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# Disrupting Neoliberal Narratives: Millennial Experiences of Work in New Zealand

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Nicolette Trueman

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## Abstract

Young New Zealanders today face a rapidly changing world of work. The continuity of capitalism and its reinvention through political-economic neoliberal reform, the introduction of the gig economy and the Fourth Industrial Revolution shape contemporary work. Situated within those shifts has been an upsurge in non-standard employment, rapid developments in technology, a globalised approach to work and an increasing onus on individuals to take sole responsibility for crafting their career and working future. For young people entering the workforce, this means they are now faced with pressures to adapt to increasingly changing contexts. This research inserts itself amongst arguments that ask how changes to the world of work have impacted young people's experiences of employment. Growing bodies of scholarship suggest millennials (born in the 1980s and 1990s) are more likely to experience uncertain employment outcomes and that New Zealand millennials have 'grown up neoliberal'. This research builds on a relatively underexplored area: millennial experiences of work in the New Zealand labour market. It contributes to discussions on how millennials locate themselves within – and navigate – uncertain neoliberal times. Using a multi-method approach, this research interviewed twelve Auckland-based working millennials, six of whom also attended a focus group. Despite engaging with different occupations and contract types, participants in this study had clear desires for self-development, growth and career progression. However, this was clouded by a general anxiety about stagnating or being 'static' in their careers. This research confirms that young people's experiences and decisions are shaped, to an extent, by neoliberal norms and ideals. However, whilst neoliberalism depicts individuals as free and equal to access opportunities and shape their own success, my research showed a complexity within the individual experience of work. Participants often recognised the external structures that influenced their environments. Rather than internalising and individualising their experiences of work, participants used markers of identity (age, ethnicity, gender) to understand their employment experiences, indicating a tendency to both conform to and resist aspects of neoliberal governmentality.

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# Chapter one: Introduction

## 1.1 Introducing New Zealand's Millennial Workers

Millennials have grown up in a world where uncertainty and disruptions are expected (Bauman, 2011) and accordingly, their expectations of the future tend to be cast against a backdrop of uncertainty (Leccardi, 2012). In these uncertain times young people face pressures to adapt in an ever-changing world (Cahill, 2016). Their experiences of employment in a rapidly changing working world has been a key debate in academic literature (Loughlin & Barling, 2001; Brannen & Nilsen, 2002; Mortimer, 2009; Ng, Lyons & Schweitzer, 2011; France, Pukepuke, Cowie, Mayeda & Chetty, 2019). Within this debate, some scholars note that millennials are the entitled generation riding the waves of the fourth industrial revolution (Chung, 2019) whereas others argue they are set to be the most exploited generation to date due to new employment phenomena such as the gig economy and the rise of non-standard work (Ng, Lyons & Schweitzer, 2011).

Emerging narratives that individualise responsibility tell young people that they are the main agents of change in their lives (France et al., 2019). This encourages the idea that to counteract uncertain futures, individuals are personally responsible to ensure their future realities meet their expectations. Global research of over 16,000 millennials found that only one in five believed they were prepared for the changing working world with over seventy percent recognising they would need to evolve their skillsets to increase their value in the labour market (Deloitte, 2019). Instead of learning a set of skills to apply to a job or trade for life as was popular in the previous decades with older generations, young people now must develop skills that will allow them to easily transition into other careers as they are more likely to change their occupations over the course of their working lives. Consequently, millennials exhibit a general anxiety about not being skilled enough, as showcased in organisational research (PWC, 2011; Deloitte, 2019).

Despite literature detailing millennial experiences of work in Canada (Worth, 2018), the United States of America (Kowske, Rasch & Wiley, 2010; Kaifi, Nafei, Khanfar & Kaifi, 2012; Silva, 2014) and Finland (Pyöriä, Ojala & Saari, 2017) the employment experiences of New Zealand millennials have been less explored in academic literature. Instead, their work experiences are largely reported within popular culture and traditional media (Murray, Toulson & Legg, 2011; Chung, 2019; Simpson, 2019). Further, it has been noted that of all working-age generations, we know the least about millennial experiences of work and their views on the future of work (Kowske et al., 2012). Some research has



shown that “buttoned-down, self-centred millennials clash with their stodgy, rule-abiding Baby Boomer bosses” (Kowske et al., 2010, p. 265) and others suggest millennials are unmotivated, lazy workers (Jerome, Scales, Whithem, and Quain, 2014; Velasco & De Chavez, 2018). Additionally, the New Zealand Human Rights Commission (2011) found that employers have shown bias toward young workers based on the belief that they lack work ethic in comparison to older employees.

As a generational group, millennials are perceived to be confident, optimistic and trusting in their ability to craft a future for themselves. Moreover, they are not particularly drawn to the notion of staying within a company for an extended period of time (Schewe et al., 2013) and are likely to leave a role in search of professional progression and self-improvement (Ng, Lyons & Schweitzer, 2018). In conjunction with optimism, research shows that millennials experience angst and worry. They feel pressured to perform well and to be accountable for their own successes at work (Kowske, Rasch & Wiley, 2010). It is argued that their angst stems from a rise in employment uncertainty, to which millennials are most vulnerable (Mills, Blossfeld & Klijzing, 2005). As a result, individualised competition between young millennials is now a normalised aspect of their working lives (Cascio, 2009). However, as we continue to move into the future and older workers leave the labour market in increasing numbers (Zemke, Raines and Filipczak, 2013), it is necessary to understand not only the conflict between generations at work but the aspirations and challenges facing different generations at work. Thus, one of the ways this thesis contributes to the literature is its exploration and insights into a relatively underexplored area of research; New Zealand millennial’s experiences of work and their imaginings of the future.

## 1.2 Background and Research Objectives

The fourth industrial revolution (often termed ‘Industry 4.0’) is characterised by systematic change and transformation resulting from emerging technologies and innovation such as artificial intelligence and automotive robotics. These innovations are transforming labour markets, which poses questions about the future of work (Jagganathan et al., 2019). The fourth industrial revolution grew alongside a global race to create cheap, flexible, ‘just in time’ labour markets. This was driven by powerful institutions and willing governments and produced a series of social, political and economic changes to individuals, industries and institutions (Schwab, 2018). Crowley and Dodson (2014, p. 29) describe these changes to work as “chronic states of disruption and precariousness without accompanying prosperity”. Global precarity is a well-documented change to the world of work (Standing, 2011) which is believed to be accompanied by increased feelings of general insecurity (Srnicek & Williams, 2015).

Exploring young people's experiences of employment in the early stages of their working lives becomes important when trying to understand how they adapt to and/or navigate these new realities of work. Whilst the onus of personal responsibility has shown to be particularly relevant with regard to increased participation rates in tertiary education amongst young people (France et al., 2019), the concept of personal responsibility can also be linked to the world of work and the new ways that we build a career. From the industrial revolution up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century work was largely seen as standard, relatively stable, permanent and ongoing as many workers would commit to an industry, trade or company for most of their lives (Edgell, 2012). However, as a result of intersecting changes including the development of neoliberal frameworks, the rise of neoliberal ideology, an increasingly globalised world, and the rapid adoption of technology; ideas around 'what work was' and 'what work meant' began to alter rapidly (Edgell, 2012), particularly in developed nations.

These intersections of change (which were largely pursued by governments and corporations) have shown to contribute to increasing pressures and uncertainties faced by individuals. Now, institutions and governments are now faced with the task of continually developing insights on innovative approaches to work and new modes of skill development for current and future workers. Government investment in higher education has enabled young people to develop skills that align with trends in the labour force, access jobs of the future and therefore participate in the labour market – a crucial variable in neoliberalism's reproduction (Jagannathan, Ra & Maclean, 2019). This thesis focuses on neoliberalism's role in shaping young people's experiences of work in New Zealand and is situated within arguments that investigate the meaning of work in today's neoliberal capitalist economy.

This research recognises that changes to the world of work are not isolated; rather, they are complex and interlinked. A key change worth documenting that influenced the world we live in today (in many Western nations at least) was the rise in neoliberal ideology which surfaced as an extension of capitalism. Whilst it is commonly recognised that neoliberalism is multi-faceted with no single definition (Peck, 2013; Scribano, 2019), it can be understood as an amalgam of "political-economic-cultural phenomena" (Peck, 2013, p. 133) that extends the logic of competitive markets into all spheres of life including political, economic and social domains. Under neoliberalism, on a political level, the decentralisation of governments and privatisation of assets re-assigns the role of the state. The new role of government is to emphasise economic efficiency based on market logic (Scribano, 2019) which is generally achieved through policy changes on a national level. Simultaneously, and not

unconnected, the political and economic dimensions of neoliberalism pursued through policy have shown an ability to influence everyday life (Springer, Birch & MacLeavy, 2016); particularly through its attempts “to instil a series of values and social practices in subjects” (Springer et al., 2016, p. 2) like that of competitive individualism (Crowley & Hodson, 2014) and personal responsibility (Schwitter, 2013; Pendenza & Lamattina, 2019).

A key aspect of neoliberalism in New Zealand has been its ability to swiftly and stealthy transform society’s perceptions of politics and the economy. Some scholars note that this created a sense that neoliberalism is everywhere (Peck & Tickell, 2002; Springer et al., 2016) due to the wide scope, large scale and fast pace of policy changes (Boston & Eichbaum, 2014). This gives rise to debates which suggest neoliberal ideals were simultaneously dispersed and entrenched within national and local practices of governance. Political figures were seen as the lead facilitators of societal transformation during the 1980s, justifying quick economic and political transitions as a series of necessary changes (Swarts, 2014). New Zealand’s 1980s economic reforms and the subsequent policies that followed in the 1990s were difficult to challenge and “based on common sense” (Kelsey, 1997, p. 2). Neoliberalism’s implementation across the country was seen as a conscious decision and a strategic plan that “worked to transform prevailing attitudes about state intervention and involvement in the economy” (Swarts, 2013, p. 123). Whilst some debates point to the idea that neoliberalism guides political decisions and shapes economic rationale, they raise the question: to what extent does neoliberalism guide and shape our social experiences? As work in New Zealand has continued to evolve, some point to neoliberalism’s crucial role (Crowley & Hodson, 2014).

My personal motivations for undertaking this research began with a reflection of my own work experiences. As a young millennial adapting to a rapidly changing working world, I have found myself engaging with a range of contract types including part-time, casual, fixed-term and full-time roles. I noticed that each contract type offered me varied disadvantages and benefits. For example, on one hand casual contracts granted me flexibility and autonomy which allowed me to feel ‘in control’ of my work despite being increasingly time poor. But, on the other hand I also craved the stability that is often associated with full-time, permanent roles to ease angst about uncertain future job prospects. What emerged in those attempts to situate my experiences of work in the context of contemporary society was a contradiction; I desired flexibility in response to a fast-paced, ever-changing working world but also craved stability in attempts to balance myself amidst uncertain future career projections.

Research I conducted in 2018/9 with one of my supervisors Alice Beban (Beban & Trueman, 2019) on young New Zealand university students saw similar contradictions emerge as participants in the study also desired both stability and flexibility in their careers. These findings emerged against a backdrop of stress, uncertainty and contradictory realities that young people face today (Nairn, Higgins & Sligo, 2012; Beban & Trueman, 2019). This prompts questions around how young workers are experiencing employment in Aotearoa New Zealand, how they are navigating the changing world of work and how they feel about the future of work. With regard to the notion that the world of work is constantly shifting (Edgell, 2012), that millennials live in increasingly stressful and uncertain times (Pyysiäinen, Halpin & Guilfoyle, 2017) and that young New Zealanders have grown up shaped by neoliberalism (Nairn et al., 2012), in this thesis, I first examine the employment experiences of young (millennial) New Zealanders in an attempt to understand how they navigate the contemporary world of work. Second, the research attempts to understand how New Zealand millennials imagine their working futures and what factors influence and/or shape their desires and anxieties for the future. Specifically, I explore:

1. How do millennials who have recently entered the workforce feel about their experiences of work so far and how do they understand and navigate tensions that arise in their experiences?
2. How do millennials imagine their working futures? What desires and anxieties do they have for their future careers? And how are these desires and anxieties shaped by their work experiences and/or by their broader ideas of the future of work?

### 1.3 Significance

Millennials are entering the workforce at an extraordinarily fast rate with fifty percent of the global workforce expected to be made up of millennials by 2020 (PWC, 2011). With regard to New Zealand, it is projected that by 2030, workforce participation will increase from 2.6 million to 3 million (Statistics New Zealand, 2017). With that, millennial workers will continue moving into the workforce with over 34,000 new workers joining the labour market annually up until 2028 (Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, 2019). New Zealand's population of young people between 15-30 is just over one million, making them just under one quarter of the total population (Figure New Zealand, 2019). The demographic of my participants falls within this age bracket and for the purpose of this study, I defined New Zealand's millennial workers as individuals born between the years 1991 and 1999 (aged 20-28). In the early years of the millennial generation, the state retreated in core sectors and services. During

this time, New Zealand moved away from government interventions; broke down collective bargaining power, privatised state enterprises, outsourced much of its labour and moved toward economic liberalisation and individualisation. The case of New Zealand is interesting due to the speed and widespread implementation of neoliberal reforms. The successful implementation of reforms and the extent to which they took hold is attributed to “New Zealand’s institutional and constitutional ‘thinness’, small size, isolation and political economic transparency” (Lewis, 2003, p. 161). This made New Zealand an “ideal site for political experimentation” (Lewis, 2003, p. 161) and “an effective laboratory for studying social change” (Lewis, 2003, p. 161).

The effects of this changing environment on New Zealand millennials in the early stages of their career is under-explored. Quantitative and qualitative research that looks into millennial experiences of work only goes as far as assessing the general values of young New Zealander’s with some references to work and employment (See Murray et al., 2011; and Schewe et al., 2013). This thesis contributes to the literature as it expands on the millennial experience of work in the New Zealand labour market and shares insights into their current working realities. It also shares insights into the future desires and anxieties of New Zealand millennials and attempts to understand how their expectations of the future take shape.

#### 1.4 Thesis Outline

The experiences, challenges and aspirations of New Zealand’s millennial workers as they navigate a rapidly changing world of work is revealed in the seven chapters of this thesis. Chapter one provided insights into my personal motivations for undertaking the study, background information on the key changes that have influenced the New Zealand labour market, situates the young millennial experience of work and discusses the impact of neoliberalism. Chapter two gives further context into the changes that have impacted the trajectory of work in New Zealand with particular regard to the development of the ‘ideal worker’ under neoliberalism. Chapter three presents literature on the formation of self and subjectivity under neoliberalism. Some literature in this chapter posits neoliberal subjects as a homogenous group which is important to consider for this thesis as this discourse holds the ability to undermine the diversity within millennial experiences of work—a point I return to in chapter six. Chapter four covers the qualitative research design and multiple methods used in the study which included interviews and focus groups.

Chapters five and six present the research findings. Chapter five shows that millennial workers exhibit characteristics of the 'ideal' neoliberal worker illustrated through their desires for career growth, their heightened levels of personal responsibility and their beliefs that upskilling is the necessary way to progress. Their experiences speak to literature which suggests the neoliberal subject is homogenous and will thus have similar experiences based on freedom and equality. However, chapter six disrupts this idea and instead showcases diverse work experiences. Further, some participants grappled with the varied external structures that influenced their realities, externalising their experiences as opposed to internalising them. Lastly, chapter seven summarises key points from the research, discusses its key contributions to the literature and gives some final reflections.

## Chapter Two: The ‘Neoliberalisation’ of New Zealand’s Labour Market

### 2.1 Introduction:

As noted in chapter one, over the last few decades the world of work has undergone rapid transformation. Key neoliberal policy changes in the late 20<sup>th</sup> century swiftly altered New Zealand’s labour market (Crowley & Hodson, 2014). This incited simultaneous and lasting changes to the labour supply, changed the nature of demand and changed temporal and spatial dimensions of work (Hawke, Bedford, Kukutai, McKinnon, Olssen & Spoonley, 2014). This chapter will first unpack the literature on neoliberalism, showcasing its adaptability. Next it will discuss the policy changes associated with the implementation of neoliberalism in New Zealand such as the introduction of the 1991 Employment Contracts Act (ECA) following the redaction of the 1990 Employment Equity Act (EEA). Lastly, it makes the point that under neoliberalism, ideas around upskilling and employability serve as tools for workers to counteract uncertain employment prospects that have grown alongside a rise in non-standard working arrangements. These points are important to consider as they discuss the systematic yet unique way neoliberalism was implemented in New Zealand. These ideas will also be important to remember in chapter three, which will discuss the formation of the New Zealand, millennial, ‘neoliberal’ subject.

### 2.1 The Adaptable Nature of Neoliberalism

Anderson’s study (1997, p. 177) observes that worker’s experiences were bound to change under capitalist and neoliberal models “because the organisations that employ workers are changing. And organisations have to change to survive in a new global economy”. Minimal resistance and opposition to the neoliberal ideology over time could be seen as a testimony to its ideological success (Davies, 2014). Despite this, neoliberalism does not have a universal definition (Davies, 2014) and is a complex term, receiving much attention in academic literature since the 1980s (Lawn & Prentice, 2015). Neoliberalism has been shown to sew the social and cultural fabrics of society together whilst simultaneously undoing its stitches through the creation of ‘wicked problems’ which Levin, Cashore, Bernstein and Auld (2012) describe as issues without straightforward resolutions and responses. Moreover, summarising the literature on neoliberalism can be problematic as the use of the term is varied (Flew, 2014) and is extensively debated in academia with large levels of disagreement (Lawn & Prentice, 2014). Some argue neoliberalism originated as an economic rationality (Swarts, 2013; Flew,

2014; Pavlovskaya & Schram, 2018) whilst others believe that neoliberalism is first and foremost a political ideology that turned state and society into a global market (Louth & Potter, 2017). To facilitate such shifts, Connell (2010, p. 35) describes neoliberalism as a process of transformation based on the “reorganisation of the mechanisms of social power around existing centres of power”. This posits the view that neoliberalism’s origins are inherently social and political due to the development of ideology (Scribano, 2019) and introduction of policies. To further elaborate on the facets of neoliberalism, Sugarman’s (2015, p. 104) definition is helpful as he expands on the causes, consequences and problems of the neoliberal effect. He notes that neoliberalism is:

A radically free market in which competition is maximized, free trade achieved through economic deregulation, privatization of public assets, vastly diminished state responsibility over areas of social welfare, the corporatization of human services, and monetary and social policies congenial to corporations and disregardful of the consequences: poverty, rapid depletion of resources, irreparable damage to the biosphere, destruction of cultures, and erosion of liberal democratic institutions.

It’s important to note that neoliberalism does not look the same across contexts. Its ability to reinvent itself in “its own directionless momentum” (Lawn & Prentice, 2015, p. 3) reveals that neoliberalism is fluid and able to adapt. This is reinforced by scholars who argue that whilst neoliberalism has not left us, it is not what it once was (Peck, 2013) and its diffuse descriptions from political ideology, to economic rationality to governmentality illustrate this. Critics argue that neoliberalism has ushered in an ‘age of despair’ (Harvey, 2006; Brown, 2015) that “swept across the world like a vast tidal wave of institutional reform and discursive adjustment” (Harvey, 2006, p. 145). Some provide reflections on the dangers of neoliberalism which “now, and should be, of great concern” (Sugarman, 2014, p. 104) as “having consciously opened ourselves up to spontaneous and uncertain processes, we are now unable to escape from them again” (Davies, 2014, p. 3).

Bodies of scholarship note that neoliberalism is a contradicting ideological force (Lawn & Prentice, 2015; Sugarman 2015) that is “founded on an assumption of inequality between competing actors, rather than inherent quality of persons” (Lawn & Prentice, 2015, p. 11). Peck (2013, p. 144) offers an explanation that acknowledges the inherent contradictions associated with neoliberal rhetoric:



It is more appropriate to define neoliberalism—or the process of neoliberalisation—through its recurring contradictions... At its contradictory heart, as an ongoing process of regulatory transformation, lies the discrepancy between the galvanizing utopian vision of freedom through the market, discursively channelling competitive forces that are far from imaginary, and the prosaic realities both of earthly governance and endemic governance failure.

Neoliberalism takes shape in various ways according to the defining political, economic and social contexts and through its ability to reinvent institutions in a ‘market like way’ (Ventura, 2012; Louth & Potter, 2017). Srnicek and Williams (2015) add to conversations on neoliberalism’s contradictions, arguing that part of its success can be attributed to the complex interplay between crisis and solution which is common within capitalist economies. Reinforcing its adaptable nature is that neoliberalism has thrived in many nations across the globe (Peck, 2013) despite their unique amalgamations of social, political and economic processes (Ventura, 2012; Türken, Nafstad, Blakar & Roen, 2016). To understand neoliberalism is to recognise the factors that give rise to it across contexts and realise that it is “not merely an ideology, not merely an economic perspective, not merely a rationality, but is the concatenation of them” (Ventura, 2012, p. 2). This understanding provides a foundation for this research as it alludes to a relationship between omnipresent market rationalities and individual ideologies (Ventura, 2012).

## 2.2 The ‘Neoliberalisation’ of work in New Zealand

To understand the way neoliberalism has changed work in New Zealand, we must understand the shifts away from collective bargaining that was achieved through nation-wide policy changes. Gosse (2002, p. 8) notes that “New Zealand’s employment history could be considered a history of unionism”. Prior to New Zealand’s economic reforms of the 1980s and 1990s, the predominant system guiding the organisation of employment “was one of compulsory conciliated bargaining for blanket-coverage awards” (Foster, McAndrew, Murrie & Laird, 2006, p. 2). In the 1990s, New Zealand experienced serious economic problems (Carroll, 2012, p. 5) including “a prolonged period [of] weak growth” that was “triggered by external shocks; but then compounded by inflexibility of the economy and the labour market[’s ability] to respond”. These factors contributed to the ideal conditions for change (Epstein, 2001) and what remained of “unionised collective bargaining...was quickly decentralised” (Foster et al., 2006, p. 2).

The introduction of the 1991 ECA prompted a rise in non-collective contracts and helped establish the new neoliberal rationale for work and labour in New Zealand (Anderson, 2007). Loss of union rights within the workplace fostered a more competitive environment (Stillman, Velamuri & Aitkin, 2008) and promoted individualism (Foster et al., 2006). Whereas previous policies supported employment unions and collective bargaining, the ECA represented a key point of transition for New Zealand workers. Instead of employees exercising collective action to achieve employment outcomes, they had to adapt to new working conditions characterised by individualised approaches to work. Ryall and Blumenfeld (2017, p. 12) discuss the effects of policy change to New Zealand employment industries, observing “very low levels of union density in key employment industries in the private sector such as retail and accommodation, agriculture, forestry and fishing, and business services, most of which have low average wages and/or high levels of casualization of employment”. This becomes an important insight as it depicts a transfer of power from the collective to the individual where by now power and control amongst/between New Zealand workers and employers was achieved through reduced levels of collective bargaining.

Prior to 1991, it is reported that over half of New Zealand’s employees were protected by some form of collective agreement (Anderson, 2007, p. 422), but the ECA “changed that picture rapidly and dramatically” with notable shifts from collective to individualised bargaining. The ECA introduced individual employment agreements, the removal of legal status amongst unions (Ryall & Blumenfeld, 2017) and the shift from compulsory to voluntary unionism (Gosse, 2002). As a policy it been said to disadvantage workers (Ryan, 1993, p. 3) as individual agreements were characterised by “a system of contract negotiation in which market-based criteria determine wages, conditions of work and employment security”. At further detriment to collective bargaining was that the private sector and employers did not favour unions (Foster et al., 2006). This saw union membership decrease by more than fifty percent in the years after the ECA’s introduction (Morrison, 1996). Whilst the move away from collective bargaining was apparent across many OECD countries, the decentralisation/dismantling of unions in New Zealand is notable as union membership in New Zealand declined at a faster rate than any other OECD nation (Ryall and Blumenfeld, 2017).

Under neoliberal policy, New Zealand saw a ‘retrenchment’ of work conditions that occurred effectively overnight (Blumenfeld & Donnelly, 2016). This new form of organisation was described as a political revolution that saw a reorganisation of power (Easton, 1997) where “the more extreme proponents of labour market reform had a simple vision to replace the award system – the law of

[individual] contract” (Anderson, 2007, p. 423). The breakdown of collective solidarity resulting from the ECA’s legislative changes have altered the dynamics of power and control in the workforce for both employers and employees and “substantially changed the way employees and employers negotiate and contract with one another” (Morrison, 1996, p. 4). In response to policy changes, what an employer desired from the employee changed dramatically. In the past, employer expectations centred on loyalty, dedication and hard work, and whilst all those things are still desired, it is now expected that employees will showcase all of the above, as well as be adaptable, flexible, willing, reliable, creative and collaborative (PWC, 2011; Fernandez-Herrera & Martinez-Rodriguez, 2016; KPMG, 2016).

### 2.3 One Step Back for Women, One Leap Forward for Neoliberalism

Despite the idea that living in a neoliberal world would positively compensate women (Downing, 2019), neoliberal policies like ECA have shown to disadvantage women’s economic and social position (Rosie, 1993). The positive view is eloquently contextualised by Downing (2019, p. 8) who states that:

The results of a combination of feminist struggles for rights of personhood (liberal struggles) and the current focus on the production of economic subjects mean that the much-critiqued ‘atomization’ of society has – at least – created the possibility for those women who want to live outside of a milieu restricted to, and entirely predicated on, family and community to articulate and imagine these desires.

In the 1980s and 1990s in New Zealand, when neoliberalism was in its infancy, it was suggested that the economic reforms would have more negative consequences for women in the workforce than men (Ryan, 1993, p. 3):

Because of the way it is mediated by a labour market structured along, inter alia, gender lines. Women are more likely to be employed in secondary jobs [part time, casual, fixed-term] and thus to experience greater competition for jobs, worse than average wages and conditions, fewer training opportunities, and employment which is increasingly casualised.

The gendered consequences of neoliberalism are important to address as it broadens our understandings of the consequences to women as a result of neoliberal policy reforms which Downing (2019, p. 9) argues “may justify critiques of the system”. Morrison (1996, p. 12) predicted that the

ECA would facilitate growth in non-standard work such as fixed term, casual and part-time employment which is often “perceived as involving poorer conditions and security than permanent full-time work”. This is particularly relevant when thinking about women at work as it is noted that women are more likely to engage in non-standard work than men (Ryan, 1993; Pacheco, Li & Cochrane, 2017), making them more vulnerable to employment insecurity.

A year earlier than the 1991 ECA, the 1990 EEA was recognised as a pivotal piece of legislation that aimed to establish equal working rights for women (Davies & Jackson, 1993) and other minorities (Humphries & Grice, 1995). The EEA attempted to institutionalise work pathways for all New Zealand women under the premise that it would grant them greater bargaining power regarding equal opportunities and equitable pay at work. Humphries and Grice (1995, p. 20) break down the rationale behind the EEA which is worth considering when understanding women’s participation at work:

First, the act was to achieve pay equity for women. This entailed the establishment of the controversial notion of equal pay for work of equal value. Second, the Act was to achieve equal employment opportunities for women, Maori, Pacific Island peoples and people with disabilities.

The EEA however, was unable to serve its original purpose and was repealed soon after its implementation. It was speculated that this occurred due to its complete contradiction to the upcoming 1991 ECA (Davies & Jackson, 1993) as it was “found to be inconsistent with the liberalised directions preferred by successive New Zealand governments (Humphries & Grice, 1995, p. 21). In other words, the EEA came into conflict with New Zealand’s market driven objectives. It is anticipated that 552 million women joined the global labour market between 1980 and 2008 (World Bank, 2012). Economic empowerment for women has been said to assist equal participation in the labour market (United Nations Women, n.d.) although, a recent study shows that New Zealand women are more likely to face uncertain and precarious career prospects than men (France et al., 2019). This is reflected in a global survey of over 4000 graduate millennials in the early stages of their working lives which found that seventy-one percent of males felt they were able to progress to a senior position with their current employer in comparison to only forty-nine percent of women (PWC, 2015). This is a considerable disparity and raises questions into the continued gendered nature of work.

A further tension that impacts women’s participation in the labour market is the ‘glass ceiling’. The glass ceiling is known as a barrier faced by women in the workforce today. It is defined as the

invisible barriers that inhibit women from progressing upwards at work, particularly in upper management and senior positions (Johns, 2013). It is also noted that women's progression is constrained by 'the broken rung' (McKinsey Global Institute, 2019). The broken rung describes the challenges women face in making the first step up from entry level positions to management positions. A global study of 329 companies (McKinsey Global Institute, 2019) employing over 13 million employees found that the broken rung inhibited women's progression to senior positions as many were stagnating at beginner and entry level job roles. For every one-hundred men promoted to senior management, only 72 women are given the same opportunity. Moreover, "there are significantly fewer women to hire or promote to senior managers... so even as hiring and promotion rates improve for women at senior levels, women as a whole can never catch up" (McKinsey Global Institute, 2019, p. 11). The relationship between the broken rung and progression at work is relevant to my research topic as millennial workers are more likely to occupy entry level/junior positions in the beginning of their working lives. Whilst these implications have been shown to affect women more than men in the workplace, they are described as being a particularly challenging aspect of employment for women of colour (McKinsey Global Institute, 2019). This was a key finding within my research and will be returned to later in chapter six.

## 2.4 Toward Flexibility at Full Force!

Work today has seen a shift from long term to short term contracts (Bauman, 2011) and despite the continuity of work itself, there continues to be considerable change in its character. In contemporary society, we have seen an upsurge in flexible, non-standard work (Heinz, 2010) which diverges from standard full time, permanent roles (International Labour Organisation, 2016). Standing (2011, p. 6) expands on flexibility, acknowledging the multifaceted nature of the term:

Employment flexibility meant easy and costless ability of firms to change employment levels, particularly downwards, implying a reduction in employment security and protection; job flexibility meant being able to move employees around inside the firm and to change job structures with minimal opposition or cost; skill flexibility meant being able to adjust workers' skills easily.

Standing's (2011) work sheds light on the different types of flexible working arrangements and their implications. These implications are often burdened by workers (Cascio, 2009, p. 10) who face "shorter employment relationships, more contingent work, independent contracting, and other

free-market arrangements". Connell (2010, p. 26) echoes this idea and believes that neoliberalism's "emphasis on labour market 'flexibility' produces a growing workforce of part-time, casual and contract labour". This is in part due to employer demand for flexible workers "with particular emphasis on hiring/firing at will and on using part-time and temporary employees" (Crowley & Dodson, 2014). The most common types of non-standard, flexible work are part-time, casual, fixed term or self-employment-based contracts (Cascio, 2009; Connell, 2010; Spoonley, 2010; Crowley & Hodson, 2014) which are recognised as precarious working arrangements "cloaked in positive terms such as flexible work" (Stringer, Smith, Spronken-Smith & Wilson, 2018, p. 172).

More than fifty percent of New Zealand employees have flexible working arrangements although the types of flexibility experienced by individuals is shown to vary by gender, industry, occupation and parental status (Statistics New Zealand, 2019). A mixed-methods survey of just over 900 New Zealand tertiary academic staff found extensive precarity and insecurity which was a highly gendered experience (Stringer et al., 2018). Moreover, participants in the research spoke negatively about their precarious work arrangements and discussed a desire for more secure job offerings (Stringer et al., 2018). Alongside contractual changes like a rise in non-standard, precarious contract types, we have also seen an upsurge in formal and informal flexible working practices which arise as a response to non-standard, less permanent, 'short term' modes of work. 'Formal flexibility' refers to the policies put in place by employers to ensure temporal and spatial modes of flexibility such as allowing staff to work from home or in semi-structured open-plan offices. These kinds of formal flexibilities allow employers to exercise a 'market like rationality' by offering "different contractual arrangements... to maximise labour coverage and flexibility and minimise labour costs" (Noon, Blyton & Morell, 2013, p. 104).

In contrast, 'informal flexibility' refers to the element of choice employees have over where and when they carry out their work duties. In this sense, employees can utilise their autonomy as workers "by reaching informal 'understandings' with other workers and with management" (Noon et al., p. 104). For the purpose of this research autonomy is defined as having 'individual freedom' at work which includes but is not limited to the ability to work independently, make decisions independently and have creative freedom. However, it is important to note that "those in higher-level jobs typically enjoy greater access to this informal flexibility" (Noon et al., 2013, p. 104) so it could be assumed that those in higher positions would have more authority and autonomy at work. Within formal and informal flexible working arrangements, we can see power dynamics operate. It has been

argued that in changing settings, employees are always adapting to power relationships within their working environments, meaning both employees and employers are “implicated in shaping politics, through day to day activities and practices of living... that support and enable neoliberalism” (Braedley & Luxton, 2010, p. 20).

## 2.5 Upskilling and Employability

Changes in the world of work such as a growth in non-standard work, the rise in the Gig Economy and a move to individualised work processes (Whatman, 1994). In New Zealand, the 1980s labour market reforms reframed the ideal worker as adaptable and flexible (Spoonley, 2010, p. 80) and has raised questions about “the appropriateness of education and training given changing labour demand”. To remain relevant in the contemporary world of work, employees are expected to build on existing skillsets and develop new skills when necessary. The pressures faced by individuals to improve their skillset is said to be influenced by “labour market, work and economic development policy visions in many developed countries” (Bryson, 2010, p. 1) which demonstrate a “fixation on skills” (Bryson, 2010, p. 1). Cochrane, Stubbs, Rua and Hodgetts’s (2017) research shows that New Zealand’s labour/economic policies favour individualism, flexibility and competitiveness. The individual’s position appears in the context of a “neoliberal economic system that demands greater (job, skill, time) flexibility (Groot, Van Omnen, Masters-Awatere & Tassell-Matamua, 2017, p. 13).

In light of this, upskilling can be seen as a tool that workers use to access knowledge that supports future participation in the labour market through ongoing training and work experience. Heightened personal responsibility is reported to be a key aspect of the neoliberal manifesto (Pyysiäinen, Halpin and Guilfoyle, 2017; Pendenza and Lamattina, 2019) which has encouraged “adaptability, permanent retraining, and flexible skills acquisition” (Scribano, 2019, p. 104) at work; most of which can be achieved through the process of upskilling. Literature on the changing nature of work in the west (Ransome, 1999, p. ix) recognises upskilling as an integral part of work and employment:

The typical picture today is of a much more fragmentary and insecure pattern of employment. The message from Government spokespeople, careers advisers and employers is to develop a portfolio of flexible skills which will, if we are lucky, allow us to find a series of niches of employment.

The above insight recognises the role of government and other institutions in encouraging the upskilling process. Additionally, Ransome's (1999) insights showcase the important role of the individual to exercise personal responsibility and develop skills to facilitate future employment prospects. Thus, workers are trained as neoliberal subjects to view themselves as instruments of success and are "drawn into a huge and ever-changing supermarket of skills and knowledge" (Anderson, 1997, p. 176) to leverage growth and progress (Crowley & Hodson, 2014). The notion of upskilling closely aligns with ideas of 'employability'. An employable worker in contemporary society showcases certain characteristics that can help individuals with labour market entry and growth. Mertanen, Pashby & Brunila (2019, p. 6) describe employability as "characteristics or qualifications enabling movement within and into labour markets" which include "flexibility, adaptability and willingness to develop and educate oneself constantly".

General shifts to the world of work, a rise in job applicants, their experience levels and their qualifications has contributed to a more competitive job market and greater demands for skilled, employable workers. In addition, there has been greater employer demands for advanced skills (Modestino, Shoag, Ballance, 2015) and qualification (Lynch and James, 2012, p. 26) "as the job market becomes more competitive, putting the onus on individuals to upskill and achieve higher". This shift is relevant when we consider millennials as consistent changes to an already uncertain world of work means they must prepare themselves with tools such as education, knowledge and practical skillsets to secure positions in the labour market. Colombo & Rebughini's (2019, p. 2) insights show that over time millennials have accepted uncertainty that accompanies their daily lives. They note:

The current cohort of young adults have grown up as 'natives' of the new social organisation... they have learned to live in new spatial and temporal dimensions, characterised by the mediation of new technologies... they have learned to take into account the uncertainty related to the persistence of economic instability, the rapid changes in labour markets, the risks of environmental disasters.

The global study on 16,000 millennials that I cited in the introductory chapter also stated that only one in five workers believed they were prepared for the future of work. Further, seventy percent of millennial employees believed they only had a few of the skills required to progress at work. This shows that millennial workers acknowledge the value upskilling brings with regard to opportunities for growth at work (Deloitte, 2019). Upskilling proved to be a key idea within this research as



participants showed an awareness of the necessity to update skillsets in the hopes of progressive career growth. The relationship between upskilling, progress and success will be further explored in chapter five.

## 2.6 Conclusion

The decentralisation of government, the dismantling of collective bargaining and the introduction of neoliberal policies such as the ECA has promoted an individualised workforce and a flexible labour market. Neoliberalism is described as a “consciously articulated political project enacting a concept of how each major component of contemporary society, including individual agents, should ideally function” (Louth & Potter, 2017, p. 17). One legislative example to show how the project of neoliberalism was enforced in New Zealand was the retraction of the 1990 EEA. The EEA was intended to benefit disadvantaged women and minorities; however, it was replaced in 1991 by the ECA. The ECA paved the way for ‘market-driven policy’ as the “seductive promises of investment and jobs bring with them requirements to provide social conditions favourable to the maximization of profit” (Humphries & Grice, 1995, p. 18). Under neoliberal logic, uncertainty is normalised which in turn provides encouragement, inspires empowerment and fuels self-directed practices for an individual (Pyysiäinen, Halpin & Guilfoyle, 2017). Millennials have been shown to value certainty (Schewe et al., 2013) and use upskilling as a way to protect themselves against uncertainty. Nonetheless, pressures on the individual to succeed has created self-driven workers, racing to secure themselves a position in an increasingly insecure world. The above discussion focused on the processes that facilitated uncertainty in contemporary settings. However, to understand young people’s positioning in the labour market today, it is also important to consider the processes that gave rise to our understandings of uncertainty and insecurity, which I will explore in the following chapter.

## Chapter Three: Crafting the Neoliberal Subject

### 3.1 Introduction

The previous chapter discussed changes to the New Zealand labour market since the 1980s policy reforms and located new experiences of non-standard, flexible work within a neoliberal context. This chapter adds to conversations on neoliberalism in New Zealand by discussing neoliberalism's influence on the self, with particular regard to its ability to shape an individual and their subjectivity. This is central to my research because New Zealand millennials are the first generational cohort to have grown up with neoliberalism (Nairn et al., 2012). First, this chapter explores the literature on subjectivities. The study of subjectivity offers a lens to understand the similar, different or contradicting lived experiences of individuals at different points in time. Second, this chapter introduces the idea that the (millennial) neoliberal subject is guided by a governmentality which encourages the internalisation of norms and the 'commodification' of self. Next, I briefly discuss ideas including mobility, progression and success, concepts that will be furthered explored in chapter five (See Fig 5.1 and 5.2). In the final section, this chapter works to unravel discussions on the neoliberal millennial subject which contextualises the uncertain lived and working experiences of neoliberally driven policy reforms.

### 3.2 What's the Fuss about Subjectivities, Anyway?

Analysing the self and subjectivities has become increasingly popular for sociologists (Larain, 1994). Subjectivity is an abstract concept that holds the ability to influence our decisions and choices based on common ideas and shared values of the surrounding environment (Hamann, 2009). It is "produced on the basis of what counts as accepted knowledge at a certain point in time" (Schwitter, 2013, p. 154). Mansfield (2000, p. 3) extends the idea that the subject is influenced by external processes. He goes on to define subjectivity as:

An abstract or general principle that defies our separation into distinct selves and that encourages us to imagine that, or simply helps us to understand why, our interior lives inevitably seem to involve other people, whether as objects of need, desire, and interest or as necessary sharers of common experience. In this way, the subject is always linked to something outside of it.

His views posit the notion that an individual subject is always exposed to external forces, introducing the idea that the self is not an isolated being. Rather, the self and our formations of subjectivity result from shared truths, values, norms and principals in any given society. Larrain (1994, p. 146) reinforces this notion, expressing how “the self is not given but develops in an individual as a result of his/her social experiences” through “the internalisation of external attitudes”. Given that common values, shared norms and guiding principles are subject to change over time, so too is the individual subject. Subjectivity could be viewed as “primarily an experience” that “remains permanently open to inconsistencies” (Mansfield, 2000, p. 7). Houghton (2019, p. 618) notes that “the concept of subjectivity finds its foundation in the intersection of social and discursive practices and lived experiences, which collate into social categories... and act as tools of inclusion or exclusion”. That is, the formation of self and subjectivity in society is a result of multiple, complex processes that work to construct identities in accordance with primary values of the time (Ball & Olmeldo, 2013). To expand, scholars (Ball & Olmeldo, 2013, p. 87) argue that “the subject is the result of endless processes of construction of identities that are to a greater or lesser extent, but never completely, constrained by the contingencies of the particular historical moment in which they are inscribed”. Subjectivity thus can be viewed as a set of social experiences that are influenced by social categories (Houghton, 2019). Focusing on subjectivities is useful for the field of labour sociology. It shows how changes to the labour market and their implications can represent themselves in people’s lived experiences and is particularly useful for my research which asks how millennials experience work in contemporary times.

### 3.3 Neoliberalism and self-governance

Neoliberalism varies across different geographical locations. Springer et al. (2016, p. 2) recognise that “there is no pure or paradigmatic version of neoliberalism, and instead a series of geopolitically distinct hybrids” making it important to reflect on the specific times and places in which ‘neoliberalisation’ occurs. The adoption of neoliberalism in New Zealand socially and economically transformed the country at a faster pace than any other nation (Connell, 2010; Louth & Potter, 2017). Furthermore, research in New Zealand shows that millennials have grown up with neoliberalism. Leading scholars Nairn, Higgins and Sligo (2012) categorise the ‘neoliberal generation’ as individuals born after 1984. New Zealand millennials are born between the years of 1981 and 2000 (Statistics New Zealand, 2018) which situates them within the neoliberal generation (Nairn et al., 2012). Their

work is important in that it showcases a series of hegemonic norms that shape the way people interact with the labour market (Nairn et al., 2012).

Beyond its larger structural effects like the deregulation of trade, the decentralisation of the state and large-scale economic liberalisation, neoliberalism is also shown to affect the individual (Harvey, 2006). Neoliberal policy and discourse often downplay the structural factors that might constrain an individual's social and economic opportunities (Sterling, Jost & Pennycook, 2016). For example, governments and institutions often speak about 'flexible economies' as a public and private good (e.g. for employer: reduced cost of labour, for employee: more autonomy and agency). Often times, this is done without discussing the risks associated with flexibility such as precarity and uncertainty (Standing, 2011). Nonetheless, neoliberalism has shown a fierce ability to alter the most private of moments such as our "social relations... ways of life... habits of the heart... ways of thought, and so on" (Harvey, 2006, p. 104). Bodies of scholarship discuss the formation of the neoliberal subject as a response to the rise in neoliberal ideals with some arguing that neoliberal values have both been internalised and normalised (Hamman, 2009; Schwitter, 2013). Some authors contextualise this view and understand neoliberalism as a 'default logic' (Hyslop, 2016; Mavelli, 2017; Pavlovskaya & Schram, 2018). Harvey's (2006, p. 146) observations show that the rapid diffusion of neoliberal ideals across nations during the period of reforms became "so deeply embedded in common-sense understandings that they become taken for granted beyond question". The neoliberal subject is viewed as an agent (De Lissovoy, 2018, p. 197) "plugged in at multiple points to a temporality constructed as a perpetual present" and due to the fragmented nature of their surroundings, the neoliberal subject is obligated to manage "fragments towards a provisional and shaky unity" (De Lissovoy, 2018, p. 197).

Also situated within conversations on neoliberalism are arguments around governmentality. Ventura (2012, p. 2) posits neoliberalism as a political-economic ideology and a unique governmentality which is "intimately tied to an individual's abilities to make market principals the guiding value of their lives, to see themselves as products to create, sell, optimise". To expand, governmentality relates to how societal discourse shapes individuals, influences their understandings and informs their self-conduct (Pyysiäinen, Halpin & Guilfoyle, 2017; Sofrizzo, Benozzo, Carey & Pizzorno, 2019). Neoliberal governmentality is a central concept in this research and offers a lens to understand how neoliberal structures of power govern people's lives. Additionally, governmentality is also understood as the willing participation of those being governed (Huff, 2013). This builds on ideas from previous chapters that neoliberal policies have changed the landscape of work and affected

the experiences of those who engage with work. Neoliberal rhetoric can be likened to the “art of government” (Pyysiäinen, Halpin & Guilfoyle, 2017, p. 216) whereby “the state acts remotely through ‘chains of enrolment’, ‘responsibilisation’ and ‘empowerment’”. This encourages individuals to accept a new way of self-governing. Neoliberalism has woven together a new social fabric for society (Ayers & Saad-Fihlo, 2015) and has over time proven its power, reproducing socio-cultural models (Peck, 2010) that encourage individuals to align their values with the dominant ideas on economic production (Jameson, 1991, xiv). Such changes have been facilitated by a seemingly omnipresent and ubiquitous neoliberal system (Brown, 2015) which has manifested as “an animating force of economic and social life” (Lawn & Prentice, 2015, p. 6). Interestingly, studies have shown that those who adopt and adhere to neoliberal ideals have a greater ‘bullshit receptivity’ (Sterling et al., 2013) making them more inclined to believe discourse even if it is untruthful (Frankfurt, 2005). Neoliberalism is just “as much of a material force as it is a social one. It is something embedded in human minds, social and political organisations, individual technologies and the built environment that constitutes our world” (Srnicek & Williams, 2015, pp. 135, 136).

Over time, however, neoliberalism has adapted. Starting out as economic policies, it eventually evolved into an ideological governance which saw a diffusion of ‘market-like rationality’ throughout both public and private spheres of life (Larner, 2000). Ventura (2012, p. 12) identifies this as structural and cultural governance that “impels us to extend the market, its technologies, approaches and mindsets into all spheres of human life”. However, what makes neoliberal governance so unique is its simplistic nature. Dardot and Laval (2014, p. 11) explain:

To govern is not to govern against liberty, or despite it; it is governed through liberty – that is, to actively exploit the freedom allowed individuals so they end up conforming to certain norms of their own accord.

This kind of governance is recognised as an invisible source of power which connects neoliberal objectives such as personal responsibility, “competitiveness, flexibility and mobility – to the subjects’ self-created ideals” (Rojo & Percio, 2019, p. 21). This shows a contradictory relationship between processes of internalisation versus externalisation, an idea that will be revisited later in chapter six. As an almost invisible, yet extremely powerful governmentality, the neoliberalisation of a given context illustrates the intersection between government strategies, subjectivity and social relations (Braedley & Luxton, 2010). Additionally, the success of individuals in a neoliberal society

depends on their ability to first internalise common knowledge and discourse and, second, to conform to the guiding logic (Rojo & Percio, 2019). Research from Srnicek and Williams (2015, p. 135) reveals that “the hegemony of neoliberal ideas has enabled the exercise of power without always requiring [executive state] power”. These discussions posit the notion that power exercised through neoliberal governance is not necessarily overt and can occur through more covert means. To support this, Rojo and Percio’s (2019) arguments shed light on neoliberalism’s influence on individual experiences noting that their experiences are a product of internalisation of norms. This raises questions around both power and agency and is helpful when thinking about this research as neoliberal subjects and their lived experiences are said to be guided by a shared common sense. Further, it shows that the actions of individuals are a reaction to the external setting, that of a neoliberal society and in fact, the balance between power and agency allows the subject to thrive.

The ‘willing workhorse’ is a term used to describe an individual’s compliance in work settings to achieve tasks. For example, a willing workhorse will exercise agency through acts of personal responsibility in response to external power relations – which can be overt or covert, formal or informal (Noon et al., 2013). The willing workhorse build on ideas from chapter two which noted that in contemporary work settings, flexible, autonomous and skilled workers are desired by employers. Chapter two also showed that in the neoliberal context, individuals have a responsibility to upskill themselves (Ransome, 1999) and to adapt to formal and/or informal modes of flexibility at work (Noon et al., 2013). On one hand, the introduction of heightened autonomy levels encourages self-management through ‘informal’ flexible working arrangements. In this sense, employers are able to empower workers under the guise that the workers themselves are in control of their work tasks (Gilbert & Sutherland, 2013). On the other hand, there is literature that suggests restricting autonomy may increase productivity under the belief that employees perform well in a highly structured, highly regulated workplace (Gilbert & Sutherland, 2013). Options for increased and decreased autonomy highlight the intricate power relations that occur at work, giving rise to ‘paradox management’. That is, the need for businesses and organisations to recognise and balance the contradictory and competing forces within a work setting (Gilbert & Sutherland, 2013).

Informal and formal flexible working arrangements can lead to direct or indirect forms of control over employees. Both increased autonomy (generally seen in informal working arrangements) and decreased autonomy (traditionally seen in formal working arrangements) in neoliberal work settings can create willing workhorses. Some individuals may thrive off freedom and agency at work

whereas others may work more productively in a structured setting. Additionally, the idea of the willing workhorse helps us to understand the subjective positions of workers because it posits the notion that individuals will take on extra work responsibilities to benefit the employer only if they are perceived the benefit the self (Scribano, 2014, p. 4):

We can grasp the concept of the individual that grew out of neoliberalism: a lone but free individual, who is able to choose the most convenient option based on a cost-benefit calculation. The best option will be the one that gives maximum gain at the lowest cost. The pursuit of self-interest is naturally stimulating. The commitment is to oneself and no one else.

The upsurge in self-interest and self-discipline is said to have been nurtured by a neoliberal ideology (Scribano, 2019) in that an individual “would produce the ends of government by fulfilling themselves rather than being merely obedient” (Rose, O’Malley & Valverde, 2006, p. 89). Millennials are influenced by a governmentality that has encouraged “the growing importance of knowledge, emotions, and social relations in work processes... in response to rapid changes in demands for skills and self-entrepreneurship” (Rebughini, 2019, p. 185). Individualisation, a core characteristic of neoliberalism is known as a proponent of risk to agency as individualised practices are “instrumentalised by new practices of self-management, self-government, and self-exploitation” (Rebughini, 2019, p. 188). These concepts are important to understand in relation to the findings because they illustrate the ways in which neoliberal ideals manifest in individual subjects.

### 3.3 The Commodified Neoliberal Subject

Neoliberalism shapes subjectivities. Citizens in these contexts are nurtured by a neoliberal rationality (Fournier, 2014) that get into our minds and our souls, into the ways in which we think about what we do” (Ball, 2012, p. 17). Furthermore, Nairn and Higgins (2007, p. 278) study on youth and their subjectivities found that the neoliberal environment “has both constrained and resourced” them in the labour market and in life. Young neoliberal subjects are “constructed as free, autonomous, individualized, self-regulating actors (Türken, 2017 p. 11). Extending beyond economic and political domains, neoliberalism has inserted itself into spheres of social life (Connell, 2010), becoming a normalised ‘conduct of conduct’ that guides individuals, their actions, their behaviours and reasoning (Türken, 2017). The conduct of conduct is an idea that shows how subjectivities grow alongside neoliberal objectives. It is “a kind of power which links the normalising objectives of neoliberalism”

(Rojo & Percio, 2019, p. 21) to the development of the self, encouraging strategies of self-governance. Türken's (2017, p. 12) discussions on the neoliberal self argues that "subjects of neoliberalism perform the particular behaviour or contribute to 'conduct of conduct' They understand themselves as free, but they are obliged to be free".

Neoliberalism readjusts social structures in accordance with developing neoliberal principals (Larrain, 1994; Connell, 2010; Louth & Potter, 2017). Only small pockets of literature discuss neoliberalism's effects on individual subjects, with much scholarship providing only macro or top down perspectives (Larner, 2003, p. 511) which "leaves us powerless to explain why people (sometimes) act as neoliberal subjects". Thus, it becomes important to situate and interpret individual experiences in relation to the governing political, economic and cultural processes as "the self-arises in the context of a variety of social experiences" (Larrain, 1994, p. 146). Leading work on neoliberal subjectivities in New Zealand focuses on youth experiences as they have 'grown up neoliberal' (Nairn et al., 2012) internalising the narrative that they are the primary investors in their future. As noted in chapter one, it becomes difficult to understand neoliberalism's effect on young people in New Zealand without considering reforms to tertiary education, which posited the notion that to be a skilled and valuable worker to society, you must pursue education. Due to the increasing reforms to welfare, labour and the economy and the logic of individual responsibility, tertiary education became the responsibility of the neoliberal subject.

As identity developed alongside neoliberal ideals, a market like rationality settled within the self. This rationality continued to burrow further into the subjectivity due to the complete and utter immersion in a world that was crowded with "everyday acts of neoliberalism" (Houghton, 2019, p. 614), facilitated through the commodification of goods, services and knowledge. For example, education can be seen as an "act of neoliberalism" (Houghton, 2019, p. 614). Despite significant increases to the cost of higher education over the last few decades, university participation rates continue to grow. This could be seen as a testament to the neoliberal project in that it proposes education as "an essential ingredient for building the knowledge economy necessary for the country's global competitiveness" (Nairn et al., 2012, p. 17). Additionally, guided by neoliberal logic, individuals are also organised around the commodification of things. Thus, we can extend the notion that under neoliberalism individuals view themselves as a commodity (Houghton, 2019). To increase their value as a commodity, it can be hypothesised that a neoliberal subject will 'invest' in themselves through relational mechanisms that facilitate the consumption of knowledge and skills. Literature tells us that



the act of consumption can bring a sense of ownership over the self (Theodoris, Miles & Albertson, 2019, p. 41) and self-branding, but ultimately, “the fact that they [neoliberal subject’s] are obliged to define themselves in this way means that they will always be disappointed: they will never reach the point of satisfaction”. The new phenomena of self-branding can be linked to neoliberalism’s role in ‘organising the subjectivity’ (De Lissovoy, 2018, p. 188) which:

Takes place against the backdrop of a shift from earlier forms of alienation to the contemporary condition of anxiety that is associated with destabilisation, precarity, and fragmentation – conditions that characterise the experience of the majority in the present.

The complex relationship between the ‘commodified self’ and the ‘consumption of everything’ within the experiences of young people births a ‘flawed consumer’ (Bauman, 2007) in that they “are defined through consumption, but their relationship with it is about survival” (Theodoris et al., 2019, p. 37). For example, young people’s consumption of knowledge despite the burden of student debt, is often viewed as the only tool to help facilitate transitions into the labour market. Although, McGuigan (2014, p. 234) observes that young people do not view themselves as ‘flawed consumers’, bringing the focus back unto the system that that shapes them:

Such a self is not unappealing. It is actually quite attractive, especially for the young, initiated as they are into a cool-capitalist way of life that does not appear to insist upon conformity.

Neoliberalism has “managed to make itself invisible by becoming common sense”. (Sugarman, 2015, p. 130). The ‘free’, ‘equal’ and ‘autonomous’ neoliberal subject indicates that “neoliberal ‘common sense’ is also internalised as part of contemporary notions of ‘self-identity’ or ‘subjectivity’, whereby we are encouraged to construct and conduct ourselves as marketable commodities” (Hyslop, 2016, p. 7). Furthermore, the neoliberal ideology taught individuals “to avoid operating in an antagonistic relation to any other ideologies or to formal structures of power” (Ventura, 2012, p. 12). The development of neoliberal subjectivities can be linked to the rise of a new socio-cultural logic (Connell, 2010). That is, the neoliberal ideology (Louth & Potter, 2017).

### 3.4 'Doing Neoliberalism': Living as a Neoliberal Subject

Even the most personal aspects of life; our desires, anxieties, anticipations, expectations and conceptualisations of self are governed by a neoliberal rationality. This same rationality promotes agency, choice and competitive individualism (Connell, 2010) and neoliberal subjects “emerge as ‘free’, ‘entrepreneurial’, competitive and economically rational” (Kelly, 2006, p. 24). Mackie (2018, pp. 1, 2) notes that “young people today are growing up in markedly different circumstances to those that previous generations experienced” and “are said to be more autonomous and have more freedom to pave their own paths”. Similarly, Nairn and Higgins (2007, p. 264) show that “young people are, in many (but, crucially, not all) ways, ‘children of the market’”. As neoliberal subjects, millennials “live in an open-ended yet known, measured yet adventurous journey into experience, one we see as generally consistent and purposeful. It is this unfinished yet consistent subjectivity that we generally understand as our self-hood, or personality” (Mansfield, 2000, p. 4)

Furthermore, central to the neoliberal rhetoric is the notion that individuals are solely and utterly responsible for achieving success within their life narratives (Luxton, 2010) with competition being a core aspect of neoliberalism (Gane, 2014). Emerging from this is the common social experience of uncertainty and unpredictability, often seen within neoliberal settings (Pyysiäinen, Halpin and Guilfoyle, 2017; De Lissovoy, 2018). Indeed, uncertainty has become a common thread in contemporary society (McGuigan, 2014). However, in a world of uncertainty that exacerbates feelings of insecurity individualism acts as a guide to fend off “threats to personal control” (Pyysiäinen, Halpin and Guilfoyle, 2017, p. 217), transferring the ‘ability to succeed’ over to the individual with very few safety mechanisms to protect them should circumstances deteriorate (Silva, 2014). Millennials are increasingly being taught how to survive a world that’s fluid, changing and fast-moving (Anderson, 1997). As Mackie (2018, p. 1) powerfully describes, young people “are compelled to be the captains of their own ship, navigating the choppy waters of modern society, determining their own futures with every step”.

Interpreting the experiences of young people in a neoliberal society prompts questions “about the extent to which powerful neoliberal discourses do not only affect people’s experiences and life strategies but also transform how young people understand themselves” (Schwitter, 2015, p. 71). As well as promoting ideals such as freedom, autonomy and agency, neoliberalism also encourages flexibility and mobility (Rojo & Percio, 2019). Situated within those ideals is the notion that the ‘entrepreneurial subject’ is a successful subject (Hamann, 2009; Dilts, 2011), promoting neoliberal

ideas of competitive individualism and personal responsibility. Houghton (2019, p. 622) expands on this idea and offers insights into the contradictions faced by neoliberal subjects as they strive to become an entrepreneur of their own lives:

The idealised enterprising subject, the product of political, societal, and organisational discourses, is seen as something individuals aspire to be. Whilst the ideal subject may be held up through dominant discourses, no individual will ever fully match the criteria. But that does not mean they will not work on their selves through reflection and their consequent actions in an attempt to match the ideal.

Houghton shows that individuals are eager to become the ideal subject despite it being an 'impossible task', which sheds light on the current challenge's neoliberal subjects face. They negotiate between a desire to succeed and an anxiety around not being enough. Sofritti, Benozo, Carey and Pizzorno's (2019, pp. 10, 11) research showed that for young people, "doing nothing becomes a nightmare, which translates into constant activity in the attempt to invent new work opportunities for oneself and thus to legitimise a sense of being". Neoliberal discourse governs the contradictory relationships that neoliberal subjects engage with. Hamann (2009, p. 38) notes that neoliberal discourse "strives to ensure that individuals are compelled to assume market-based values in all of their judgements and practices" in order to "become 'entrepreneurs of themselves'". Consequently, the entrepreneurial spirit that is imbued within neoliberalism encourages individuals to view themselves as instruments to their personal success. Dilts's (2011, p. 137) research shows that the entrepreneurial spirit is intrinsic to neoliberal subjectivities, arguing that "entrepreneurial activities and investments are the most important practices of the neoliberal self". Tertiary education is an example of such self-investment. However, it should be noted that there are "no limits on what could be reconsidered now as a form of entrepreneurial activity" (Dilts, 2011, p. 137).

The subject of work and employment is also considered an individual venture (Lynch & James, 2017). As noted in chapter two, the labour reforms of the 1980s and 90s were a major aspect of New Zealand's neoliberalisation (Crowley & Dodson, 2014). Reforms changed the nature of employment and altered employment experiences as "the country abandoned its full employment goal and commitment to adequate social welfare position in favour of privileging a market in allocating employment and resources" (Nairn et al., 2012, p. 11). Increased skills and qualifications and flexible and adaptable employees become tools for mobility within the labour market. Anderson (1997, pp.

180, 181) notes that “young people are being told that instead of learning the skills of a lifetime trade or profession... they may have to change occupations several times in their working lives”. This gives rise to the importance of mobility, not exclusive to physical movement, but inclusive of social and cultural norms of progression. The importance of mobility, and its relation to success is an idea that surfaced within this research and will be explored more in chapter five.

### 3.5 Conclusion: Mobility as success?

To summarise, this chapter explained neoliberalism’s influence on the self and subjectivity. Discussions on the neoliberal subject in this chapter revealed that the neoliberal ideology has become embedded within subjectivities, disguising itself as common-sense. More than that, neoliberalism has created commodified subjects whose goals and aspirations closely align with a market rationality. Through ‘acts of neoliberalism’ such as pursuing tertiary education or ongoing training, neoliberal subjects are able to market themselves as commodities which reinforces the consumption of everything under neoliberalism (Bauman, 2007). Neoliberal ideals such as autonomy, competitive individualism and agency encourage the idea that mobility is crucial for successful employment narratives. Rather than analysing the social structures that cause tensions in their lives, neoliberal subjects would instead reflect on their own, individual ability and skill level (or supposed lack of) and use that as a motivator for self-development. An example of self-development is the idea of upskilling which was discussed in chapter two. Upskilling allows individuals to mobilise themselves and facilitate progression which is important for young workers who are often told that they will most likely change careers, jobs or industries more than once in their life time (Anderson, 1997). Sociological literature on success is limited although, one sociologist notes that “success can be defined as whatever the actions of individuals or collectivity receives positive rewards because such actions are regarded as important to the group and/or larger society” (Iutovich, 1988, p. 5). It is noted that “discourses about mobility have long been seen as inextricably linked with success, as if it cannot happen without mobility” (Cuzzocrea, 2019, p. 50), perpetuating the idea that moving within the structures that shape us is necessary to succeed and thrive within society. Despite this, Türken (2017, p. 48) recognises that “individuals who constantly engage in reinventing and developing themselves are not guaranteed success”. Examining the literature on subjectivities shows the dangers that can occur when perpetuating the same ideals. Even if individuals believe they are taking steps to prepare themselves, uncertain and changing conditions cannot guarantee the success of their efforts. For example, young people go to university guided by the notion that qualifications will allow them to move more freely

within the employment landscape. However, upon finishing training and education, young people finishing university “find themselves confronting a labour market that is increasingly uncertain, as decades of neoliberal policies and current technological change have created stagnant wage, high living costs and precarious work” (Beban & Trueman, 2019, p. 101). This is important to understand in relation to my findings, as my participants described success as a ‘feeling’ that could be achieved through the act of practising mobility which was on one hand driven by their internalisation of neoliberal norms and on the other hand propelled by an anxiety around stagnation. This will be discussed in depth in chapter five.

## Chapter Four: Methodology

### 4.1 Introduction

Chapter one situated the millennial experience of work against a backdrop of change and transformation. It showed that millennial experiences of work are underexplored in New Zealand. In chapters two and three I discussed the literature that contextualises millennial experiences of work in Aotearoa. This chapter will discuss the project's research design, its methodological approach and the methods employed to acquire and analyse the data. The first aim of this study was to explore and make sense of the employment experiences of young New Zealanders who had been working for no more than four years in the labour market. The second aim was to identify and interpret their anticipations for the future of work and gain some insights into their desires and anxieties regarding the future. An important factor to consider when reflecting on the research was its non-linearity. With that in mind, I'd like to borrow Gilling's (2000) notion that research is comparable to the art of juggling where researchers learn to be flexible, patient, understanding, strong and resilient. At different stages throughout my research, it underwent key points of transformation in response to different sets of challenges which will be explored in this chapter.

This qualitative research project is situated within an interpretivist paradigm and is fundamentally exploratory. Gilling (2000, p. 15) reminds us that the premise for conducting research "is the goal of exploration – a search for new answers, a solution to a problem, a better way of doing things, an explanation for something that is puzzling". This research also takes a social constructionist approach in an attempt to understand the employment realities of millennial workers. Interviews and focus groups comprised the multi-method approach for this research. These happened sequentially, with interviews occurring first and the focus group second. The sequential nature of the methods allowed me to develop rapport with participants across multiple stages. Moreover, it allowed investigation first into individual employment experiences and then into the collective experiences which allowed me to cross check for points of similarity or difference. This chapter will first give some context on the research design and methods and will expand on changing nature of this project, highlighting some key challenges and solutions. Second, it will discuss the projects ethical considerations. Next, the chapter will discuss the recruitment process and participant profiles. The final sections will discuss the interview, focus group and data analysis processes.

## 4.2 Research Design and Methods:

Qualitative research approaches are especially useful when gauging the attitudes and positions of a given sample population (Mack, Woodsong, MacQueen, Guest & Namey, 2005). Quantitative research is often used to explain a phenomenon whereas qualitative studies rely on interpretation to derive meanings and generate ideas (Thorne, 2000), rather than just an explanation of data. Qualitative studies are inductive and start from the perspective of the subject. Embracing subjective approaches can benefit qualitative analysis processes (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). Alternatively, quantitative approaches generally start from the researcher's belief about certain ideas (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009). Therefore, "the choice between quantitative and qualitative methods cannot be made in abstract but must react to the particular research problem" (Alvesson and Sköldberg, 2009, p. 9). As this research called for an exploration of the millennial work experiences, it was essential that participant narratives were central. Qualitative research assisted in this process, allowing for a depth in exploration into a relatively underexplored area, that is, millennial experiences of work in the New Zealand labour market.

Qualitative studies are often situated within interpretivist paradigms (Neuman, 2014; Silverman, 2014; McNeil & Chapman, 2005). Some scholars suggest that interpretive approaches risk over-generalising (Alvesson & Sköldberg, 2005, p. 3), involving the "risky leap from a collection of single facts to a general truth". Nonetheless, interpretivism posits that multiple interpretations of a single experience are likely to occur (Neuman, 2014). Interpretivist approaches allow researchers to derive meaning from datasets without the influence from previous predictions. As a researcher it is important to be an "observer in the world" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3) using interpretive practices to "turn the world into a series of representations... attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meaning people bring to them" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 3). Qualitative research allows the often-complex subjective experiences of the collective to surface, broadening our understandings of "the 'human' side of an issue – that is, the often-contradictory behaviours, beliefs, opinions, emotions and relationships of individuals" (Mack et al., 2005, p. 1).

Exploratory research investigates new or under-explored phenomena. Researchers who conduct this line of inquiry should "adopt an investigative stance and explore all sources" (Neuman, 2014, p. 38) in attempts to address knowledge gaps and produce new ideas. Neuman (2014, p. 105) notes that "what people see and experience in the social world is socially constructed" and "just because people's experiences are socially constructed does not make them illusionary, immaterial, or

unimportant". McNeil and Chapman (2005) extend the idea that to explain the social world around us, we must first learn to see the world from the standpoint of the intended sample. This research applies a social constructionist framework. Social constructionism is situated within interpretivist thought, which concerns itself with the subjective experiences of participants. Unlike naturalist approaches to research which try to assess 'what' is going on, the constructivist approach asks, 'what' is going on and 'how' is it being brought into being? (Silverman, 2014). Furthermore, a social constructionist will argue that reality does not naturally exist, rather it is produced (Alvesson & Skoldberg, 2005) and therefore socially constructed.

Social constructionism provides an avenue to understand individual subjective experiences whilst interpreting the degree of influence from surrounding, external structures. Applying a social constructionist framework assisted my exploration of millennial work experiences in New Zealand as I was able to get a sense of the general trends affecting their lives as well gain insights into how they made sense of their lived experiences. The methodological framework that has been outlined above is beneficial to my research as it sought to understand employment experiences of New Zealand millennials in a neoliberal context. To achieve research aims, it was important to keep participants experiences of work and their imaginings of the future a key focus. The steps taken to achieve this will be expanded on below.

To make participant experiences a central feature that spoke to individual stories and also collective narratives, this research implemented a multi-method approach across two phases, including interviews and focus groups. The focus group and each of the interviews were audio recorded with an exception of one participant. Audio recordings assisted the transcription process and allowed me to revisit and re-explore the dialogues and interactions from the interviews and focus group. I was able to closely analyse changes to tone or behaviour, reflect on the general atmosphere and consider the pauses or other pieces of information that was previously missed. To avoid background noise so the quality of audio was unaffected, I organised one-on-one interviews in quiet space, namely local cafes or in some instances at the Massey University Albany Campus.

To construct an accurate picture of the surrounding social reality and to develop a clear understanding about subjects' lives, rapport should be built with participants (McNeil & Chapman, 2005, Marvasti 2011). Self-disclosure is known tool to strengthen rapport and is an idea situated within qualitative research practice (Etherington, 2001; Dickson-Swift, James, Kippen & Liamputtong, 2007;



Marvasti, 2011). Self-disclosure involves being “aware of ourselves; to know what we are thinking, feeling, intuiting, what concerns us and what we believe in” (Etherington, 2001, p. 122). Moreover, practicing self-disclosure in social research settings is known to enhance rapport and build trusting relationships as it allows the researcher and participant to comfortably and freely express their perspectives. It can also help participants understand the research and the researcher’s goals in more depth (Marvasti, 2011).

The project initially began with the intentions of holding three to four focus groups (5-6 people each) based on different contract types (full time, part time, self-employed, fixed-term/casual) and one collective workshop with all members of the four focus groups present (20 participants total). However, recruiting people to attend both the focus group and workshop proved to be a challenge. Whilst I had interest from prospective participants, the difficulty was agreeing on a date in which all participants could meet for the collective workshop (which was to occur after the focus groups). One participant that had agreed to take part suggested meeting for an initial one-on-one conversation prior to the focus groups so they could understand more about myself and the research. After the first, successful one-on-one meet up (which ended up serving as a pilot interview) I decided to formally include the interviews as part of the research process. This marked a significant change in my methodology, reflecting the notion that “research seldom goes from a to b to c” (Gilling, 2000, p. 15). Rather than having a large-scale collective workshop with all focus group participants, I altered the methods slightly to include a focus group with individuals from the interviews who were able to attend. The sequential nature of the two methods (first interviews, then focus groups) allowed me to build and strengthen relationships across different phases of the project. From the recruitment stage during the project’s infancy where initial contact with participants was established over email (see Appendix A), to the first sets of interviews and the focus group during data acquisition, there was a continued effort to establish and affirm rapport.

### 4.3 Ethics

This project was peer reviewed and deemed to be low-risk by the Massey University Human Research Ethics Committee (MUHEC). Given the nature of the two-step methodology, there were ethical considerations about the participant-researcher relationship as well as the participant-participant relationship. As the researcher, it was my role to ensure participants’ information was kept confidential and that their privacy was respected. The information sheet (Appendix B) and consent

forms (Appendix C and Appendix J) that were given to participants before the interviews/focus group commenced reassured them of their rights including confidentiality and privacy agreements.

One of the first principals of social research is to do no harm (Davidson & Tolich, 1999). With that in mind, a key ethical issue to consider for this research was participant privacy and confidentiality and caution was needed around revealing participant information given the multi-method approach. Interviews and focus groups are both linked in their qualitative nature; however, each method requires different sets of skills and ability from researchers. Across both modes, researchers must be visually aware and listen closely in order to note any changes in the atmosphere or to participant behaviour. As the facilitator, it was my responsibility to protect participants' interests and wellbeing and to ensure that no conversations and points of discussion would result in harm. How information was expressed and handled during the sessions was important to be aware of given its focus on personal work experiences. Ensuring participants understood their rights to privacy and that their information was confidential was an important aspect, particularly as the methods used requires greater caution when handling information. In the first phase of data acquisition, during the interviews, the final written exercise asked participants to answer two questions:

1. What worries you about the future of work?
2. What excites you about the future of work?

Before writing their answers, I explained to participants that their responses would be used in an 'initial analysis' to provide extra information for the second phase of research, the focus group. Focus group participation was voluntary, we discussed their desires to attend the focus group after interview sessions ended. Before making their decision, I made it known that in the focus groups (a space for collective discussion) there was a chance that information from their interviews may be brought up, particularly if there were similarities between participants; however, they were reassured that this would only be based on the information from the final written exercise. All of the participants that agreed on attending the focus group were happy for their answers to be shared. These questions were purposely included at the final stages of the interview so I could have some tangible evidence to analyse before the focus group. Further, through assessing their answers I was able to disseminate some key themes raised by individuals in the interviews that speak to common trends in the world of work e.g. financial insecurity, automation, gendered anxieties.

#### 4.4 Participant Profiles

All the participants involved in my study resided in Auckland, New Zealand which is known for its ethnically diverse population (Statistics New Zealand). Six participants in the study identified as Asian, five as Pākehā and one as Indian. Regarding the gender split, four participants identified as male and the remaining eight as women. Out of the six participants who identified as Asian, five identified as women and one identified as male. One male identified as Indian and three out the five participants who identified as NZ European/Pākehā identified themselves as women with the last two identifying as male. Seven out of the twelve participants were on full-time contracts, one was self-employed, two were part-timers and the final two engaged with fixed term/casual contracts. The variety and range of contract types were purposefully selected to capture the diverse roles and contracts in an uncertain and precarious working world (Standing, 2011; Colombo & Rebughini, 2019) which has shown to disadvantage certain groups in New Zealand (Springer et al., 2016; France et al., 2019). Participants were born between 1993-1999 and their ages range from 20-28 years old. Whilst still considered millennials, I argue that the participants in this research are 'younger' millennials. To contextualise, Devaney (2015, p. 12) notes that:

There are likely to be differences between younger and older millennials. The millennials who were born between 1986 and 1992 were entering the job market during or at the end of the recession which began in December 2007 and ended in June 2009, while millennials born since 1992 might still be obtaining their education and entering the job market.

Men and women included in this study were still children and adolescents in the early 2000s with the oldest participant reaching his teenage years (13 years old) only in 2006. This suggests that my sample did not fully engage with the labour market until after the 2008 financial crash which presupposes that they could have different attitudes to work than 'older' millennials. Older millennials were likely to be transitioning into roles or had firmly established jobs in the labour market at the time of the financial crash, forcing them to go from pretty certain career prospects to immense uncertainty (Devaney, 2015). Each participant in this study had no more than four years' experience in the labour market which was a strategically chosen variable which helped me to understand the work experiences of those in the early stages of their working lives. In choosing an age range that spanned nearly a decade, I was able to ensure the study was inclusive to those who may have left high school at an early age as well as cater to individuals who may have undertaken higher education and thus

only began engaging with the workforce in their early to mid-twenties. For a brief description of each participant, see Figure 4.1 below.

Table 4.1 Participant Profiles

Jack	Jack identifies as a 27-year-old Asian male. He works full-time as a senior treasury analyst for a New Zealand bank after completing a degree in finance.
Cara	Cara is 23-years-old and identifies as an Asian woman. After completing her degree in human resources, she began working full time as a junior recruitment officer for a health care recruitment service.
Daniel	Daniel is 27 and identifies as Pākehā. After finishing his Bachelor of Arts degree, he began working casually as a sales merchandiser.
Rohana	Rohana is a 25-year-old physiotherapist who works full time. After studying at university for four years, she now works in the public healthcare system and is employed in a local hospital. Rohana identifies as an Asian woman.
Carrie	Carrie identifies as a Pākehā woman and is a 23-year-old full-time receptionist for an electrical company following the completion of her Bachelor of Arts degree.
Noreen	Noreen is a 24-year-old female teaching assistant who identifies as Pākehā. After graduating with a Bachelor of Arts, Noreen works at a local university and is mainly employed under fixed-term and casual contracts.
Ashley	20-year-old Ashley identifies as an Asian woman. She works as a part time construction worker on a building site.
Will	24-year-old Will identifies as Pākehā. After completing his apprenticeship, he became a self-employed contractor in the construction industry.
Annie	Annie is 23-years-old and identifies as an Asian female. She is employed part time as a receptionist.
Tyla	Tyla is a 23-year-old graphic designer working full time, a role she received after completing a degree in Art Design. She identifies as Pākehā.
Zane	Zane is a 26-year-old male. He works full-time for a small-scale start up business as a software developer and identifies as Indian.
Tina	Tina is 22-year-old woman who identifies as Pākehā. After finishing her undergraduate degree, Tina landed a full-time role after undertaking an internship in her final year of studies.

Interestingly, all of the participants with one exception had undergone university study with each receiving a bachelor's degree or equivalent. Although I didn't specifically seek out university graduates, the fact that the majority of participants had received tertiary education of some sort is not surprising. Government funded strategies that have encouraged a surge in university participation rates (Dadelszen et al., 2006; Ministry of Education, 2017) particularly since the 1980s neoliberal reforms (Trueman & Beban, 2018) have seen high levels of tertiary educated men and women entering the labour force (Ministry of Education, 2018).

#### 4.5 Recruitment

Before the recruitment process began, I created an excel spreadsheet to input participant demographic information. This made participants easily identifiable as I was able to quickly see who was eligible for the study (based on age, contract type, years in workforce etc). To assist this process, I created a small online questionnaire on Survey Monkey and distributed the link online using social media apps. The survey asked general demographic questions such as name, age, ethnicity, job title, job industry, type of contract, years in the workforce and asked for their contact details if they were interested in participating (Appendix E). I created this with the intention that it would reduce back and forth correspondence with potential participants to help me identify their eligibility for the study. However, in the initial stages of recruitment I was receiving less attention than I expected, with only a handful of participants reaching out in the first month. I suspected the lack of email communication and rapport-building in those beginning stages affected people's decisions to agree to participate, particularly as building rapport is a crucial aspect of qualitative research (Lune & Berg, 2017). In response, I altered my recruitment strategy which will be discussed further below.

Along with the questionnaire, I created a poster (see appendix F) through Canva, an online software although I later created a simplified version (See appendix G) because I felt it would better communicate the research intentions and what was required of the participants involved in the study. The second rendition included a quick response (QR) code linked to the online questionnaire which was inspired from other research posters I had seen around the Massey University Albany campus. A 2015 marketing study on perceptions of QR codes found they can ease the process of online searching (Ozkaya, Ozkaya, Roxas, Bryant & Whitson, 2015). The QR code can be photographed on a cell-phone, directing individuals to the website fixed in the code (which, in this case was the Survey monkey questionnaire). The newly designed poster was distributed around the Auckland area and posted to

social media platforms. Neighbourly and Facebook were the two main social media apps used in the recruitment process.

Using social media to recruit young people is seen as effective, particularly as younger generations have higher levels of online engagement than other generational groups (Valor & Sieber, 2005). Neighbourly allowed me to advertise in my surrounding suburbs. Living on the North Shore in Auckland, these included Beach Haven, Birkdale, Glenfield, Highbury, Birkenhead and Chatswood. However, these attempts were unsuccessful and I believe this is due to the lack of engagement with the app in my locality. With regard to Facebook, rather than posting information about the research exclusively to my own social media profile, I also posted information in common Facebook groups. These groups were specifically focused on employment (e.g. Auckland Jobs, Auckland full-time jobs, Auckland Work Wanted/Offered, Casual Part Time Temp Jobs in Auckland) and community notices (e.g. Beach Haven community page, Papakura and Takanini Grapevine, Torbay community page, West Auckland and Surrounding Areas Community Page). This provided potential exposure to over one hundred thousand individuals who were members on the Facebook pages. Once joining the private pages, I made sure to reach out to the page administrator to ask permission before posting information about the research (See Appendix H for initial and then revised Facebook posts). Following these posts, I had more interest and was able to recruit a total of twelve participants.

#### 4.6 Interviews

As mentioned earlier, the first phase of data collection involved interviews. During the interviews, I learned general information about participants and gained insights into their past and present experiences of employment. Additionally, participants and I developed a level of openness, trust and comfortability. This encouraged a level of rapport that could be later extended in the focus group. It is important to note the power dynamics that can surface between interviewer and interviewees (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015, p. 28) as they are noted to be “easily overlooked if we only focus on the open mode of understanding”. Moreover, as power is an inherent aspect of human interaction (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015, p. 38) “the point is not that power should necessarily be eliminated from research interviews, but rather that interviewers ought to reflect on the role of power in the production of interview knowledge”.

It became important to develop strong rapport with participants so that they felt comfortable during the process. Rapport building with participants became a key way to mitigate asymmetrical

power dynamics. Rapport is defined by Lune and Berg (2017, p. 82) as “the positive feelings that develop between the interviewer and the subject”, however, it is also important to understand that this “should not be understood as meaning that there are no boundaries between the interviewer and subject” (p. 82). Having a common understanding is often seen as the most effective way to begin rapport development. As both myself and the participants were young millennials engaging with work, we were able to immediately relate on a common ground.

For most interviews, I met with participants one on one. However, on one occasion, two participants (Daniel and Jack) asked if they could be interviewed together as they were already friends and felt more comfortable doing the interview with one another. For each of the interviews, we usually met over coffee, somewhere public. I held interviews where the participants felt comfortable. I asked for location suggestions from them to ensure they were comfortable with the space and that they did not have to travel far for the interview. The interviews were semi-structured. The open-ended interview questions served as a guide with the expectation that discussions and answers may vary across participants. Semi-structured interviews are made up of a group of key questions that guide areas of exploration (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008), allowing the researcher to view participants as a vessel of knowledge or fountain of information that can be activated or deactivated with the right questions (Marvasti, 2011). I created some primary questions to generate discussions but also drafted secondary questions that would allow me to probe for more information if necessary (see Appendix I).

Interviews are useful when exploring the historical, social, cultural and material aspects of people’s lives (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015). They are also ideal when investigating people’s views, experiences, motives, perspectives and knowledge on a subject, issue or social experience (Mack et al., 2005; Alvesson & Sköldbberg, 2005). Skill levels of an interviewer is said to be related to past practice and experience when conducting interviews (McMurray, Pace & Scott, 2004). Fortunately, two previous projects; one in research and the other in academic course development, allowed me to develop my skills, apply them and strengthen them over time (See Beban & Trueman, 2018). The interview was broken down into four main stages with a final exercise reserved for the end. The first stage was general introductions where I asked participants to tell me their name, their first job and the best and worst thing about it. This allowed participants to start reflecting on those polarising moments of good and bad in their employment histories, which made for great conversation starters. Stage two included: asking about current roles, the importance of work to participants, what they

believed to be characteristics of a 'good job' and how they rated their current role on scale of 1-5 with one being poorly and five being exceptional. Using a five-point Likert scale proved to be an effective way of quickly understanding how they rated their experiences which became the key focus for the next stage of the interview. In this stage I probed more into their experiences of work and asked participants to further discuss their experiences as well as the rewards and challenges associated with their work. The fourth stage was a reflection on the future of work. For example, I asked participants where they saw themselves in ten years career-wise and what they felt would need to be done to achieve their goals. The fifth stage encouraged discussions of their general desires and anxieties about the future and included a written exercise as described earlier.

Despite research which suggests young people are exceptionally prone to precarity, insecurity and flexibility more than any other generation, (Standing, 2011; Statistics New Zealand, 2014; Cochrane et al., 2017; Groot et al., 2017), interview participants did not focus on these aspects of work as much as I had expected. Instead, participants focused on their desires for career progression. It was common for participants to situate themselves within uncertain and often precarious times, however those experiences did not define their time in the labour market. Instead they spoke about the more subjective and personal experiences of hardship or discrimination at work that defined their experiences. As the interviews were semi-structured with a range of questions, their limited discussion of key trends like insecurity and precarity did not pose an issue; rather, it allowed me to focus in on and listen closely to the unique sets of participant experiences.

#### 4.7 Focus Groups

Along with interviews, focus groups are known to be opportune for exploratory based research (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015) as they facilitate investigations into people's perceptions on specific issues through collective discussion (Kitzinger, 1994). Focus groups are effective when investigating the experiences of a group. Markova, Grossen, Linell & Salazar-Orvig (2007, p. 46) characterise them as "a thinking society in miniature" particularly in their ability to stimulate collective conversations that originate from individual streams of thought. Whilst individual interviews allow researchers to gain insight into subjective experiences, focus groups generate detailed explanations of collective experiences and allow participants to question others views and explain their own (Neuman, 2009). Focus groups are useful in multi method approaches as they allow you to collect the 'group language' on a given topic (Gill et al., 2008) producing rich sets of data that surface through a series of verbal group interactions (Markova et al., 2007). This is an important aspect to consider for this project as it



seeks to understand the collective desires and anxieties of young people regarding the future of work alongside their present-day, individual experiences of work. Further, focus groups are advantageous and can be distinguished from other qualitative methods (Boateng, 2012, p. 54) due to their “purposeful use of social interaction in generating data”.

Out of the twelve interview participants, six attended the focus group session which is regarded as either the minimum (Steward & Shamdasani, 2015) or optimum requirement (Gill et al., 2008) for focus groups. There were some challenges in arranging a time for the focus group. This was due to the general busyness of participants working lives. Many participants conducted work on the weekdays and were not interested in a late night, post-work focus group. To mitigate these challenges, the focus group was held in the weekend on Sunday the 4<sup>th</sup> of August, 2019 at 2pm. It was held on the Massey University Auckland campus and for the specific location, I hired ‘The Wonder Room’, a quiet, light and open space. I set up a comfortable, circular seating arrangement for participants, which is known to assist in creating a comfortable environment (Krueger et al., 2001). Their seats centred around a table of food. Food was purchased by me prior to the focus group and was reimbursed thanks to Massey University’s Graduate Fund. Participants had around 30 minutes to eat some food and converse. In this time, they were able to get to know more about one another which gave them the time to feel comfortable in each other’s presence. I believe that in giving participants some time to converse and get to know each other, they seemed comfortable with conversing with each other and responding to different concerns during the focus group discussion. It is important for participants to develop rapport with each other in focus group settings and is argued to have a positive effect on the validity of findings. This is because participants may feel more comfortable to be open and forthcoming about their views on a given issue or topic (McNeil & Chapman, 2005).

Focus groups hold the potential to add breadth, depth and perspective to topic discussions (Côté-Arsenault & Morrison-Beedy, 1999). The ‘non-directive’ style of group interviewing can raise different views, perspectives and spark “lively collective interaction” (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015, p. 175) which is said to induce “more spontaneous expressive and emotional views than in individual, often more cognitive interviews” (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015, p. 176). Whereas the interviews focused on individual experiences of work, the focus groups provided opportunities to investigate the collective millennial work experience. Like the interviews, the focus group was organised in stages. After participants had some time to get to know each other and eat some food, the session started informally with a small picture response game where I asked participants to react to a series of photos

(also known as memes) associated with work and employment (See appendix J). Memes have been said to aid in norm formation, particularly in young people (Gal, Shifman & Kampf, 2016, p. 1700) as they express “existing cultural norms” and serve as a “tool for negotiating them”. Including memes was a worthwhile opening exercise that facilitated laughter and connectedness based on feelings of relatability.

Before focus groups commenced, I asked participants to read, and if they were happy with it, sign a second participant consent form (See Appendix K) which differed from the ones distributed in the interviews as it directly addressed the roles and responsibilities of participants in a group setting (e.g. being respectful to others and confidentiality). First, I introduced myself, the research and discussed the usefulness of a focus group in relation to the research aims. Next, I made sure to communicate participants’ rights for the session. Following this, I discussed my responsibility as a researcher and their responsibility as focus group participants in terms of being respectful of all views put forward by others to co-create a safe, comfortable space. As the researcher, I had a commitment to ensure participants felt safe, comfortable, respected and that their information would be kept confidential. In a focus group setting, confidentiality is important to consider due to the group dynamics. After this, I asked participants to introduce themselves whilst responding to the question “Where do you see yourself career-wise in three years”. This opened up conversations on anxieties and desires. For instance, during her introduction, Tyla raised concerns about being over-worked and underpaid, which stimulated conversation amongst the group.

The second stage of the focus group focused on future career goals which stimulated talks on desires, anxieties, expectations and reflections on their ability as workers. A key part of my role as the moderator was to stimulate conversations when necessary and bridge experiences when the opportunity came up (See Appendix L). For example, if an individual in the focus group was discussing an experience that I knew linked to another’s, as a moderator I would say something like: “Wow Sarah, that’s super interesting! Bob and Sam, you both raised similar ideas in your written responses to final exercise in the interview. Do you think your experiences could offer a similar or different perspective?”. Through this I was able to generate a more collective discussion. As noted previously, evidence provided to me from participants’ written reflections from the interviews meant I was able to craft questions that would respond to, and further explore, their desires and anxieties for the future of work. The final stage asked participants to reflect on any trends they felt were currently influencing the world of work, along with things they felt may influence it in the future. I also asked them to reflect

on current positions and brainstorms the tools, actions or steps that they may need to take to reach the future career goals they discussed when introducing themselves.

Key discussion points that arose between participants during the last stage were: future career progression, the prevalence of higher education in securing jobs, the emergence of new jobs and eradication of old ones and balancing children with careers to name a few. Focus groups proved to be more challenging than interviews. Whilst I had some experience interviewing people one-on-one, I had never formally conducted a group discussion session. To prepare myself, I made sure to research tips and techniques as well as thoroughly plan the stages of the focus group. The Wonder Room was a quiet space, and to record the focus group, I used my phone's audio recording app and placed that in the middle of the table where it remained there for the duration of the session. The focus group generated data that I may not have been able to get from interviews as participants were able to bounce their ideas off each other, adding depth and strength to the responses. For example, through Carrie's discussions of 'male aggression culture' at her workplace, her insights sparked larger conversations around women and work. Whilst some females touched on their gendered experiences of work in their interviews, focus group sessions allowed me to see how these issues were reacted to on a collective level.

#### 4.8 Data Analysis

After each of the interviews and the focus group, I set aside time to free write on the sessions to note down key information, points of interest and ideas to revisit during the upcoming analysis. Free-writing has been noted to produce benefits for qualitative, thematic analysis (Thorne, 2000). Additionally, I took the time to detail the stages, tasks and actions taken in the interviews and focus group. Given that the methods were semi-structured there was room for fluidity. The non-linearity of the research design meant it was important to reflect on each stage to ensure methodological transparency (Brinkman & Kvale, 2015, p. 305) as "everything is potentially important to our understanding of knowledge production". During the analytical stage, inductive analysis was applied which fostered a connection to the material as I was analysing from the 'ground up' whilst keeping participant stories central during the process. Thematic analysis is an analytical strategy I applied which allowed me to identify patterns within the data. During this analysis I kept in mind that a 'good' thematic analysis should go beyond just describing the data (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017) and should also include a thorough interpretation to reveal information about particular topics or issues.

Using thematic analysis assisted my overall research aims and assisted the identification of themes within the data. Fortunately, I had gained transcribing experience from prior research projects which taught me the value of transcription for analysis. Transcription allows you to gain an overview of the similarities, contradictions, tensions and conflicts and interpret them with reference to specific issues or topics discussed during the interviews. Additionally, listening to the audio recordings from the interviews and focus group often brought out new ideas and further contextualised others. I began this process by first typing out quick and later detailed transcriptions either directly or soon after interviews and the focus group were complete. A benefit of quick transcription is that I was able to begin analysis immediately, quickly uncover the semantic data that surfaces during the first stages of analysis (Maguire & Delahunt, 2017) and familiarise myself with the datasets. Detailed transcriptions included behavioural patterns and details on subjects physical and non-verbal behaviours (e.g. two second pause, breathing heavily, was shaking their head). Brinkman and Kvale (2015, p. 209) note that detailed transcripts may “sensitise interviewers to the finer points of interview interaction” (p. 209).

When I had finished transcribing, I printed the transcriptions in full and made sure to highlight key words, notes or recurring themes. For each portion of highlighting, I followed up with a sentence or two describing its significance in terms of how it broadens my understandings of my research topic. Next, I collated themes on my computer. I used Microsoft Excel to document key themes which had been mentioned and cross-reference themes between participants. Additionally, I used Microsoft Word and Google Docs to write down key notes and quotes.

It is noted that writing plays a significant role in data analysis (Thorne, 2000). It is not an isolated process; rather, it is a continued endeavour throughout the research whether it be formal or free writing. Writing is important to me as a researcher and helps me articulate my thoughts in a way verbal discussion cannot. During the analysis, I made sure to reflect on findings in relation to conversations that were (or were not) present in the literature. This allowed me to assess what might need to be addressed in the literature review. In the coding stage of analysis, I categorised the data by identifying common themes that may consist of a range of patterns, ideas, words, behaviours, interactions, sentences or phrases. This provided me with a foundation to begin the second key stage of analysis: interpretation of the themes. In this stage I was able to situate the voices and experiences of participants within broader conversations of millennial employment experiences and address my research aims.

## 4.9 Conclusion

Through this project I learned to become an adaptable and responsive researcher, learning a lot about the unpredictability of research and gaining a deeper appreciation of its complex nature. Over the course of this project, my methods evolved. Initially the aim was to conduct a series of focus groups and one collective workshop to get a sense for millennial experiences of work in New Zealand. Various challenges such as participant availability meant the project had to change. And as per the suggestion of a participant, interviews were first conducted. Participants also had an opportunity to attend a (optional) focus group to follow up on their work experiences. Changes to my project benefitted my overall investigation into millennial experiences of work. The focus group maintained the collective stories I was hoping to encapsulate with my initial project design (group-based research) and one on one interviews granted the time to get to know participants and learn more about their individual work narratives. Had my methods not evolved in the ways they did, the key thematic discussions that will be discussed in Chapters five and six may not have surfaced. These discussions are important as they showcase contradictions within New Zealand's millennial neoliberal subjects. This chapter addressed the projects research design, its methodological framework and the methods applied to carry out research aims. It highlights an exploratory, interpretivist approach whereby interviews and a focus group were used to investigate millennial work experiences, their views and expectations on the future ahead. Subsequently, the following two chapters will discuss these findings.

## Chapter Five: New Zealand's Neoliberal Subjects: Millennial Discussions on Work

### 5.1 Introduction

To restate the importance of addressing neoliberalism's effect on society, it is worth revisiting ideas from the literature review which suggest that neoliberal rhetoric is a force powerful enough to penetrate the minds, body's and souls of individuals (Ball, 2012). With that in mind, we cannot deny neoliberalism's presence. And to take this further, we must address the challenging and often confronting realities that accompany it. Younger generations in New Zealand have 'grown up neoliberal' (Nairn et al., 2012), being governed under its logic for the majority of their lives. With such a strong reach, neoliberalism's ability to insert itself into the lives of young people and guide their responses to labour market changes emphasizes the power it wields over individuals. This chapter focuses on the contradictions within the millennial subjectivity, arguing that the constant desire to progress is a reaction to an unstable world of work. In showcasing participant values, views and attitudes towards work, my study broadens our understanding of millennial work experiences. This is important, particularly as the working world in New Zealand is transforming rapidly, creating ongoing consequences that must be explored.

My study revealed a collective desire amongst participants for consistent, progressive growth. Moreover, participants appeared to be career driven and were largely confident in their abilities to progress and succeed. Their collective desires to progress show that to some extent their desires are informed by their neoliberal subjectivity and in other ways, their desire to progress is propelled by an anxiety around stagnation and minimal progression at work. The findings of this study are presented in chapters five and six. In this chapter I introduce the neoliberal millennial and expand on work experiences while in the next chapter, I'll discuss some challenges, tensions and disruptions to their experiences of work in the New Zealand labour market. My study therefore confirms that young workers in New Zealand are informed by neoliberal subjectivities, particularly as they all showed signs that they were eager to adapt, willing to upskill and keen to take personal responsibility for their success through continued mobility and progression in their careers. First, I will discuss the link between three core concepts that emerged in this study: mobility, progress and success. Second, the findings illustrate an internalisation of neoliberal norms. It shows the willing workhorse in action and discusses participations perceptions of higher education and the value it brings in relation to their career goals. Third, I highlight millennial views on their desires to upskill based on their perceptions of

its ability to facilitate acts of progress and feelings of success. Final discussions in this chapter confirm that the millennials in this study were shaped by a neoliberal subjectivity which in part influenced their desires to be mobile in the labour market, progress and be successful. It also exposes an innate anxiety around stagnation in their career and shows that their desires to progress and feel successful are also propelled by their worries of being static which could be understood as a neoliberal response to an everchanging world of work.

## 5.2 Mobility, Progress and Success

In this section I will unpack the key linked ideas of mobility, progression and success, developing an analytical framework for understanding millennial experiences of work that will then be developed throughout the rest of the chapter. To the millennial workers in this study, the core concept of mobility facilitated the act of progression. To facilitate progressive growth in their career, participants spoke to two kinds of mobility (upwards and sideways):

**Mobility 1 (M1):** upwards (or vertical) mobility in a career. This might occur through receiving an increase in pay or promotion which might consist of taking on a higher role within a company or receiving a higher position at another company.

**Mobility 2 (M2):** not exclusively linked to upwards mobility i.e. a promotion or increase in pay. M2 differs from M1 in that it is defined by sideways (or lateral) mobility. It includes accepting job opportunities to gain new skills and experiences even if it were at a similar pay rate or position.

Within the sociology of work, mobility is often understood as upward growth (Abercrombie, Hill & Turner, 2000). In this study, M1 is best reflective of the traditional view. M2 however, emerged as a form of mobility not often described in literature. That is, the desire for movement in a direction that does not necessarily need to be upward and can be achieved through lateral or sideways mobility.

Progression in this study is defined as continual movement (facilitated by either M1 or M2) in a way that enables individuals to grow in their career and personally. In other words, progression is symbolic of the 'doing' or 'acts' of mobility i.e. constant upskilling and movement. The idea that 'doing' progression is helped by practises of mobility was valuable to millennial workers in this study in that through upwards (M1) and sideways (M2) mobility they were able to counteract feelings of being "stuck" in their careers. If horizontal and vertical forms of mobility are both understood as being

progressive for growth, then progression can be understood as the opposite of being static. And because progression is defined as being non-static, progression then inevitably requires mobility. In efforts to counteract career stagnation which was undesirable to participants, success was largely seen as an ongoing process in that there were no fixed end-points.

Success is often viewed as the achievement of a task or goal (Collins Dictionary, 2006). In the sociology discipline, success can be understood as a “social reaction to the action of an individual and/or collectivity” (Iutovich, 1988, p. 5). Workers in this study interpreted success as a state of feeling which was enhanced by continual progress to avoid stagnation in one’s career. Whereas progression is the ‘doing’ of mobility, success reflected feelings that you are going somewhere, not stagnating and continually moving in a direction that is progressively beneficial for one’s career. Participants did not describe success as an overarching desire or a fixed goal; rather they described it as an ongoing aspiration. Moreover, success was linked to mobility. Young, millennial workers in this study understood mobility (M1 & M2) as a progressive means to growth that enabled success. Together the tripartite relationship of mobility, progress and success was symbolic to participants in that it reassured them that they were ‘on the right track’. But, to maintain success in their careers, particularly as it was not seen as a fixed ideal or a permanent space, there was a recognition that mobility and thus progression needed to be ongoing to uphold feelings of success. Participants had an understanding that success was a non-static concept in that success had no end point. Success was an ongoing process and was not something to achieve, rather, it was something to maintain. Moreover, success could only be maintained through a series of ongoing actions in the view of my participants. Thus, both mobility and progression were crucial enablers of success

Figure 5.1 illustrates the relationship between mobility, progress and success. In this figure, mobility both M1 (‘upward’ mobility) and M2 (‘sideways’ mobility) facilitates progression. Doing progression is strongly linked to the idea of being anti-static or not stagnant. Progressive strides in the career became an enabler of success. Success was a state of feeling and as success was ongoing and not a fixed idea, mobility (M1 & M2) was an important tool in maintaining a successful career through continued progression.



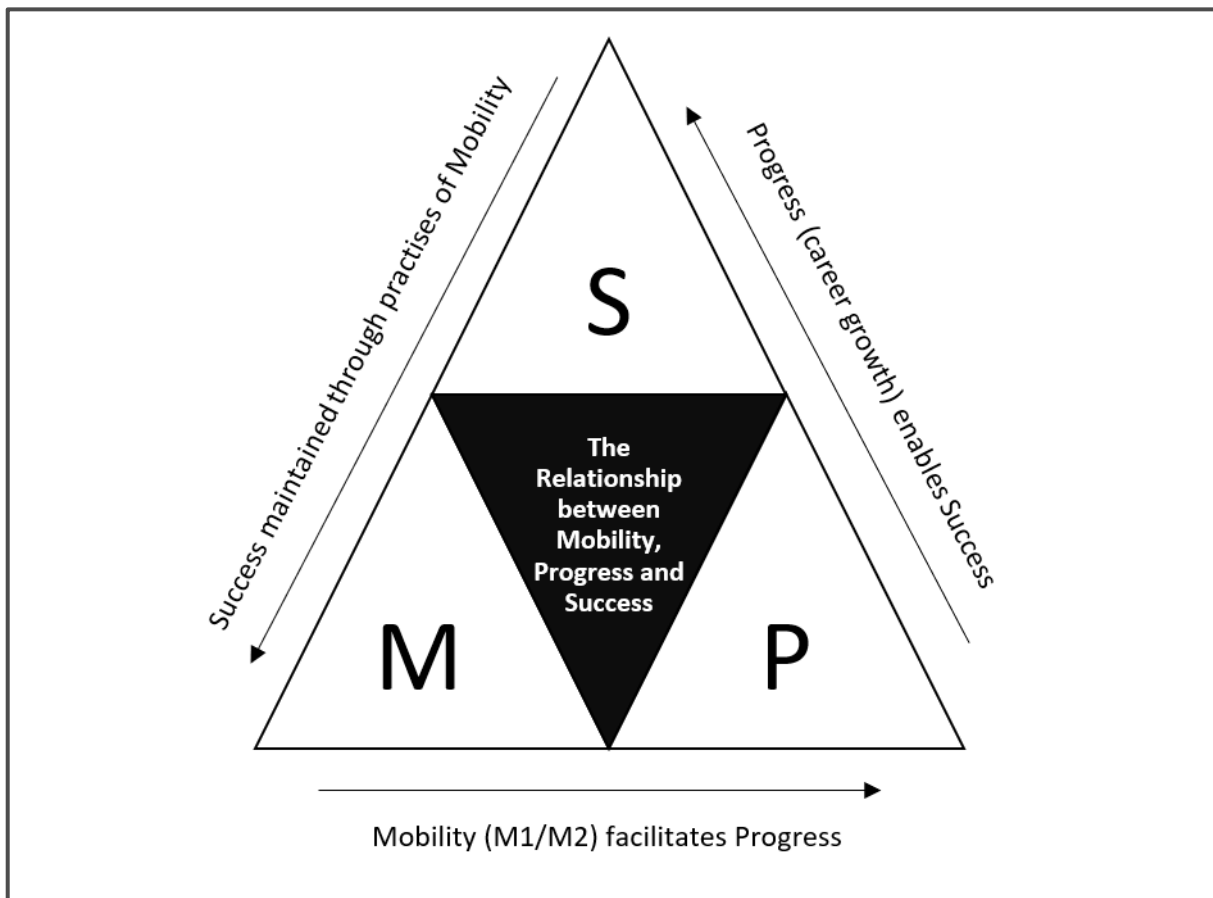


Figure 5.1 Relationship between Mobility, Progress and Success within Millennial working lives  
Focus group discussions support the notion that millennial workers desire progression as a way to mobilise themselves and enable successful careers:

I think it [work] is more for the experience and skills you learn.

(Rohana, Physiotherapist)

I'm the kind of person who likes change and I like learning.

(Tina, Event Manager)

As soon as I become capable at what I'm doing it becomes really repetitive... I really like to be challenged and I know that stepping out of the comfort zone can be very daunting... but it gives me room to grow.

(Annie, Office Administrator)

If I do decide to leave the healthcare industry and pursue something else, I can do that because I've learned soft skills and hard skills that I can take with me anywhere and I'm keen to learn more.

(Cara, Healthcare Recruitment Advisor)

In their conversations, Annie, Rohana, Tina and Cara emphasise the role of upskilling in order to learn more, challenge themselves, progressively grow their careers and enable success. Chapter two showed that upskilling can leverage of success (Anderson, 1997). When reflecting on the relationship between upskilling and success, mobility (particularly M2) was a 'leveraging' tool in that it enabled progress through skill development which counteracts feelings of being static and maintains feelings of success. Being able to facilitate career progression through different forms of mobility was viewed by participants as important for successful employment narratives. In other words, success was enabled through acts of being non-static utilising one and/or both forms of upward (M1) and sideways (M2) mobility to help with career progression. Thus, progression was symbolic to participants as it reassured them that they were on the right track. However, rather than there being a fixed end-point, being successful was viewed as fluid and ongoing in the sense that any kind of mobility, be it a job promotion, salary increase or the development of new skills would facilitate the doing of progress and thus feelings of success.

All participants in the sample indicated a desire for progress in their careers. More than that, they also showed an awareness of the different forms of mobility that can facilitate progression and thus enable success. In the following conversations that occurred across the interviews and focus groups, participants responded to anxieties around feeling 'stuck' or 'stagnant' at work. When describing the significance of progressive growth in her career, Tina notes:

I think for me it's just feeling like you're not stuck where you are.

(Event Manager)

Tina's discussions add weight to the idea that career progression, or the idea of being non-static and mobile helps counteracts feelings of being stuck, stagnant or immobile. Another focus group participant, Jack, discussed the notion of being stuck and links it directly to a lack of skills:

[If] you can't get a job because you're an unskilled worker then you're kind of stuck.

(Jack, 26, Senior Treasury Analyst)

Jack's assumptions that you must be skilled to move otherwise you're "stuck" could reflect a normalisation of neoliberal ideals. That is, an awareness of the need to upskill, keep relevant, mobilise, progress and importantly, to not expose oneself to the unnecessary risks that might come with being unskilled, under-skilled or unemployed. For the participants in this study, progression served as a safety net in an increasingly uncertain world and was a way to mitigate unease around their general anxieties of limited growth or stagnation in their careers. The implications of chasing growth and progression was discussed during an interview with Zane, a junior web developer. Zane works for a small-scale business and despite being in his current role for only six months, Zane notes:

I feel like a cog in the machine.

(Web Developer)

Zane also spoke to the desire to mobilise himself through the process of upskilling. After hearing stories that some of his friends were made redundant in company restructures, Zane feels more vulnerable and at risk in his junior position in comparison to senior colleagues. He feels that updating skillsets regularly allows you "to prove yourself to the boss". Overall, participants exhibited a general sense that if you work hard, you will progress on a personal and professional level. This finding is notable, particularly if we consider the kinds of ideas promoted and presented to young people about work and life in general. For example, neoliberalism suggests that every outcome in one's life is enabled by individual effort which takes pressure off external institutions like the government, and accelerates pressures felt by the individual, creating a necessity for heightened personal responsibility. This message is spread in discourses of employability promoted to millennials by the government, schools, tertiary institutions, organisations and multi-national corporations (Tertiary Education Commission, 2016; KPMG, 2017; Ministry of Business, Innovation & Employment, 2019) and is a body of literature which suggests workers must be adaptable and multi-skilled.

Even though millennials have grown up in a world of change and increased uncertainty (Pyysiäinen, Halpin & Guilfoyle, 2017) one thing participants in my study were certain about was their desire to progress. One could argue this is an optimistic view considering it stems in part, from the fear of being static, stagnant or unable to move forward. Irrespective of their class, gender, ethnicity or the industry they worked in, participants in this study all had desires of career progression. Furthermore, there was an underlying sense that doing progression would enable feelings of success.

Some simply defined progression as having the opportunity to grow and develop at work as shown in responses from Tina and Annie:

my goal for the next three years would be to be in a job where I can grow.

(Tina, Event Manager)

I want to grow... so if I'm in a good company and they have a good company culture, then I can have a lot of space to grow.

(Annie, Office Administrator)

In contrast, Tyla saw progression and growth as an upward process but also brings a financial element to her definition:

I think I'd like to kind of step up and move up a bit... and also get better pay as well. I don't know if I'm being underpaid but I think I deserve more... you know, could reflect what I'm doing. I feel ready for one [a pay rise], I think I've proven myself.

(Tyla, Graphic Designer)

Her desire to 'step up' at work suggests she values professional growth and development in that it reinforces her ability to successfully build on skillsets when necessary:

it's just like achieving that goal, getting better at what I'm doing.

(Tyla, Graphic Designer)

Cara also discusses the role of finances in progression:

I think for me to have more money, to achieve my full satisfaction at work and to go further, I want to just learn as much as I can from everyone like everyone from the lowest to the highest.

(Cara, Health Recruitment Advisor)

In this study, progression and growth appeared to be a uniting desire amongst participants. International studies reinforce this finding, particularly as millennials are shown to value job characteristics that lead to professional progression (Ng, Lyon & Schweitzer, 2018). Despite this, their motivations to progress differ. Annie highlighted the importance of a positive working environment, believing it would lead to a wider range of beneficial opportunities for both personal growth and professional development. Tina's desire to be in a job where she can grow suggests that progression

is tied mainly to her professional development. Tina and Annie both desire the opportunity to grow within future roles which could suggest a lack of opportunity for progression in their current roles. Unlike Tina, Annie or Tyla whose desire to progress was steeped in personal and professional development, Jack's intent to progress reflects a certain angst and fear around age, position and status:

Wait. Do I have a fear of being poor? I don't think so... I have a fear of working at like 70 years old, that's my fear like fuck I'd hate that fucking shit. I saw some dude [working] in Kentucky Fried Chicken... he looked like [he was] 85 and that was really sad.

(Jack, Senior Treasury Analyst)

Jack seems more confident of himself which may arguably be down to his seniority at work, especially as he notes: "I got myself a position where I'm not that far away from the top", which illustrates mobility and progressive growth as he is already experiencing professional development. Thus, his current experiences of employment are not as much of a worry for him in comparison to post-retirement age working.

#### 5.4 Millennials Practising Mobility: Progression in Action

Participants showed a desire for continual upskilling to assist with progression and growth across their careers. These findings complement research which suggests young New Zealand workers are not impressed by those who choose to remain in a company for life (Schewe et al., 2013). To add weight to the argument that change is an accepted aspect of employment for my participants, this study shows that to some extent, young New Zealand workers transition through a series of stages to practise mobility through acts of progression. To expand, participants had normalised ideas of growth and development, interpreting them as an opportunity to progress their careers, to challenge themselves, expand their knowledge, acquire new skills and apply them to new roles. Thus, I argue that the through practises of mobility, employment experiences of millennial workers in this study are cyclical in nature. I created Figure 5.2 to demonstrate the idea that work is a series of recurring interactions that consist of a) securing a role b) demonstrating acquired skills c) garnering new ones d) hitting the 'progression plateau' and e) engaging with new career opportunities.

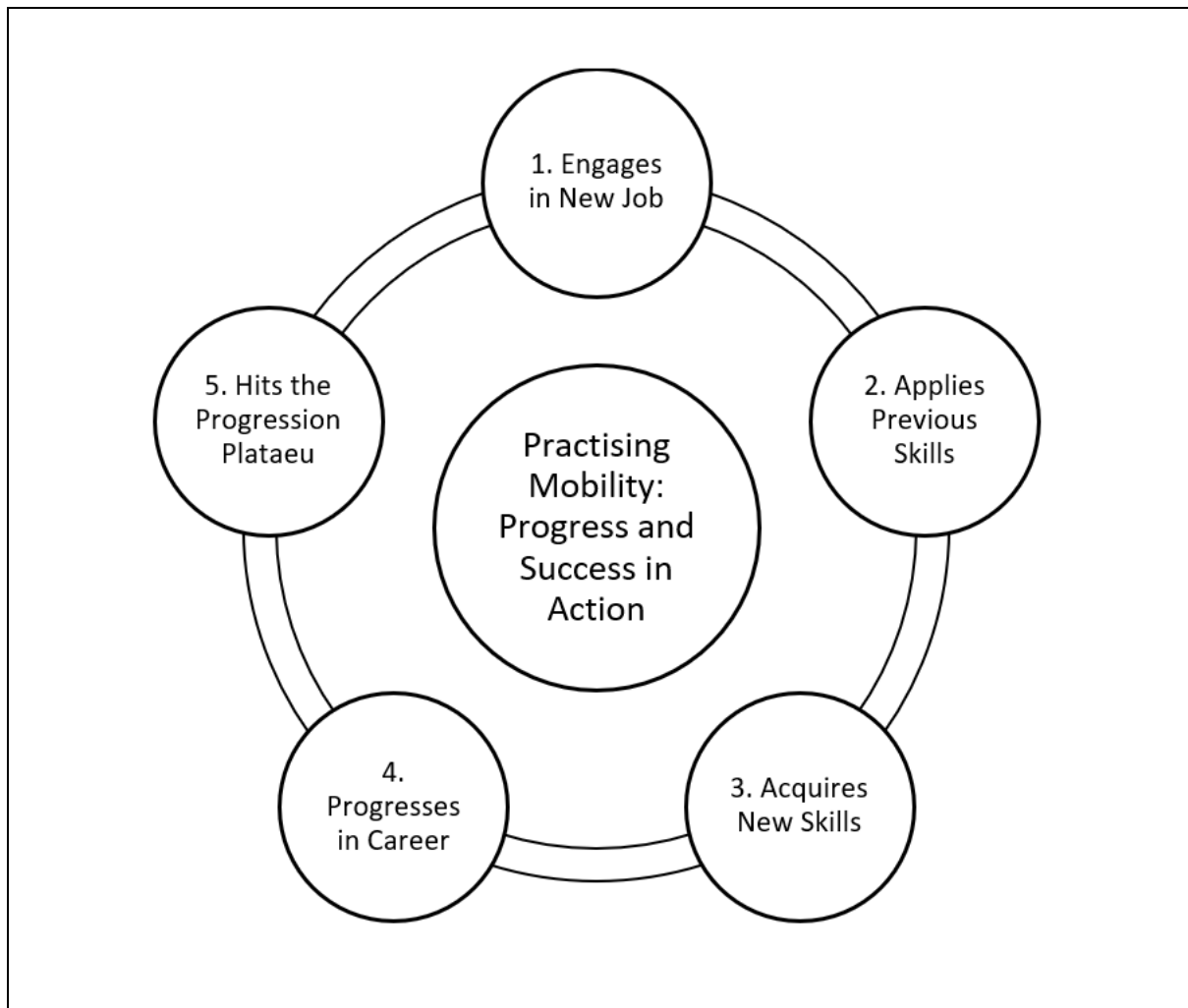


Figure 5.2 Practising Mobility: Progress and Success in Action

The progression plateau is an idea that came out of this thesis and posits that an individual can only reach a certain level of achievement before opportunities for progress and thus success, decline. To illustrate millennial mobility in action Zane's quote shows that as long as you're progressing you are growing:

[I would like to] develop my skills... I don't believe in staying too long at one place...  
variety is important.  
(Web Developer)

Some participants described the progression plateau and recognised barriers to progression within their current workplaces:

I feel like my passion has decreased... particularly because I don't think there is ongoing training for me.

(Annie, Office Administrator)

I would like to further my educational qualifications which I feel would give me better... more opportunities for perhaps longer fixed-term contracts [and] just opening up some more opportunities.

(Noreen, Tertiary Teaching Assistant)

Further, when reflecting on past job experiences, Jack makes direct reference to the plateau of financial progression, an aspect that directly influenced his decision to seek new roles:

When I was at my other job, my last job, I felt I had reached my income cap, and [thought] I'd probably plateau at around 3% raises and so that was the drive to look for something else.

(Senior Treasury Analyst)

In response to the progression plateau, Figure 5.2 posits that individuals desire new career opportunities through mobility in the hopes of further progression. To exemplify this, Tyla and Annie illustrate the desires to move workplaces if there was no longer room for growth:

I [would] eventually want to change jobs, just to like expand my knowledge.

(Tyla, Graphic Designer)

I would love to be offered ongoing training so I can upskill and keep learning. Otherwise I'd just go somewhere else.

(Annie, Office Administrator)

Their responses show some similarities, particularly as they both desired progression and believed this could be achieved by moving onto new roles. For example, Tyla is clear about her desire to change jobs to enhance her pool of knowledge. As well, Annie indicates a desire to upskill. Notice she is clear in her intentions to move workplaces if the opportunity to progress was not offered to her with her current employer. For Annie, she places some expectation on her employers to provide training yet she is forthcoming with her pledge to move elsewhere if necessary. Both participants speak to a desire to change roles and similarly, both women have internalised the idea of personal responsibility often associated with the neoliberal subjectivity (Schwitter, 2013). The desire to upskill and progress is in

part influenced by their anxiety around stagnating in their careers. As stated earlier, participants did not see success as an endpoint; rather, success was a 'state of feeling' and was described as an ongoing process. Borne partly because of their neoliberal subjectivities and partly from their anxieties was the need to constantly upskill out of fear of being 'left behind' or stagnating.

Within my research, it was understood that the ability to grow and progress rested on the individual's pursuit. For example, through discussions on current employment experiences and future career desires my research shows the tendency for millennial workers to internalise the necessity to upskill. That is, participants individualised the need to upskill, seeing it as beneficial to the self. Furthermore, majority of participants (with the exception of Annie) did not see employers or the government as responsible for offering on-going skill training. Arguably, as a result of competitive environments and hyper-individualised approaches to work, participants showcased a heightened sense of personal responsibility which posits the idea that an individual should be responsible for life outcomes. In this sense, for millennial workers in this study, personal responsibility was a mobility tool to facilitate acts of progress and enable feelings of success. To be personally responsible in the context of this research was to commit to a future of progressive growth. For example, Tyla uses self-obligation as an anchor point to interpret the importance of progress at work. Notice how she firmly locates herself when discussing the value of moving into a senior position:

it's just like achieving that goal of getting better at what I'm doing and proving to myself that I've got really good at what I'm doing.

(Graphic Designer)

Tyla's focus on the individual shows the importance of progression to her and it reinforces her ability as a worker and showcases her commitment to progress. Tina also echoed similar a commitment to growth:

Right now, I feel like I'm just stuck in my role and it's becoming quite repetitive. I'm the kind of person who likes change and I like learning and I'm not really doing that at the moment.

(Event Manager)

Participants desired progressive growth in their careers including skill development, promotion, new opportunities and salary increases, new roles etc. Growth proved to be of value to young workers, particularly as it created the momentum needed to facilitate progression. This research shows that



practices of mobility (Fig 5.2) facilitated growth and therefore progression. According to Figure 5.1 progression enables success and to maintain success (which is viewed as an ambiguous rather than definitive desire) constant practises of mobility are required which highlights the cyclical aspects of mobility and progression. One participant who understood the skills required for progression was Jack, a senior treasury analyst. His story illustrates the politics of progression and the nuances that accompany it. For example, after leaving university, Jack exclusively sought roles “with the goal to make money” and he felt that “getting a job in the money markets was the best way to do that”. After meeting his financial goals early on in his career, his desires shifted to that of progressive career development through upward mobility. Jack values upward mobility (M1) and progression in a vertical sense as opposed to side ward mobility (M2) to progress at work. This could arguably be due to his current seniority at work so that vertical upwards mobility within his company is viewed as an achievable and feasible reality:

My work goal in three years would be... to be in [upper] senior management.

(Senior treasury analyst)

In a seven-month period, Jack secured a senior role within his company which he considers the best thing about his job:

I got myself a position where I’m not far away from the top. I’m considered an expert... which is pretty cool.

(Senior Treasury Analyst)

His quick progression within his company speaks to the important idea of ‘political skill’ as I will now explain. A politically skilled individual is said to be someone who utilises their understandings of their workplace in order to “enhance their personal and/or organisational goals” (Banister & Meriac, 2015, pp. 776). Through Jack’s attempts to navigate work he recognised the steps needed to succeed and reflected on his barriers to progression:

Obviously, there is a little side note because for example, if everyone in the positions that I want right now are thirty-six, the age that I want to be when I get to that position [then] they are not going to leave their positions for more than ten years. So, by the time I get to thirty-six as well all the positions will still be full.

(Senior Treasury Analyst)

Whilst his current role is not considered part of the upper tiers of senior management, Jack understands what is required to progress, recognising the challenges that accompany career progression:

Well I got three steps to the top but obviously each promotion gets harder and harder and harder. But you have to apply for shit that's out of your reach with the expectation that you'll learn on the job.

(Senior Treasury Analyst)

Jack's response showcases an understanding of his work environment and the skills necessary to progress (Silvester & Wyatt, 2018). Whilst he acknowledges the challenges that may accompany progression into senior management, being confident and willing to learn are two political skills recognised by Jack as a way to progress. This coincides with observations that political skill enables growth within a given industry and is a key aspect in predicting one's work outcomes (Banister & Meriac, 2015).

### 5.3 The Personally Responsible Neoliberal Subject

Neoliberal policy reforms of the 1980s and 1990s altered people's interactions with the labour market. Changes such as the decentralisation of collective action, reduced union rights, and the introduction of the 1991 ECA among others, cemented New Zealand's neoliberal and ideological shift (Blumenfeld and Donnelly, 2016). Moreover, this promoted a personally responsible subject through the "acculturation of the population to adopt enterprise values based on methodological individualism" (Lawn and Prentice, 2015, p. 21). Contrary to the popular narrative that millennials are 'spoon-fed' or should be renamed as 'Generation Whine' (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010; Velasco & De Chavez, 2018), young people these days have grown up living in a world that firmly pushes a 'personal responsibility' agenda. Cahill (2016, p. 1) notes that "as young people attempt to negotiate this neoliberal context, society's anxieties about political and economic changes are projected onto their bodies". Millennials in this study showcased tenacity and drive, propelling the idea that they will work hard to earn their success. Interestingly, despite claims of millennials being 'lazy' workers (Jerome et al., 2014; Velasco & De Chavez, 2018) my investigation into New Zealand's millennial employment experiences reveal an internal tension that they face. This tension is about personally responsible for their own progression, holding themselves accountable for their own success and feeling like they must remain employable through upskilling and reskilling. In this research personal responsibility is defined as the

idea that the outcomes in one's life is dis/abled by individual effort or lack of. As a consequence of growing up in a neoliberal environment, my participants had completely normalised the idea of personal responsibility—viewing themselves and their actions as the main agent of progress in their careers.

Higher education can play a key role in personal responsibility agendas. Qualifications have been viewed as tools to equip the workforce promoting the “broader paradigm shift from the idea that tertiary education is a public good to education as an individual economic investment” (Beban & Trueman, 2018, p. 100). Tertiary educated workers are increasingly desired by employers (Modestino, Shoag & Ballance, 2019). University fosters an individualised, competitive environment, meaning individuals must practice personal responsibility to achieve progressive growth in the lives. Thus, individuals are trained in the act of personal responsibility and self-management prior to entering the labour markets. In this study, education is viewed and valued as a non-static, mobile tool that facilitated the act of progression. Participants in this study discussed a positive relationship between education and career and viewed qualifications as a way to enable their transition in the labour market. They recognised it as necessary for facilitating their interactions with the labour market. Participants in both the interviews and focus group commented on this relationship: For example, Noreen noted in her interview:

There is no way I'd get the job without education.

(Tertiary Teaching Assistant)

Similarly, during discussions of education in the focus group, Jack explained:

For me, I wouldn't have been able to get a job if I didn't get the education.

(Senior Treasury Analyst)

For Jack and Noreen, education was a tool in which they could act 'personally responsible' for their futures. They both show an understanding that without higher education, they would not have been able to enter their respective industries. Interestingly, most of the participants in my sample had attained some form of higher education. For example, all participants had completed a Bachelor's degree except for Will, who had undertaken a building apprenticeship instead. During the focus groups, when reflecting on the value of education, two participants noted:

I think having a degree sort of shows [employers] you have discipline and time management skills.

(Tina, Event Manager)

I don't think [education] will ever be irrelevant. Having a university degree shows you can learn on your own and that you can handle the responsibilities and workload.

(Jack, Senior Treasury Analyst)

In response, another focus group participant commented:

I feel like having done a degree has definitely helped me grow.

(Carrie, Office Administrator)

When unpacking the value of work, both Tina and Jack believe that higher education demonstrates your ability as a worker whereas Carrie believes education attributed to her growth. Her views show that she is aware of the value of education as a mobility tool to facilitate progressive growth (as shown in Figure 5.1). Carrie, Tina and Jack's views demonstrate an internalisation of norms associated with education and career, particularly the notion that attending university will prepare you as a worker. In Cara's interview, she discussed the shift from university to her work life as a health care recruiter, demonstrating the role work now plays in her life:

Work is such a big part of my life since I graduated. I guess it's like, it's replaced university. At the age that I'm at [22 years old], it's the most important thing to me.

(Healthcare Recruitment Advisor)

Cara works for a company that encourages a work-life balance, offering many flexible policies to its workers. Despite this, flexible employment structures are said to be inherently neoliberal (Crowley & Hodson, 2014). With that in mind, it becomes important to consider research which suggests that progressive management styles like those with attractive employee policies may still run the risk of restricting freedom and autonomy rather than promoting it as they hold "the incredible advantage of turning the individual into a willing workhorse" (Leger & Leger, 2011, p. 88; Cruz, 2016) a concept that I introduced in chapter three. Cara is a willing workhorse and illustrates this when describing her tendency to stay late, work over time, and work from home if necessary:

I'm just starting out and I want to show them that I can do the work, so I'll stay [late] and won't tell anyone. I'll just stay and do the work.

(Healthcare Recruitment Advisor)

Cara felt she's at an age where she should be working hard to secure her future. Her intrinsic desire to progress illustrates high worker competency levels. Work related competency is idea which is said to be important to employees in that it demonstrates their knowledge, skills, attitudes and ability to perform tasks (Puteh, Kaliannan & Alam, 2016). Moreover, Puteh et al. (2016, p. 45) note that high worker competency results "in an increase in employee engagement and career development". Her quote demonstrates a desire to be seen as a competent worker to the extent where she is willing to work unpaid overtime. Cara rarely asks for help as she does not want her superiors to think she couldn't handle the workload and notes that 3-4 nights a week she works extra hours in the office. Interestingly, she justifies the overtime as a personal choice she makes, and she recognises its detriment to her work-life balance:

It's a personal choice to not have a work/life balance. I want to prove myself. I'm just starting out and I want to show them that I can do the work.

(Healthcare Recruitment Advisor)

Cara notes that her managers are strongly dedicated to ensuring employees have a healthy work-life balance. She worries that they would show signs of disapproval if they found out she was working overtime. To mitigate this, she refrains from telling her supervisors:

I don't tell my manager, she hates it. She wants us to have a good work-life balance.

(Healthcare Recruitment Advisor)

Cara illustrates the ideas of personal responsibility and the 'willing workhorse'. Even though her company has policies in place to support employees, Cara chooses to stay late and work over-time in an attempt to prove herself as an employee. Interactions between Cara and her manager demonstrates the different ways in which neoliberal subjectivities play out in the same context. For example, Cara clearly demonstrates aspects of personal responsibility, however, she is simultaneously encouraged by superiors to take greater strides to achieve a healthy work life balance. In doing this, her manager (perhaps unintentionally) shifts the responsibility onto Cara, implementing processes of 'controlled autonomy' – a concept which is seen to be the main driver of neoliberal management, subjecting employees to invisible relationships of control through imposition of authority (Cingolani,

2019). Gilbert and Sutherland (2013, p. 1) might argue that such a process arose due to a steady increase in “the necessity of balancing the seemingly contradictory tensions of autonomy and control”. Cara’s story shows that she often made sacrifices as a result of work demands. She noted that even when faced with an unexpected life event, she felt it was her personal responsibility to continue working, and ultimately, she was worried about letting colleagues down:

My dad... he was in the hospital recently and I wanted to take 1 or 2 days off just to stay in hospital with him and I felt really bad like I didn’t want to let the team down like so, I know that my other colleague can log into just her emails from her phone. So, I did that, just so I could do emails.  
(Healthcare Recruitment Advisor)

Interestingly, her desire to not let the team down also demonstrates a responsibility to the collective. However, in comparison to pre-industrial collective responsibilities, we can see that collective processes of responsibility and power dynamics have changed. For example, Cara’s experiences closely mirror the idea of ‘invisible labour’. Crain and colleagues (2019 pp. 6, 8) define invisible labour as work tasks carried out “within the context of paid employment that workers perform in response to requirements (either implicit or explicit) from employers” which is done “for the benefit of the employer” and can be “crucial for workers to generate income, to obtain to retain their jobs, and to further their careers” (Crain et al., 2019, pp. 6, 8). Cara’s persistence to stay overtime and continue working at all costs, even when family members are ill, demonstrates the stronghold of both personal and collective forms of responsibility at work. A healthy work-life balance ceases to exist for Cara and she willingly acknowledges this. Her heightened feelings of personal responsibility and her desire to prove her work-related competency have turned her into a willing workhorse; an idea which shows the internalisation of neoliberal norms.

#### 5.4 Enabling Progress and Success: Upskilling

Another way my research demonstrates the prevalence of neoliberal ideals in relation to millennial work experiences can be understood through the idea of upskilling and is therefore worthy of further discussion. Constant upskilling and change can be viewed as a response to a world of work that has shifted away from permanent employment and toward fixed term, temporary contracts and self-employment (Edgell, 2012). In this study I define upskilling as the ability for employees to acquire and expand skill sets in the name of career progression. My research shows that the process of upskilling

served as a mechanism for young workers to facilitate acts of progression. Additionally, their desire to be challenged in the workplace, learn new things and have new experiences indicates their intentions of upskilling oneself over time, an action that is promoted under neoliberalism governance in attempts to better utilise the workforce (Elhefnawy, 2019). For example, participants valued growth and learning:

I think I still have room to grow... I need to move on and I know that I am capable enough to do something else.

(Annie, Office Administrator)

I feel like life should always be about learning, so, a central part of your job should be learning.

(Noreen, Tertiary Teaching Assistant)

To achieve growth, upskilling was understood as an effective means of career progression. Further, it was a common perception that this was to be achieved through avenues of personal responsibility in an attempt to secure a career in an increasingly insecure world of work. During focus group discussions, participants showed a desire to build new skills through ongoing learning, which would benefit current or future roles:

I could just expand what I do... learn more programmes... just adding on another path.

(Tyla, Graphic Designer)

I would like to have ongoing training so I can upskill and keep learning.

(Annie, Office Administrator)

Participants in this study perceived upskilling as beneficial to a career, particularly as it encourages individual growth and therefore progression. Participants felt personally responsible for upskilling. Across the interviews and focus groups there was little mention of the role employers and/or governments play in providing opportunities for workers to upskill. Annie and Tyla both reference the individual when discussing their desires to learn more skills. Cara also believed that mobilising oneself through upskilling, “working hard... and just learning” would facilitate career progression. For Tyla, continuous learning was an important part of work in that it demonstrated to that she was a competent worker. For example, she notes: “it shows I’ve been able to put myself into my work”. Participant’s desires to upskill was a reaction to a changing and often uncertain world. Annie posits:

Everyone has to move... the world is changing. If you don't move you will be left behind.

(Office Administrator)

Noreen contributed to conversations on a changing world of work and articulated the importance of upskilling through the lens of an employer:

In a world where things are changing so quickly... I think from an employer's perspective [upskilling] is quite attractive... that's what you would be looking for in an employee.

(Tertiary Teaching Assistant)

She expanded on this idea, noting that skill-building reinforces to employers that:

You're flexible and capable of working in a diverse range of environments... and that you are able to adjust quickly and that your able to morph yourself... and deliver in an appropriate manner.

(Tertiary Teaching Assistant)

Noreen demonstrates the value of upskilling in the sense that it illustrates your capability as a worker to employers. Despite this Noreen still held the view that it was the worker's responsibility to upskill and learn on the job, particularly in fixed term work:

I haven't received any formal training on how to actually do my job... there's an expectation that you're already equipped to be able to do the work. So, if you are unfamiliar with a process, or a system or anything you need for your job, the cost is put on to you to spend those extra hours training yourself to be able to do that job.

(Tertiary Teaching Assistant)

Noreen provided further insights into the implications of limited training opportunities:

[It's] externalising the costs onto workers but the workers can't do anything about it. They have to subsume those costs and deal with that themselves otherwise they wouldn't get the job.

(Tertiary Teaching Assistant)



Noreen's language, that of "externalising costs" in one way suggests she thinks employers should be providing upskilling opportunities. However, Noreen's reflections on her experiences of fixed-term work also shows an awareness that external costs (e.g. no formal training, no fixed work environment) are subsumed by individual workers. I argue that her discussions are both a critique of current work experiences as a nonstandard worker but also a normalisation of them, particularly as she feels workers "wouldn't get the job" if they weren't willing to subsume costs. Importantly, participant's desires to upskill and thus progress themselves, whilst being influenced in part by their neoliberal subjectivities, was also propelled by anxieties around being stuck and static. Career upskilling was viewed in conjunction with the belief that learning should be a process that will increase chances of growth, learning and therefore progression. Some participants gave context to these anxieties, noting their worries and fears of being:

Left behind... So, I'd like to be challenged and feel challenged.

(Annie, Office Administrator)

And:

Not having a clear progression opportunity.

(Daniel, Sales Merchandiser)

Or having worse off retirement prospects:

The slower I progress, the less likely [retirement] becomes.

(Jack, Senior Treasury Analyst)

Or, as Tina recognised; she had hit her progression plateau at work meaning there were minimal opportunities for career development:

[There's] no room for me really to grow [in my current position].

(Events Manager)

Participants felt that upskilling was not optional; rather, it was a necessary and normalised aspect of millennial employment narratives. When considering the context, that is, Aotearoa New Zealand, this finding is unsurprising as previous research suggests that "the project of neoliberalism consistently tells (young) people, their success or failure is on them" (Worth, 2018, p. 443), exposing the circle of influence between greater structural processes and subjectivity. Many participants had normalised

and subsequently internalised the idea that upskilling is a personal responsibility and individual endeavour. This shows a connection of influence between neoliberal subjectivities and millennial workers in this study and gives rise to a set of anxieties that can accompany contemporary working realities.

## 5.5 Conclusion

Neoliberal policy shifts and the rolling out of neoliberalism has encouraged the development of a neoliberal subjectivity. Millennials in this study showcased neoliberal subjectivities particularly through their desires to progress, and their views that it was their personal responsibility to facilitate career progression. My findings in this chapter expand understandings on millennial experiences which have been under-explored in the literature (Kowske, Rasch & Wiley, 2010). In this research, millennials revealed a collective desire to progress and succeed in their careers. There was a general sense that the act of doing progression would enable success, which in this study, represented a state of feeling. Unravelling this idea further, participants showed that their desires were propelled to some extent by a general angst around stagnation or 'immobility' in the labour market. Career progression in this research was reflective of consistent mobility (both M1 & M2) or the idea that they can move across or within industries if they feel unhappy with their rate of progression or if they get too comfortable. This relates to the concept of upskilling as my participants felt that upskilling would facilitate movement more easily into another career/workplace and therefore enable them to progress. Amongst some millennial workers, though, my research suggests that career progression can take on a more traditional meaning of vertical movement within the workplace, with participants such as Jack feeling confident in his ability to quickly move upward and progress within his company/organisation. My research therefore suggests that constantly learning new skills and constantly seeking change to a different job when things become too comfortable are both ways young workers stave off stagnation and 'success' is thus about being able to demonstrate to oneself that you are moving, learning.

Fears around progressing too slowly, being 'stuck' in their positions and not having clear pathways to progression presented themselves across participant narratives. Participant discussions showed the internalisation of neoliberal norms which in part shaped their experiences and desires. Another significant shaper of their desires were anxieties around being static in their career which propelled their desire to be personally responsible for their progression through growth, learning and upskilling. Figure 5.1 showed the relationship between mobility, progress and success and Figure 5.2

showed mobility in action expanding on how millennials in this study practised progress in the hopes of success. Feelings of success were subject to change and dependant on acts of progress and opportunities for mobility. Young millennials in this research showed the ability to evolve and adapt and had normalised the neoliberal ideals of upskilling (willingness to learn new skills) and adaptability (seeking change in a different job when things become too comfortable). Thus, ideas situated within neoliberal governmentalities showed to, in part, shape participants desire for progress and success. Alongside this, their desires were also propelled and shaped by their anxieties around stagnation. This shows the different ways in which neoliberal structures of power shape peoples lived experiences and speaks with literature that notes “contemporary [neoliberal] citizens are governed through their rationality and their anxiety” (Fournier, 2014, p. 309).

## Chapter Six: Disrupting the Neoliberal subject

### 6.1 Introduction

As noted in chapter two, the young neoliberal subject has been presented as homogenous; a collection of individuals who share the same characteristics, face similar obstacles and feel the same pressures as one another. To some extent my research confirms this, as I discussed in the previous chapter. The millennials in this study shared some collective characteristics including a heightened sense of personal responsibility and an overarching desire to progress. However, despite living in a society that promotes homogenous, neoliberal beliefs, participant's experience of work showed diversity and difference. Whereas chapter five examined millennial experiences of work and labour in New Zealand, affirming my argument that New Zealand's young workers are shaped by a neoliberal subjectivity, this chapter shows that millennials experiences of work are not homogenous.

Data from the interviews and focus groups showed that experiences differed according to different aspects of participant's identity. Discussions also illustrated a complexity in the ways in which participants interpreted their work experiences. This chapter aims to address how young workers make sense of the situations they encounter at work, and in doing so, it reveals disruptions to, and differences in, neoliberal subject. This chapter contains four key thematic discussions. First, I discuss the varied experience of freedom at work under different contract types. Second, I show gendered millennial work experiences with discrepancies between men and women's experiences of non-standard work and the construction industry. The third thematic discussion focuses on the double minority effect (Harnois, 2015) and the normalisation of external stigma from those who identify with more than one minority group. The chapter ends its thematic discussions with a continued focus on intersecting inequalities for women wanting to balance children and a career.

### 6.2 Contemporary Contracts: Diverse Experiences of Freedom

Millennials are said to have higher levels of job satisfaction than other generations (Kowske et al., 2010) promoting the idea that by enlarge, millennials are content at work. During the interviews which focused on individual experiences of work, I asked participants how satisfied they were at their current jobs and got them to rate their experiences on a scale from one to five (one being poorly and five being excellent). Whilst my research showed that participants were on average reasonably satisfied with their job (with an average of 8.16/10), job satisfaction varied significantly across men and women's experiences. Overall, male participants were more satisfied with their jobs and had a mean

of 9.25/10 for men, as compared with 7.625/10 for women (see Table 4.1 below). Whilst my sample is small and is not representative of the broader population, these findings suggest that New Zealand millennial women are less satisfied at work and face greater barriers to progression than men. This speaks with international findings which suggest millennial males are more satisfied at work than females (Kaifi et al., 2012). Further, and as I will discuss later in this chapter, women of colour tended to face more challenges than Pākehā women, reinforcing the double minority effect or the notion that there is a cumulative effect of disadvantage for minority identities (Harnois, 2015; Juan, Syed and Azmitia, 2016).

Table 6.1: Women's and Men's Job Satisfaction Levels out of 10

Men	/10	Women	/10
Will	9	Carrie	6
Jack	9	Annie	8
Daniel	9.5	Tina	8
Zane	9.5	Tyla	10
		Cara	8.5
		Noreen	6
		Rohana	6
		Ashley	8.5
<b>Men's total mean</b>	<b>9.25</b>	<b>Women's total mean</b>	<b>7.625</b>

Zane is a junior web-developer and works for a small-scale, locally owned business. During his interview, when reflecting on current work experiences, Zane discussed the value of creative freedom. In his role, Zane experiences high creative autonomy and freedom and values the ability make creative decisions without boundaries or barriers. Zane is on a full-time, permanent contract which is often perceived as more secure than other non-standard contracts. However, Zane feels vulnerable in his position and he worries about his future. He reflected on his junior role in a small-scale start-up which contributed to his insecurity in that he feels less valuable than someone in a higher position. He holds the belief that he will be the first team member to be “out of a job” if there were a restructure in the company, especially given that he had only been in the role for just over a year.

Jack’s definition of autonomy differs from Zane’s focus on creative autonomy and relates strictly to independent working practices. Jack and Zane have both been in the workforce for just under four years. Whilst Zane is still a junior position, by comparison, full-timer Jack’s career progressed at an exceptionally fast rate. Jack did not seem uncertain about future prospects or insecure in his position whereas Zane did. Three years after graduating university, he secured a role at a prominent New Zealand bank. His quick progression from a junior to senior management role provided him with new levels of autonomy, status and freedom at work. In his interview, he acknowledged the restrictive nature of the banking industry and admits that previous roles have granted him “more autonomy than being in a bank”; however, he explained that his senior position in the banking role was a key factor that influenced his satisfaction levels. Further, he recognises that his senior position grants him higher levels of power than previous, junior positions in the bank:

In a bank, there is a lot of red tape. However, I’m lucky in the fact that I’m in the treasury team because red tape doesn’t really apply because a lot of the time, we can get around things by saying ‘it’s required’.

(Senior Treasury Analyst)

Whilst Jack and Zane are both on full-time contracts, their experiences differ. Jack admits that being promoted to senior treasury analyst granted him autonomy, allowing him to carry out his work without many barriers. This facilitated his desires for freedom at work both in his current role and with regard to prospective future ones. Comparatively, Zane recognises that he has minimal power at work. As a result of his junior position, his bargaining power is limited which enhances feelings of powerlessness, uncertainty and lack of autonomy. Additionally, Zane desires guidance, collaboration

and mentorship from his employers and notes that “direction and mentorship is important”. Interestingly, these desires were not described in other male accounts, although opportunities for guidance and mentorship are noted as common desires amongst young workers (KPMG, 2017). For example, Dan, a casual product merchandiser, values working independently and autonomously. As it stands, Daniel and Zane are both in low-level, junior positions, yet interestingly and likely due to his casual contract, Daniel appears to have higher levels of autonomy and freedom:

Well, I haven't had a boss directly tell me what to do since I was like eighteen because I work by myself... my boss will call me and I just don't pick up if I don't want to talk to her. And I can choose if I work at 8am till 3pm or 3pm till 10pm. There are some exceptions, but I just have so much freedom... like I just can pretty much do whatever I want.

(Daniel, Sales Merchandiser)

Participants like Daniel and Jack glorify the idea of self-directed work, minimal regulations and not answering to superiors whereas Zane celebrated collaboration and direction. It makes Zane feel more engaged and connected to his job which increases the value and meaning work brings to his life: “no one wants to work, just to work... work should add meaning... value to our lives”. Despite working in different industries under different contract types, Jack and Daniel experience a similar sense of freedom and autonomy at work in terms of their ability to conduct work independently with minimal restrictions. Despite this, Daniel's nonstandard working narrative differs slightly to Jack's in that he is rarely disadvantaged by rules, regulations or red tape. Both Daniel and Jack's job positions have facilitated autonomous working practices albeit due to different reasons. Their experiences illustrate the different ways in which power can play out at work. For example, despite both having similar ideas of freedom and autonomy at work, freedom arises for them through different avenues. For Jack, freedom is a result of his senior job position, and for Daniel, it is a result of his low-level position. Whilst their industries and contract types differ, their experiences share some similarities which reinforces the varied and unique nature of contemporary careers (Arthur, 2008).

From a young age, Daniel has had the freedom to be his own boss and has worked independently and autonomously for the majority of his working career. Despite going from job to job, he notes that he has consistently experienced self-directed practices over the course of his career and has enjoyed that aspect of his work. Although he is a casual worker, Daniel does not feel the

stressful effects associated with nonstandard work (Auer & Cazes, 2002; Standing, 2011; Cochrane et al., 2017) and describes his work as 'easy'. Comparatively, Noreen, a 24-year-old casual worker in the education industry is often subject to stressful conditions and strenuous workloads. Her career so far has shown to be sporadic consisting of a handful of temporary, fixed-term contracts, some of which are carried out simultaneously. To illustrate the intensity of her work, she explains: "over a six-month period last year I had six different jobs on the go". Some may argue that Noreen is fortunate to have been offered multiple contracts, particularly as she works in a notoriously competitive work environment. However, securing one contract does not guarantee the next and her experiences reveal some tensions as she expressed that "not having any guarantees" can be stressful:

Yeah, I was probably naïve, I didn't realise that it's actually quite challenging [casual work]. Not knowing if you're going to make an income in the next four months... it's never guaranteed... your colleagues will say 'we'll sort something out there will always be something', but it's like 'can I have that in writing?' cause my bills are still going to continue.

(Tertiary Teaching Assistant))

Whilst Daniel enjoys the freedom of non-standard work and feels secure in his role, Noreen feels constricted by this type of work and has admitted to feeling vulnerable throughout the entirety of her career. For example, Noreen's job satisfaction sat at 6/10 in comparison to Dan's score of 9/10. When discussing their satisfaction levels, Daniel often spoke to the theme of freedom and put forward a positive view of his work. In Noreen's discussion, however, instead of referencing the positive values of her work, she immediately spoke of the negative aspects. Whilst she doesn't specifically allude to the probable causes of change in her workplace, Noreen recognises the impact that changes have brought to workers:

I feel like a lot of the costs of running the institution and running the business are externalised onto workers... particularly short term or casual and fixed term workers [for example] not providing the training, and not paying for their equipment. Yeah... they're externalising the costs onto workers but the workers can't do anything about it.

(Tertiary Teaching Assistant)



Despite demonstrating capability as worker, particularly as she has secured multiple contracts with her employer over the last few years, Noreen still worries about her future. Rather than discussing themes such as freedom and autonomy like Daniel and Jack did, she voices concerns about simply sourcing and securing work, describing the challenging aspects of waiting for the next role. She often referenced being in a 'state of obligation' to employers to say yes to contracts and also feels personally responsible for herself in order to minimise the possibility of an insecure working future:

You never know when your next job is going to come up, so when they do come up... you say yes. I might not have any jobs come in for like a month... and it's like how do I pay rent then? So, you're kind of in this state of obligation to say yes to any contract or any job that comes up.

(Noreen, Tertiary Teaching Assistant)

Alongside this obligation to work in order to pay her bills, Noreen also feels obligated to say yes in order to maintain her reputation with employers. Noreen worries that saying no to a contract may affect future job offers, and as a result, she tends not to dispute the terms of her contract because:

You're in this situation where you're almost forced to say 'yes, yes, yes; to any given short-term contract that gets offered to you... because the moment you say no... you almost get blacklisted.

(Tertiary Teaching Assistant)

Noreen's insights speak to workers' rights in relation to non-standard, specifically fixed-term work. For example, as a full-timer in New Zealand you are entitled to benefits such as sick leave (Clare et al., 2013). However, in comparison, Noreen's fixed-term roles provides no protection or safety nets if she falls ill or has an emergency. Further, as her contracts consist of short-term stints of work, they naturally tend to be time-sensitive, making it difficult to take extended periods of time off, even if she is unwell:

there's specific deadlines that have to be met... and although it's up to you in how you do that work, you need to get that done before the deadline so if you happen to fall sick the week before you've got a deadline due it's like... tough luck... you still have to meet that deadline and you still have to do that work so quite often in past instances when I have been sick I've thought 'Okay... shit... what do I have to do... oh my god...'

and then I'll end up having a breakdown.

(Tertiary Teaching Assistant)

Noreen's experiences under a fixed-term contract illustrate its potential to negatively affect health and wellbeing particularly for employees that face fixed deadlines and limited worker rights and protections such as the entitlement to sick leave. What is most troubling, however, was the ability for Noreen to disregard her wellbeing and persevere with work despite her health issues:

I've had a breakdown before. In one instance, my flatmate got really sick. I got sick from her and then I passed it to my partner. We were all at home on this one Friday super sick. I woke up in the morning and my partner was like 'nope... I'm not going to work I'm too sick' and I just had a full breakdown thinking 'that's so not fair, I still need to do work'. So, I went and set up on the couch with blankets and my computer... coughing... sneezing... so sick but I just had to get the work done... there's just no way around it.

(Tertiary Teaching Assistant)

Her experiences also give rise to bigger issues involved in temporary work, particularly in her account of the implications for fixed term employees that are not protected with benefits such as sick leave. Some research argues that women participate in temporary employment to create a balance between work and non-work activities (Walker, 2011). However, Noreen's experiences hinder relationships and activities outside of the workplace and this has proven to be problematic for her personal life. She speaks to the challenges of navigating paid and unpaid work commitments, especially given that her contract does not supply her with a set space to carry out her work duties. This is notable as it has proven to be detrimental to her wellbeing:

I don't have an office to go to at work, so I don't have a work space, I've got to find those spaces in my own environments... not having an office to go to at work is really problematic for my personal life because it blurs the boundaries between my personal, home life and my work life. And I guess it is a consequence of being on casual and fixed-term contracts. They don't offer you those workspaces where perhaps if you were on a full-time guaranteed contract those kind of office spaces would be provided to you, but that's a big one that I struggle with... it's stressful, even trying to think about where I can work for the day. Trying to find a space can be conflicting

because I can't always work at my home because there are other people there in my house and it doesn't always work out... it is quite stressful; it does impact stress levels and obviously physical and mental wellbeing.

(Tertiary Teaching Assistant)

Noreen makes a connection between her experiences of fixed term work and her declining mental and physical health which has been shown as an issue related to non-standard, insecure work (Hünefeld & Köper, 2016). This is particularly interesting when reflecting on the discussions of flexibility from chapter two as whilst working from home is often seen as a positive aspect of flexible workplaces, for some workers it can be difficult, especially when they don't have suitable workspace at home. This calls into question the experiences of low-income families and households e.g. people who have small rentals, flatting accommodation or those with big families. Her experience aligns with other studies showing that nonstandard employees are more vulnerable than other workers and as a result, often face greater challenges to their mental, physical, social and financial wellbeing (Blumenfeld and Rosenberg, 2015; Pacheco, Li & Cochrane, 2017). Noreen represents part of a wider demographic in New Zealand, one which sees casual and fixed term work dominated by women, particularly in the education industry (Stringer et al., 2018). Her age, gender and occupation—a young, female, fixed term worker in an academic environment—places her in a position of vulnerability in comparison to male colleagues who are more likely to be higher paid and have permanent contracts (Stringer et al., 2018). Thus, Noreen's challenges as a fixed term worker illustrates experiences of vulnerability amongst casual and nonstandard working women in New Zealand.

### 6.3 Intersecting identities: Gendered Experiences of Contract and Industry

The first part of this section will illustrate differing experiences of non-standard work between men and women across contract types. The latter part of this section will showcase the different experiences of work between men and women within the construction industry. These key points showcase the continued gendered nature of work. At the same time, they highlight a complexity in experience which varied according to the dominant ideas and ideologies associated with different contract types and industries. A male participant whose work can also be considered non-standard is Will, a self-employed builder who works in construction. His working practices are largely driven by himself with minimal authority from above. As a contractor he values independence and emphasises the importance of being 'in control' of his working environment. Research suggests that contract work can be precarious, often restricting workers rather than freeing them, particularly young workers

(Theodoris, Miles and Albertson, 2019). But in contrast to these ideas, Will experiences a large degree of freedom in his role:

I like being a self-employed contractor. There is no proper contract, you don't work for a specific company. Your self-employed and you can do what you want. Like realistically, you can. You get your own freedom. [It is] so much better, so if you can't come in tomorrow, they can't do anything about it.

(Self Employed Builder)

In comparison to Noreen's experiences of nonstandard work as detailed in the previous section (6.2), Will did not feel vulnerable or identify as precarious and enjoys the freedom of being self-employed. Like Dan's accounts of non-standard work, Will values autonomy, independence and the ability to be his own boss, all of which contributed to his high satisfaction levels. These values were also reflected in his future aspirations. Will noted that: "in ten years... I'll definitely be my own boss... have my own company" and seemed confident in his ability. Will's confidence in his future aspirations suggest it is an achievable goal at least for him as a Pākehā, male builder. This speaks to literature on white privilege in New Zealand which suggests that Pākehā New Zealander's "have a number of unearned advantages enabling them to live their lives with greater ease than many non-whites" (Gray, Jaber & Anglem, 2013, p. 83).

Pivoting to the focus to the construction industry and gendered issues, in comparison to Will, Ashley has just started her career and works part-time as a construction worker. Like Noreen's accounts of work, Ashley also feels a sense of obligation to prove herself. She feels obligated to work hard, showcase her skillsets and prove herself, particularly as she is a female in a largely male dominated industry. Unlike Will who enjoys the freedom available to him as an independent contractor, albeit with greater risks and heightened individual responsibility, Ashley is thankful for her position as a construction employee with a permanent part time contract, and views it somewhat like a safety net. The protection and stability her part-time contract offer counteract feelings of vulnerability:

I've seen some people who will slack off on site, and because they're contractors they don't have any protection. Sometimes the site foreman will just tell them to go home... but I can have a bit of peace of mind knowing I'm on a part time contract...

they can't just fire me on the spot.

(Ashley, Construction Worker)

Despite feeling relatively secure in her position, Ashley is new to a predominantly male industry and feels discouraged, often embarrassed by her current skill levels. She speaks to the experiences she faces as a woman in construction. She showcases a hyperawareness around gender and illustrates the pressure she faces to prove herself to male counterparts:

There are times when I'm the only girl on site. It can be a little... intimidating. I feel like I need to prove myself, work hard. Because I'm new to the industry, I know I need to prove my worth.

(Ashley, Construction Worker)

For Ashley, her concerns centre on the gendered experiences she faces in a masculine construction industry. The desire to prove herself to superiors in order to progress relates back to the neoliberal concept of personal responsibility and her insights contribute to my argument that New Zealand's young workers are guided by neoliberal principles. For Ashley, exercising personal responsibility at work was a way to overcome barriers to progression. However, despite efforts to 'do' progression, barriers continued to grow, and interestingly, she specifically recognises that her ability to progress is shaped by and at times held back by her gender. Thus, Ashley feels she must compensate for her gender and newness to the industry. This is not uncommon, as it is noted that upholding traditional job expectations like the masculine culture associated with construction work (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2011) and navigating gender dimensions, requires women to display both masculine and feminine traits (Gherardi and Poggio, 2001), creating added challenges to the female experience of construction. A report investigating the nature of gender segregation of New Zealand's trade industry (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2008, p. 38) found that "young people who express non-traditional gender interests may experience both direct and indirect messages about 'appropriate' gender/sexuality roles". A subsequent report on women in the trade industry found that overall, diversity and inclusion had increased (Ministry of Women's Affairs, 2011). However, Ashley's experience indicates otherwise and during her first few days on site when carrying out the tasks that had been assigned to her, Ashley experienced sexual harassment from male colleagues:

They always cat call me... you know those female call outs that guys do? I usually get that. That's the thing, when going into those types of things [industries] (Construction Worker).

Her experiences reinforce ideas of 'everyday sexism' which "is generally taken to refer to non-violent sexism experienced in everyday interaction" (Powell, 2015, p. 922). This research shows differences in men and women's experience of work across industry and contract type. Noreen a casual teaching assistant and Ashley a part timer in the construction industry discussed significant barriers and challenges in their work experiences. Their discussions showed differences from men in the study. For example, rather than internalising the behaviour towards her as neoliberal subjects are shown to do (Schwitter, 2013), Ashley rationalises it through a process of externalisation, recognising the different ways in which an aspect of her identity, her gender, influences working experiences. This shows that the 'work hard and you can achieve anything' idea is incorrect as gender constructs shape experiences of work. Noreen's experiences of non-standard work further exemplify a process of externalisation. She normalises the notion that fixed term work externalises the costs onto her and understands it as intrinsic to precarious, academic, fixed term work. Her experiences are reinforced by literature which suggest New Zealand women academics are more likely to face precarity in their careers than men (Stringer et al., 2018).

Despite being in the same industry as Will, Ashley's discussions of gendered discrimination from male colleagues supports arguments that women in construction face difficulties when establishing their occupational identities. This is due to the dominant cultural ideologies and actions of men in the industry which purport feelings of 'otherness' and can often lead to forms of exclusion and harassment (Welsh, 1999; Denissen, 2010). Ashley had normalised her colleagues' behaviour towards her, believing it was "part of the job". This suggests that part of the problem with sexual harassment in the construction industry is that it is not viewed as a problem. This was shown in Ashley's response to my question about resolving challenges and tensions at work as she had no intentions of reporting discriminatory behaviour toward her. Instead, she noted: "you just have to ignore it". This is important to consider, particularly as sexual harassment at work can be viewed as a tool for maintaining systems of inequality (Berdahl and Moore, 2006). Ashley's accounts of work show that her occupational identity has been constructed as 'different' or 'inferior' (Denissen, 2010).

#### 6.4 Anticipating Stigma: The Double Minority Effect through Intersecting Identities

Individuals who identify with multiple minority identities have been shown to face more challenges than those of a singular minority identity (Ng & Sears, 2010; Gray et al., 2013). My research clearly illustrates that young men and women in New Zealand face disparities at work. Additionally, my study shows disparities within the female experience of work with the intersection of minority identities resulting in a double minority effect (Harnois, 2015). Participants who identified with two minorities e.g. females and ethnic minorities faced more barriers to progression than Pākehā women in the study. Ashley and Cara both identify as Asian women. In comparison to female Pākehā participants, Ashley and Cara faced multiple forms of discrimination at work, with both cases leading to feelings of occupational segregation. Both women attributed experiences of racism and discrimination to their ethnicity, age and gender but appeared nonchalant when discussing how they felt about these encounters. Rather than interpreting their experiences through the lens of a neoliberal subject and viewing challenges and tensions as a failing of their own, both Ashley and Cara attribute aspects of their employment experiences to systems of inequality. In attempts to interpret and understand their experiences, both women very directly attributed their encounters with workplace racism and discrimination to markers of their identity:

I think it's honestly because of my gender, my age and... well it's hard not to discriminate against someone like me... an Asian girl.

(Cara, Healthcare Recruitment Advisor)

[I'm] not being taken seriously because males tend not to give a flying fuck about the opinion of a female, especially because I'm younger, I'm Asian and I have no experience.

(Ashley, Construction Worker)

Along with experiencing active discrimination, Ashley also reports passive discrimination from colleagues on the construction site and spoke about times she felt uncomfortable:

[They] look at you differently like you don't belong. I would get that a lot... I just stand out like a sore thumb because I'm so different.

(Construction Worker)

In describing herself as different, Ashley indicates an awareness of the dominant ideologies that place her in a position of 'otherness'. She normalises discriminatory behaviour towards her and seems aware of the interactions between various systems of inequality that disadvantage her at work. To make sense of the tensions that result in gender and ethnic discrimination, she acknowledges externally produced stigmas that label her as an anomaly. In response, Ashley hopes for a more diverse workplace in an attempt to disrupt the cultural ideologies associated with construction work:

It's hard to be happy sometimes. I would love a range of people... a diverse workplace because in construction, it's mainly men.

(Construction Worker)

Cara, a full-time recruitment agent also speaks to experiences of discrimination at work that heightened after she received a promotion at work. Cara and her manager both originate from the Philippines, which contributed to criticism directed towards her. Rumours circulated that Cara received the promotion only because she shared the same cultural heritage as the supervisor. Many of her co-workers began to undermine her authority and would refuse to complete tasks she had assigned them. Additionally, she sensed bitterness and discriminatory behaviour directed at her from older, Pākehā colleagues as they believed she was promoted "because the manager was also Filipino". Within her Filipino culture, she was always taught to respect her elders. Cara drew on her ethnic identity and cultural values to inform her response to tensions. Despite the criticism, Cara did not internalise or accept the opinions of her co-workers. Instead, she acknowledged that her dedication and hard work warranted the promotion. Intersections between her ethnicity and age provided an angle through which she could interpret experiences. For example, despite feeling bullied and discriminated against, Cara states:

I accepted it because of my culture... I respect my elders... so I never made a big deal out of it.

(Healthcare Recruitment Advisor)

The ways in which Cara and Ashley make sense of workplace discrimination illustrates a process of externalisation over internalisation. When discussing discrimination at work, both women refrain from blaming the self. Rather than internalising and individualising tensions, they recognise a relationship between gender, ethnicity and their experiences of employment. As neoliberal millennials, they share a common desire for progression and feel personally responsible for their



employment outcomes. However, as young Asian working women, they do not feel individually responsible for other people's perceptions of them. Instead, they attributed experiences of discrimination to the external stigmas attached to their age, gender and ethnic identities. Literature tells us that the neoliberal self is prone to internalising negative experiences, bringing the focus back to the individual. However, my research shows that Cara and Ashley make sense of themselves through a process I call 'de-individualising' as they discuss employment experiences in conjunction with multiple, intersecting identities. Additionally, they anticipate externally produced stigma's and normalise discrimination which reveals a process of unconscious justification of their experiences and should be explored further.

This section shed light on the ways in which multiple aspects of identity e.g. gender, ethnicity and age can affect employment experiences. Ashley and Cara's discussion also give rise to the interplay between ethnicity, age and gender and show the value of intersectional analysis. Their discussions showcase processes of externalisation rather than internalisation as they shift away from self-blame and move towards an understanding of the processes that are informing their experiences. Worth noting is that Pākehā women in the research did not report any negative or discriminatory experiences at work. Taking a gendered analysis alone for this study would not have shown the ways in which intersecting identities shape the differences between women's work experiences (Davis, 2008).

## 6.5 Childbearing and careers: Millennial Perspectives

Literature tells us that female fixed term workers are more likely to experience hardship and insecurity in comparison to male fixed term workers (Clare et al., 2013; Stringer et al., 2018). Noreen describes these hardships with particular reference to insecurity and anxiety. For Noreen, work brings value to her life as it enables her survival. For her, work represents more than just a stepping stone to progression:

It means I can have a roof over my head and some food to eat. Which is kind of sad, but that's a bit of a central driver in this day and age. Like not having parental support or if your partner doesn't earn a lot of money then you've really got to think about that sort of stuff before you take on a job like how much you're going to be able to have each week.

(Tertiary Teaching Assistant)

She continued to expand on her concerns with a focus on age. Age surfaced as a central component which allowed her to make sense of tensions at work and barriers to progression:

I think that with being younger, it's maybe perhaps perceived that there aren't as many obligations that me as a person have to meet outside of my work life, so employers don't have a sense of obligation to offer me more guarantees.

(Tertiary Teaching Assistant)

Noreen feels disadvantaged by her youth and believes age is a key factor influencing her employment experiences in that it creates barriers to progression, particularly as she has only been offered brief fixed-term contracts as opposed to extended ones. Noreen hypothesised if she were an older fixed term worker, her employers would offer longer-term contracts and believes that with her age comes the perception that she has fewer obligations than older workers, making her more flexible by nature:

I think perhaps if I was older, if I was 40 [or] 50, if I had you know children, if I was married... you know all those kind of social expectations that come with being older there would be more likelihood of having either a longer term fixed term contract like a two year contract or a three year contract or a roll over contract where there's more sense of stability or a guarantee that you'll have something when this job finishes.

(Tertiary Teaching Assistant)

The intersection of age and gender are used as tools to make sense of her employment experiences and assess future outcomes. For example, she thinks that having children would place her in a more advantageous position at work. In contrast to Noreen's perception, literature confirms that women with children are disadvantaged in the workplace and additionally, it is noted that women without children are also subject to discrimination (Correll, Bernard & Paik, 2007; Pedulla, 2016). Noreen's view illustrates the dichotomy between ideas such as the motherhood penalty and childless discrimination (Correll, Bernard & Paik, 2007). Both ideas represent the kinds of ways that neoliberal culture disadvantages women at work. The evolution of her ideas and thinking is also notable. Initially, her starting point for making sense of experiences was age. However, as she expanded, she continued to weave in a gendered aspect with regard to motherhood and having children. Her insights reinforce the tendency amongst my participants to externalise rather than internalise experiences through the intersection of identities and analysis of external stigmas.

As a temporary worker, Noreen's concerns around motherhood focused on security and stability as she believed employers would offer her more attractive contract terms if she were a mother. Whilst Tina also shares concerns about motherhood, as a full-time events co-ordinator she is in a more secure position than Noreen. During focus group discussions, Tina shared her anxieties around managing her future and referenced a common anxiety faced by women which centred on the ability to simultaneously manage children and a career. To mitigate this anxiety, Tina desires flexibility in her future career and believes it is the only viable way to balance being a successful careerwomen with being a mother. Her desires illustrate the challenging realities of working mums who must balance paid and unpaid roles as "the costs of child rearing are borne disproportionately by mothers" (Budig & England, 2001, p. 204). Tina's observations of colleagues with children informed her assumption that "parents, like mums, would obviously want to have more time off work". Tina also grapples with the prospects of balancing motherhood and a career, using both gender and age as reference points to assess opportunities for progression. For example, she was initially embarrassed about sharing her concerns:

It's so stupid because this should be something that is not a worry of mine now but I think that having kids and a family [would hinder progression].

(Tina, Events Manager)

Interestingly, after sharing her anxieties, Tina quickly dismissed her desires for a family based on the belief that it will impact opportunities for career progression. She makes sense of future prospects with reference to the disadvantages of balancing a child and a career. She grapples with the idea that having children may impact career prospects:

In all honestly... I think it's going to set me back... Obviously I've always wanted a family but [...] it's hard. It's tough.

(Events Manager)

Cara also shared similar views. She is a driven, goal orientated and a career-focused young woman who is just as passionate about one day having a family. However, she feels that having children may alter perceptions of her with regard to how capable and available she is in the workplace. Here, she engages with a common discourse in today's society that reports on the disadvantage's mothers face in the workforce (Corell et al., 2007; Benard and Corell, 2010). She considers a future without children

for the purpose of career progression. However, a childless future has still proven to expose women to discrimination.

The anxiety participants expressed over having a family and pursuing a career was heavily gendered. Several female participants discussed similar anxieties to Cara and during the focus group, women discussed the challenges associated with career and motherhood which received no input from male participants. Moreover, in the interviews, men did not raise any concerns about balancing children with their career. Issues like the gender pay gap, lack of female representation in positions of power and the challenges in balancing paid and unpaid work have really come to the fore in the last two decades. Subsequently, the fact that the millennial women in this sample specifically discussed their anxieties around career progression and managing a family suggests that the realities of parenthood is of concern to millennial women as they feel that it could impact their career progression. Cara's concerns of balancing children and a career also raises questions of disparity in relation to ethnicity. For example, Tina and Cara share similar views on balancing children and a career. However, based on reported discrepancies between minority and majority experiences of motherhood and employment (Connell et al., 2007) as an Asian female, Cara would be in a more disadvantaged position than Tina, a Pākehā female. As women, they are likely to face discrimination in the workforce (World Bank, 2012). But, as a woman who identifies as an ethnic minority, if Cara were to have children, she may face more discrimination than that of a Pākehā woman.

Whilst all participants showcased a sense of confidence in achieving their desires and goals, women's views of the future were governed by worry and angst about balancing a career with children, whereas the male participants showed no such anxieties. I suggest that their views are informed by what Damaske (2011, p. 411) would call 'gender ideologies'. These ideologies are made up "of beliefs that may guide marital decisions, workforce participations, and family formation". Gender ideologies help explain my findings with regard to women's beliefs about child rearing responsibilities. Behind women's anxieties was the belief that they would undertake majority of the reproductive/productive work alongside their employment experiences and were more actively thinking about future employment/family dynamics. It's important to note that in the context of this study, the anxiety around balancing family and career obligations were exclusively gendered. Men did not speak to an anxiety around balancing children and a career whereas women did. This shows that in comparison to women, men's imaginings of their employment futures are unaffected by the possibility of having children.

## 6.6 Conclusion

Literature tells us that neoliberal subjects are self-motivated, driven and are made to feel personally responsible for their life course trajectory. They are eager and willing to learn new skills, are increasingly flexible and have the capacity to adapt. Whilst millennial workers in my study showcased all of the above characteristics, they also highlight a desire for growth and progression within their careers and tended to equate consistent progression with continued success. In addition to this, an aspect that has been said to enable neoliberalism is the ability for the neoliberal self to internalise norms and individualise tensions that fall outside neoliberal norms (Schwitter, 2013). Participants did show signs of the neoliberal subject, however, women in this study also showed a tendency to externalise norms with some making sense of their experiences by realising that there are stereotypes and subject positions that others put onto them. People's experiences of work differed with respect to gender, employment contract, industry and, ethnicity. Participants went on to explain the realities of their employment experiences through intersecting identities and precarious work positions. This is a significant finding for this research and speaks back to (neoliberal) ideas that 'progress' is available to all equally (Fournier, 2014). Thus, my research shows that diverse differences present within the millennial experience of work in New Zealand represent a series of disruptions to the neoliberal narrative. Men did not allude to any forms of discrimination in the work place, while women experienced various forms of discrimination in the workplace. This finding illustrates contemporary social conditions of continued gendered and racialised experiences of discrimination at work, confirming ideas that women, and particularly women from minority ethnic groups, are more disadvantaged than men under neoliberalism (Dalingwater, 2018).

## Chapter Seven: Conclusion

### 7.1 Introduction

This final chapter will first discuss the social climate this research responds to. It will briefly summarise the changing nature of work, the introduction of neoliberal policy, the rise of neoliberal governmentality and its implications to the working world and its workers. Second, I will cover the key findings from the thesis which showed that participants in my sample were informed by a neoliberal subjectivity through ideas such as personal responsibility and the necessity to upskill. Additionally, participant descriptions of their work experiences showed a complexity and diversity within them, disrupting the notion of an all-encompassing neoliberal subject. Next, I will discuss the relationship of the literature to the research which gives rise to new insights about millennials experiences of work in New Zealand. Fourth, I will discuss and reflect on the key ideas found within the research and pose some recommendations for further research.

I initiated this research after reflecting on my own experiences of work in a rapidly changing socioeconomic context. Particularly due to the rise in non-standard work and the Gig Economy, work is seen as multi-faceted and there are multiple ways in which people can access and engage with labour markets. I was curious about other millennials' experiences of the New Zealand labour market, and I embarked on this research project with some questions:

1. How do millennials who have recently entered the workforce feel about their experiences of work so far and how do they understand and navigate tensions that arise in their experiences?
2. How do millennials imagine their working futures? What desires and anxieties do they have for their future careers? And how are these desires and anxieties shaped by their work experiences and/or by their broader ideas of the future of work?

Some arguments posit that the world's growing complexity has resulted in a rise in global uncertainty (Pattyn & Liedekerke, 2001). A continued capitalist model, the rapid development and application of technology and changes to production and trade based on efficient economics has characterised nations that adopted the neoliberal model. Chapter two's explorations into the literature showed that neoliberalism is hard to define. It is a complex term and it would be wrong to define it as an overarching monolithic force. Its power lies in its ability to influence and shape the environment around it through unique processes that differ across contexts. To extend the debates on

neoliberalism's influence, Chapter three showed that young millennial workers in New Zealand are immersed in a social climate that is shaped by neoliberalism. More than that, millennials (born in the 1980s and 1990s) have been shown to be influenced by a neoliberal governmentality and have 'grown up neoliberal' (Nairn et al., 2012). Millennial workers in New Zealand are moving within a neoliberal moment which, as noted in chapter two, was strategically introduced through a series of neoliberal policy reforms. In the 1980s and 1990s, the government introduced new policies that systematically transformed New Zealand's political, economic and social climates. Thus, millennial experiences of work in the contemporary New Zealand labour market can be situated against a backdrop of consistent change to the world of work, which has led to an underlying uncertainty. The multi-method approach which included interviews and a focus group was applied in an attempt to understand individual experiences whilst situating them within a collective narrative.

## 7.2 Summary of findings

This research produced insights into the lives of millennials who had worked in the New Zealand labour market under a full-time, part-time, self-employed or fixed-term/casual contract for no more than four years. There is a strong rationale for focusing on contracts and age, particularly due to shifts in the world of work which has seen a rise in non-standard working arrangements and a popularisation of previously atypical contract types like that of casual and fixed-term work (Whatman, 1994; Morrison, 1996; Auer & Cazes, 2002; Kalleberg, 2009; Walker, 2011). Scholarship on non-standard work links it to a growing uncertainty and precariousness (Standing, 2011), with young workers being the most vulnerable to uncertain work circumstances (Mills, Blossfeld & Klijzing, 2005; Pyysiäinen, Halpin & Guilfoyle, 2017; Colombo & Rebughini, 2019). A key intention for this research was to investigate millennial New Zealanders' imaginings of the future of work with regard to both their current experiences of work and their broader ideas about the future of work.

Chapter five showed that participants shared a general desire for progressive growth and success in their careers. The goal of progression is not uncommon and has been seen in research on young people and work (Crowley & Dodson, 2014; Ng, Lyons & Schweitzer, 2018). Millennial workers in this study have grown up neoliberal (Nairn et al., 2012) and this research showed that they were informed by neoliberal subjectivities. Participants' desires with regard to work were driven by neoliberal ideals like upskilling and personal responsibility but also propelled by anxieties. On one hand, millennial workers in this study were eager to work hard, progress and feel successful which speaks to literature that millennials feel accountable to achieve self-success (Kowske, Rasch & Wiley,

2010) and illustrates that to some extent, millennials are shaped by a neoliberal subjectivity. On the other hand, when further unpacking their desires, an anxiety around career stagnation became apparent. To ease their anxieties and to stave off stagnation, participants' desires to progress reflected willingness to adapt, learn new skills and change roles when things become too comfortable.

Mobility is a key point to consider when reflecting on millennial experiences of work and participants seemed confident in their abilities to move within the labour market. Mobility facilitated the 'doing' of progression which enabled the 'feeling' of success as shown in Figure 5.1. Mobility as I used it builds on the literature as participants in this study showed a desire for both upward (M1) and sideways (M2) mobility. In developed, industrialised economies mobility is generally understood in an upwards sense given that "the structure of employment is continually upgraded" (Abercrombie, Hill and Turner, 2000, p. 323). This study builds on traditional understandings of mobility and contributes new understandings through the introduction of lateral or sideways mobility (M2). Moreover, it contributes to research on the 'mobility turn' which posits that contemporary socio-economic contexts are driven by movement (Jeanes, Loacker, Śliwa and Weiskopf, 2015).

Recent studies have shown that success and mobility are linked (Cuzzocrea, 2019) although in a neoliberal capitalist economy, success is not always guaranteed or achievable (Türken, 2017). Success is generally defined as the accomplishment of a goal or action (Collins Dictionary, 2006). The meaning of success in this study diverges from traditional understandings of success. To these young millennials, reaching a specific position in an industry, accepting a particular job or earning a large salary was not definitive of success. Success in this study represented a 'state of feeling' that could be achieved through the act of 'doing' progression and practising mobility. Feeling successful was desired by participants as a way to minimise anxieties around stagnation and immobility in participant careers. Success was an ongoing goal that would be enabled if they followed models of an 'ideal' worker which they understood as a personally responsible individual who regularly upskills themselves in the name of mobility for progressive growth, and thus, success. I encapsulate millennial mobility and their practises of progression in my diagram describing the cyclical nature of work (Fig 5.2).

Millennials have grown up amidst a series of political, economic and social changes (Hershatter & Epstein, 2010). My research also supports previous research by showing that millennials feel pressured to perform well (Kowske et al., 2010) and feel individually responsible for their own success (Beban & Trueman, 2018). Situating their desire to progress against a series of anxieties shows that to



some extent, millennial workers in New Zealand are willing to, and have internalised the need to adapt. They view it as an individual venture whereby success is produced through the doing of progression, sometimes through tools for mobility (M2) like upskilling, learning and self-development. Understanding participant's employment desires and anxieties in New Zealand's labour market broadens our understandings of neoliberalism's reach. Whilst neoliberal policy has been shown to shape the labour market, my research confirms that to some extent, neoliberalism has also shaped millennial workers with particular regard to their 'adopted' neoliberal ideas such as being flexible, willing and personally responsible for the self. However, my research also highlights the diverse contemporary experiences of work under neoliberalism which provides critiques to the viability of the 'ideal' (neoliberal) worker model.

Chapter six disrupts understandings of the neoliberal subject. It reveals contradictions within the millennial subjectivity. As a result of their diverse work experiences, young millennials in this study faced varied advantages and disadvantages based on markers of identity; weakening arguments that speak to the homogeneity of neoliberal subjects. Some participants were subject to clear systems of inequality and power, particularly women. This finding speaks to other literature which notes that New Zealand women are exposed to higher levels of uncertainty and insecurity than males (Stringer et al., 2018; France et al., 2019). Despite sharing a desire to progress, understanding the necessity to upskill and recognising the individual's role in crafting success—all of which are key aspects of neoliberal governmentality—chapter six showed that the realities of millennial work experiences were varied and diverse. Under neoliberalism, it is supposed that all individuals are free and equal (Hamann, 2009; Fournier, 2014). That is, neoliberalism posits that every person will have the ability to progress equally resulting in the same chance of success. However, my research produces insights that counteract that prediction and instead, shows a complexity within the individual experience of work. For example, some women spoke to power imbalances within the workplace, had concerns about balancing children and a career and felt more 'constricted' than free in nonstandard roles when compared to their male counterparts.

Additionally, my research showed processes of intersecting identities. Some women normalised challenges such as racism, sexual harassment or discrimination. Women attributed their experiences to markers of their identity (age, industry of work, ethnicity, gender), recognising the interplay between their identity, dominant cultural ideologies and their employment outcomes. In comparison, male participants had higher levels of job satisfaction than women, did not speak to

workplace discrimination and had no concerns about balancing children with work. In comparison to the women non-standard workers in this study, males who were engaged in non-standard work like that were quick to speak on the value of flexible, self-directed practices in that they felt more levels of freedom than constriction. Male workers also spoke to structures of power but their experiences were still distinct from women's. What was noticeable was that when men spoke about work, they kept their individual narratives front and centre whereby each discussion was intrinsically linked to the 'development of the self' in this present moment, whereas women tended to grapple with how structural barriers influenced their current experiences providing reflections on its ability to disadvantage their futures. This can be compared to women who spoke to more structural conditions, constraints and traditional gendered norms. Through their discussions, participants spoke to the idea that neoliberalism effects are not equally felt. Participants actively recognised the kinds of injustices that came alongside their experiences of work. Moreover, when grappling with their working realities, participants showcased an ability to externalise, rather than internalise (albeit with some gendered variation). This contradicts bodies of literature which note the neoliberal subject will internalise the world around them (Schwitter, 2013; Hart & Henn, 2017). This is significant as it shows that the ideas around 'working hard' and 'achieving anything' can be disrupted as constructs like gender, age, contract type and ethnicity shape people's experiences of work.

Participants showed a distinct recognition of the external, often structural forces that affected their positioning in the world of work and this was largely gendered with women recognising these processes more than men. Despite the fact that participants had a shared desire of movement and progression which was in part shaped by their neoliberal subjectivities and in part propelled by a general anxiety and uncertainty about their working futures, their experiences also indicated a complex layering of tensions and anxieties that disrupted the narrative that neoliberal subjects are homogenous (Schwitter, 2013; Hamann, 2009; Fournier, 2014). My research shows that different experiences can emerge within the neoliberal subject, giving rise to the idea that the neoliberal subject isn't a fully-formed, all-encompassing being, rather it adapts and reshapes itself over time as a response to general changes and shifts.

### 7.3 Key Contributions

Previous studies into millennial work values focus mainly on how the family unit shapes work values (Murray et al., 2011; Schewe et al., 2013). These studies discuss the formation of work values based on the participants upbringing and family values without considering their past work experiences

which might have shaped their work values. My research into the contemporary New Zealand labour market shed light on a largely unexplored aspect of scholarship: insights into the work experiences of New Zealand's millennial workers. By looking at their experiences, I was able to tease out other processes which shape their values, views and expectations of work, providing a deeper understanding of where those values come from. On the one hand, my participants had similar values with regard to their desires to progress. Their neoliberal subjectivities and the anxieties that often accompany neoliberal working contexts shaped and informed their desires for mobility, progress and success. On the other hand, their diverse employment experiences and the ways in which they understood these experiences rested on processes of externalisation. That is, some participants recognised the systems of injustice that were disadvantaging them. This shows that there is more to understanding people's work values than family influence alone as my participants had clearly understood the realities of their experiences with regard to markers of identity distinct from the family unit such as gender, age, contract type and ethnicity.

Further, in response to the lack of empirical research on New Zealand's young workers, this thesis specifically contributes new understandings of the millennial experiences of work for those who have just entered the New Zealand labour market. My research speaks to ideas in the literature that millennials are situated within relatively uncertain times, and it contributes new understandings to the literature as it offers New Zealand specific empirical research insights that detail the similarities and differences in millennial working experiences. This research illustrates that processes of neoliberalisation in New Zealand have played a distinct role in influencing millennial experiences of work with respect to the formulation of a distinct subjectivity. In New Zealand, the neoliberal subject embodies a discourse of individualisation through ideas such as personal responsibility and the willing workhorse. With that in mind, millennial experiences of work in New Zealand can be located within two contradicting narratives. The first is that millennials are living in a moment characterised by ongoing change, innovation and development. Second, and in response to broader changes beyond their control, millennials must do more than live with uncertainty, they must overcome and adapt to fulfil expectations of the 'ideal worker' through continual progression and self-development in the hopes of ongoing success.

Analysis of the neoliberal subject might posit that if we are in this neoliberal moment that is all encompassing and if our subjectivities are formed through these processes then it is hard to imagine an alternative. My research challenges this idea. Understanding neoliberalism as a form of

capitalism and as something that is always shifting shows that neoliberalism is not a singular, monolithic force. Rather, its complexities lie in the intersecting relationships between ideas and policies which are designed and accepted and challenged. Thus, whilst New Zealand society has arguably been in a neoliberal moment since the structural reforms of the late 1980s, neoliberalism has shifted, altered and adapted when needed. This is important to consider when we think about the questions that arise in the thesis about millennial subjectivities. It shows that like neoliberalism, the neoliberal subject is not a static subject and can adapt and evolve when necessary. More than that it reveals processes of co-constitution, i.e. structures shape people but people shape structures too. We see this in my research as some participants critiqued their contemporary experiences of work which signalled a potential for different kinds of futures. For example, processes of externalisation were present amongst narratives as many recognised the complex factors that influenced employment outcomes.

My research contributes a deeper understanding of neoliberalism, its effects on work and its effects on individuals in society by exploring how millennials locate themselves within – and navigate – uncertain times. Their views speak to neoliberal narratives of individualisation which posits individuals as capable and personally responsible for their working futures. Despite literature that labels millennials as lazy (Jerome et al., 2014; Velasco & De Chavez, 2018), narcissistic, entitled and cynical (Twenge, 2006) participants in my study were eager to progress their careers. Part of this desire to progress was informed by their neoliberal subjectivity whilst other parts were propelled by their anxieties of being static in their careers. Even though participants were firmly situated within a neoliberal world, they put forward explicit critiques of neoliberalism. One part of the critique involves the recognition that participants were caught up in labour market uncertainty whereby millennials must upskill to be able to move more freely and progress. Women's experiences of work under neoliberalism formed a second part of the critique as they did not accept or internalise neoliberal norms. Rather, they recognised and named structural inequalities that disadvantaged them, which they understood as being based on different ideas, cultural ideologies and workplace dynamics. Moreover, participants recognised the injustices they faced as a result of external structures which shaped and influenced experiences. Therefore, I suggest that as my participants are performing the neoliberal subject, they are simultaneously pushing against it, conforming in ways and resisting in others.

## 7.4 Conclusion

This research investigated young people's experiences of work in the New Zealand labour market and contributes to conversations on how young millennials interpret and navigate uncertain, and often changing working conditions. Shifts in the world of work have occurred on a global level, creating heightened uncertainty, insecurity and precarity due to processes such as globalisation and neoliberalisation. New Zealand's young millennial workers have entered the world of work during times of change and are shaped by a neoliberal governmentality. This has taught young workers to be personally responsible for their growth, progress and success in the labour market and is set within an interesting reality: the desire to progress is shaped by their neoliberal subjectivities and simultaneously propelled by the anxiety of stagnation or limited opportunity for career growth. Whilst this research produced new insights into millennial experiences of work with regard to their desires and anxieties around the future of work, continued investigations could expand on arguments made throughout this thesis. Research is needed to further explore New Zealand's neoliberal millennial subject. Ongoing research into young millennials' views of the direction of New Zealand's labour market could provide new insights into their interpretations of the future. Given the diverse range of disadvantages faced by participants which reinforced disrupted neoliberal narratives, I believe further research is needed to gain a clearer understanding of the actions that could be taken to improve millennial's experiences of the labour market. Participatory action research which investigates, understands and explores solutions with participants to enact social change (Cahill, 2016) could be one way to pursue this.

When taking into consideration that the world of work has seen fast-paced, continued changes since New Zealand's 1980s and 1990s neoliberal reforms, I suggest that this body of scholarship will require continued attention. The millennial participants in this study revealed processes of reflective thought that was used in attempts to be critical of and critique their neoliberal working realities. They unpacked and interpreted their contemporary working realities, disrupting the notion that the neoliberal subject is an agent of internalisation. Participants in this study showed an awareness of the steps needed to facilitate ongoing success which was demonstrated through their recognition of the necessity to mobilise themselves through tools such as upskilling in the name of progressive growth and thus success. Moreover, women in this study acknowledge and, in some cases, normalised the processes influencing their employment experiences.

As I come to the end of this research process and after coming to my conclusions, as a millennial worker myself, these findings are useful when understanding my own position in the working world. This had challenged my ideas of success. In the beginning of this study my view of success had an end point. However, after researching the continued, changing nature of work, I've realised that success does not have to be defined by a particular educational qualification, position in an organisation or the amount of money you are compensated (which framed by previous understandings of success). Rather, understanding success as a state of feeling highlighted the importance of the journey, the mobility, the process and progress of 'doing work'. This has changed what my motivations are in regards to work and has encouraged me to find the personal value in progress.

It is also important to address the change and disruption to the world of work amidst the Coronavirus (CoVid-19) pandemic. As Devaney (2015) noted, the 2008 recession was a definitive event that shaped the lives of 'older' millennials (born 1984-1992). The social and economic effects of CoVid-19 may well be the key event to impact 'younger' (born 1993-1999) millennials i.e. millennials in this sample. Global events are still unfolding and we do not yet know the extent of effects. Nonetheless, in this short time frame there have been clear changes that have altered the trajectory of work and altered our prior conceptualisations of it. Both globally and locally we are seeing massive government stimulus packages to increase funding for the public good and social welfare (Eaqub, 2020). In this current time, we can see a focus on public versus private and collective versus individual which could signal the end of the neoliberal era as we know it and what lies ahead is uncertain. In New Zealand, the lockdown period has seen a majority of non-essential work transferred to home-based spaces. The lines between definitive standard and non-standard work have been blurred, and insecurity and uncertainty are high amongst all industries and all contract types. Personally, in light of Co-Vid 19, I find myself feeling more precarious and insecure than ever. As a young, female, academic I might be more disadvantaged than my male counterparts. As a precarious academic tutor, my fixed-term contract offers could suddenly stop. As the world of work continues to change, scholars will need to continue investigating millennials and work to contribute to ongoing understandings of new, emerging and changing working contexts and its impacts to millennial (and all) workers.

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## Appendix A: Initial email to participants

Kia ora!

Thank you so much for expressing interest in this research project. My name is Nicolette, I am a post graduate student at Massey University. I am currently studying a Master of Arts majoring in Sociology and have loved every moment of my academic journey so far! I am undertaking a research project and am looking for participants to share their experiences of work so far. I believe work is such a big part of our identity and I am eager to learn about how younger generations experience labour and employment in New Zealand.

I am looking for participants to be part of a conversation based on your work experiences. You must have had:

- No more than four years work experience on **either** a full-time, fixed term/casual, self-employed or part-time contract
- Be between 20-28 years old
- Be available for a one-hour interview and a two hour focus group

The interviews can be held in a location at your convenience and will discuss your current experience of work. The focus group, however, will require you to travel to Massey University's Albany campus and will centre on your views on the future of work. The focus group session will be a relaxed, informal environment where discussion of your views is encouraged. As a token of my appreciation you will be reimbursed for your time in the interviews with a \$25 food, fuel or book voucher or a \$50 voucher if you decide to attend both the interview and focus group sessions. Food platters and drinks on the day of the focus groups.

In this email, I have attached an information sheet that will give you more details about the project. Please feel free to have a read of this and get back to me if you are still interested. I would love to have you on board and am eager to hear about your work experiences!

Below there is a link that will also take you to a 2-minute survey if you haven't already. Please fill out this survey, so I can confirm your eligibility for participating in this research:

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/NKPMQ6K>

Thank you again for your time. I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Warm regards,

## Appendix B: Participant Information Sheet



Nicolette Trueman | Master of Arts (Sociology) student  
College of Humanities and Social Sciences | Massey University Albany  
Private Bag 102 904 | North Shore 0745 | New Zealand  
Ph: [REDACTED] | [REDACTED]

### ***New careers and their prospects: navigating the future of work***

My name is Nicolette Trueman and I am conducting a research project that will assess young people's current experiences of employment and their gauge their expectations for the future of work. The project is required for the completion of my Master of Arts (Sociology) at Massey University.

**Project Description:** In the last few decades the world of work has undergone rapid and extensive changes. With many young workers entering the labour market, we now have new sets of people *formulating their working identities*. This project aims to investigate the current experiences of individuals in the early stages of their career and stimulate a more general discussion of your desires, anticipations and expectations in relation to the future of work through focus groups and a collaborative workshop. I would like to invite you to take part in this project.

**Participant identification and project procedures:** As an ideal candidate, you will have no more than 2-3 years' experience in the workforce and will be between the ages of 18-28. If you choose to take part in this project, you will participate in one 1.5 hour (approx.) focus group and one 3 hour (approx.) collaborative group workshop. As a token of appreciation, you will be provided with a \$30 voucher. The focus groups aim to incite discussions of your current experiences of work and the workshops purpose is to stimulate conversations regarding your views on the future of work.

**Data management:** The focus groups and workshops will be audio and video recorded to assist data analysis. Please note that copies of the recordings will be destroyed after the analysis stage.

**Things to think about:** I understand that discussing your experiences and anticipations of work in a group setting may be daunting. I want this to be a safe space for you to share your unique experiences so please note, if you choose to participate, you are not obligated to respond to questions or themes that cause any feelings of discomfort. To protect your identity as a participant, you are welcome to choose a pseudonym that will be used in my final report and any publications arising from this project. If you are interested, I will email you a summary of the project findings.

**Participant's Rights:** If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- Decline to answer any particular question;
- Ask any questions about the study at any time;
- Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- Be provided with a summary of the project findings when it is concluded; and

## Ethics

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher, please contact Prof Craig Johnson, Director, Research Ethics, telephone 06 356 9099 x 85271, email [humanethics@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@massey.ac.nz).

## Project Contacts

This research project is conducted by me as a student as part of the completion of my Master of Arts. It is carried out under the supervision of Dr Vicky Walters and Dr Alice Beban. If you have any questions or concerns about this project, you are welcome to contact me or Vicky using the details below.

Student researcher	Course controller/supervisor	Course controller/supervisor
Nicolette Trueman	Dr Vicky Walters	Dr Alice Beban
██████████	09 414 0800 ext. 83851	06 356 9099 ext. 83851
████████████████████	v.walters@massey.ac.nz	a.beban@massey.ac.nz

## Appendix C: Participant consent form (Interview)



Nicolette Trueman | Master of Arts (Sociology) student  
College of Humanities and Social Sciences | Massey University Albany  
Private Bag 102 904 | North Shore 0745 | New Zealand  
Ph: [REDACTED] | [REDACTED]

### ***New careers and their prospects: navigating the future of work***

I have had the details of the study explained to me, my questions have been answered to my satisfaction, 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 and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

1. I understand that all the information I provide will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by law, and the names of all people in the study will be kept confidential by the researcher.
2. I wish / do not wish to have a summary of findings returned to me once the research is complete.

I would like to be known as \_\_\_\_\_ in any written work resulting from this research.

#### **Declaration by Participant:**

I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby consent to take part in this study.

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Sign \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix D: Initial and revised Facebook Post

### Initial Facebook Message:

#### Participants Wanted:

My name is Nicolette Trueman and I am a Massey University Master's research student. I am now recruiting participants for a study focusing on young people's current experiences of employment. You will be reimbursed for your involvement with a \$25 petrol, grocery or book voucher. I am looking for individuals of all ethnic, gender and cultural backgrounds. The ideal candidate should have no more than 2-3 years' work experience in the labour market and will be:

1. Living in Auckland
2. 18-28 years of age
3. Employed on either a full time, casual, self-employed or fixed term contract.
4. Working 30+ hours per week

The study consists of one focus group and one group based workshop. This project aims to reflect on the working experiences of young people in the early stages of their career and stimulate discussions of their desires, anticipations and expectations in relation to the future of work. The research will involve you coming into the Massey University Albany Campus for one weekday evening focus group (1-1.5 hours) and one Saturday morning workshop (2.5-3 hours).

If you are interested or feel that you might like to engage in conversations about the future of work, please don't hesitate to contact me. I am happy to provide more information and details. My contact email is [REDACTED] or call/text on [REDACTED]

### Revised Facebook Message:

#### Participants Wanted!

Hey! I'm looking for people aged between 18 and 28 to participate in a research project as part of my Master of Arts in Sociology. The project aims to investigate the working experiences of young people in the early stages of their career and discuss their expectations in relation to the future of work. To get involved you'll need to be employed on either a full time, casual, self-employed or fixed term contract and working 30+ hours per week.

You'll need to be available for two focus group sessions with other participants. These sessions will be held on the Massey University Albany campus. The first session will take between 1.5-2 hours and the second session will take between 2.5-3 hours. You will be reimbursed for your involvement with a \$25 petrol, grocery or book voucher. To register your interest in taking part feel free to complete this 2 minute survey <https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/3KFTDZB>

## Appendix E: Online demographic survey questions

1. What is your full name?
2. To what gender do you most identify
  - a. Male
  - b. Female
  - c. Transgender male
  - d. Transgender female
  - e. Gender non-conforming
3. What ethnicity do you identify with?
  - a. NZ Maori
  - b. NZ European
  - c. Mixed European Maori
  - d. Asian
  - e. Pacific
  - f. Other European
  - g. Indian
  - h. Other (Please Specify)
4. What is your age?
  - a. \_\_\_\_\_
5. What contract type are you on?
  - a. Full-time
  - b. Part-time
  - c. Fixed term
  - d. Casual
  - e. Self-employed
  - f. Unemployed
  - g. Other \_\_\_\_\_
6. I have been in the New Zealand workforce for no more than....
  - a. 1 year
  - b. 2 years
  - c. 3 years
  - d. 4 years
  - e. 5+ years
  - f. I have not worked in the NZ workforce

7. What qualifications did you gain before entering the workforce?
- a. None
  - b. High School (NCEA)
  - c. Undergraduate degree
  - d. Post graduate degree
  - e. International qualification
  - f. Other \_\_\_\_\_
8. Thank you for completing this survey. If you are interested in participating in the research further please leave your email and phone number (optional) and I will be in touch
- \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix F: First poster attempt



# MASSEY UNIVERSITY



## Are you intrigued about the future of work?

- HAVE YOU BEEN WORKING FULL TIME FOR NO MORE THAN 2-3 YEARS?
- ARE YOU ON A FULL TIME, FIXED TERM, SELF EMPLOYED OR CASUAL CONTRACT?
- ARE YOU BETWEEN THE AGES OF 18-28?
- WOULD YOU LIKE TO BE A PART OF A FOCUS GROUP AND WORKSHOP TO DISCUSS THE FUTURE OF WORK?

### About the researcher

My name is Nicolette Trueman.  
I am a student at Massey University and am undertaking research to complete my Master of Arts in Sociology

### Contact



# Social Research Opportunity!

I am looking for participants to be part of a conversation based on your work experiences. You must have had:

- At least 2-3 year's work experience on **either** a full-time, fixed term, self-employed or casual contract
- Be between 18-28 years old
- Be available for a 1.5 hour focus group and a 2 hour group workshop

Research will be carried out at the Massey University Albany campus. It will be a relaxed, informal environment where discussion of your views are encouraged. As a token of my appreciation you will be reimbursed for your time with a \$30 petrol, food or book voucher and will be provided with food platters and drinks on the day.



The **QR code** will take you to **2 minute survey** |  
link to confirm your eligibility for this research  
or email me [redacted] for  
more information.

QR Scanners are available at the App store or Google  
Play store



## Appendix H: Message to Facebook page administrators

Hi there,

My name is Nicolette Trueman. I am a Master's student at Massey University Albany. I am currently recruiting participants for a study focusing on young people's experiences of employment in New Zealand and feel that your page would be a great way to advertise to the local community. My research aims to involve individuals who live in Auckland. May I please ask permission to post a 'Participants Wanted' notice on your group page? If you need any more information please reach out at [REDACTED] and I will be happy to discuss more details.

Kind regards,

Nicolette

## Appendix I: Interview questions

### Interview: Introduction to the research and Questions

My research focuses on the experiences of young people who are in the early stages of their career in the hopes of mapping out how young people navigate labour markets and interact with the variables that may influence their experiences of employment (for example, the type of contract you're on, what qualifications you hold even down to what gender you identify with). With an ageing population, in the next few decades we are about to see an exodus of workers out of the labour market. Listening to the voices of these new generations of workers will allow me to get a sense of some of the attitudes and values young people have in relation to work.

As you know, this research is being conducted in two parts. This one on one interview, constitutes the first part of the research. Part two, will be a group discussion with other interviewees and will be held at Massey University Albany Campus on Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> August and will require approximately 2 hours of your time. Please try and keep this date free and you will receive some more information on the timing. For your time, you will be reimbursed with a \$50 food or fuel voucher that will be given to you at the end of Part two – the focus groups.

Stage one – introductions and overview	1. Introductory exercises – name, first ever job, best and worst thing about it
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Stage two – opening questions/exercises	<ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Ask about current roles – job title, length of time in the role, industry, contract type, specific tasks/responsibilities/work environments</li><li>2. What does work symbolise to you? what drove you to seek employment in that role? How do you feel your current role has either expanded and/or limited your career opportunities?</li><li>3. Thought exercise – think back to the day you got offered your current job. How did you feel? What were you excited for? What were you nervous for? What were your expectations of the job? What were the motivations to accept the job? Why full</li></ol>
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	<p>time/casual/fixed-term, self-employment? What was appealing, if anything about this type of contract?</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Small discussions/ brainstorm on what they believe to be that characteristics of a 'good job' e.g. flexibility, stability, collaboration. Where do these ideas stem from? Is it from personal experience in the labour market e.g. past jobs? Is it from knowing about our changing world of work? Why would you characterise _____ as a symbol of a 'good job'?</li> <li>Rating game –How satisfied are you with your job? Scale will be 1-5 (1 = not satisfied, 5 = very satisfied)</li> </ol>
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Stage three – in depth discussions on experiences	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Generate discussion based on previous exercise. Are participants satisfied with their current roles? Why or why not? What aspects make you dissatisfied? What aspects make you satisfied?</li> <li>Describe the most challenging aspect of working in a (full-time, casual, fixed term, self-employed) job over the last 2-3 years. How did that make you feel? How was that challenge resolved?</li> <li>What is the most/least stressful aspects of work</li> <li>Do you achieve/maintain a healthy work-life balance? How does work affect you? What impact does work have on your emotional, mental and physical wellbeing?</li> <li>What was the most memorable moment at work in the last couple of years?</li> <li>What's the most appealing incentive within your contract and why?</li> <li>How do you feel about your performance at work? Do you feel valued as an employee? How secure do you feel in your job position? Do you experience any noticeable hierarches at work?</li> <li>How do you feel about your experiences so far? What are your overall impressions of work when you reflect on your position in the labour market?</li> <li>What value does work add to your life?</li> <li>What value do you feel you add to your job/company?</li> <li>How financially secure do you feel?</li> </ol>
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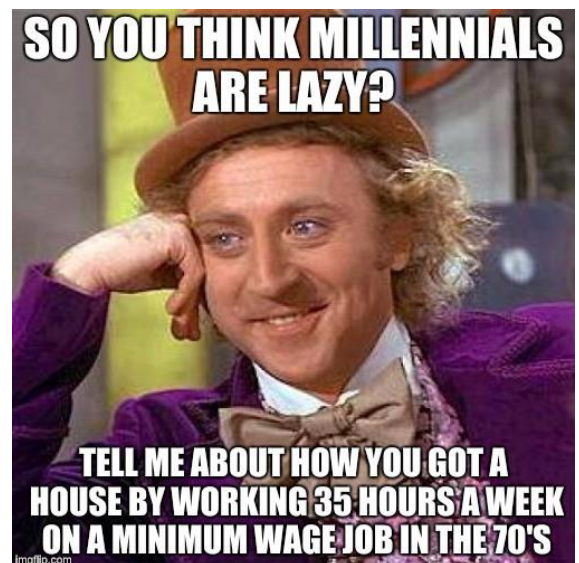
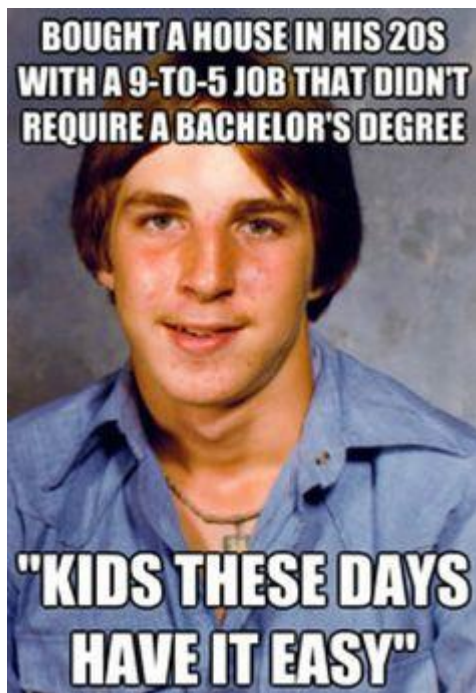
	<p>12. In what ways, if any, does work decrease the value in your life?</p> <p>13. Working identities? How much of your working life makes up your identity</p> <p>14. What needs improvement in your workplace?</p> <p>15. What are the worst aspects of your job?</p> <p>16. Biggest misconception they've learned about work?</p> <p>17. Biggest sacrifice they've made as a result of work?</p> <p>18. Based on the reflections... How well have participants adjusted to the workforce over the last 2-3 years?</p> <p>19. Most memorable experience in the last 2-3 years of work?</p>
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Stage four – Reflections on experiences	<p>1. Where do you see yourself career wise in 10 years? (Get them to generally discuss their prediction)</p> <p>2. If everything was put aside then, your current job, your qualifications, your experience across different industries – what would be your ultimate dream job?</p> <p>3. Discuss their desires/anxieties around their dream job (What's stopping you from going for it right now? What influenced your desire to work in this type of role? How do you think you will be able to achieve this? What steps will you need to take?)</p>
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Final Exercise	<p><b><u>** NOTE – GET THEM TO WRITE THIS DOWN ON A PIECE OF PAPER AS YOU WILL SAVE IT FOR THE FOCUS GROUP **</u></b></p>
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	<p>Last exercise – get them to write down reflective answers on two different pieces of card to provide talking points for focus group</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. What excites you the most about the future of work?</li><li>2. What worries you the most about the future of work?</li></ol>
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Appendix J: Meme's used in Focus Group (Source: Google Images)



## Appendix K: Focus group consent form



Nicolette Trueman | Master of Arts (Sociology) student  
College of Humanities and Social Sciences | Massey University Albany  
Private Bag 102 904 | North Shore 0745 | New Zealand  
Ph: [REDACTED] | [REDACTED]

### ***New careers and their prospects: navigating the future of work***

My name is Nicolette Trueman and I am conducting a research project that will assess young people's current experiences of employment and their gauge their expectations for the future of work. The project is required for the completion of my Master of Arts (Sociology) at Massey University.

**Project Description:** In the last few decades the world of work has undergone rapid and extensive changes. With many young workers entering the labour market, we now have new sets of people formulating their working identities. This project aims to investigate the current experiences of individuals in the early stages of their career and stimulate a more general discussion of your desires, anticipations and expectations in relation to the future of work through focus groups and a collaborative workshop. I would like to invite you to take part in this project.

**Participant identification and project procedures:** As an ideal candidate, you will have no more than 2-3 years' experience in the workforce and will be between the ages of 18-28. If you choose to take part in this project, you will participate in one 1.5 hour (approx.) focus group and one 3 hour (approx.) collaborative group workshop. As a token of appreciation, you will be provided with a \$30 voucher. The focus groups aim to incite discussions of your current experiences of work and the workshops purpose is to stimulate conversations regarding your views on the future of work.

**Data management:** The focus groups and workshops will be audio and video recorded to assist data analysis. Please note that copies of the recordings will be destroyed after the analysis stage.

**Things to think about:** I understand that discussing your experiences and anticipations of work in a group setting may be daunting. I want this to be a safe space for you to share your unique experiences so please note, if you choose to participate, you are not obligated to respond to questions or themes that cause any feelings of discomfort. To protect your identity as a participant, you are welcome to choose a pseudonym that will be used in my final report and any publications arising from this project. If you are interested, I will email you a summary of the project findings.

**Participant's Rights:** If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- Decline to answer any particular question;
- Ask any questions about the study at any time;
- Provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission  
to the researcher;
- Be provided with a summary of the project findings when it is concluded; and

## Ethics

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research. If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher, please contact Prof Craig Johnson, Director, Research Ethics, telephone 06 356 9099 x 85271, email [humanethics@massey.ac.nz](mailto:humanethics@massey.ac.nz).

## Project Contacts

This research project is conducted by me as a student as part of the completion of my Master of Arts. It is carried out under the supervision of Dr Vicky Walters and Dr Alice Beban. If you have any questions or concerns about this project, you are welcome to contact me or Vicky using the details below.

Student researcher	Course controller/supervisor	Course controller/supervisor
Nicolette Trueman	Dr Vicky Walters	Dr Alice Beban
██████████	09 414 0800 ext. 83851	06 356 9099 ext. 83851
████████████████████	v.walters@massey.ac.nz	a.beban@massey.ac.nz

## Appendix L: Focus Group Questions

### Focus Group Prep (Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> August 2 pm)

#### Part one (30 min)

General conversation, eating, drinking, getting comfortable in the environment

#### Part two (5-10 min)

Get participants to react to meme's about millennial experience of work, small discussion of key ideas within meme's (education versus experience, 'lazy millennials', unfair stereotypes, non-standard work, automation)

#### Part three (10-15 min)

Introductions, introducing myself, recapping the research, purpose of focus group, what is needed of participants, Koha, ask permission for audio recording, discuss the dynamics of group setting (confidentiality, privacy, respect), structure of focus group

#### Part Four: (20 + min)

- a. Get participants to reintroduce themselves to participants and answer "Where do you see yourself career wise in 3 years?"
- b. Discussion of career goals (any anxieties or desires coming through? Ask participants to expand)
- c. Open up discussion from interview written exercise (What worries you the most in the future and what excites you the most?)
- d. Anything else you guys envision for yourself in the future?

#### Part Five: (20 + min)

What tools, steps, processes or actions did they take to get to current points in their career? Do they think these will differ in the future (e.g. upskilling/education)? Discussion of the future of work, changing nature of work, adaptable millennials? Tools, steps, processes or actions needed to benefit their working future? What does a successful working future look like? What does an unsuccessful working future look like?

#### Part Six: (10-15 min)

Focus group de-brief, reflections, questions, final thoughts, ask for feedback on experience, hand out Koha's, thank participants, offer food left overs.