succinct, as she compares women's standpoints to how "Black women quilters place strong color and patterns next to one another and see the individual differences not as detracting from each piece but as enriching the whole quilt" (Hill Collins, 2002, p. 263). Secondly, circle as a noun refers to the circle of women's voices enabled through generations of feminist scholarship, which, to borrow from Haraway's articulations of feminist science,

can be beautifully described as "the joining of partial views and halting voices into a collective subject position" (2004, p. 93). As Haraway makes clear, this subject position becomes collective through its very "limitations and contradictions," (2004, p. 93), in not seeking to go beyond situated knowledges. Thus, I see subject positions and standpoints as forming this metaphorical circle of women's voices, both beyond and within the project. Within my project, there are the historical standpoints of women in colonial Aotearoa, who fought tremendously to gain women's rights to education, albeit often within heterosexist, racist, and imperialist subjectivities, and most significantly there are the women's standpoints within my project, who for all of their educational gains still face arduous gendered constraints in the early 21st century. Here, Rose's conceptualisation of horizons seems pertinent, in seeing how women's standpoints are constrained by their historical times and circumstances, theorised as the "narrow range of possibilities whose restrictions are hard to discern because they form the horizon of what is thinkable" (Rose, 1996, p. 17).

Retaining the individual differences in the women participants' narratives, whilst not positioning women such as Anahera, Sajida, and Alex as cultural 'others' within the project was a significant challenge. It was challenging interiorly, as I attempted to check the deeply ingrained and problematic class and cultural assumptions which form part of my subjective negotiations of the world, and on paper, where the intention to acknowledge the intersection of race, class, gender, and sexuality is perpetually at risk of sliding into 'othering' practices (Ahmed, 2017). I drew on feminist intersectional writings, particularly Patricia Hill Collins's articulations of Black feminist epistemologies (2002), and the scholarship of Māori women in New Zealand, as they have negotiated Pākehā academic and feminist contexts (Irwin, 1992; Moeke-Maxwell, 2008; Te Awekotuku, 1991; Waitere & Johnston, 2009), to inform my negotiations of 'difference' within the analysis of women's stories. I was also supported by my Māori cultural advisor and my experiences studying te reo Māori in Māori tertiary wananga. I took cues from the participants' own cultural descriptions and emphases in arranging their narratives within the analysis. For example, although Anahera explicitly identified as Māori, she only implicitly and infrequently drew on her position as a Māori woman within a Pākehā society in making her narrative meaningful. In comparison, she returned again and again to financial precarity in describing her journey through educational and relational contexts. Even as colonisation has positioned Māori within precarious sociocultural locations, including widespread poverty, I did not wish to impose my own

academic understanding of Anahera's cultural identification on her narrative. Here, Tess Moeke-Maxwell's (2005) theorisation of the 'third space' in Māori women's identity negotiations emphasised the imperative of leaving space for Māori women to explore and narrate their cultural hybridities. I hope I have given Anahera space within the analysis to tell her own story, whilst still highlighting the gendered discourses operating within her narrative. I took the same approach positioning Sajida and Alex within the centre of the analysis, not on the margins as comparative 'others.'

The research interviews were some of the most significant, challenging, and enjoyable aspects of the project. They also left me with no doubt about the relational and co-constructed nature of interview data, or stories (Hydén, 2013). I was conscious of a need to locate myself as a subject (researcher, interviewer, woman tertiary student) within the interviews, so as to develop rapport with participants but also to make myself visible and vulnerable as a speaking partner within what would eventually become the text and transcribed version of our exchange. It was about relationships – the relationship between myself and participants, first and foremost, but also between our oscillating positions within the broader social power relations which we were occupying and negotiating during the interviews. Although I did not disclose personal details in the majority of the interviews, there were highly significant moments within particular interviews whereby my sharing of something personal opened up multiple narrative doorways between myself and participants. For example, in my interview with Alex, after she disclosed her experiences as a 'gay' woman, I disclosed my own experience coming to identify as non-heterosexual. From here, deeper discussions were enabled about how gender and heteronormativity operate within educational contexts.

Methodologically, the project involved a shifting and partial focus as my understanding of women's intimate partner expectations deepened. I moved theoretical locations as the women's narratives directed me, but retained my original research questions as waypoints from which I could meaningfully mark my journey. For example, I set out to research women's relationship expectations, not their relationship experiences per se. I made this initial distinction between expectations and experiences for methodological clarity: I wanted to focus on women's narrative constructions of relationship expectations, rather than their lived experiences of relationships. I also wished to avoid discouraging women who were not in relationships, or whose relationship expectations were not informed by relational

experiences, from feeling less authoritative in their expectations in comparison to their in-relationship peers. However, as the research progressed, I became suspicious of the usefulness of this distinction within my project: whether they were in relationships or not, participants drew on a wide range of experiences, from their early childhoods through to their first school years and beyond, to recall how their relationship expectations were formed.

There are also necessary boundaries and limitations to the project. I did not set out to make broad generalisations about the women's negotiations of higher education and intimate partner relationships, but rather to gain insights into women's negotiations of gender from their standpoints. Thus, I remain within the situated knowledge of the project, not within broader knowledge claims emphasised within social science research. Another important distinction remains around my use of the word 'woman' and the disturbing exclusionary discourses toward transwomen currently circulating within some strands of feminist scholarship and broader society. To rearticulate my sampling criteria: all self-identifying women, including transwomen, were welcome to take part in my project, and I consider it a limitation of the research that transwomen's voices are absent from the women's collective standpoints within the project. As Sara Ahmed wrote in her discussion of Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminist scholarship, "the policing of the boundaries of women has never *not* been disastrous for feminism … feminism begins with a premise that is a promise: we do not have to live by other people's assignments" (2017, p. 269; my italics). Lastly, emerging at the centre of my analysis, but not at the centre of my research questions, was the value and meaning of education for women. As well as forming part of the necessary neoliberal 'credentialing system,' (higher) education was spoken of with significant emotion from the women participants. Hence, an avenue for future research would be how women in neoliberal, postfeminist contexts are affectively and collectively bonding with institutionalised education.

I introduced this research project in reference to one of my favourite feminist texts, Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own.* I now conclude my journey, and so go back to where I started – "Oxbridge on a fine October morning" where Anon has been chased off the lawn, because she is a woman (Woolf, 1929/2015, p. 5). In *A Room of One's Own*, Woolf captured the fabulous yearning (and suppression) of women in her post-Victorian times to

possess education – and by possess I mean quite physically gain access to the books, pens, paper, libraries, lawns, colleges, lecture halls, and laboratories denied to them by their gender. As Woolf memorably observed, women were everywhere and nowhere in the great libraries of men, locked out yet simultaneously kept in. Women, she asked, "Are you aware that you are, perhaps, the most discussed animal in the universe?" For all that has changed since 1929 and 2020, the materiality of education remains. A room of one's own and some money is still a prerequisite to women engaging in higher education, just as higher education is now a prerequisite to many women gaining economic security, especially as the gendered pay gap persists. Here, I wonder about the articulation of loss within postfeminist contexts, and women's ability to speak through and in loss as we simultaneously defend our gains within postfeminist contexts. Perhaps this is where the image of ideal womanhood haunts me most, both in its historical and futuristic visitations: as postfeminist sensibilities reach deeper into subjectivities and wider into public discourses, will women lose the ability to weep, to cry out in frustration at what is expected of them now, to speak of old pains and new gains?

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Appendix I

Bessie Wenerau Grace

Wene's mother, Te Kahui Kerehi, was the first-born daughter of Te Heuheu Tukino, the chief of Ngāti Tūwharetoa Iwi; and Wene's father, Lawrence Grace, was the son of the well-known Reverend Grace, an Anglican missionary. Perhaps unsurprising given New Zealand's small pool of graduate women teachers, Kate Edger was principal at Nelson Girls' College during Wene's attendance there (Wene had won a scholarship to the prestigious secondary school in 1889). Despite Wene's academic excellence, it took her twenty-one years to complete her BA, having first enrolled at Canterbury in 1905. Partial historical records provide an incomplete picture of Wene's life during this stretch of time, though it is evident she pursued many other adventures alongside her undergraduate studies (Morris Matthews & Mane-Wheoki, 2014). For example, between enrolling and graduating, Wene trained as a teacher and taught at a private Anglican college in Christchurch (Ngaio Marsh was one of her students); successfully requested to be declared a 'New Zealand European'; travelled to the United Kingdom; became engaged and un-engaged to New Zealand's tennis star, Tony Wilding; and eventually committed herself to religious orders. Between 1908 and 1911, she had studied on campus in Christchurch, being a popular student and tennis player; the remainder of her studies appear to have been completed through exemption (Morris Matthews & Mane-Wheoki, 2014).

When Wene graduated in 1926, she did so from London. As Morris Matthews's (2008) archival research has shown, most early New Zealand tertiary students struggled to pay their university tuition fees. In Wene's case, her mother's tribal connections helped to fund her education. While Wene's father insisted on a 'European education' for his children, it was through funds acquired by the leasing of Ngāti Tūwharetoa land that Wene's tuition fees were paid for (Morris Matthews & Mane-Wheoki, 2014). Wene's example shows that even when gendered and racist educational prohibitions were overcome, another barrier was encountered: that of money, and the implicit workings of class which regulated access to tertiary education. Ironically, it was by declaring herself a European through the Native Land Amendment Act of 1912 that Wene was granted some legal and financial rights over her tribal inheritances, perhaps helping her to complete her education (Morris Matthews & Mane-Wheoki, 2014).

Analysis Mindmaps

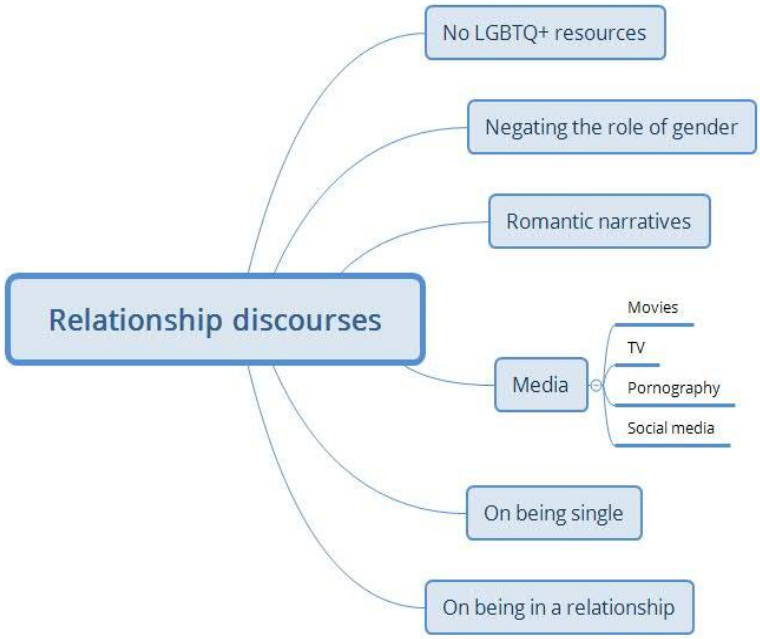

Figure 6: Relationship discourses descriptive category

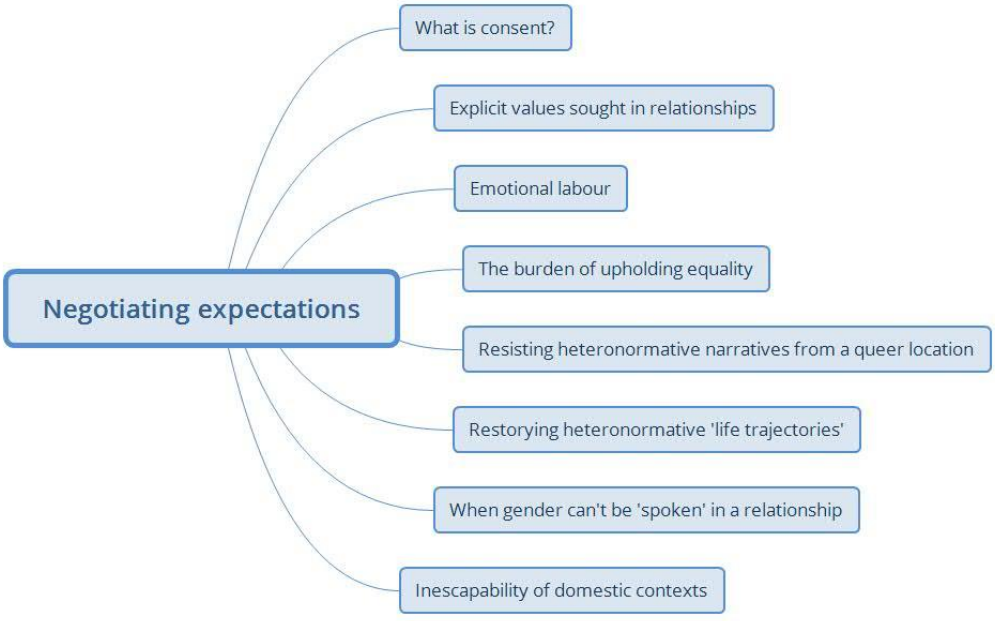

Figure 7: Negotiating expectations descriptive category

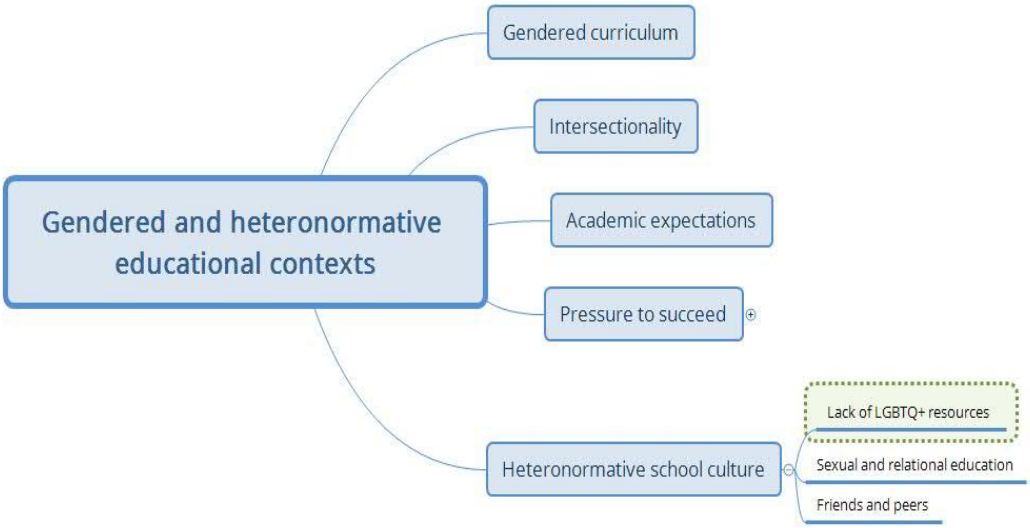

Figure 8: Gendered and heteronormative educational contexts descriptive category

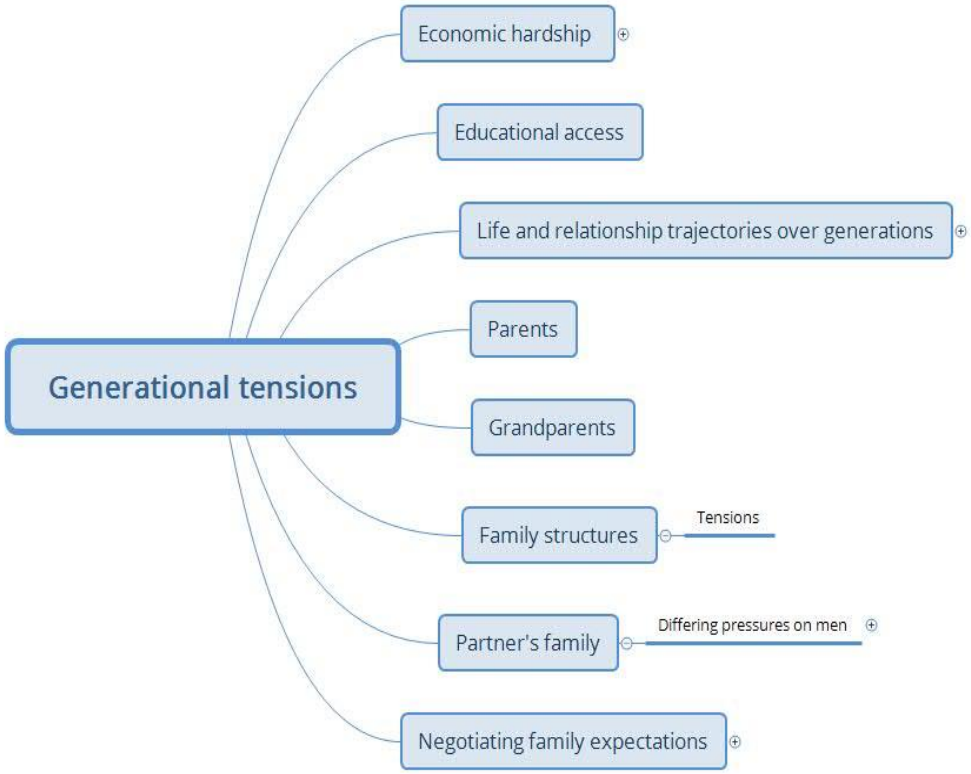

Figure 9: Generational tensions descriptive category

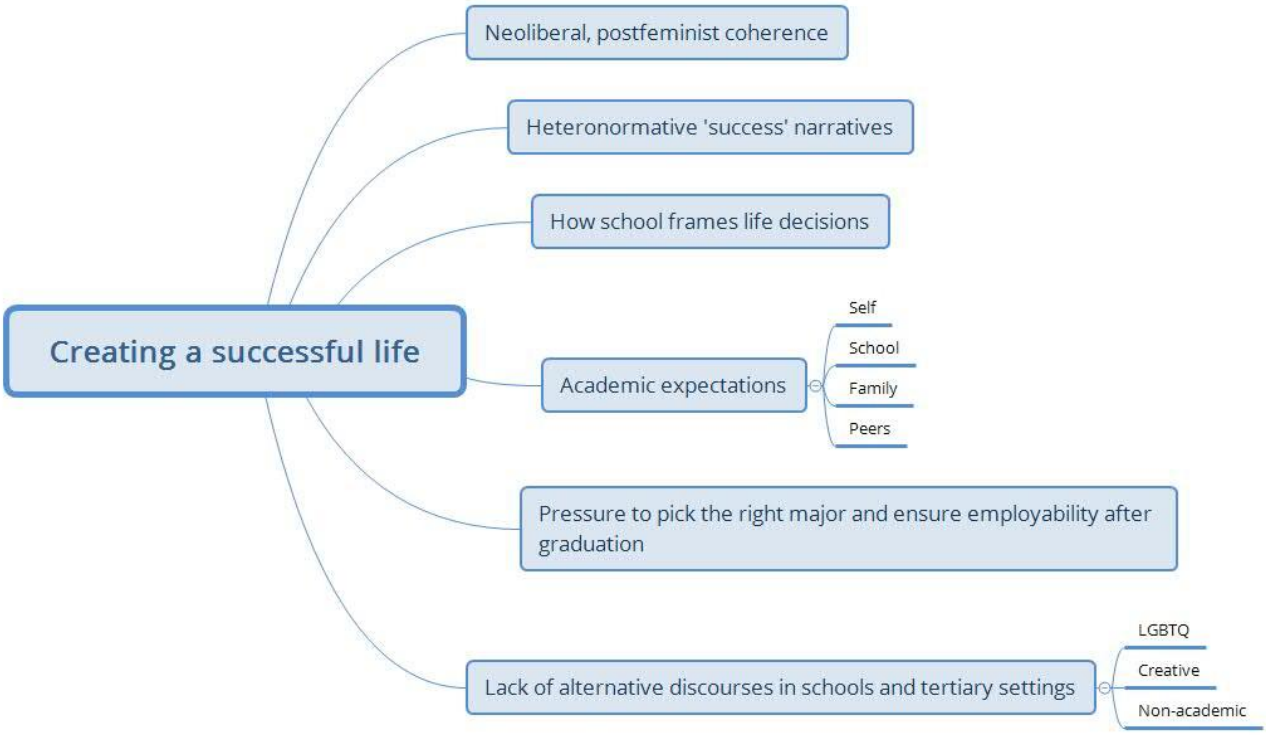

Figure 10: First iteration of successful girls discourse

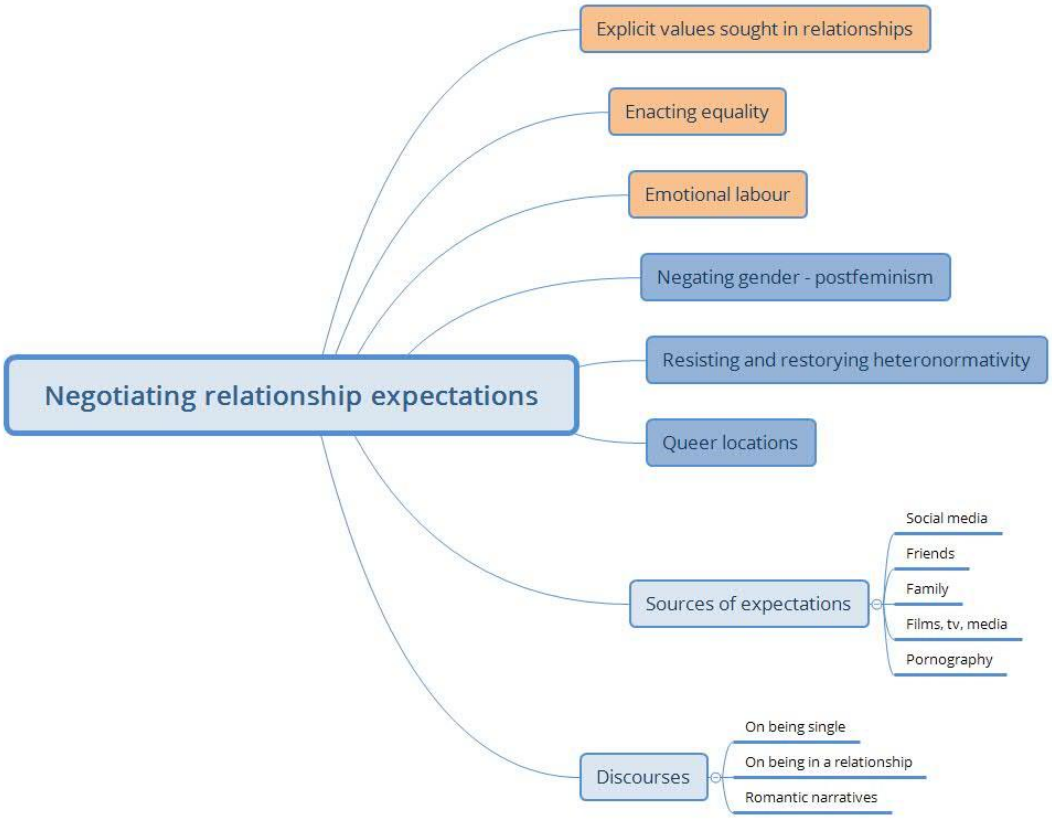

Figure 11: First iteration of companionate relationship discourse

Transcription notations

Table 1: Transcription notations

Notation	**Description**
(pause)	Interviewer or respondent pauses
(laughs) or (both laugh)	Interviewer or respondent or both laugh
–	Interrupted speech
Underlined	Emphasised speech
...	Excerpt begins or ends midway through sentence
[deleted: talks about subject]	Portion of text has been deleted from transcript as it was a 'side discussion' or not relevant to the current analysis

Appendix II

Women's relationship expectations during their time as tertiary students

INFORMATION SHEET

Researcher:

Tēnā koe. My name is Leola Meynell, and I am conducting this research as the thesis component of my Master of Arts degree, under the supervision of Professor Mandy Morgan, School of Psychology, Massey University, Palmerston North. If you have any questions about the research, please feel welcome to contact either myself or Mandy by phone or email. Our contact details are provided on the last page.

Research project:

Although tertiary study can be a time of intense academic and social growth, women students may still be disadvantaged by gender stereotypes and norms, particularly in the roles they are expected to fulfill within intimate partner relationships. This research aims to better understand how women students negotiate such challenges, by hearing their perspectives, thoughts, and feelings on what they expect from intimate partner relationships and how they see themselves within those relationships. The project aims to be inclusive of and welcoming to all self-identifying women, however they understand an intimate partner relationship.

Participants:

Participants need to be self-identifying women over the age of 18, current or recently graduated tertiary students, proficient in English, and located in the Palmerston North area. Participants do *not* need to be in (or have previously been in) an intimate partner relationship, as the research focuses on relationship expectations, not experiences. Up to 12 participants will be involved in the study. I am recruiting participants through snowball sampling. Trusted intermediary contacts from within my own social networks have circulated this information sheet amongst women whom they know and who they think might be interested in taking part in the research. Therefore, you have

received this information sheet because someone that I trust knows you, and thinks you might be interested in the project.

What this study will involve:

If you decide to take part in this study, you will be involved in a face-to-face interview with me, Leola. The interview will be semi-structured and conversational. I will begin by asking you some basic questions about your relationship expectations, but I hope that your insights and responses will direct the interview. Prior to interviews taking place, I will meet potential participants to discuss the research, establish any cultural support needed, and obtain your written informed consent. I expect that interviews will take approximately one hour, but if you would like to talk to me for longer than that, I will make sure I have the time available. The interviews will take place in a private discussion room at either Massey University Library, Manawatū, or the Palmerston North Public Library. Participants will be provided with koha/refreshments during the interview, and a $25 grocery voucher as compensation for their time and travel to the interview venue.

As discussing relationship expectations may bring up distressing feelings or negative previous experiences for participants, there will be time available at the end of the interviews for participants to reflect and seek further support if needed. The contact details of two professional support agencies available in Palmerston North and a nationwide abuse helpline are provided below. To protect participants' confidentiality, I cannot contact support agencies on behalf of participants. However, I can offer other forms of assistance, such as the use of a phone and being present with participants if they choose to contact support agencies. Details of support agencies available are also on the last page.

Project procedures:

If you decide to participate, it will be important that you understand the purpose and procedures of the research, and on that basis, sign a consent form before your interview. Participation is confidential, and the following steps will be taken to protect participants' privacy. Interviews will be digitally sound recorded and stored on a password-protected device and a password-protected cloud drive. However, you have the right to decline to be sound recorded and still participate in the research project; if so, I will ask for your consent to take notes during the interview. I will be transcribing the interviews myself, and participants' names and identifying details will not be transferred to these transcripts, with pseudonyms being used instead. If you decide to participate, you will have the option of choosing your own pseudonym. Digital recordings will be destroyed after their transcription. Digital notes from the research project will be retained in a password-protected cloud until my thesis has been graded. Informed consent forms will be kept for a minimum of 5 years. They will be securely stored by my supervisor, in a locked location in her office, in the School of Psychology. Transcripts

must also be kept for a minimum of 5 years; these will be stored in a locked location in the School of Psychology, separate to informed consent forms.

Before I begin the data analysis, I will meet again with participants in-person to give them a copy of their individual interview transcripts or notes to read, consider, and request changes to. If participants are satisfied with the accuracy of their transcripts or notes and consent for extracts from them to be used in my analysis, they will be asked to sign a transcript release form. Participants will be asked to return copies of their interview transcripts or notes. Participants can withdraw from the research at any time, up until releasing the transcript for analysis. When the research is finished, participants will be confidentially contacted, to discuss the findings and have an opportunity to give feedback. Consent is for the interview data to be analysed only by the current researchers (Leola and Mandy).

The research project is qualitative, based on feminist standpoint epistemologies and narrative analysis methodologies. I have selected this design as it emphasises participants' perspectives, understandings, and stories, whilst recognising the diversity of women's backgrounds and experiences.

Participants' Rights:

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- Decline to answer any particular question.
- Withdraw from the study (at any time up until your transcript/interview notes have been finalised or analysis of the transcript/interview notes has commenced).
- Ask any questions about the study at any time during participation.
- Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used.
- Be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.
- Ask for the audiotape to be turned off at any time during the interview.

Participation is voluntary. You do not need to tell the person who passed on this information sheet whether or not you intend to contact me. If you would like to participate, please contact me (Leola) directly to arrange a meeting. Thank you for taking the time to consider my project.

Researchers Contact Details:

Leola Meynell: [redacted], [redacted]

Mandy Morgan: (06) 356-9099, ext. 85075, c.a.morgan@massey.ac.nz

Support Agencies Contact Details:

Youth One Stop Shop (YOSS) offers free information, support, advocacy, counselling, and health services for young people in Palmerston North. They can be contacted in person at 31 Princess St, Palmerston North, by phone 06-355-5906, or online at http://www.yoss.org.nz.

Abuse and Rape Crisis Support (ARCS) Manawatu provide free support to people who have experienced abuse and their whānau. They can be contacted in person at Linton Court, 10 Linton Street, Palmerston North, by phone 06-356-5868, by email admin@arcsmanawatu.org.nz, or online at http://www.arcsmanawatu.org.nz/.

Safe to Talk is a sexual harm helpline provided by the Ministry of Health NZ. They offer 24/7 confidential support by trained specialists. They can be contacted by phone 0800-044-344, email support@safetotalk.nz, or by live chat at https://safetotalk.nz.

This project has been reviewed and approved by the Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, Application SOB 18/43. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research, please contact Dr Rochelle Stewart-Withers, Chair, Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Southern B, telephone 06 356 9099 x 83657, email humanethicsouthb@massey.ac.nz

Women's relationship expectations during their time as tertiary students

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

Interviews are semi-structured. An introduction and opening questions will be used to begin the conversation and develop rapport; however, it is hoped that participants' stories and perspectives will lead the interview. If needed, further open-ended questions can be used to deepen the conversation and elicit responses.

Introduction

Kia ora. Thank you for taking part in my research and giving your time to be interviewed today. It is much appreciated. To begin the conversation, I will ask you some open-ended questions about your expectations of intimate partner relationships. There are no wrong answers, and I hope you feel comfortable sharing your thoughts, feelings, and perspectives with me. The main purpose of the interview is for you to tell your own story, and for me to listen.

If at any time you would like to take a break, or ask additional questions about the research, please feel free to do so. Do you have any other questions or concerns to discuss, before we begin?

Interview questions

1. To start, would you mind telling me a little bit about yourself: when you started studying and what your study arrangements are.

2. Can you think of any expectations you had of intimate partner relationships prior to starting tertiary studies, and how these might have changed since you have been a tertiary student?

    - For example, when you were at high school, did you or your classmates talk about relationship expectations in ways that are different to how you talk about them now?

- In what kind of settings were relationship expectations talked about (e.g., at home, school, elsewhere), and was it an easy topic to discuss?
- If appropriate, move to prompts in Question 6.

3. Can you think of any expectations you currently have for an intimate partner relationship? (These do not need to be based on past or present relationships, although I understand they might be too.)

    - If you are in a relationship now, what do you expect of yourself and your partner in your relationship?
    - If you are looking for a partner or relationship, what do you seek, and what would you expect of yourself and your partner in your relationship?
    - If you are not seeking a relationship, do you feel pressured to be in a relationship or justify your reasons for not being in a relationship?
    - Do you talk with your friends about relationships? What kind of things do you talk about?

4. Can you describe how consent would be discussed and agreed upon in your ideal relationship? By this, I do not mean only sexual consent, but relational consent, such as consenting to your responsibilities and roles within the relationship.

5. How do you feel your own role within an intimate partner relationship is affected by you being a woman?

    - Do you feel pressured to be in a relationship?
    - Are there any roles you feel pressured to take up within a relationship, because you are a woman?
    - Where do you think these pressures come from?

6. How do you feel your relationship expectations are affected by your tertiary studies?

    - [Returning to our earlier discussion of how your relationship expectations have changed since starting tertiary studies,] are there any aspects of tertiary study which you think have affected your relationship expectations the most?
    - For example, what you are learning in your courses, living away from home, trying to manage demanding workloads, etc.

7. Are there any other thoughts or stories which you would like to share?

Women's relationship expectations during their time as tertiary students

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

I have read and understood the information on the study, or have had it explained to me in my first language, and my questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand the Information Sheet (attached as Appendix I), and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study. I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time, up until signing the Authority for the Release of Transcripts form (attached as Appendix II).

1. I agree/do not agree to the interview being sound recorded.
2. If I agree to the interview being sound recorded, I understand that the recording of my interview will be destroyed after transcription and it will not be returned to me.
3. I understand that I will have the opportunity to make changes to the transcript or notes of my interview if I wish to do so.
4. I understand that I will be given a summary of the findings when the research is completed.
5. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Declaration by Participant:

I _____ agree to take part in this study as described in the information sheet.

Signature: _____ **Date: _____**

Women's relationship expectations during their time as tertiary students

AUTHORITY FOR THE RELEASE OF TRANSCRIPTS

I confirm that I have had the opportunity to read and amend the transcript or notes of the interview conducted with me.

I agree that the edited transcript or notes of the interview and extracts from either of these may be used in reports and publications arising from the research.

Signature: ..... **Date:** .....

Full Name - printed .....

Te Wānanga o Aotearoa

24 July 2018

Ko Patricia Tepania toku ingoa
No ngā uri o Ngapuhi rāua ko Ngai Takoto

"He iti pioke no Rangaunu, he au tona"

To the Ethics Committee

RE: Leola Meynell – Proposed Research Project

I am writing to confirm that I have discussed with Leola Meynell her proposed research project. As part of her research project I am willing to be her kaitiaki and provide cultural advice and support in which her Māori participants volunteer to take participate in.

Nāku iti noa, nā

Patricia Tepania

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