“No better than the Feminazis”

Emancipatory Potential in the Contradictions and Complexities of Young
People’s Understandings of Politics, Gender and Work

By

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Abstract

The intersecting politics of gender and work influence the changing nature of work itself, and how it is experienced. Unemployment, underemployment, precarity, and overwork, along with issues concerning unpaid care work and housework, impact upon an increasingly significant and disparate group of people. This warrants a critical reflection on assumptions concerning the creation of fixed identities around occupations. The emerging workforce is especially affected by the fact that “good” jobs (full-time, decently paid careers) are increasingly difficult to find, and at the same time, the scarcity of long-term jobs can cause people to be more committed to the workplace to ensure the security of ongoing employment. This further complicates the focus on full employment as a perceived marker of gender equality; not to mention the implications of an increased commitment to formal employment on the dual-wage labour market (such as housekeepers and nannies) and unpaid care work. However, literature concerning the feminist challenging of work and other approaches to the theorisation of work, as well as how perceived changes to work influence the future/emerging workforce, is currently limited. This research will, accordingly, focus on these areas. In this thesis, I am interested in examining the nature of political engagement, and how it is affected by changes to the prioritisation of time, access to material resources, and the dwindling of a fixed occupational identity. Of specific interest is how these wider issues are perceived by young people (secondary school students in New Zealand), rather than the subjective experience of people currently in the workforce. Young people are often characterised as having straightforwardly adopted the norms and values of neoliberalism, as opposed to being politically engaged. This research is made up in equal parts from theoretical and empirical components. Firstly, the theoretical work of Autonomist Marxists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri,

and feminist economic geographers Katherine Gibson and Julie Graham (known as J.K Gibson-Graham) provide a framework that allows young people's engagement with politics to be recognised and understood as multifaceted, meaningful and agent-driven. Secondly, findings from focus group research conducted with secondary school students highlights the socially-generated nature of knowledge itself, bringing language that young people use to discuss these issues to the forefront. Combining these two modes of analysis highlights the complexities and nuances of young people's understandings of these issues, advancing theory on how young people engage politically.

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Introduction

In this thesis, I am interested in examining the nature of political engagement, and how it is affected by changes to the prioritisation of time, access to material resources, and the dwindling of a fixed occupational identity. Of specific interest is how these wider issues are perceived by young people (secondary school students in New Zealand), rather than by people currently in the workforce. Young people are often understood as being politically disengaged because of lack of interest in electoral-based forms of political engagement. However, this is ignoring “political consumerism (boycotts and buycotts), demonstrations or marches, signing petitions, and other non-traditional methods of engagement” (Boulainne 2015, p.1844). Additionally, the present effects of neoliberal and marketised policies affect the kinds of political engagement that people have access to. The increase in precarious work means that young people’s lives are defined less by traditional structures and more by choice and risk, with standard markers for transitions from youth to adulthood “complicated and staggered,” requiring individualised focus on lifestyles and shifting networks in order to be located within “a more flexible or dislocated labour market” (Sloam, 2012, pp.675-676). Accordingly, it is necessary to apply a broader understanding of politics when researching young people’s engagement with political issues.

Nevertheless, the understanding of young people as having agency to make change is not straightforward. One specific example from the empirical research captures this point. The term “feminazi” was used in distinctly different ways between Groups A, B and E, but in all of these groups, participants used this term to refer to either a group of people themselves or those who use the term. Participants in Group A described how

gender equality needs to happen “automatically” rather than being “forced,” and that groups treating everyone equally without having to think about it, while working on a “main cause,” were “how it should be.” One participant said that “if it was an all men led group and we wouldn’t respect that because we wanna see women in the roles, but the men were the best people for the job, then we’d be no better than the ‘feminazis.’” This participant’s comment highlights the problematic essentialising of gender differences, with “feminazi” representing a feminism overly focussed on the rights of women. However, studies have shown that in workplaces where it is not acceptable to discuss implicit inequalities, further sexism can take place (Gill, 2014, pp.509-514). Accordingly, while participant responses could be interpreted as a case of young people being born into a time where they naturally absorb the neoliberal notion of an individual’s right to “unfettered competition” (p.524), this research will make the case for the importance of seeing the contradictions and complexities of these young people’s understandings of politics, gender and work.

Chapter one will set the wider historical and place-based context of this research. Policies not directly addressing gender equality significantly impact these issues, as explained by the theory that the “social” is a newly developing sphere that comfortably fits into neither the traditionally public, political sphere, nor the state itself (Fraser, 1989; Nicholson, 1986). This aligns with a challenging of the value attributed to unpaid work in the home, traditionally done by women in the so-called private sphere, and in this context, it becomes apparent that some feminist gains have only benefited women of middle and upper-class backgrounds. Meanwhile, unravelling these histories involves a negotiation between local tendencies and the implementation of imported economic events. The New Zealand context of egalitarianism, liberalism, and class

dominance from 19th century to World War Two will be discussed, followed by the place of economic policy and gender from WWII to the 1980s; lastly, New Zealand's introduction of neoliberalism, and the role of the state from 1984 to the present, will be outlined.

Autonomist Marxists Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, and feminist economic geographers Katherine Gibson and Julie Graham (known as J.K Gibson-Graham) both provide insight into the forming of a counter-hegemonic force that is focussed on creating a future that counters the negative effects of neoliberalism, theoretically altering how the political subject is positioned in both time and space. While not commonly combined in theoretical analysis,¹ both theorists approach collective identity formation in a way that provides important insight into the identity of the change-making neoliberal subject, and the approaches that these theorists take will be compared and contrasted. Gibson-Graham incorporate an underlying focus on the valuation of unpaid domestic and reproductive labour, and similarly, Hardt and Negri's work is applied to this context by theorists such as Weeks (2011). The implications of their respective works will be discussed in chapters two and three, followed by a transition towards discussion of the empirical research.

In chapter two, the ways that Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham's work is useful for constructing a different way of being individual and collective will be explored,

¹ There are exemptions. For example, educational theorists Andrew Gibbons and Emit Snake-Beings (2018) combine Autonomist Marxism with geographical theories of space to critique educational policy's current rhetoric of a "future-focussed education," offering a reuniting of space with the active generating of community as a solution to the anxiety concerning the reality of an unknown future. Geographical theorist Gradon Diprose (2014) pairs Autonomist Marxist insight into precarious employment with Gibson-Graham's research to analyse performance art as a tool for enabling an emancipatory imagining of space that re-examines societal norms of behaviours around employment and productivity.

followed by consideration of how the limited inclusion of concrete material realities in these theories are problematic. Hardt and Negri's and Gibson-Graham's deconstruction of often unchallenged binaries, as well as the treatment of collective identity formation as a *process*, are useful theoretical tools for constructing political identities that accommodate new forms of collectivity and individuality. However, it is problematic that the binary between public and private spheres is not adequately addressed, and that the hegemonic nature of more concrete realities is to some extent neglected. As a solution, in chapter three it will be discussed how it is possible to effectively combine Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham's theories of collective identity formation as a *process* with an acknowledgement of material realities, while maintaining the benefits of the initially discussed theories. Further, the theory of an *unresolvable tension* is necessary to sufficiently address the overlap between public and private spheres, and material and abstract realities.

Chapter four will outline the methodological framework for this research, preceding the findings, which will be outlined in three chapters. Empirical data allowed for further insight into how these theories apply to a practical context, and how this context affects or challenges the theory. Participants were students at secondary schools from various cities in New Zealand, and focus group discussions were used to investigate their attitudes towards political engagement and gender equality, amidst the changing nature of work.

The following three chapters, discussing empirical research, will each in some way address the following questions, which were outlined prior to the collection of data (see chapter four):

- How do young people today perceive feminism/ gender equality, and what are the main issues they consider important?
- What types of information regarding gender equality/feminism and work are youth influenced by most and why? How do they read the information they are exposed to?
- In what way does youth engagement with these issues align with the literature that describes individual versus collective approaches, and are there any new conclusions to be drawn within this context?

A graph outlining initially coded responses can be found in appendix three.

Chapter five focuses on how young people positioned themselves within their social group, and what social formations for political change were seen as ideal, considering that the way that participants engaged with one another in focus groups to in itself be an important source of information with regards to feminism, and engaging with others directly described as political. Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham's theories of collective identity formation as an ongoing *process*, along with the contradictory aspects of time and space discussed by David Harvey (2006), provided a useful lens to view these ideas.

In chapter six, perceptions of the space where political engagement occurs will be discussed, exploring the divide between the workplace, society and home. This chapter will also pay particular attention to the following questions (see chapter four):

- To what extent does the way young people perceive work affect their prioritisation of everyday tasks and activities, including acts promoting or advancing social change?
- In what ways are youth perceptions of their capacity to affect social change in the future influenced by their imagining of a life trajectory that is tied to job prospects?

It will concern how participants described political engagement within the formal and physical spaces where social connections were made. These concepts are traditionally understood as collective and public, and in opposition to political engagement that is individual, private, and informal. However, Hardt and Negri's theoretical tools, regarding how the nature of political agency changes along with production, are useful for recognising how participants categorised these spheres differently. Further, the notion of shifting between accounts of reality "as it is," and impressions of how things could or should be, is useful for avoiding the straightforward positioning of youth as the individualist neoliberal subject when concerning their viewpoints on feminism/gender equality, enabling an understanding of the imagined space of the workplace and the political domain.

In chapter seven, the discussion focuses on how identities are constructed through historical narrative, and how this affects the domain where political engagement takes place. A range of viewpoints concerning ways that the word feminism should be understood framed discussions about what information concerning gender equality/feminism was important. Hardt and Negri's theory of the *false duality* between the individual and collective, and the concept of an *unresolvable tension*, provide tools for understanding young people as both embodying the changes of the present political context, and the ways they are empowered to be change-making subjects. This chapter will focus more particularly on how these theories are present in the concept of time; how both collective identity formation as a *process* and the framing of identity through historical trajectory are relevant to how participants discuss the use of words, which they referred to as "labels."

Chapter 1: Work, Gender and Politics in New Zealand

According to some feminist theorists (see Fraser, 1989; Nicholson, 1986), the “social” is a newly developing sphere that does not comfortably fit into the traditionally public, political sphere, nor the state itself. It is rather “a site of discourse about people’s needs, specifically about those needs that have broken out of the domestic and/or official economic spheres that earlier contained them as ‘private matters’” (Fraser, 1989, p.156). Closely related to the value attributed to unpaid work in the home, typically done by women in the so-called private sphere, both the emergence of state welfare and the funding of state services (such as education and healthcare), and resistance regarding these measures (including “micropolitical resistance” and social movements), are of direct concern to gender (p.157). The negotiated location of this new “social” domain is evident in settler New Zealand in the way that the relationship between class and gender have been complexly intertwined with fundamental cultural norms. Policies not directly addressing gender equality significantly impact these issues, with some feminist gains only benefiting women of middle and upper class. Meanwhile, unravelling these histories involves a negotiation between local tendencies and the implementation of imported economic events.

The following discussion is divided into three parts. Firstly, the competing tides of egalitarianism/ liberalism and class dominance in 19th Century- WWII in New Zealand will be discussed, and how this aligned with images of the imagined New Zealander, and first wave feminism. Secondly, the implication of wider state policies on gender equality and equity from WWII to the 1980s will be addressed, and how this related to second wave feminism, as well as wider economic policies targeting gender equality.

Thirdly, the introduction of neoliberalism and its continued effects on work, gender and politics in New Zealand from 1984 to the present will be discussed. This will concern implications of the increased freedom of finance, considering how much party politics and social movements influence social and economic conditions, and impacts on the future of work and welfare. This will demonstrate how unpaid work is undervalued, and that aims for its recognition are important to consider at present.

19th Century- WWII

The Imagined New Zealander

An “egalitarian ethos” was developed by the settler population, who envisaged a society based on achievement rather than birth right. Having moved to New Zealand seeking freedom from the class-based inequalities of their homeland, it was known as a place where overt public displays of status were frowned upon and status was only accepted when earned through hard work and conduct (Seve-Williams, 2013, p.245). Along with this was a “powerful myth of classlessness” (p.126). However, the fact that governments were influenced by the farming community until at least the 1970s is, according to political historian James Belich (2001), an indication of class. This claim is made on the basis that this group convinced society that they were the “backbone of the country” (pp. 150-151). The rise of the New Zealand protein industry was a significant transformation in New Zealand history (p.68), but farmers and their families were never more than 20% of the population, and often less (pp. 150-151), making them a minority with significant dominance. Further, the 1912 strikes involved a strong worker’s presence as well as a significant opposing force consisting of the farming and ruling classes (Belich, 2001, p.91). While amongst workers, a demonstration of nationwide class consciousness was late to start, and a strong independent Labour party

did not emerge for some time, unionism in New Zealand can be traced back to the beginning of settlement in the 1830s. This was to some extent imported from Britain, but the eight-hour working day achieved in 1840 was a distinct improvement to British working conditions for most, representing “a deep integration of New Zealand populism and ideas of the dignity of labour” (Belich, 2001, pp.133-135). Accordingly, the social dynamics of early settler New Zealand involved an intersection between the vision of a classless future, and the rebranding of previous class formations.

This ethos also had racialised and gendered undertones, and unlike many other countries, structural inequalities in New Zealand, were “virtually hidden” (Seve-Williams, 2013, p.245). In this society that was seemingly a meritocracy, inequality was perceived by the European settlers as resulting from a lack of effort, and accordingly Māori and other non-white groups were considered “intrinsically inferior” (Seve-Williams, 2013, p.245). As late as 1937, Māori lived in predominantly rural, isolated areas that were marginal to the urbanising Pākehā economy. Māori communities survived through sustenance agriculture, gathering, hunting and fishing, often alongside casual and seasonal work. In the 1900s there was an abundance of temporary waged work for public and private development sites, although this diminished after 1910. Māori were reliant on “spasms of casual waged work for cash,” and were especially vulnerable to recession and illness (Belich, 2001, p.192). Similarly, the disparities in working conditions were perceived as not equality, but “difference” between men and women. It has been suggested that New Zealand is a “gendered culture,” with gender facilitating “the maintenance of the egalitarian ethos which is characteristic of New Zealand life” (Bev James and Kay Saville-Smith, 1989, pp.7-12). This is seen in the archetype of the hardworking, virtuous pioneer (white, male) farmer

that was the stock figure of 19th century ideology (Belich p.153). At this time, many farm labourers were female, including dairying, market gardens, poultry and pig keeping. Males took over as the work became commercially viable and specialised. Women and children continued to work in these areas, but their involvement has been “minimised, denied or written out” (Belich, pp. 150-151). On the other hand, it is argued that to some extent there was place in settler egalitarian ideals for shifts in gender relations on account of being in a farming community where women worked (Sulkunen, 2015, p.93).

First Wave Feminism

The term first wave feminism² is used to refer to an international movement occurring in the late 19th century that challenged the traditional position of women at the time. It worked towards women having equal rights to men in both public and private spheres. While New Zealand women were far away from other places where these ideas were being developed, many of the main elements were shared with first wave feminism elsewhere; education for girls and women at all levels and increasing the number of women in paid employment were both elements “clearly visible” in New Zealand in the early 1890s (Grimshaw, 1972, pp. xiii-2). New Zealand’s small size made it easy for ideas to be broadly spread, so consequently it did not fragment like suffrage movements elsewhere, such as the conservative and militant branches in Britain (Coney, 1993, p.3). However, Māori women were involved in campaigning for rights both in this movement and in Māori parliament, and in the European parliament separate Māori

² The wave terminology is critiqued for over-simplifying the struggles of the constantly changing and dispersed actions that counter sexism and gender inequality (Nicholson, 2010; Hewitt, 2010). It is also claimed as problematic considering that women at this time did not call themselves feminists (Nicholson, 2010).

rolls were introduced right from the beginning (Rei et al., 1993; Coney, 1993). While all Māori could register on the Māori roll, only those with freehold property worth at least 25 pounds could choose to register on the European roll. Nevertheless, a majority voted in the Māori roll and showed considerable interest in voting (Rei et al., 1993, pp.29-37). Further attention to the class-based undertones of the suffrage movement will follow.

From 1890-1912 the Liberal party was in power, and a weak introduction of a welfare state was made. This, along with full suffrage, gave New Zealand the international reputation of being an “exemplary paradise.” The first wave feminist movement was especially strong in New Zealand (Belich, 2001, p.166), and New Zealand women winning the vote in 1893 made it the “first self-governing country to legislate for universal female franchise” (Coney, 1993, p.12). Accordingly, there is indication that the widespread egalitarian ideals shaping broader social and cultural contexts contributed to this (p.13). On the other hand, assumptions that women’s suffrage in New Zealand was liberal tends to downplay its conservative aspects (Markoff, 2003, p.91), with another prominent reason for the early gaining of full suffrage being a strong trend of moral evangelism. A “world fad” of puritanism and extremism is argued to have been more prominent in New Zealand than elsewhere. For instance, it was a “decidedly New Zealand measure” that there were moral conditions placed on receiving benefits, such as no fighting or drinking. Middle-class women were perceived, within their own ranks, as moral guardians of this puritanism (Belich, 2001, pp.167-169). This was the basis of their claim for inclusion in politics, and consequently all women’s interests were not necessarily promoted. Further, often these women made alliances with their bourgeois husbands (James and Saville-Smith, 1989, p.33) to create a new

conservative power that countered the threatening force of full male suffrage, as male labourers gained the vote in 1879 (p.137). Meanwhile, the all-male labour movement opposed women's voting rights, perceiving women to be a threat to the labour market (Sulkunen, 2015, pp.96-97). The predominant male drinking culture at the time was described as "the cause of desertion, destitution and physical attacks against women" (James and Saville-Smith, 1989, p.41), suggesting a further reason why the morally-grounded Women's Christian Temperance Movement played a significant part in the suffrage movement (Coney, 1993, p.20). Further, although moral evangelism was "strongly resisted" by mostly lower classes (Belich, 2001, p.168), 78% of eligible women registered to vote in the first election, suggesting that working women were engaged with suffrage to some extent (p.186). The relation of conservatism, liberalism and class to the achievement of full suffrage was multifaceted and complex.

WWII- 1980s

Second Wave Feminism

Second wave feminism is the term commonly used to refer to a global movement prominent in New Zealand from the 1970s through to the late 1980s, and strands such as liberal, socialist and Māori contributed to a "substantial cultural shift" by the 1990s. The four main fronts were equal treatment through and in politics, greater control of health/ reproduction for women, awareness of male violence towards women, and the end of gender discrimination— especially in the workplace. The involvement of women in politics surged from the late 1970s. Meanwhile, abortion decreased with the contraceptive pill, but around this time anti-abortion movements started to become prominent, making it necessary for feminist movements and initiatives to improve access to safe abortions for women. Until the 1970s "wife beating" was largely

accepted as normal, and feminist campaigners helped to publicise this issue and introduce women's refuges (pp.496-499). The gains were, accordingly, widespread and involved a significant focus on the changing of cultural norms.

Wider Economic Policies and Gender Equality

However, it is important to note that while governments have professed to be committed to equality for women since the 1970s, wider economic policies also have significant impact on the improved status of women (Rudd and Roper, 1997, p.142). A drastic change in the economy was brought about with the end of WWII. This is described as the "long boom" from 1945 to 1973, including "sustained economic growth fuelled by historically high levels of profitability and productive investment, full employment, low inflation, rising real wages..." (p.3). Like the United States and Western Europe, manufacturing occupations increased and farming declined; in its place the service economy and white-collar workforce expanded significantly (Locke, 2007, p. 164). Additionally, the war marked the move from socioeconomic segregation and low status participation in the workforce for both Māori and women, through involvement in both war and waged labour. Women started participating in more traditionally male occupations, and their participation in paid employment went up by a third (Belich p.308). While many left their new jobs when the war ended, and employment returned to pre-war levels until 1961, lasting entry into new occupations did occur at this time; for instance, women continued to work in banks, the police, post offices, railways and the civil service after the war. Accordingly, while not straightforwardly an improvement for women, the economic changes following WWII led to diversified career choices.

Further, war brought a “mass exodus from domestic service,” with very few New Zealand households hiring servants anymore (p.501). It is important to understand this change as more complex than either empowerment or entrapment. While more middle-class women may have been subjected to unpaid household labour, lower class women likely had access to more diversified career choices. Married women’s domestic lives and childhood were widely romanticised, and so were married men’s lives. The notion of the “kiwi bloke,” spending time at the pub each night, was transformed into the “family man,” who earned a large wage so the wife could stay at home (James and Salville-Smith, 1989, p.41). Meanwhile, mainstream 1960s feminists globally challenged the notion that “a woman’s place is in the home” (Nadasen, 2010, in *No Permanent Waves*, Hewitt, pp.179-181). While New Zealand households were well-equipped with modern household appliances, which were comparatively cheap at this point, most men did not help with the housework. Most houses only had one car, and so housewives were often isolated while husbands went to work each day; as late as 1981, a quarter of women had no personal access to money, with many never going out at night (Belich, 2001, p.496). The need for an emerging critique of this culture was, accordingly, necessary.

But at the same time, less privileged groups, such as black feminists in the United States, challenged the “double standard” between the expectations of white middle-class women and poor women of colour, who did not have the option to stay at home and look after their children (Nadasen, 2010, pp.179-181). Further, with the state universal family benefit being paid to mothers, tax exemptions for dependents, and a “new spasm” of state assistance for home ownership and state homes in New Zealand, it was “unusually easy” to provide a secure and affluent home for children (Belich,

2001, pp.489-493). The provision of the right for welfare to enable the choice to be a stay at home mother was something that women of colour in the United States were campaigning for (Nadasen, 2010, pp.181-185). For some women, state support that benefited women's caring role can partly be interpreted as a move to freedom from the devaluation of this type of work. During the years of economic prosperity of the post WWII boom, many saw marriage as an opportunity for freedom. With husbands, women could move out of their family home, at a time when living in a shared house with other single people was not acceptable (Belich, 2001, p.494). The valuation of work in the home is evidently a complex negotiation between different, and sometimes conflicting, aims and ideals, and this is intertwined with each person's alignment to the dominant social group.

This period was followed by a global recession in 1974, which was a "crucial turning point in New Zealand's economic history," with a significant decline of incomes and rising unemployment (Rudd and Roper, 1997, pp.3-4). These measures were allegedly magnified by the populist leader of the Third National Government Robert Muldoon. Policies sought to keep things the same as before, maintaining connection with Britain and the welfare state (Belich, 2001, pp.394-396). However, what is typically referred to as the "Keynesian" approach, involving governmental income support to sustain the demand for production, while "using government intervention to promote non-inflationary growth on the supply side" (Rudd and Roper, 1997, p.40), is claimed to have been progressively entrenched in New Zealand since 1935 (Roper, 2011, p.17), in step with similar international trends (Fraser, 2013, p.212). At this point in New Zealand, state investment continued but was poorly allocated (Rudd and Roper, 1997, p.16; Belich, 2001, p.402) and full employment, which had been an institutionalised

commitment since 1935, was gradually abandoned (Roper, 2011, p.10). This was alongside a mixture of positive and negative changes towards women's experiences of paid and unpaid work. As family state assistance gradually eroded, women were increasingly pressured into the workforce (Belich, 2001, p.496). However, the "substantial rise" in female participation in the paid workforce from 1961-76 was also because female wages increased (p.502). This further demonstrates that women's increasing involvement in the paid workforce was a mix of both liberation and exploitation, as their role as unpaid carers was less supported by the state.

Moreover, Māori and women still experienced more unemployment in proportion to other groups in society. The National movement Te Roopu Rawakore O Aotearoa (people who had nothing) was created by and for the unemployed, and included leadership from these two groups. They asked for "the right to work and a living wage for all," attempting to combat the "dominant myth," due to years of full employment after WWII, that any New Zealander could obtain a job if they wanted to. This mirrors the wider backdrop of the complex relationship between the international movement of socialist feminism and the state, critiquing both disciplinary aspects of the bureaucratic welfare state, and the underlying male-dominated framework of the marketised workforce (Fraser, 2013, p.216). The public image of the unemployed in the media, and as portrayed by government politicians, was a socially deviant "dole bludger" or "victim." Unemployment groups aimed to combat this stigma, by targeting the government for failing to create jobs, and framing unemployment as a collective oppression rather than a personal failure. These groups also provided direct assistance to unemployed people negotiating the welfare authorities, and opened unemployed workers' centres (Locke, 2007, pp.163-168). The presence and influence of this

movement indicates significant treatment of both work and welfare policies as a racialised and gendered issue.

1984- Present

Increased Freedom of Finance

Neoliberalism was introduced to New Zealand, preceding an election of the fourth Labour government of 1984 (a typically Left-wing party) (Belich, 2001, p.412).

Internationally, neoliberalism was a response to the financial crisis of the 1970s (Harvey, 2010, p.6), involving “an ensemble of economic policies in accord with its root principle of affirming free market.” The results were “intensified inequality,” “crass or unethical commercialization,” an “ever-growing intimacy of corporate finance with the state,” and “economic havoc” eventuating with the increased freedom of finance (Brown, 2010, pp.28-30). The process of shrinking the state, through the privatising of state services, lessened the impact of unions and employment law on working conditions (Kalleberg, 2009, pp.2-3); accordingly, this period involved a drastic shrinking of the sphere of the “social” (Fraser, 1989, p.156). New Zealand was an especially ideal carrier of these policies and, while not new on a global scale, adoption was rapid (Belich, 2001, p.406) and extreme. Billions of state assets were sold off, and the previously “exceptionally Keynesian or interventionist” government swung in the opposite direction. As a result, lack of protest can also be attributed to substantial policies being implemented incredibly quickly and unexpectedly, and that there was a widespread impression that change was needed to “fix” the economy, but “no alternative” seen (p.412).³ This demonstrates that a mix of local and international

³ However, the extent of powerlessness must not be over-emphasised. Political theorist Toby Boraman (2004) claims that much of the history of organisation against neoliberalism in New Zealand has been ignored, and that it should be referred to as resistance that was defeated, rather than passivity (p.15).

factors determined the way that neoliberal policies were implemented in New Zealand. While perhaps at some level happening earlier in New Zealand due to its small size, the global observation of “a new sense of vulnerability to transnational forces” emerged at this time (Fraser, 2013, p.191).

Similarly, the influence of wider economic ideology beyond the scope of party politics is clear in New Zealand’s political history. It is argued that the Keynesian welfare state and then neoliberalism dominated, with neither government removing central features of the neoliberal policy regime, and that this trend continued to the fifth Labour and National governments (Roper, 2011, p.37). The preceding National government furthered the same neoliberal agenda, as did the fifth Labour government coalition⁴ that came to power in 1999 and governed for nine years (p.18). In contrast to the previous two governments, this government had a clear commitment towards retreating from the neoliberal project. The Prime Minister Helen Clark raised awareness around issues concerning equal pay for work of equal value (Rudd and Roper, 1997, pp.154-156), and the “Working for Families” policy was beneficial to welfare beneficiaries and low-mid income earners with kids. However, New Zealand remained one of the more unequal countries in the OECD after those nine years (Roper, 2011, p.20). While to some extent it could be claimed that this was on account of the time needed to unravel the previous governments’ policies, the persistence of inequality, despite intent towards improving this, could also indicate some of the limits of party politics to changing New Zealand’s wider economic framework.

⁴ The successful 1996 referendum was a major change to New Zealand’s electoral system, as at this point New Zealand's government adopted a system of proportional representation, meaning that more than just the two major parties could run for seats in Parliament (Belich, 2001, p.408).

Meanwhile, “welfare wars” became globally topical and prominent, and disproportionately affected women (Fraser, 2013, p.144). Similar trends took place in New Zealand under the Fifth National Government. In 2008, in amidst a severe global financial crisis, Labour lost to National, who held power for the next three terms (until 2017). The National party continued to have popular support, claiming that they were more competent in managing the economy in times of crisis than the previous government (Roper, 2011, p.27). Unemployment levels were consistently high, yet the National government’s welfare policy failed to acknowledge unpaid work, assuming that sanctions and incentives for beneficiaries would increase labour-power supply. This ignored the fact that there was actually little labour demand (pp.30-34). While the Labour 1999 government did not significantly shy from neoliberal policies, National followed a legacy of the Right that treated work as straightforward “justification of reward,” meaning that what counts as work is unquestionably connected to paid labour outside the home (Jones, 2017, p.143). Dismantling the fundamentally gendered roles of both caregiver and breadwinner is arguably at the core of eradicating sexism, meaning that the challenging of what counts as work is vital (Fraser, 2013, p.135). Accordingly, it is likely that internal issues were to some extent worsened by a government that did not take this into account.

Nevertheless, both governments produced policies that limited any action outside of a marketised agenda. The 2000 Employment Relations act (with subsequent amendments) is the main legislation governing employment relationships in New Zealand (Community Law, n.d.). It was said to be a return to a more even balance between business and unions than 1991 reforms, which were extremely restrictive towards unions by international standards. However, it differed from prior union-

centred laws in New Zealand, with changes still retaining employer advantage to “utilise a wide corporate structure to plan and combat unions while unions are often confined to reacting to some small part of an employer's enterprise” (Anderson, 2000).⁵ In 2011, it was reported that working class and social movement struggles were “historically low,” and that Treasury was more influential to policy than these groups, regardless of which government was in power (Roper, 2011, p.35). This is a network of political and business elites that have increasingly dominated the economic opinions reaching the politicians since the 1970s, with advice now consistently in favour with the neoliberal status quo (Belich, 2001, p.412). Additionally, while the role of community groups, interest groups and social movements in policy formation has been acknowledged by the government since 1856, the contractual ethos recently guiding the public sector has led to decreasing funding and rising accountability. This means groups are told to work with the community, but the government dictates what community needs are (Grey and Sedgwick, 2015, p.91-121). Organisations distribute funding but are not “trusted” to contribute to public debate, and this behaviour is reportedly rationalised, regardless of which parties are in power, as part of “prudent fiscal responsibility” (pp.120-122). This aligns with wider structural shifts away from “citizen” and towards “client” (Fraser, 2013, p.213), and perhaps explains the compartmentalised focus of many initiatives towards gender equality in New Zealand. It was, for instance, reported in the 2012 International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (National Council of Women New Zealand, 2015) that there were “strong” Non-Governmental Organisations such as the

⁵ Precariousness in employment was also increased with the 2000 Employment Contracts Act which, for instance, meant that employees could serve a trial period of up to 90 days when starting a new job, and not be able to “bring a personal grievance or any other legal action to challenge the dismissal” if dismissed within this time (Community Law, n.d.).

Women's Refuge and the union movement, but that they needed to be more "dynamic," "focussed" and "connected" (p.34). This demonstrates how the actions of parliamentary politics, and wider social organisations, are limited by underlying market-based frameworks.

The Future of Work and Welfare

However, a relatively successful social movement in New Zealand that broadly challenges this normative conception of work is Auckland Action Against Poverty. Initially taking action against the welfare reforms in 2010, this group campaigns for the rights and worthiness of beneficiaries. It builds links between unemployed people and trade unions, in the process challenging the "productive" and "unproductive" status ascribed to workers and beneficiaries respectively. This group challenges the dominant media narrative surrounding paid workers and welfare recipients, and they have developed a major media presence. For instance, the 2012 protests at National Prime Minister John Key's campaign launch successfully shifted the media focus to this government's punitive welfare system (AAAP, n.d., "About"). They also work on policy and research, with projects including the 2016 launching of a campaign to stop the sanctions on beneficiary sole mothers who do not identify the father of their child on the application form, as well as the running of education programmes for the general public on economic principles and alternatives (AAAP, n.d., "Stop the Sanctions"). This demonstrates that while resistance to the neoliberal regime is impeded, there is still a prominence of movements that focus on challenging the very category of

productive worker⁶, while also directly taking action to change the welfare institution itself.

The September 2017 election was won by a coalition led by Labour's Jacinda Ardern, and this government promises to focus on such issues as combating child poverty, lowering tertiary education costs and decriminalising abortion ("Jacinda Ardern to be New Zealand's next PM after Labour Coalition Deal," 2017). However, the extent that the intense marketisation of New Zealand's economy can be unravelled remains to be seen. A fundamental measure of this is the value attributed to the work of the "social," including the care work that remains unpaid. A promising premise of the Future of Work Commission, established by Labour, is that the future of work is not predetermined but rather created through policy (The Work Future of Work Commission, Labour Party, n.d.). This allows for discussion about what counts as "work" itself, allowing a revaluation between categories of "paid" and "unpaid." But while the commission's recent report includes a realistic discussion of the need for a changing relationship to work, at the peak of automation when there are not enough jobs left for everyone, unpaid work is considered important mainly for allowing experience that can eventually lead to paid work, rather than the value in itself (p.37). Further, while the full report (not a main feature of policy/ summary reports) discusses the importance of including women in employment, providing recognition and monetary support for unpaid child care through benefits (p.38), there is little accompanying discussion about males and females sharing domestic work. This again

⁶ Other movements include We Are Beneficiaries and Beneficiary Advocacy and Information Service (BAIS).

indicates that a market focus, and “private” attribution to unpaid labour, is largely prioritised over a questioning of what counts.

Summary

Early settlers in New Zealand sought freedom from class-based inequalities, and so status was only accepted through hard work and conduct, and both the disparities between the Māori and Pākehā population and between women and men were thought to be due to inferiority in these areas, rather than structural inequalities. While on the one hand New Zealand’s early adoption of first wave feminism indicates the inclusion of women in the egalitarian culture of early settler New Zealand, there is also indication of a significant middle-class dominance. Further, in some senses a simultaneous working-class movement was happening under the surface, indicating the multi-faced nature of interactions between the movement and class. The second wave feminist movement had success in many areas, such as increasing women’s involvement in politics, asserting reproductive rights and making domestic violence visible. While the state has claimed to have included a focus on gender equality from this time, wider economic changes also had a significant effect on gender equality and work and welfare policies were clearly a racialised and gendered issue. The adoption of neoliberal policies has internationally been at significant detriment to the “social,” and accordingly to issues concerning the value of work most typically done by women.⁷ In New Zealand, the implementation was especially rapid and extreme, and it appears that upholding such economic policies was not straightforwardly in the control of the current party in power, although the continued election of governments with a

⁷ Although Nancy Fraser (2013) would emphasise that neoliberalism was a mixture of benefits and detriments to second wave feminism.

marketised and business-oriented focus intensified levels of unemployment and welfare depletion. Nevertheless, Treasury appears to have an influence on the scope of social movements, and the lack of connection between increased employment for women and the associated value of unpaid labour in initiatives of the recently elected Labour government draws attention to the continued importance of organisations that further push a critical angle on what really counts as productivity.

This chapter has explored where feminist issues intersect with matters of the economy and the state, and how New Zealand is situated within a global historical context. This sets the backdrop for further discussion of theory on political engagement focussed on the valuation of unpaid work in the home, followed by findings from empirical research involving young people contextually situated in present-day New Zealand.

Chapter 2: Positioning the Subject in Time and Space

Hardt and Negri, and Gibson-Graham both offer important insight into the forming of a counter-hegemonic force that is focussed on creating a different future by altering how the political subject is positioned in both time and space. They are part of the major shift from historical research to “interdisciplinary social research with an empirical intent” that took place in critical analysis of contemporary social life commonly referred to as critical theory (Caterino, 2008, p.176). In particular, the work of Karl Marx, Michel Foucault, and Pierre Bourdieu is drawn on. The next two chapters focus on explaining these theories, and what they mean for constructing an alternative notion of the political subject. Firstly, the construction of political identities through these theories will be critically analysed in a chapter called “The Collective, Evolving Individual.” This will set up a discussion in chapter three concerning “As It Is and How It Could Be,” which will explore what the theoretical limitations of these works tell us about where political change and political identities are positioned in time and space. Time refers to historical narratives that immediately shape actions and identity, while space is the immediate environment and context.

Contemporary political theorists, such as Wendy Brown (2010) and Jodi Dean (2009, 2015), bemoan the lack of a collective organisation on the Left, suggesting that these structural changes have been poorly adjusted to. It is claimed that the Left itself has adopted characteristics of the competitiveness of the capitalist profit imperative and the destructuring of state services that leave every individual to be responsible for themselves, meaning that any counter-hegemonic action from the Left is hindered by a failure to work collectively. Similarly, Nick Srnicek and Alex Williams (2015) argue

that the Left has largely failed due to the adoption of “folk politics,” “a collective and historically constructed political common sense that has become out of joint with the actual mechanisms of power” (p.10). As the nature of problems become increasingly complex, the Left has shown itself unable to adapt, choosing the “everyday over the structural,” and the “particular over the universal” (p.11). It is claimed that while something like folk politics was once appropriate, and remains a necessary starting point of any movement, it must be able to upscale from this point (p.12). This means the solution is to once again build a mass collective movement, but one that is appropriately matched to the changing crisis itself.

However, the extent that societal change warrants a return to previous conceptions of a collective counter-hegemonic force is debatable. It has been claimed that “this isn’t a business as usual period” (McChesney, 2013, p. 221), with the corruption of policy-making processes meaning that harnessing the power of global private wealth in the free market is unlikely through democratic reformative means (p.217). Additionally, it has been argued that “this is a system that no longer acts as though it has a future” (p.226), with globally invasive mechanisms for the profit motive and corporate greed being fuelled off unsustainable practices. As a result, struggles will be required to continue to shift focus towards depleted resources, environmental destruction caused by human emissions, and increasing need for synthetic biology/geo-engineering, along with the need to think carefully about the use of new communicative technologies (Dyer-Witheford, 2013, p.199). With these significant changes in mind, it could be argued that the core ideals underlying the way political change is approached need to be reassessed.

Meanwhile, the place and conditions where political engagement begins have changed, as discussed by theorists Guy Standing (2011) and Kathi Weeks (2011). The scarcity of paid employment can cause people to be more committed to the workplace in order to have a job at all (Standing 2011), and it is important to consider how increasingly precarious work affects the prioritisation of time, access to material resources, and the dwindling of a fixed occupational identity, all of which influence the nature of political engagement. For instance, it is claimed that women are likely to have less control over time and resources due to the disproportionate amount of domestic labour they perform alongside working in the paid labour force. This leads to being involved in less collective, more “private” types of action and adopting a very different impression of what good civic engagement is (Coffé and Bolzendahl, 2010). Accordingly, as work becomes a larger but more precarious part of daily routine for an increasing number of people, very different realities of social organisation likely affect the types of political engagement that are possible and desirable. Further, if parents in full-time (or casual/sporadic) employment are persuaded to become more committed to their jobs, the undervaluation of domestic care work is potentially worsened. As indicated in chapter one, the negotiation between entry into the workforce and economic freedom required to stay at home is complex, and one that is often at odds between women from more and less privileged status. It is accordingly argued that a rethinking of the meaning of work is an important task, but one that is often side-lined in political agendas (hooks,⁸ 2014; Weeks, 2011; Fraser, 2013).

⁸ Author spells name in lower case.

Instead of returning to collective engagement as the most important ideal and focus, along with structural and universal challenges to power, this section will build a case for the importance of focusing on altering conceptions of the very relationship between the “collective” and the “individual.” Some key ideas of Hardt and Negri, in conjunction with Gibson-Graham, will be compared and contrasted. These theorists deconstruct the binary of individual and collective political engagement, and how these preconceived notions are positioned in time and space, meaning perceptions of the past, current and future material reality. Gibbons and Snake-Beings (2018) similarly describe geographical concepts of space as enabling a liberation from the disorienting reality of an unknown future, as described by Autonomist Marxists, by fostering an interdependence between individual and collective civic engagement. This is seen as an important but often overlooked element in the forming of counter-hegemonic communities (p.38). While these theorists apply this notion as an alternative to education policy’s problematic conceptions of a “future-focussed” pedagogy, similar theories will here be applied to viewpoints that young people have towards wider societal changes. This enables a theoretical framework that places political engagement as more than just traditional forms of political collectivity, such as involvement in unions, political parties, and protests. Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham aim to critique the assumption that political engagement focussed on individual narrative is always representative of capitalist enclosure, only disguised as political engagement that challenges the Right (Dean, 2015, p.81); rather they suggest there are different ways for the self to be defined and for people to be connected. Accordingly, the work of these theorists is useful when analysing how the self can be empowered to make change in the present.

While Hardt and Negri's earlier work has since been modified in their more recent publications, the theoretical analysis and responses to books *Empire* (2000), and *Commonwealth* (2009) are of interest to this research as they highlight the tension between material and abstract (or concrete and imagined) realities. *Empire* (2000) introduces the concept of "multitude" and this is continually built on and discussed in Hardt and Negri's following publications, such as *Multitude* (2004) and *Assembly* (2017, p.307). Similarly, Gibson-Graham's (2006) book *The End of Capitalism (as we know it)* was an important contribution to theory on the capitalist- *noncapitalist* relation, and a timely return to focus on the social construction of knowledge, challenging recent theory that was too heavily grounded in ontological thought. It offers an important analysis of how academic theories interact with wider knowledge and political action (Kent, 2007). However, Hardt and Negri's (2009) balancing of concrete versus imagined realities is critiqued as "too broad to be useful" (Oksala, 2015, p.291), and similarly Gibson-Graham's (2006) work is described as only beneficial when combined with theories that take concrete realities into account (Kent, 2007). This research will explore the mechanics underlying the theoretical discourse between these concrete and imagined realities.

This chapter is divided into two sections. The first section, "Deconstructing Binary Logic," explores the ways that Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham's work is useful for constructing different ways of being both individual and collective. The second section, "Overlooking Material Realities," discusses the limitations of these theories, and ways of overcoming these.

Hardt and Negri (2009) break down the theoretical divides typically conceived of as public and private.⁹ This is done by, firstly, challenging normative interpretations of Michel Foucault's¹⁰ conception of power that entail a shift of agency away from the subject; secondly, a normative framing of paid employment as a separate and private/individual domain to be critiqued, widening the sphere where political action can take place. Control is understood as both exploitation, and revolt against it, within and beyond the workplace. The notion of collective identity formation as a *process* is used to describe Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham's theories that allow broader and more diverse groups to be understood as part of this category of class. This frames transformative identities, deconstructing the very framework that creates a need for class politics, and allowing the *difficult* process of overcoming conflicting identities to be framed as important change. However, as a result of understanding a significant change in the nature of production, there are limits to the extent that these theories acknowledge and take into account material realities. These limits can be seen in Hardt and Negri's emphasis on being able to change the power dynamics underlying social inequalities, which neglects to adequately recognise the concrete material interests underlying these. Also, there are arguably problematic differences between affective labour, and the types of internet and knowledge-based work that have become central forms of production, that need to be kept distinct. Accordingly, while Hardt and Negri theorise an increase in the sphere of capital production that enables more groups and actions to be counted as political, their theory of there being no "outside" capitalism

⁹ Also see Hardt and Negri's (2000) alignment of the rhetoric of the crisis of the Left with a mistaken binary between public and private spheres. Hardt and Negri describe their thesis as largely opposing what is currently described as the Left (p.44).

¹⁰ Hardt and Negri focus on the later works of Foucault. From the mid 1970's, approaches of his works shifted to connect previous analysis of knowledge with social structures of power (Hegburg, 2008, p.182).

(Hardt and Negri, 2000, p.46) is critiqued for extending the perimeter of capitalism rather than deconstructing this. Tasks most at the core of human existence still resist being marketised.

Deconstructing Binary Logic

Being “Within” Apparatuses of Control

Foucault argues that rather than a central or transcendent “locus of power,” there are “a myriad of micropowers that are exercised in capillary forms across the surfaces of bodies in their practices and disciplinary regimes” (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p.31).

Instead of distinct categories of controller and subservient, the control is dispersed, and enacted inwardly through the body. “Micropowers” are not clearly visible, material or separate from practice; they are inescapably embedded in life itself, and little can be done to challenge it. They are often interpreted as an “empirical description of how power works,” meaning that the subject is powerless to make change (p.59). Less visible than straightforward exercise of control, it can also be seen that the subject is unknowingly controlled by these “micropowers.” Others have, similarly, critiqued the theorist’s role as an objective and well-informed observer of subjects who are mystified to the extent of their exploitation (such as Weeks, 2011, p.3), or drawn attention to the problematic framing of the enemy (such as “capitalism;” Gibson-Graham, 2006) as a coherent and powerful force that is not to be challenged. However, as these theorists suggest, it is a theoretical construction that leads to the subject being understood as powerless.

While Foucault is sometimes understood as betraying Marxism for shifting the focus away from the oppressive nature of wider structures towards the individual,¹¹ Hardt and Negri understand this shift to be not just about domination but also about where bodies resist (p.31). The Foucauldian notion of “micropowers”, when aligned with Hardt and Negri’s theory of vital change in the social nature of production, allows for a subject that is theorised as having agency to make change. Hardt and Negri describe the Foucauldian concept of power in a way that, in contrast to other theorists who frame the individual as powerless to this force (such as Wendy Brown, 2010, pp.47-80), constructs an individual that is able to bring about change. A fundamental component of Autonomist Marxism is the idea of a significant break from previous modes of production. In the late 1960s, the problem of capitalist exploitation was significantly redefined as intellectual labour became a core part of the production process (Berardi, 2010, p.31). Production, such as work done on the internet and across geographical borders, takes place in “decentralized networks” that demand freedom to access commonly-owned materials. This means that the content produced tends to be easily replicable, resisting legal and privatising attempts. As a result, it is clear that workers are “within” the apparatuses of control rather than subservient to and separate from them (p.x), and not only control but political change can happen from the body. The Foucauldian conception of power dispersed through bodies is taken beyond the previously discussed limitations to envisage “the potential for the production of alternative subjectivities” (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p59).

¹¹ For instance, political theorist Wendy Brown (2015) describes Foucault’s 1970s lectures on neoliberalism as directly opposed to neo-Marxist frameworks, despite some people drawing on his work in this context. Neoliberalism was seen as not arising from capital accumulation, but rather from liberal governmentality (pp.54-58), and the economic realm separate from the political (p.77).

Identifying the Problem with Work

A perceived break from previous modes of production entails a blurring of spheres otherwise thought of as exclusive, increasing the scope for where political engagement can happen. Hardt and Negri (2009) critique assumptions that the political domain is separate from economic and legal structures (p.5).¹² As feminist theorist Linda Nicholson (1986) describes, the domains of “state,” “family” and “economy” are often taken for granted as separate, and universally related to society rather than capitalism specifically (p.168). This means that because the family is a private and separate domain under capitalism, Marx treats reproductive activities (such as child rearing) as ahistorical rather than part of the consideration in social conflicts, activities and components of social change (p.193). Nicholson argues that Marx’s use of “production” is ambiguous, with the association of creating material objects being the most commonly referred to, as opposed to reproductive or affective labour (pp.175-178). This means that both the work partaken in the workplace outside the home, and unpaid labour inside the home, are neglected in political theory due to relationships in these spheres being thought of as individual rather than social (Weeks, 2011, pp.2-3). Accordingly, the “state” is the sole domain of political action, while the “family” and “economy” are private domains. However, interpreting Marx’s theories within the framework of the historical process of a progressive domination of the market means the historical specificity of the domain of family is acknowledged, taking into account previous kinship models and possibly different futures that do not compartmentalise the family in this way (Nicholson, 1986, p.197). As described, Autonomous Marxism is

¹² The importance of a blurring of the political, economic and social spheres is more thoroughly addressed in Hardt and Negri’s 2017 book (p.34).

based on this premise that it is necessary to interpret Marxism differently to match the significantly altered nature of production (Berardi, 2010, p.31). In taking to account the blurring of these spheres, Hardt and Negri's theory is useful for allowing the categorisations attributed to resistance to be liberated from these separate domains, and territories previously rendered as "private" (as opposed to the solely public domain of politics) to become potential domains for resistance.

Further, this normative divide between productive and non-productive activities is often implicitly connected to a differentiation between consumption and production.

Critiquing theorists that describe the work ethic as being replaced with the consumption ethic, Autonomist Marxists claim that they are in fact the same thing, or else that consumption is used to strengthen workers' ties to production. Hardt and Negri (2009) describe the blurring of the divide between consumer and producer during the shift from production of objects for subjects (like commodities), as prominent in the factory, to the "production of subjectivity itself" (p.x). An example of this is how the "myth of equal exchange" masks the inequality in the relationship between the indebted and owner of commodities. The indebted are perceived as responsible for paying their debts as a result of consuming, yet the debts are increasingly needed for basic living requirements such as shelter (Hardt and Negri, 2012, pp.14-18). Similarly, in her book *The Problem with Work*, social theorist Kathi Weeks (2011) combines Marxism, feminism, and post-work politics, including significant focus on Hardt and Negri. Weeks explains how work is seen as a path to independence and the wage as self-sovereignty, associated with "spiritual independence" as opposed to "relying on religious institutions and authorities" for material needs. Because of this, governments protected the welfare of citizens by defending their right to paid employment, in a

similar way to what was described in chapter one as being prevalent in National's appropriation of the Right's treatment of work as a plain "justification of reward" (Jones, 2017, p.143). However, there is a tension between work as independence and the subordination of employee to employer. Accordingly, the subjects constituted are "both exploiting and exploitable" (Weeks, 2011, pp.50-53). Both examples draw attention to the intertwined nature of production and consumption, widening the theoretical scope of exploitation. A comparison with Gibson-Graham's methods of deconstructing binaries will be discussed in the next chapter, as first it is important to investigate how transformative identities are framed, in liberation from these divides between individual and collective spheres.

Blurring Individual and Collective Identities

A significant theoretical tool for blurring individual and collective identities, and widening of the scope of production, is the framing of collective identity formation as a *process*, as seen in how theorists approach class. For instance, rather than structuring class around a concrete location or identity, Hardt and Negri (2004) describe their concept of "multitude" as being connected, or collective, but in a way that is broader and more diverse. They compare it to a network such as the internet, in that "the various nodes remain different but are all connected in the web" (p.xv). Accordingly, the theory is tailored to the recent growth in visibility of precarious and de-standardised employment, as it accommodates identities of workers that are more transitory and spread-out. As similarly outlined in chapter one as strongly affecting New Zealand, Gibson-Graham (2006) describe the economic restructuring of the 1980s and 1990s, and resulting increase in part time and temporary jobs. They highlight that as a result of these changes, people are less likely to experience work as a primary basis of identity

(p.47). It becomes more common to have a dispersed range of associations to different workplaces and socioeconomic markers that constantly change and develop, as opposed to a lifetime identification with one job or profession. Hardt and Negri's (2004) "multitude," unlike "the people" or "the masses," are neither a homogeneous group nor "greyed out" with their differences submerged. In this sense, they are very different to the "working class" (xiv).¹³ Gibson-Graham (2006) also describe class as a process rather than a group, meaning that an individual can relate to several different parts of the class system at once (p.52), and that it is a moving association of identities and positions rather than a set identity or fixed location. Hence, both theorists understand a diverse range of changing identities to fit within a group-based framework, suitable for the currently destandardised working life trajectory.

Secondly, Gibson-Graham (2006) describe how class as a process avoids the "problematic conceptions" involved in it being defined by concrete factors that rigidly constrain an identity towards experiencing specific class attributes. For instance, a person may be exploited in some ways, but also own a business (p.51), or be dependent on a spouse in a higher income bracket, but personally have access to limited resources (p.61), as described in chapter one as being common for middle-class women following WWII. These aspects are overlooked in conventional class politics, which position subjects as having a certain level of authenticity or inauthenticity towards class identity (p.51). Constructing a normative theoretical framework of variable as opposed to static space means that class components are always understood to relate to other aspects of identity. This, similarly, means that *nonclass* political arenas, such as feminism,

¹³ However, it is only one Marxist interpretation of class that treats it as a fixed category, and other theorists interpret class in similar ways. For instance, well-known Marxist historian Edward Palmer Thompson (1963) also specifies that class is a relationship (p.9).

environmentalism and indigenous rights (p.204) can be seen as having effects on class transformations, increasing the potential for class diversity (pp.70-71). Hardt and Negri (2009), likewise, critique movements that are centred on “a group investment in maintaining injured status” as opposed to working towards changing the oppressed nature of the identity itself. They consider it to be the quest for freedom that is missing (pp.326-329). Revolutionary, as opposed to “nonrevolutionary” class politics, means a liberation from work that destroys both the structure of worker subordination and the identity of the worker itself, and a feminism that aims to abolish gender hierarchy, to the point that remaining differences are nothing like what we currently recognise as gender (pp.333-334). By theorising identity markers as always relative to each other and in the process of transforming into something different, as opposed to being standalone and fixed, the construction of more diverse identities becomes the norm. This allows the presently oppressed status of some groups to evolve into more liberated future identities.

Thirdly, the “multitude” is considered to be a theoretically powerful concept because it includes those from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds working together. The fears felt when meeting people from backgrounds significantly different to one’s own have to be addressed in order to remove those inequalities. For example, deconstructing the divide between rich and poor itself involves tapping into the power that the fear and hatred of the poor truly represents (Hardt and Negri, 2008, pp.40-46). Rather than a fixed group, it is explained how “the external boundaries of the network are open such that new nodes and new relationships can always be added” (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p.xv). Similarly, Gibson-Graham’s (2006) description of class as a process, whereby individuals can relate to several different parts at once, breaks down the division

between exploiter and exploited. It claims to be an emancipatory way of explaining and eradicating inequalities between groups, as people are neither right nor wrong in their relations to class, but each association has different effects (p.54). The purpose of class is not necessarily about enabling a coherent collective political force, but increasing awareness and communication between groups typically divided in society. This allows for “momentary and partial identifications between subjects constituted at the intersection of very different class and nonclass processes and positions” (p.54).

Subjects are considered to be so intertwined in the mechanisms of control themselves that some individuals might “understand their economic experience as both a domain of difference and a region of possibility” (p.19). As a result, the changes made from moments of interaction between people from very different groups within the current society are in itself framed as important change, breaking down these divides.

Lastly, for Hardt and Negri (2009), just as the factory was a powerful site of antagonism and rebellion in part because it was also a site of pain and suffering, this process is understood to be a difficult one (p.258). The “abolition” of (fixed) identity is necessary as “existing identities will no longer serve as anchors” (Hardt and Negri, 2008, p.339), and this means that the process is painful because “your ‘self’ has to be sacrificed!” (p.339) However, while difficult, it is described as fundamental to forming a new kind of collective identity, suitable for better futures. People need to *learn* to cooperate with one another freely, and being able to do this involves changing the self. This process does not automatically follow emancipation, and rather “democracy can be learned only by doing” (pp.362-363). This means that, alongside changing the self, disagreements between people are part of the normal, everyday process of change, allowing for a transformative transcendence beyond these fixed identities (p.349). The

notion of difficulty as part of the process of creating new realities is also, to a lesser extent, found in Gibson-Graham's (2006) description of the household as a site for class conflict. The form is "continually under renegotiation" rather than hegemonic (p.68). Notably, the difficulty emphasises the seriously transformative nature of these processes. For both Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham, the power is dispersed rather than simply being held by a controlling force, permitting micro-level acts to themselves be theorised as having serious and significant influence. This entails a more fluid rather than static form of collective that is also very different to the isolated individual.

Overlooking Material Realities

Challenging What is Counted

Hardt and Negri increase the scope of what theoretically counts as political engagement, and this is a significant contribution to theorising new ways of being collective and individual. But on the other hand, their understanding of *process* further highlights the tension between new forms of production and struggles concerning what counts as productive. While there are clear parallels with Gibson-Graham's work, as well as differences, this will be more specifically discussed in the following chapter. Firstly, there is arguably a limit to how much things can be changed, which is overlooked when not recognising the conflicting material interests underlying the current reality. Hardt and Negri (2009) describe how increased independence and use of intellect/emotions at work, due to the shift in focus of production to knowledge and affect-based actions, means that the way that we are oppressed is often at an inner rather than outer level. This can also be a process that is reversed in our favour (p.59). However, vague claims of overcoming difficult mutually-beneficial communications in

some senses glosses over the possible significance of unspoken hegemonic powers.¹⁴ The other party involved in difficult social relations may not be prepared to make changes. This could be on account of their own conflicting material advantage; or even if there are good intentions on both sides, some hegemonic powers could continue subconsciously. An example is Rosalind Gill's (2015) account of how gender issues in the workplace become unspeakable and unheard, with the language to describe sexism thought of as old fashioned and quaint, leaving no acceptable words to discuss the persisting inequalities. As a result, issues are only able to be discussed on a personal, rather than structural, level (pp.509-524). There are also claims that the word "feminism" being thought of as outdated has had a similar effect (Walby, 2011, pp.7-8; Offen, 1988, p.119). It is, accordingly, apparent that the implicit control behind the language of a subject in a position of power is an important factor in attempts at change that is not adequately considered in Hardt and Negri's theory of collective identity formation as a *process*.

Similarly, the finite nature of the continued, but previously dominant, forms of production are largely overlooked. While Hardt and Negri (2009, p.x) describe a shift in the "ultimate core" of production rather than a total move to newer forms of production, they are nevertheless critiqued for largely "airbrushing" over the "sharp differences in living standards between global North and South" (Dyer-Witheford, 2015, p.128). Behind the scenes, there is a huge volume of low paid, exploitative labour involved in producing hardware to allow these abstract platforms to function, such as the microchip factories in Silicon Valley (p.69). In fact, it is claimed that, overall, the

¹⁴ Hardt and Negri's 2017 book, *Assembly*, specifically focuses on how to overcome this, and other problematic aspects of leaderless social movements (such as pp.xvii-xix, pp.14-18).

share of industrial work globally has remained “relatively steady over recent decades,” but has shifted to the periphery (p.135).¹⁵ Allegedly, despite the hype, tech companies are a relatively small part of the economy while manufacturing still employs more people in the United Kingdom and the United States (Srnicek, 2016, p.10). In both cases, the material realities are glossed over by narratives that focus on the recent changes in experiences of dominant social groups. Further, it is assumed that a specific type of social and personal change will allow technological tools to be used differently, with little discussion on the internal and external forces of control that technology represents. Social media platforms such as Twitter, which are suggested by Hardt and Negri (2012) to be ideally reappropriated for social change (p.36, 90),¹⁶ are arguably so embedded in capitalist control (surveillance) and profit that the only way such technologies can be used is if an alternative platform is created. Considering that “suppression for privacy is at the heart of (the) business model” of social media technologies suggests that it is fundamental that new public platforms are created that are “owned and controlled by the people” (Srnicek, 2016, p.12). Assuming a naturalised, rather than specifically contrived, process of the development of these platforms allows their inherent association with power to be overlooked.

¹⁵ Hardt and Negri explicitly state in their 2017 book *Assembly* that there may be no shift in production quantitatively (with no change in the number of factory workers), but rather that shift in focus of the global capitalist economy has overall changed.

¹⁶ Hardt and Negri further stress in their 2017 book that, while the corporations behind social media platforms are no doubt powerful, “activists will always find new ways to use information and communication tools” (p.214). As it is a platform that is intertwined with its users, the mechanisms of control can also potentially be subverted in favour of the users (p.221).

Revealing the Limits to Assimilation

Secondly, there are arguably problematic differences between the forms of production categorised as newly prevalent, and the so-called older forms of production, that need to be kept distinct. Hardt and Negri (2010) frame affective labour and knowledge as indistinguishably included in the new central workings of capitalism, forming the umbrella term “immaterial labour” (pp.348-349). By affective labour, they mean the human contact and interaction that produces and manages affects. The “products” of this labour are relationships and emotional responses; they are intangible, and hence “immaterial,” although they have a corporeal aspect and often mix with material forms of labour (Hardt and Negri, 2004, p.96). With trends towards the hegemonic form of labour becoming “immaterial,” this means that “the images, codes, knowledges, affects, and even social relations and forms of life” are incorporated into the central means of production (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p.266). However, it is argued that while included in the same category, clear differences can be seen between “ideas, images, knowledge, code, languages, software, advertisements,” which can be endlessly multiplied with no extra energy, and such things as “social relations, affects, health care, education,” requiring the “same amount of energy every time” (Rigi, 2015, pp.194-195). For instance, you can share a piece of computer code multiple times and it does not require any extra labour, but every moment of working in a call centre requires further physical and mental energy. The significant difference between the constant labour required of affective work and the infinitely expendable functions ascribed to new technologies draws attention to the continued prevalence of jobs that must remain within the limits of physical human exertion.

Essentially, it is because Hardt and Negri's revision of production is strongly rooted in the recent emergence of the software-side of new computer technology that there are limits to the scope of its appropriation. Additionally, Autonomist Marxist Franco "Bifo" Berardi highlights the affective dimension of this issue, focusing on the tension between new technologies and affect. He claims that "the contemporary subject of cognitive capitalism... is not simply a producer of knowledge and a manager of symbols. Capitalism is the mobilization of a pathos and the organization of a mood" (Smith, 2009, pp.9-10). Accordingly, Berardi describes the divorce of the soul, which includes intellectual operations and "affective and libidinal forces that weave together a world" (pp.9-10), from the body. The relation between "sign and referent" disappear during the shift from mechanical to digital (p.110) and the two selves are caught in "two separate worlds happening simultaneously." They try to be fully embedded in a new, limitless digital world, but only reach the limits of where this is possible (p.90). In this sense, alienation is the "submission of the person to the thing," with the machine an animate object versus the body inanimate, separated by consciousness, but now "no longer capable of realizing at what point the otherness of the thing transformed the world of everyday experience, making us estranged from ourselves" (p.111). This is, essentially, a mismatch between the infinite power of the machine and the human experience, which is not infinite (p.158).

However, there are tensions between Berardi's (2009) ideas themselves, and the affective nature of work in the home, at the point when the changes to production are discussed. The claim that a recent increase in enjoyment of work represents "the impoverishment of existence and communication" (p.83) is arguably an oversight to the blurry line between work and leisure. Berardi describes how, under digital

transformation, “the entire lived day becomes subject to a semiotic activation which becomes directly productive only when necessary” (p.90), yet women have long been expected to be on call to be productive on a much longer, or more fragmented scale, than the 40-hour work week (Waring, 1988, p.138). This aligns with claims that the current focus on changes to work only eventuate when “the western male worker began feeling the negative effects of the new post-industrial flexible job market” (Factore, quoted by Gill and Pratt, 2008, p.11). It is apparent when considering unpaid domestic labour and the so-called “naively masculine” view that labour is a curse; something that is done only to escape pain or attain pleasure, with any action being taken to outwit it (Waring, 1988, p.26). At the point that caring for children is considered work, the line between work and pleasure is saliently blurred, further underlying the importance of including care work in the wider context of theory on the nature of work.¹⁷

It is in a similar vein that Hardt and Negri are critiqued for extending the perimeter of capitalism, neglecting that not everything is embedded in capitalist logic yet. Rather, it is claimed that care work is one of the few things that still happens “outside capitalist logics” (Jarrett, 2015, p.114).¹⁸ This is based on the Marxist notion that capitalism is at essence the creation of a market for human labour, along with the typically Weberian focus on a system that progressively rationalises society towards depersonalisation, monetary calculations and increasing technical control over people and nature (Money,

¹⁷ However, other theorists have applied Hardt and Negri’s theories, including the blurring of the public and private sphere and the embedding of the self in the labour process, to describe feminist political movements that focus on the value of domestic labour (Carrol, 2016). Additionally, it has been claimed that the Autonomist Marxist refusal of work was beneficial to simultaneously pursuing “better work” and “less work,” accordingly recognising the fundamental value of domestic labour (Weeks, 2011, 108).

¹⁸ Although, Autonomist Marxist theorist Sylvia Federici (1974) specifies that claiming that domestic labour should be paid is not about struggling to enter capitalist relations, as it has always been part of it. It is “a revolutionary demand not because it destroys capital, but because it forces capital to restructure social relations” (p.81). The discourse around being “inside” or “outside” capitalism will be further discussed in chapter three.

2001). Rather, it is debatable whether all affective labour has in fact already been absorbed by capitalism, and whether it should be; whether all labour, some of which cannot be defined as solely work or love, can be given a monetary value at all. It may not be as simple as putting “proper compensation” on emotional labour, as in some cases doing so questions the validity of friendship or love (Oksala, 2016, pp.292-293). Accordingly, while it is apparent that the break-down between the spheres of private and public are a significant part of Hardt and Negri’s work, it is argued that a more “multi-phasic” incorporation of production into capital is needed so that it is possible for “such activity to exist within an economic framework, but to nevertheless maintain the integrity that comes from its non-market dimensions” (Jarrett, 2015, p.215). This means providing further acceptance of the notion that the work is both “economic but also cultural; material and symbolic; alienated and self actualizing” (p.217).¹⁹ This is beyond the deconstruction of state, family and economic spheres facilitated by Hardt and Negri’s widening of the category of capitalist production. In sum, while the blurring of these spheres is addressed in *Empire*, a problematic divide between them arguably remains in Hardt and Negri’s treatment of affective labour.

Summary

When aligned with Hardt and Negri’s theory of vital change in the social nature of production, the Foucauldian notion of “micropowers” is a theoretical tool that can facilitate the understanding of a subject that is politically empowered, despite being controlled through the body. The domains of “political/public” “home/private” and

¹⁹ While Hardt and Negri (2000) describe struggles as anti-systemic, creative and positive as well as being negative (pp.59-61), the key point of contention is in the exclusivity of each of these categories (in the context of work), as opposed to a true blurring of the lines of the categories themselves.

“business/ economic” are often unquestionably recognised as separate, meaning, for instance, that political engagement can only happen outside of the workplace and the home. Identifying this blind spot means that what was thought of as “private” becomes a potential sphere for resistance. Further, it allows production and consumption to be understood as intertwined, capturing the tension between independence and subordination experienced as both worker and consumer. This breaks down the divide between work and nonwork, increasing the potential sphere for resistance. Hardt and Negri’s and Gibson-Graham’s framing of class identity mean that a diverse range of different and changing identities stay whole within this new framework, rather than being reduced to the shared aspects of a group, like the working class. Identity markers are always relative to each other and in the *process* of transforming into something different, not standalone or fixed, meaning that changes made from moments of interaction between people from very different backgrounds are in itself understood as important change for breaking down the very divides that generate structural oppression in the first place. The fact that this *process* is described as *difficult*, and political action of vital importance, enforces the seriously transformative nature of actions—ones that more people are in the position to be a part of. However, while it is claimed that new forms of production have moved to the centre of production overall rather than taking over altogether, Hardt and Negri are, firstly, critiqued for the lack of focus on the implicit control behind language, and secondly for overlooking the inevitable continuation of the old forms of production behind this new software-based façade, and this technology’s inherent association with power. Thirdly, the difference between the ongoing energy required of affective labour and the infinitely replicable nature of the work online is also overlooked; a mismatch between the infinite power of the machine and the limited energy of human experience. This, accordingly, indicates the

requirement of a further deconstruction of the divide between work and nonwork than what Hardt and Negri provide.

This chapter addresses how Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham's work can help to understand ways of resisting the neoliberal and marketised status-quo while tuning in to the new ways of being in the present world, acknowledging that the way that history is commonly understood can restrict the theorised scope of resistance and transformative constructing of realities. However, a critical analysis of these theorists' work also draws attention to the complexity of negotiating between the subject who identifies with fixed categories of the present versus potentially alterable conditions, specifically concerning the subordination of traditionally feminine forms of labour. The chapter that follows will further explore the tension between identifying the present and leaving space for evolving futures, investigating solutions to these limitations found in Hardt and Negri's works and further focusing on how they compare and contrast with Gibson-Graham's theories.

Chapter 3: As It Is and How It Could Be

The previous chapter concluded that Hardt and Negri's and Gibson-Graham's deconstruction of often unchallenged binaries, as well as the treatment of collective identity formation as a *process*, were useful theoretical tools for understanding how political identities can accommodate new forms of collectivity and individuality. However, it is problematic that the binary between public and private spheres is not adequately addressed, and that the hegemonic nature of more concrete realities is to some extent neglected. This chapter will investigate solutions to these limitations, firstly claiming that it is possible to effectively combine Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham's theories of collective identity formation as a *process* with an acknowledgement of material realities, while maintaining many of the benefits of their work; secondly, it will be argued that the theory of an *unresolvable tension* between the contradictory aspects of time and space, as described by David Harvey (2006), is necessary to sufficiently address the overlap between public and private spheres, and material and abstract realities.

Both Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham's²⁰ work is critiqued for under emphasising how present realities can restrict the changes that can be made, both when the other party has reasons to not want change, and in overlooking the remaining presence of material labour behind the workings of internet-based technologies. Erik Olin Wright (2015) highlights the importance of maintaining an awareness of these conflicting material contexts as a core part of class identity, despite these class locations becoming

²⁰ However, Gibson-Graham et al. (2013) emphasise that they do not suggest a "blueprint" for change, but rather "a commitment to a continual process of 'becoming in common' through refusing the homogenization of identities" (p.11).

more complex with the changing nature of work. Further, combining this with Bourdieu's (1977; cited by Mills, 2008) concept of class in everyday interactions, as interpreted with Carmen Mills' (2008) emphasis on agency, arguably overcomes the limitations of Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham's work, while maintaining the benefits. However, it is necessary to consider both the nature of the space where political engagement takes place, and the ways that this relates to how political change is measured across time. Against Hardt and Negri's theory on the breaking down of previously arbitrary spheres of the public and private, Gibson-Graham approaches this terrain through critiquing treatments of the concept of capitalism itself in historical narrative. As a result, this could be interpreted as enabling a further deconstruction of these spheres than what takes place in Hardt and Negri's work. Nevertheless, a closer exploration of the difference between these two theories reveals a paradox between what will be described as *naming* and *not naming* historical events. Both theories to some extent work at interrupting the assumptions of the status quo, and both *naming* and *not naming* could be understood to represent an empty space, void of historical connotations. Accordingly, this is a paradox that warrants the theorisation of a constantly active tension, between different modes of time and space, and *naming* and *not naming*. It is arguably best to see this as an *unresolvable tension*, as opposed to trying to give preference to one or the other. For instance, many young people identify with neoliberalism, and the theory of an *unresolvable tension* is useful for understanding the multifaceted nature of the relationship between how things are and how they could be.

Recognising Conflicting Material Interests

Acting Within the Rules of the Game

The importance that people from distinctly different backgrounds and positions in the current organisation of society not only debate with one another, but that they do so with an understanding of the implicit controls behind use of language that expose concrete power imbalances between subjects, is overlooked in Gibson-Graham and Hardt and Negri's theories of collective identity formation as a *process*. While Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham claim that due to changes in material realities, it is no longer relevant to have this rhetoric in theories of class, Marxist sociologist Erik Olin Wright (2015) emphasises that there are still conflicting material interests between distinctly different groups of people, meaning that it is necessary and possible to recognise these, despite the destructuring of the workplace requiring sufficiently complex methods of calculation (pp.164-169). Assuming it is not possible to present an alternative to capitalism right at this moment,²¹ one can think of there being *rules of the game* of capitalism (Grusky and Weeden, 2004; cited by Wright, 2015), meaning that not all possible "moves" are available but rather only ones permitted within the present context. Subjects are related to the game in objective ways, and there are certain laws of cause and effect within the game that cannot be altered at this stage (p.169). This means that people forming links of communication across differences are still subject to material restrictions and conflicting cultural norms. While Hardt and Negri (2009, pp.326-329) and Gibson-Graham's (2006, pp. 51-61, 70-71, 204) focus on changing the wider frameworks of status identity could be interpreted to mean that the *rules of the*

²¹ Gibson-Graham would disagree on this point, as they rather understand capitalism as needing to be overthrown gradually, starting with the present moment. This point is further discussed in the next section of this chapter.

game can and will be targeted, the previous examples demonstrate the importance of also taking into account groups with objective material interests. Realising that these sometimes contradict each other means that the way people from different backgrounds connect needs to be considered more carefully. Wright (2015) suggests that while useful for drawing attention to certain issues,²² the problem is, overall, obscured rather than clarified by using class in a way that does not acknowledge conflicting material interests (p.173). Accordingly, this version of class largely opposes what Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham suggest, which is that concretely defined identity markers and groups are a hindrance to political change.

However, some of Bourdieu's work (Mills, 2008) combines these two concepts of class in a way that overcomes the weakness of theories not addressing material interest, while maintaining the benefits of informal attempts at change that target the *rules of the game* themselves. Bourdieu considers that those who are in power are likely perpetuating inequalities that they may not even be aware of (p.10). It is claimed that "while the rules of the game are accepted and it appears as if everyone is free to play and everything is negotiable, more often, it is a game in which the rules are determined by the dominant" (p.14). The rules are played according to how knowledge is not only accessed, but also received and interpreted. It is inseparable from language and expressions themselves, and these are never neutral, but are rather embedded with markers of class background (p.9). This process can sometimes involve certain aspirations or fates being thought of as "unthinkable" or "inevitable" (p.7). For

²² Referring to Guy Standing's Precariat which are described as a class, but Wright claims that it is not useful to define them as a class because they cannot be connected to conflicting material interests. Hardt and Negri's "multitude" is similar.

instance, in a school setting, Bourdieu (Mills, 2008) describes how schools assume middle class attitudes and values in pupils, with any other background regarded a liability. The “cultural capital”, accrued from experiences within family or extra-curricular groups, includes language competencies, implicit and explicit values and knowledge, as well as attitudes to or relationship with academic culture required for success at school. Accordingly, the “habitus” of a student will ideally resemble the values the school seeks to transmit consciously and unconsciously (p.14). This demonstrates how class can be directly embedded in subtle cues of language and behaviour.

At first this may seem incompatible with Hardt and Negri’s (2009, pp.326-329) critique of theories that disable the subject’s ability to change their environment, as Bourdieu is often criticised for leaving no room for subjects to assert agency and make change. However, Mills (2008) perceives a central element of Bourdieu’s theory to be undermining the dualisms of objectivism and subjectivity, structure and agency, and determinism and phenomenology (p.5). In a school setting, this means that on some occasions, students’ outlooks on the future are constrained by their social conditions and conditionings, or maybe even be adapted to wilfully embody the limited options available; on other occasions, they may recognise the capacity for “improvisation” that can generate opportunities for action. Class actors, such as the teacher, can help to change class oppression by simultaneously giving voices to those whose cultural views and experiences are often suppressed, and by making the *rules of the game* explicit enough for those who have not accrued such “cultural capital” to participate, as well as maybe even challenging those rules. Accordingly, this interpretation of Bourdieu aligns well with Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham who, as described in the previous

chapter, also aim to transcend these divides. For example, it is suggested that for Bourdieu, the agency is present when someone in privilege lets those who are less advantaged know the *rules of the game* (p.14). This theory could be used in combination with Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham's concepts of the *difficult* change-making process, whereby the categories of class themselves are transformed through micro-level interactions between people from different backgrounds. It would ensure that a continued critique of objective class positions is considered by political subjects during the process of making new connections. Accordingly, Hardt and Negri's and Gibson-Graham's theories on class as a *process* are useful when combined with more specific theories of class.

Identifying an Unresolvable Tension

The Paradox of Naming and Not Naming

As discussed in the previous chapter, Hardt and Negri's *Empire* is critiqued for not deconstructing the binary between the private and public worlds enough to be useful for advancing feminist aims. This can be further explored through a comparison with Gibson-Graham's work, which better addresses this by understanding productive and non-productive activities as crossing over. A fundamental difference between these two theorists is in the way that the public and private divide is understood to be blurred; for Hardt and Negri, this looks more like a Venn diagram, as the categories themselves remain intact, while for Gibson-Graham it can be imagined that categories are mixed up and disseminated in a mosaic form. Focusing on the historical narrative that underpins these theoretical constructions of reality leads to a challenging of the way that capitalism is portrayed in theory, and how this influences the surrounding discourse concerning what counts as productive. Gibson-Graham (2006) suggest that it is a

specific and unhelpful assessment of history that prioritises major events over smaller actions, and that it is only as a result of seeing the capitalist crisis as a unifying process that it is assumed that “capitalism cannot be chipped away at, gradually replaced or removed piecemeal. It must be transformed in its entirety or not at all” (p.256). This is as opposed to Hardt and Negri (2000), who would consider these gradual, micro-level changes to be only one part of the process of constructing new realities rather than the creation of them (pp.73-74). They would see an *ungraspable event* as when change actually happens (p.28), with the role of social movements “preparing ground for an event they cannot foresee or predict” (p.88). This is centred around the historical phenomenon of spontaneous events that change everything, occurring when individuals each make the same decision to act on an impactful mass scale (pp.86-87). In turn, against Hardt and Negri’s (2000) position, which proposes creating a new reality “within the shell of the old” (p.207), Gibson-Graham’s work describes the deconstruction of the shell-like framework itself. Perceivably, through breaking down the category of capitalism into disjointed and dispersed pieces, the domains of public and private (along with political, social and economic) are too enabled to further morph from their previously conceived forms.

Further, theorists both negotiate between being “inside” and “outside” capitalism. However, Gibson-Graham (2006) describe some parts of the self as embedded in capitalism while other parts are not (p.28), and Hardt and Negri, consider the self to be inescapably embedded in capitalism. For instance, they claim that since the change in dominant form of production that blurs the line between producer and consumer, it is “no longer possible to identify a sign, a subject, a value or a practice that is ‘outside’” (Hardt and Negri, 2000, p.385). As Gibson-Graham (2006) focus on capitalism as a

multi-faceted process, the very fact that the household works outside of these logics is constructed as a powerful force against these capitalist aspects of society. Individual cases are framed as consisting of several conflicting factors of association with production, with some parts of the self embedded in capitalism (as *being* capitalism) while others are not. By theorising the self as never wholly embedded in capitalism, a hybrid of what Gibson-Graham refer to as and capitalist and *noncapitalist* practices (p.28) are seen to be found in even the environments typically considered to be the most capitalist. As Gibson-Graham describe, this means that “economic sites that have usually been seen as homogeneously capitalist may be re-envisioned as sites of economic difference, where a variety of capitalist and noncapitalist class processes interact” (p.18). This allows for the historical framework itself to be rewritten in a way that wholeheartedly incorporates the reproductive nature of labour that was previously written out. It is a solution to the claim that care work is the last thing to be able to fully assimilate into “capitalist logics” (Jarrett, 2015), as everything is theorised to be happening both in and outside capitalism. This makes apparent that changing the underlying narrative behind capitalism itself breaks down the binary between productive and non-productive activities.

However, the remaining question is how change can be measured when there are no concrete signifiers of identity, with historical narrative constantly changing to fit the latest imagined realities. Gibson-Graham sufficiently deconstruct reductively exclusive historical markers, but it is apparent that, like collective identity formation as a *process*, the solution is focussed on constructing relative rather than fixed identities. As they frame the subject as containing parts of a class identity marker but not completely *being* this identity, these theories are mirrored in the construction of wider historical

narrative. This demonstrates that further theoretical tools are needed to understand both. *Not naming* is a term that will be used to describe how Gibson-Graham reject any historical events or markers. The previous chapter explored how not having acceptable language to discuss sexism can lead to *unspeakable inequalities* (Gill, 2014, pp.509-514), whereby the post-feminist assumption that everything is now equal is widely spread in workplaces. This is a case of there being no language to *name* present realities, which are rendered as only acceptable in the past. Alternately, *not naming* in the context of historical trajectory could be interpreted to mean that history is a smorgasbord of identities and experiences to choose from. When workers did experience sexism, issues were largely dismissed as individual problems, comfortably fitting into the perceivably neoliberal notion of the shifting of societal roles onto the individual; becoming unhelpfully rendered as a personal choice or a weakness rather than a structural problem (Dean, 2015, p.52). Similarly, Gibson-Graham (2006, pp.166-167) describe being able to *choose* one's class position as a result of new workplace relationships that distribute the power evenly. While less attention is paid to the clear limitations of free choice, considering that *not naming* history was a solution to the neglect of the productive activities of non-dominant groups as a result of *naming* indicates that neither is the ideal solution. The complex relationship between these two concepts, accordingly, warrants further exploration.

Despite their differences, the notion of the location of space within historical progression is surprisingly similar between Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham, with both framing the self as being in some sense intertwined in space rather than separate from it. Despite the significant differences in constructions of time, theorists share many concepts of collective identity formation as a *process*, as discussed in the

previous chapter. Additionally, as described, the negotiation between the “inside” and “outside” of capitalism for both theorists is used to reframe the problem and solution of its prevalence. This means that it is the very force that sustains the current system that can destroy it (Hardt and Negri, 2009, p59).²³ For both theorists, a subject is theoretically empowered to politically subvert the very mechanisms that are in control. It could be argued that permitting everything to be (in part) outside capitalism, as Gibson-Graham (2006) suggest when they describe even a financier as having *noncapitalist* aspects (p.18), serves a similar focus to Hardt and Negri’s inclusion of everything inside capitalism leading to having the power to exit (with the entire self exiting the system in one go, as opposed to in stages). Although they appear to be opposites, both theorists reappropriate the function of the word capitalism, as a concrete name and placeholder in history, into a fluid and empty signifier. In various ways, both claim that capitalism is everything *and* nothing. For Gibson-Graham (2006), even acts that are seen as the most capitalist include *noncapitalist* aspects, with intention of making capitalism less of an impenetrable force (p.18); for Hardt and Negri, to *name* everything capitalism, similarly, lessens the threat, as it is something that is a part of us, rather than something outside. This confuses the clear divide between *naming* and *not naming*, and it could be concluded that both theories are focussed towards *not naming* in various ways. However, as will be explained, it is not enough to simply position them as both under this category.

²³ This is based off a re-interpretation of Marx’s theory of the progression from formal to real subsumption to describe the forces involved as active and subjective, highlighting that the will of involvement from social subjectivities is a vital part of the process of the resistance to existing forces, leading to a new form of control (Hardt and Negri, 2000, pp.255-256).

Additionally, the space where *not naming* resides is not a straightforwardly empty signifier in the way that it might initially appear. It could be interpreted that Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham both, to some extent, follow the notion of “blank space” or “blank canvas,” as liminal territory with the promise of alternative futures, ignoring the history of labour struggles and racial oppression that previously happened in this space (Dawkins, 2011, pp.266-267). However, Gibson-Graham (2006) describes how widespread use of a “problematic misinterpretation” of the concept of space, which was naturalised with the rise of capitalism between the 17th and 19th centuries, was a “seemingly unproblematic, common sense notion of space as a container or field, a simple emptiness in which subjects and objects are ‘situated’ or ‘located.’” Further, in this construction of “absolute space,” the female (in the traditionally expected role of domestic labourer and mother, or in her role as child bearer) becomes an “empty vessel,” ready to be filled up with identities from the outside (pp.73-74). It renders a female’s influence as only important to history when that empty space is “filled up”; with “a phallus, a child, or a purchased commodity,” and even then it is only a peripheral part of the system rather than at the centre, as the subject of history (p.79). But through a revised conception of history, the self can have relations to things like capitalism without having to be filled up with them to *be*. Focusing on “relative space” enables the subject to be freed from becoming capital and being “caught in a space of no escape” (p.86), instead having access to an “indeterminate” space between capitalism and other things (p.81). Material space can be empty space, while abstract space can, rather than being empty, be the relations between things. This suggests that not only do both *naming* and *not naming* lead to similar results, but they paradoxically overlap.

Accordingly, it is more useful to frame a constantly active paradox between the material and abstract conceptions of time and space, as opposed to trying to claim one of them as more important. David Harvey (2006) holds that the “territorial and capital logics of power differ and are not reducible to each other” (p.xvii), meaning that different frameworks of spatio-temporality have to be kept in constant “dialectical tension” (p.xx). He describes three different frameworks. “Absolute theory” means that space is fixed and unchanging, separate from time, and this needs to be combined with “relative theory,” which assumes that movement itself changes the nature of circulation of commodities, and “relative space-time,” which is time that is “inherent in, and created through matter and process” (p.xx). The notion of this *unresolvable tension* within economics will be appropriated to describe a careful balance between *not naming* realities, for hope of progressing towards new ones, and *naming* realities, in order for them to be recognised. For the purposes of this chapter, cases of *not naming* will be treated as “relative space” and cases of *naming* as “absolute space,” preferring the abstract concept of relative and absolute space, as described by Gibson-Graham (2006), over the specifics of Harvey’s three concepts. This is an important theoretical addition to an analysis of how the success of groups can be measured over time. As described, this concerns both identity markers in space (class identity and the place for change-making social connections) and time (the historical narratives that ultimately shape the way the identity at present and in the future is imagined). Leading into empirical research concerning young people’s engagement with these matters, this chapter will finish with an application of this theory to a more specific setting in order to further analyse how it can be applied to position young people as having change-making agency.

Vanguards of Change or Victims of Circumstance

Young people are uniquely positioned in relation to this *unresolvable tension*, as both issues concerning societies' valuation of unpaid domestic labour such as child rearing, as described in chapter one, and the development of new models of production, are of direct concern to them. As described in the previous chapter, Hardt and Negri's work incidentally allows for a further inclusion of work in the home in theory of political change. A historical break is theoretically constructed, based around the notion that modes of production have changed along with technological advancements that include internet-based technologies. However, work in the home, as well as the emphasis of internet-based technologies, are areas where the multifaceted nature of production is arguably neglected. Accordingly, this chapter focuses on a further breaking down of the binaries between material and abstract realities, as well as productive and non-productive, and public and private. Young people may not yet partake in paid employment, and so are typically dependent on how much society values the intrinsic value of human existence beyond paid employment, such as the work of child rearing. This aligns them with the inclusion of both the unpaid work of their parents/caregivers and their own status as non-workers. They are also born in an era in which the nature of production has changed significantly, along with a major global shift in political structures towards neoliberalism, as described in chapter one. Young people are, accordingly, "native subjects"²⁴ to these technological and political changes. There is an interesting intersection between work in the home and the recent emergence of

²⁴ "Digital natives" is a widely used term to describe young people's assumed familiarity with technology, but according to Helsper and Eynon (2010), there is little research supporting the assumption that young people use technology as if it is their native language, while older people are more like immigrants.

neoliberalism and internet-based technologies, making this a useful practical example for how the *unresolvable tension* between material and abstract worlds functions.

Further, many young people regard themselves as empowered and liberated in the context of post feminism, individualism and neoliberalism, acknowledging that there are gender inequalities but rejecting feminism due to its association with collective political engagement. For some, this kind of engagement has been seen to take away their ability to manage their own lives, in contrast to the weakness of asking for help (Zucker and Bay-Cheng, 2010, p.1909). In fact, young women are described as the “ideal neoliberal subjects... regarded as the beneficiaries of newly advantaging conditions under late modernity, such as gender equality legislation, flexible labour markets and mass consumption” (Scharff, 2012, p.11). This can lead to the straightforward conclusion that they suffer from false consciousness, “mistakenly” identifying with the neoliberal subject position because they do not know anything else. However, as avoiding the understanding of young people as lacking agency is a core focus of this research, the remaining question is whether the ideal solution to involving these people in politics is to match their level of embeddedness in their neoliberalised reality. This is, too, problematic. For instance, sociologist Brian Loader (2007) describes how the solution for youth’s disengagement from politics is typically portrayed in one of two ways in theory. Firstly, it is described as not being young people's fault that they are disengaged, and that rather politicians need to inhabit virtual spaces in order to connect with those “born wired into the digital world;” secondly, that technological changes and new media can be assimilated into old models of politics in order to engage young people (pp.1-2). Neither adequately address what determines the way these technologies have developed. Studies show that young people immersed in

smartphones want their privacy too, with many unaware of the extent of surveillance (p.152). Additionally, it could be argued that the practices that some of these platforms encourage, such as advertising products to children, are unethical (pp.78-79). This, accordingly, demonstrates a careful balance between seeing young people as agents rather than victims, but understanding the contexts that lead to limited available options for acting.

In this sense, *not naming* often represents future alternative potentials, while *naming* acknowledges concrete realities, and neither on its own is ideal. When assigning names and categories to situations, there is a tension that “exists uneasily with the awareness that the divisions between these spheres are nevertheless a fact of our social world and its past which also needs to be taken into account” (Nicholson, 1986, p.11). In order to bring about change that includes diverse groups of people, it is necessary that theory takes into consideration that movements start from where people are, as opposed to where they *should* be. Accordingly, it is useful to apply the notion of an *unresolvable tension* to the divide between concrete and imagined realities, taking context into account while also providing scope for future alternatives. The *naming* of realities continues, to some extent, but with constant negotiation with the possible futures of *not naming*; a concept that can happen both on the level of class identity and the construction of historical narrative.

Summary

Wright’s (2015) theory of the *rules of the game* is important for acknowledging the concretely conflicting material interests between subjects, allowing the way that people from different backgrounds communicate to be more carefully addressed. But while

this could appear to oppose Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham's theories of the extended emancipatory reach of class, Mills' (2008) interpretation of Bourdieu's theory maintains the benefits of imagining subjects as having agency and increasing the sphere of political action, while acknowledging those aspects that were not sufficiently discussed in Hardt and Negri's and Gibson-Graham's work, for instance allowing the alignment of *difficult* change-making processes with a more concerted reflexion on material context.²⁵ Nevertheless, the question remains how change can be measured across time. Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham's theories differ on this matter, and Gibson-Graham's theory focuses on the blind spot created by ignoring the role of women in history in the past, reconstructing the binary of the individual and collective to a further extent than Hardt and Negri. However, while transcending some of the limitations of Hardt and Negri's work, there is a clear paradox between the theorists' treatment of both history and identity formations. While Gibson-Graham professes that everything is in part capitalism, and Hardt and Negri describe *everything* as being capitalism, these theories have clear parallels that confuse the clear divide between what is described as *naming* and *not naming*, and both could be described as either. This leads to the claim that Harvey's theory of an *unresolvable tension* between different concepts of economics is useful for making sense of how Gibson-Graham's notions of "relative" and "absolute" space relate to *naming* and *not naming*. For instance, it is important not to portray young people as lacking agency, even in the cases when they willingly embrace new technology and ideas or behaviours specifically

²⁵ Gibson-Graham's other work has more explicit focus on material context, however. For instance, Gibson-Graham et al.'s 2013 article 'Thinking with Marx for a Feminist Postcapitalist Politics' focuses on multi-faceted nature of power dynamics between academic and community members in their research, and how these are managed (pp.xxix-xxx). Overcoming such difficulties is a significant focus of the Community Economies Research Collective (p.10).

characteristic of neoliberalism. The notion of an *unresolvable tension* helps to understand the interaction between how things are and imagined or alternative realities, separating out such supposedly all-encompassing narrative tools as neoliberalism into several specific and relative processes, while maintaining the connection between imagined solutions and the concrete realities of past and present that people come from when approaching change.

This chapter has provided an insight into some theoretical tools that are useful for understanding the tension between material and imagined realities, and named and unnamed concepts. This builds on the discussion in the previous chapter concerning different ways of being individual and collective. The following chapters will address how these theories help to understand empirical research, and how the empirical research offers further insight into these concepts.

Chapter 4: Methods

In order to explore how young people's engagement with politics is affected by the recent context of work, gender and politics in New Zealand, as well as how theory both helps to understand these contexts and is further understood by them, this chapter describes the methods used to collect the empirical data to be discussed in the following chapters. Participants were students at secondary schools from various cities in New Zealand, and focus group discussions were used to investigate their attitudes towards political engagement and gender equality, amidst the changing nature of work.

The nature of paid employment is currently changing, and this research considers the ways that young people's perceptions of the past, present and future are affected by this. Initial questions, developed in early stages of research design, concerned attitudes towards gender equality/feminism²⁶ and work, and engagement with social change amidst the changing nature of work. Focus groups are useful for highlighting the contextual and socially-constructed nature of knowledge, and young students are a group with an interesting position, both in the changing society and as receivers of unpaid care work. This research project includes two focus groups that were completed in 2016 as part of my honours internship at the Ministry for Culture and Heritage, prior to the commencement of this thesis, and three focus groups undertaken as part of the MA study in 2017. Human ethics approval was granted for both sets of focus groups (see appendix four), and both used activities involving tangible resources to create a relaxed and participant-led conversational setting.

²⁶ The words "gender equality" and "feminism" were alternated in focus group activities in order to include participants who identified with each term, and to encourage discussion about these words

The successful methods of recruitment influenced who was involved in focus groups. Some participants had a specific interest in discussing the issues while others did not, and involvement relied on the sustained commitment of an interested teacher to arrange the meeting together of a group of participants. Data was initially coded using what Braun and Clarke (2013) describe as an inductive approach, with themes being strongly linked to data (see appendix three for graphs outlining each focus groups' coded responses), but this was followed by an explicit shift towards researcher-derived coding. The social dynamics within focus groups, and between focus group participants and me, the moderator, also influenced the nature of discussions. Sometimes it was clear that impressions of formal education spaces determined the nature of topics that students considered suitable to discuss. On these grounds, it is important to be aware of how individual narratives can be lost in focus groups, and that there are limits to defining the socioeconomic influence of student views. However, the focus groups were overall organised in a way that enabled the collection of data that provided some insightful reflection on the research questions and theory.

Outline

The purpose of this research is to better assess how perceived changes to work influence the future and emerging workforce. This is done by, firstly, investigating young people's attitudes to gender equality and work in the context of how they interpret the information that they encounter; secondly, by considering the ways that the capacity for engagement with these issues is perceived by young people. This empirical research initially set out to answer the following questions:

Attitudes to Gender Equality/ Feminism and work:

- How do young people today perceive feminism/ gender equality, and what are the main issues they consider important?
- What types of information regarding gender equality/feminism and work are youth influenced by most and why? How do they read the information they are exposed to?

Engagement with Social Change amidst the changing nature of work:

- To what extent does the way young people perceive work affect their prioritisation of everyday tasks and activities, including acts promoting or advancing social change?
- In what ways are youth perceptions of their capacity to affect social change in the future influenced by their imagining of a life trajectory that is tied to job prospects?
- What aspects of youths' perceptions of the nature of their own agency for change are considered unique to their stage in life and which aspects do they attribute to their generational cohort?
- In what way does youth engagement with these issues align with the literature that describes individual versus collective approaches, and are there any new conclusions to be drawn within this context?

Methodological Procedures

The answers to these questions were explored through qualitative research. I conducted focus groups, which are useful in the context of this research for allowing an analysis of the sense made of generational and structural contexts from a collective and socially-generated level. They are more like the everyday process of social interaction than other qualitative research methods, such as interviews or surveys, avoiding some of the artificiality that can occur due to removal of context in qualitative data collection (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.109). Focus groups are also good for accessing underrepresented views, because people talk to others like themselves rather than the researcher, which is especially relevant for assessing attitudes amongst youth, and allows for detailed accounts of how participants interact with each other. It typically facilitates the generation of unexpected knowledge, encouraging participants' own

vocabulary (p.110). There is also the potential for helping to promote social change through the very act of talking about these issues, and because of this focus groups can be empowering for allowing participants to share their views with others (p.111).

As described in chapter three, young people are uniquely positioned to the aspects of production that are of significant relevance to this thesis; both the feminist concern of care and the recent prevalence of internet-based technologies mean that young people are at the heart of the tension between abstract and material realities. For this reason, it was decided that the participants in these focus groups would be young people, and within the requirements of university ethics approval, students aged 16 and over were targeted. In order to encourage responses that were not overly led by my input, with a conversational atmosphere and enjoyable interaction amongst students, I aimed for between four and six participants to be recruited for each group. According to theorists Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2013), larger groups can be hard for the moderator to manage, while smaller groups are more likely to lack lively conversation, or not include enough different perspectives (p.116). Where possible, participants would be encouraged to sit in a circle formation, so that they could see each other and the moderator could make eye contact to include each participant (Stewart et al., 2007, p.90). Each focus group was planned to last 50-60 minutes in order to fit into a lunch break or class period.

The first activity, continued from the 2016 research, involved handing each participant a photo of a recent celebrity or historical figure (from the women's suffrage movement), with statements that this person had made about gender equality/feminism on the back. The following activities used laminated sheets with questions about political engagement and space to write the answers with whiteboard markers. It was intended to encourage participants to discuss the issue in enough depth to be able to

refine their answers to key ideas to write down. Question prompts were chosen to encourage participants to agree and disagree with each other, rather than just straightforwardly answering the moderator (as suggested by Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.17). Overall, tangible resources were intended to allow me less intervention in the conversation, providing a nonverbal way for the conversation to be kept focused on the topic (see appendix one for more detail on research questions).

Recruitment Process

Participants were secondary school students, recruited from schools and extra-curricular organisations.²⁷ Three of these were class groups, one was an after-school programme group where some participants were friends, and one was a group of people from the same school who shared a particular interest in the subject but did not know each other personally.²⁸ Demographic information is included in appendix two.

The recruitment process influenced participants involved in the focus group discussions in the following ways. Firstly, some participants had a specific interest in discussing the topic, while others did not. Originally it was expected that participants would be recruited by personally responding to a poster posted at their school that encouraged those with a range of viewpoints to discuss issues, but no participants were recruited in this way (Thompson, 2016). For this reason, focus groups were initiated by requesting to work directly with a class group (or after school group) of secondary school students. In 2017, letters sent to principals or deputy principals specified from the start that students be introduced to the study by teachers and asked whether or not they wanted to

²⁷ Some attempt was made to include first year university students, but this was not successful, and was later abandoned due to time constraints.

²⁸ Also see Limitations section for further discussion on this matter.

participate. Additionally, some of the focus groups were arranged to be completed in other cities outside Wellington, in order to widen the scope for schools participating, while avoiding having to put too much pressure on already contacted local schools, and the organisers of some extra-curricular groups were also contacted. In 2017 focus groups (C-E), a small research grant was obtained to allow a café voucher (\$8) to be advertised as provided to each participant for their time, and to hopefully encourage more interest. As done previously, light snacks were also supplied; an important factor in enabling relaxed and lively discussion (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.120) and also for providing modest compensation for the time commitment required. Group D appeared to not have a specific interest in the topic area and so were more likely to participate with the incentive of a voucher, but groups C and E seemed happy to participate regardless. For Groups A and B, students either chose to take part to get out of a scheduled class or had their class replaced with my focus group (with their permission), so not all were necessarily committed to the conversation. In Group B a participant chose to sleep for most of the discussion, and in Group A, one participant chose to contribute very little. This indicates that the recruitment process led to some participants with a less direct interest in the topic being involved than what was originally intended.

Secondly, significant commitment was required from students or teachers to organise a group to participate, further influencing the social dynamics of groups that agreed to participate in the research. The involvement of a group of friends was originally required for recruitment (Thompson, 2016), although focus groups ended up being acquaintances due to ongoing difficulties recruiting groups of participants. In 2017, there were a few responses from participants who were notified about the study

electronically via university or friend networks, but they were individual people and did not reply after I asked them to find three others to participate with (to make up the requirement of at least four participants). This suggests that it takes significantly more effort to coordinate a group than to agree to participate in an existing project as an individual. The resulting involvement of participants through teachers meant that they took on this commitment instead. Posters were primarily sent electronically to teachers, and in some cases these were reportedly shown to a group of students when asking if they wanted to take part. Others had the information recalled to them in a newsletter, email or verbally by the teacher that I contacted. It seemed like agreement to participate relied on a main teacher showing personal interest in the project and going to significant effort to get their students engaged, or else supervising a keen student in getting other students engaged (Group A). Judging by students' responses in one of the focus groups ("... 'cause, like, Miss Bennet²⁹ emailed me like five times about it..." - Group C) they each got significant reminders about the project from their deputy principal rather than organising themselves, even though the teacher mentioned advertising the focus groups in the school's newsletter. On other occasions, several follow-up emails or a phone call were vital to getting a response from teachers at all (Thompson, 2016), and many responded that they were too busy to be involved. Accordingly, this time commitment likely resulted in some schools, or students, not participating. This demonstrates the significant role of the teacher (or leader) in mediating between this study and students that agreed to take part. The consequences of

²⁹ Pseudonyms used

students being recruited to the study individually, rather than in groups, will be further explored in the Limitations section of this chapter.

Data Analysis

As with the 2016 honours project, VUW Human Ethics Approval was received (see appendix four for Ethics Approval, and appendix five and six for Participant Information Sheet and Consent Form). Recording of data included taking note of the wider context of the focus group environment, group dynamics and activities, as well as audio recordings of discussions themselves. Few notes were taken during discussions, in order to maintain a relaxed and casual atmosphere, but a journal entry concerning the setting of each group was completed afterwards to ensure that the wider context was recalled. This included seating plans and any initial impressions about the focus groups overall. Completed laminated sheets were also photographed. Focus groups were all fully transcribed from the audio recordings, including overlapping speech and indication of significant noises or inaudible utterances.

The data was then coded and grouped using an inductive approach, which involves themes being strongly linked to data (Braun and Clarke, 2013). Described as “complete coding,” a word or phrase capturing the essence of each piece of data was identified in accordance with relevance to research questions, before becoming more selective (Braun and Clarke, 2013). This was done through several stages of inserting relevant data into table form, to separate out different types of responses, before arranging these into separate files for what became key themes across all focus groups. The names and groupings in each file were progressively adjusted to increase the cohesiveness and independence of each theme. This started with the obvious crossovers, before more

careful groupings were made. Small paragraphs were written at the top of each file, summarising each theme, and categories were altered to become more coherent.

Lastly, the writing stage involved explaining how the set of data for each theme related to the theory. While the initial process was focussed on identifying themes from the data, to some extent independent from theory, the next stage involved an explicit shift towards researcher-derived coding. This means that at first the content of the data was intentionally prioritised, “mirroring participants’ language and concepts” (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.207), before introducing interpretation that went “beyond the explicit content of the data,” meaning that at this stage theory shaped an analysis of “the assumptions and framework that underpin what is said in the data” (p.207). Five themes were identified (see appendix three for graphs outlining this final stage of coding), and these were then arranged into three theory chapters, more closely matching the coded data with theory. Adequately combining data and theory was difficult to negotiate through the later stages of processing data. Some sections of the coded data, such as discussion about social media, were omitted due to space constraints as they did not clearly fit with the theory. Additionally, while most of the initial research questions were answered to some extent, the question “what aspects of youths’ perceptions of the nature of their own agency for change are considered unique to their stage in life and which aspects do they attribute to their generational cohort?” was not. However, the data generated to address the other questions seemed to fit in a more interesting way with the theory, and was worthy of being focussed on with enough depth for the length of this thesis. In sum, the overall discussion on findings from this research is the result of a careful balance between data and researcher-derived coding.

Limitations

As stated in the Recruitment Process section of this chapter, due to difficulty recruiting from posters directed at participants themselves, it was decided to encourage class groups to participate. This meant that the dynamics of some of the groups was quite different to groups of friends responding to a poster, and indicates participants were not directly interested in the topic or else were not intuitively comfortable engaging with other group participants. These are some reasons that led to me directing the conversation more significantly than planned. However, I believe I challenged and encouraged the participants' views in a way that built on the responses they had already given. Rather than too heavily determining what was discussed, this required them to further reflect on their thoughts. However, overall, there was much variety in how I interacted with each focus group. In Group C students were eager to discuss the issues, and so I was only involved to occasionally direct the conversation back to the relevant questions or to introduce a new question; in Group E, even though students continued a lively discussion of their own accord and directed each other back to the relevant topics without my input, similar encouragement to further reflect on responses was provided as with Groups A and B. Additionally, as a Masters student with little association with young people aged 16-18, I was approaching their familiar world as in many ways an outsider. This meant that at times I was genuine in asking for further clarification of terms and ideas that were familiar and taken-for-granted amongst members of the group.

In a few cases participants asked me for clarification on facts, such as the historical background of one of the photos handed out, and I attempted to rather draw the attention back to participant-driven discussion. However, at times it was apparent that I

was taking a position that reminded participants of a teacher, despite deliberate attempts to avoid being overly authoritative. This was especially the case in Group D, which was different to the other groups as it was not in a school setting. Additionally, some participants seemed unfamiliar (or uncomfortable) with various conventions of the focus group itself, such as the reading component and the use of personal anecdote to discuss ideas in depth. In this case it was necessary to significantly prompt a majority of the participants. In this discussion, one participant (Pākehā male) significantly dominated the conversation while the other three (from Māori and Samoan backgrounds) needed constant prompting and did not provide too much depth on many of the topics. Participants initially looked perplexed at all the pages of paperwork (Participant Information Sheet, Consent Form, Focus Group Rules and Demographic Slip); while I read everything aloud in an attempt to avoid feelings of inadequacy or intimidation, in retrospect, it would have been beneficial to ask participants more about what they wanted. Maybe if participants most comfortable reading had helped the others, I would have avoided setting a precedence for closely directing the conversation and stifling most of the interaction between the less vocal participants. It is possible that at least one of the participants did not speak English as a first language, or else several participants usually only associated reading with school and so were not entirely comfortable reading in what was meant to be a causal focus group session.

Additionally, there is no doubt that interactions between participants in the school groups were, to some extent, shaped by pre-existing dynamics of classroom interaction. Students thought of as successful in the classroom tended to take a similar place of dominating or mediating the conversation. In Groups A and B, the student whom the teacher assigned to come and meet me at the reception was the one who ended up most

significantly dominating the conversation; in Group C, it appeared that the student who met me was quite revered by other participants for her academic achievements, meaning that her readiness to lead the conversation and reinforce others' responses helped lead to everyone else's participation. By the same token, as participants were presumably on classmate (or after school programme attendance) terms rather than friends, they had explicitly diverse opinions in Groups B, D and E. In Groups B and D this required me to mediate between different opinions. It is possible that one or two people with stronger or more opposing views were more restrained, perhaps in order to accommodate the different thoughts of others in the group, or else "watered down" their views slightly in order to keep the conversation less argumentative. There is also potential that at times points of view were more polarised, or that participants were persuaded by opposing arguments. This process played out in a very explicit way in Group E, where some participants clearly positioned themselves as having different viewpoints to others, but also directly acknowledged that they were being persuaded by other perspectives as the focus group progressed. In other groups, it was more implicit that different viewpoints were being negotiated within the group.

Even if not apparent in the data at face value, it is important to be aware of the implications in focus groups for individual narratives to be lost (Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.113). However, by the same token, knowledge itself is socially constructed. Feminist academic Sue Wilkinson (1998) suggests that while focus groups are applauded as being more useful for assessing wider contexts of participants, bits of data are often extracted by themselves and analysed like interviews rather than acknowledging how the conversation itself is instrumental in constructing the knowledge (p.112). Accordingly, I have included larger extracts of dialogue between

participants, and made apparent who said what when there are opposing views (using pseudonyms to ensure anonymity). This is also important to avoid the tendency of prioritising certain contradictory responses over others (p.118). In Group D, participants were most explicitly restricted by the convention of the focus group itself. One participant had a strong opinion and other participants tended to say that they agreed, although it is possible that they were doing so to avoid confrontation or to give me the “right answers.” Nevertheless, thematic data analysis inherently prescribes responses themselves be taken at face value, giving only limited attention to what was intended by the responses. Although the length and time-restraints of this project do not allow both Thematic Analysis and Critical Discourse Analysis to be used, doing so would provide significant insight on the social dynamics involved in the construction of the knowledge itself. However, when keeping in mind these tendencies, the spontaneity of the themes and common taken-for-granted descriptions that did arise through the data provided an in-depth insight into the research topic of this thesis.

Lastly, for my study, it seemed too difficult to frame a demographic question that effectively provided a coherent and non-confronting impression of how participants identified with class. While not concretely determining the background of specific participants, the decile ranking of school groups in this study (see appendix two) helped to generate a general sense of the socioeconomic background of students, and overall culture of the school. A similar socioeconomic marker for the After-School group was determined based on the same census data used to calculate deciles. The decile system in New Zealand determines how much state funding is allocated to each school, and it is calculated based on information taken from the Census of Population and Dwellings, with each school given a ranking between one and ten. Each ranking is ten percent of

New Zealand schools, and it is calculated according to percentage of households with income in the lowest 20% nationally, percentage of employed parents in the lowest skill level occupational groups, household population, percentage of parents with no educational qualifications and percentage of parents receiving income support benefits. The lower decile schools, accordingly, get more state support, while the higher decile schools get less (Ministry of Education, n.d.). However, discourses in the media have suggested that the fact that some lower socioeconomic families live in high socioeconomic areas limits the effectiveness of the redistribution of funds, and that the increasing level of disparity between lower and high decile areas means that the higher decile schools are reportedly still at a marked advantage financially (“Time Running Out for Decile Funding System,” 2014). While attempts were made in the present study to include groups from a range of backgrounds, most of the schools that agreed to participate were higher decile. Accordingly, the potential favouring of higher socioeconomic backgrounds, as well as a complexity beyond the socioeconomic assumptions underlying this research, needs to be remembered. Nevertheless, my research does not aim to provide an accurate cross-section of young people, but rather to offer rich qualitative insights into how some young people think about these issues.

Summary

This research set out to understand how the future and emerging workforce interpret changes to work, in the context of engagement with social issues and gender equality. In order to grasp how this knowledge is socially constructed, through the lens of young people themselves, focus groups were conducted with small groups of secondary school students. They were designed to encourage relaxed but stimulating conversation between participants in their existing classroom or extracurricular activity time.

Tangible, interactive, and non-confronting activities were used, with the intention of limiting the amount of intervention from me, the moderator, although actual intervention was varied between groups. The recruitment process was inevitably affected by the time commitment required, and this determined the social connections between participants who agreed to take part. To some extent, deliberate efforts were made to include participants who were not specifically interested in the subject matter, so as to ensure diverse viewpoints. Additionally, Human Ethics Committee approval required that participants agree to certain guidelines and conditions of participation, including confidentiality. Data was coded using thematic analysis, according to methods outlined by Braun and Clarke (2013). The initial processes involved a conscious prioritising of data over theory; the writing stage entailed a shift from a data-driven approach to more explicitly research-driven organising of data, and so the end result is a combination of both. Along with a realisation of the constant negotiation between theory and data underlying the processing of data, I note the limitations of this research as follows. Firstly, I ended up leading discussions in some groups, due to the recruitment of participants who were not intuitively comfortable with one another, although this was arguably done in a way that encouraged further depth of discussion around already emerging ideas. Secondly, the convention of the focus group design itself and its completion in a school setting prioritised forms of knowledge such as reading that were expected in this type of environment, and some students interacted with each other in a way that was significantly influenced by the dynamics of classroom interaction. As a result, some participants did not discuss issues comfortably. Thirdly, it is important to be aware of the limits of thematic data analysis for fully capturing the power dynamics behind the way that participants interacted, although incorporation of Wilkinson's (1998) emphasis on a discussion-centred processing of the

data partly acknowledges this. Lastly, it must be taken into account both that the socioeconomic backgrounds of most participants in this study are generally higher than New Zealand's average according to the measuring of deciles, and that an accurate sense of background of participants can only in part be captured by the demographics collected.

This chapter provides context for the data discussed in the following chapters.

Understanding this, as well as limitations of the data that has been collected, allows for the findings to be interpreted in a balanced and adequately critical way. The findings of this research have been divided into three chapters, initially based off the themes generated through data-generated analysis and then adjusted to more closely resonate with the theory discussed in the previous two chapters.

Chapter 5: Engaging with Others as Vital but Hard

This is the first of three chapters that focus on findings from the collected empirical data, and the parallels that can be drawn with theory. It will explore how young people positioned themselves within their social group, and what social formations for political change were seen as ideal. Chapter six, “Political Engagement in Formal and Physical Spaces”, will address the space where political engagement is seen to take place, exploring the divide between the workplace, society and home; chapter seven, “Identities and ‘Labels’ to Choose or Overcome,” will concern how identities constructed through historical narrative affect this space.

The chapter is divided into two sections. Connections will be made with the discussion in chapter two concerning collective identity formation as a *process*, as well as claims in chapter three that it is useful to also combine this theory with the notion of conflicting material interests involved in collective identity formation. The first section addresses the function of people discussing who they know in constructing political meanings and realities, considering how this frames participant views on feminism. Referring to friends with opposing views helped participants to more comfortably bring up viewpoints that were contrary to opinions of other participants, and similarly, referring to older role models who were feminist meant that feminism was framed as an acceptable and normal topic of discussion. The way that familiar people were discussed also in part indicated an implicit marking of class identity, but referral to male friends not understanding feminism cut across these notable measures of class, adding interesting insight into Gibson-Graham’s concept of *nonclass*. The second section concerns direct conversation relating to the ways that engaging with others was seen by participants as important for change. “Meeting like-minded people” (one of the cards

handed out, see appendix one) was often discussed as only being useful when combined with other actions, while meeting people with different opinions was considered by many groups to be more important, and fundamental to change. The difficulty of the process of changing both the self and others for this to be possible was inferred to some extent, drawing interesting connections with Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham's theories of transitioning rather than fixed identities. However, the complexity behind claims of others needing "knowledge" in order to understand hints at prevailing hegemonic dynamics between the participants and the perceived or known other, aligning with theoretical claims of the importance of maintaining consideration of conflicting material interests. Accordingly, it is useful to combine the previously discussed notions of transitioning identity with Bourdieu's theory of how class identity is embedded in other forms of power. Seeing participant responses using this theoretical lens enables the richness provided by these combined concepts to be understood as arising from the data.

Conjuring Friends as Others or Allies to Legitimise Views

In Group C, in particular, it became apparent that this discussion was serving the purpose of allowing these students with similar interests to meet and share ideas with like-minded people, and it is interesting that in three of the focus groups, participants discussed how their friends would think differently to them or what people were saying in the group.

Cass: It was really hard trying to explain to my friends like where I was gonna be

Phoebe: Yeah

Cass: Like, like

Phoebe: See, I just didn't bother

[Laughs]

Shawna: Just like, sure

Sophie: Neither

(Group C);

Tim: ... especially around my group of friends, like if you say the word feminism, it's just like "ahhh feminists"... [growling] "feminists, feminists!"

(Group E);

Joseph: ... when I hear feminism I especially think that- I hate the Milo

Yiannopoulos³⁰ stuff, but the friends I have are on his side of ethics and that

(Group D).

This brings to question whether the lack of opportunity for young people to discuss these issues with like-minded people hindered the availability of social groups to sign up for these focus groups (building on the discussion in chapter four), and leads to interesting predictions about how the disparate nature of these conversations would be different if people were with their friends. It aligns with Braun and Clarke's (2013, p.115) methodological discussion about the complexity of claiming that participants are homogeneous. They suggest that, contrary to many claims in literature, encouraging recruitment of people who know each other might inhibit free discussion of issues, such as if group norms suppress dissenting views. For these young people it seems apparent

³⁰ Controversial British journalist, critic of feminism.

that they have different perspectives to their friends on these issues, and these views may not get the chance to develop as a result. Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham's focus on playing explicit attention to the difference between alignments *within* a group, as opposed to focusing on similarities, is useful for bringing out this insight.

On the other hand, as a result of groups at times containing opposing viewpoints, it seemed that participants mentioned their (non-participating) friends in a way that in part neutralised the conversation. So, by the same token, it is likely that the last two comments involved the participant situating themselves in the group; distancing themselves from their friends, as a way of making the ideas that they were talking about more acceptable. For example, in Group D, other participants presented opposing views to the participant who made this comment; when asked directly, they said that they agreed, assumingly to avoid confrontation. Accordingly, it is likely that the participant with opposing views made clear that his friends believed the things more than him, prior to talking about viewpoints that he sensed other participants disagreed with. In Group E, the participant was also faced with some opposition to his ideas of "gender equality" being a better term to use than "feminism". Because of this, he seemed to attempt to distance himself from these ideas, or else was actively reflecting on the normative contexts where his ideas originated. This technique was also used in order for participants to feel less alone in their beliefs, conjuring allies for comfort. Another participant referred to his female friends at work as sharing in his experience of being discriminated by gender, in a way that perhaps added further support to his perspective of males being discriminated against, which none of the other participants in the group directly shared. This is an example of how meeting people with different opinions is a

difficult process, as described in theory, but how semiotic tools can be used to counter conflicting material views.

Similarly, it seemed that anecdotes of older role models identifying as feminist were important to participants enforcing or legitimising their own comments or beliefs, although this was more indicative of where their knowledge came from than the need for symbolic support from those outside the group. In Group D (where some had never heard of feminism) and A (where participants were opposed to using the word as an identity marker), participants did not identify themselves as feminists, and in Group B the one participant who identified as feminist did not talk about any older role models. However, participants in Group C talked about older people in their lives who acted favourably around issues of political engagement. For example, one participant told a story of her aunty wearing an outrageously fashionable outfit while working in a hospital and standing up for abortion rights, and another told a story of her cousin being the youngest member to be a partner in a high-profile professional firm; a participant described how “this woman I know has a t-shirt that literally says ‘feminism is the radical concept that men and women are equal’and it’s, it’s amazing.” These examples indicate how participants have older feminist role models that encourage them to also be feminists. Similarly, in Group E, a participant described how her mother told her about what feminism means and why she should be a feminist. Accordingly, this aligns with Zucker and Bay-Cheng’s (2010, pp.1987-1918) claim that exposure to positive factors in feminism, such as having a family member who is feminist, correlated with an increase likelihood of self-identification, while for others the stigmatisation and extremist/negative connotations which have been associated with feminism were perceivably unchallenged. Being feminist could, in turn, be connected

to Christina Scharff's (2012, p.16) findings that people from disadvantaged backgrounds may not be familiar with the term feminism, or else may associate it with educated or privileged women.³¹ This indicates the extent to which people you know influences your ideas and use of language, connecting with Bourdieu's notion of the class connotation behind words themselves (Mills, 2008), as this indicates how the word feminism comes to mean different things depending on association with people in more or less privileged positions in society.

However, it must be realised that Group E was a decile ten school, and participants were still widely aware of the stigma towards feminism out of school as well as amongst their peers, to the extent that they described how their teacher had banned the word feminazi³² in her class. This aligns with Gibson-Graham's (2006) claim that it was necessary to recognise "the intersection of very different class and nonclass processes and positions" (p.54), which can be seen particularly in the way that male use of feminism is discussed in several groups. This may also have been overlooked by Scharff (2012), whose book was called *Young Women and Feminism*, and accordingly would not have been focussed on males. One participant directly drew attention to how only the female half the room identified as feminist:³³

Sandra: Can I just point something out?

Tim: Yeah

³¹ However, there is no doubt that there have always been strong movements of women that are in socioeconomically disadvantaged groups (either identifying with aims similar to feminists or directly calling themselves feminist), as also discussed in chapters one and seven.

³² Term associated with stigma towards feminism, discussed in introduction and chapter seven.

³³ Point discussed further in chapter seven

Sandra: The only people in here that have a problem with feminism/

Tim: Are the boys?

Sandra: Are the males

[Laughs]

Further, on more than one occasion, participants in Group C told anecdotes of their male friends not understanding feminism. Similarly, in Group B, participants described how people at their (co-ed) school (which, they told me, had such things as a feminist club and Amnesty club) did not have a problem with the term, but that the nearby boy's college would have. They joked that if I advertised my focus groups at their school, the posters would probably be "ripped down." One of the stories Group E described was of the stigmatisation of feminism in a male-dominated workplace (through casual use of the word "feminazi"). So while the stigmatisation of the term feminism was by no means used by only males, there is indication that this is one of the intersecting processes alongside class. This is another way that it is useful to combine the insight into the widened domain of class, which collective identity formation as a *process* provides, with Bourdieu's analysis of the signifiers of conflicting material interests implicitly embedded in language.

Meeting People with Different Perspectives to Make Change

With several groups, the topic of meeting like-minded people led to a discussion on engaging with people who hold different opinions as being important to change.

Everyday social connections between different people is described by Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham as in itself an important change-making *process*; similarly, participants described meeting like-minded people as only a starting point leading to

other changes involved in engaging with people with different opinions (Group C), such as protests (Group D, E). In Group E, participants emphasised that you should not be talking to like-minded people, but rather the opposite. Activities that involved talking to people were described as the best way to bring about change, as they were the most effective, considering the small amount of effort involved. A participant in Group C said “none of us should content ourselves with just being around people who make us feel validated in our opinions.” Additionally, participants in this group emphasised that people should “go out of their way” to engage with people with different perspectives, and that this was how change happens. “Peoples’ perspectives get challenged on an individual level and then it’s like a ripple effect ‘cause they go out and... like, challenge other people... etcetera, etcetera.” This, accordingly, demonstrates a practical setting where the theoretical notion of collective identity formation as a *process* can be seen.

However, the manner that it was effective to communicate with others was carefully specified by Groups A and C. In Group A, a participant described how it was necessary to

make an opinion that isn’t harsh and isn’t going to cause that much controversy and just preaching equality not, ‘you’ve been discriminating against us,’ because that’s only going to make things worse.

In a similar vein, participants in Group C described how it was not worth “rant(ing)” to people who did not want to listen, and that in general it was not a good idea to “preach” to people, but rather “engage in conversation.” It was discussed how it is important not to “seem like holier than thou” as this is not going to persuade people, “cause it’s easy to feel like, ah yes, I am... so woke, so feminist. You are... like, regressive and... stuck

in the past, and you should be listening to me, cause that's just not helpful?" Interacting rather than conversations being one-sided was also considered important; not "confront(ing) aggressively," but rather making an effort to "positively engage with people." One participant joked that she had been banned from family conversations after being like that once, suggesting that perhaps this was an ongoing negotiation for some. These accounts of the specifics of how to communicate with other people suggest that some level of personal change, or in the very least monitoring of one's own behaviour, is needed in order to change others. Accounts of the difficulties involved in some ways resonate with the notion of a *difficult process* described in literature as eventuating due to the self being a part of the change. However, the following section will address the notable tension between this treatment of imagined futures and concrete realities.

"Just Knowledge" as a Signifier of Class

Parallels with the *difficult process* of meeting non-like-minded people are also found in the discussion of inner prejudice. Participants in multiple groups resonated with Kate Sheppard's referral to the "barrier of prejudice" (see appendix one) as being something that is still relevant today (Groups A, E), and that goes beyond electoral privileges (Group A). Similarly, in Group E, participants identified with this phrase, because even if you have the right to vote, it does not necessarily mean that you will. This connected with significant discussion about the importance of "having enough knowledge." For example, In Group A participants discussed how they would

Liam: probably vote

Jack: I have enough knowledge, yeah.

Olivia: Yeah, I think, as long as you're educated on it and you feel like you have a standpoint.

The general concept of not having enough knowledge was discussed to a certain extent in all of the groups, with most referring to others not having enough rather than themselves. Accordingly, the aspect of the *difficult process* that involves others having to change as well brings out a more complex dimension of this narrative of change, and this will be discussed.

The people who did not understand were at times presented as having agency; being directly responsible for their actions as opposed to being unable to access information out of circumstance. For example, in Group B, there was more attention paid to how people choose to remain ignorant; how they were “just blind,” did not care, were not paying attention, or were only interested if directly impacted themselves.³⁴ But people without knowledge were also presented as agentless and victims of circumstance due to the pervasiveness of inner prejudice. In Group E, a participant explained how “when we grow up, we don’t really get a choice in what we think, like you grow up with your family and your environment and, whatever; that environment is just what you can sometimes become.” This is the same as how in Group C a participant said “I can’t put myself in their shoes when... I’ve been brought up” (to think otherwise); in Group A, a participant explained how “we tend to have these generations of generations of bias and prejudice that come up and it’s really hard to break those mind-sets that keep coming through.” Further, some groups expressed frustration towards this situation. For

³⁴ Group D’s discussion around inner prejudice was quite different to other groups, with one participant referring to women’s lack of interest in entering the workforce as itself causing a gender pay gap and being the problem that needed to change/ might change of its own accord over time.

example, in Group B, the problem with voting was discussed as being that people did not have “enough knowledge” and for some participants, this was at times intertwined with a helplessness and confusion about the enormity of the problem of others not understanding. This was prevalent in Group C, when many expressed feeling overwhelmed by how little others understood, and it seemed to be a large and unfathomable problem. One participant said “I just CANNOT comprehend WHY they think that ‘cause it just seems SO counterintuitive.” This notion of the pervasiveness of environmental context on identity formation, notably, parallels the theoretical tension between politics starting from the embeddedness of current context, and providing scope for alternative imagined futures, as discussed in chapter three. Similarly, the theory aligns with how participants discussed the conflict between making change and acknowledging the context that shapes who people are.

By the same token, participant discussions around “knowledge” raise the question of what this “knowledge” is really like from the perspective of the people that participants refer to as “knowledge-less,” and how it is acquired. For instance, implicit reference to knowledge being held by a dominant group can be seen in use of the word “they.” Several groups repeatedly referred to a “they” that were uninformed and perhaps blamed for lack of change. This is in the sense that participants said that everyone had to be involved in change-making actions, such as voting, for them to matter. As described above, participants also understood it to be possible to get through to those with different beliefs with the right approaches to conversation and in certain circumstances. The key problem was that, in order for this to work, “they” had to be willing to listen; if they did not, there was nothing you could do. This is demonstrated in the ideas that Group C discussed:

Anahera: This sounds bad, but like [...] don't waste your time... ranting on to someone that doesn't want to listen/

Shawna: Yeah/

Cass: That's true

Sophie: Yeah, nah I get ya

Cass: That's true/

Shawna: Just move on, like

Anahera: They don't wanna listen, they're not gonna listen, they're not gonna do anything about it.

In this sense, it draws attention to the potential limits of Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham's theories of class as a *difficult process* to explain the specific process of inner change as it likely occurs. Potentially subtle expressions of power, from either the participants or whomever they construct as the misinformed others, are not accounted for. Accordingly, there is no room for questioning if what is described here involves different beliefs or identities being subconsciously prioritised in alignment with already hegemonic forms of culture.³⁵ This means further tools, such as Bourdieu's concept of class, are useful for negotiating the subtle differences between ideology and identity. Bourdieu frames the implicit and explicit values and knowledge as themselves carrying the culture of the dominant class, which allows for further investigation into what is meant by "just knowledge."

³⁵ See chapter seven for further examples of this tendency.

However, a suggestion that the use of the phrase “just knowledge” is related to class hegemony must not be mistaken as trivialising participants’ claim of wider societal views needing to change. In Group B, the term was used when describing the Roast Busters scandal— when a group of teenage males posted pictures on social media of getting young women intoxicated to sexually assault them, and the police were accused of not adequately responding to the crimes (“Roast Busters Scandal: Police Chief Admits Mistakes,” 2013). Participants described how “some people didn’t believe those girls because they thought they were just playing up.” Because of this, people having knowledge (referred to as “culture change” after I prompted the term) was described as the hardest thing, but the thing that needs to happen. Group C also referred to rape culture as a tangible and concrete issue, because people refuse to accept that it exists, or that there is a problem. Rather, an understanding of the possible place of class hegemony in this discourse could help to explain some of the unknowns of how these unfathomable ideas, that participants describe, became common knowledge in the first place. Bourdieu’s theories entail that class is something that is entrenched in the way that knowledge is not only accessed, but also received and interpreted. It is inseparable from language and expressions themselves, and these are never neutral, but rather accrue associations with class background. As a result, it seems likely that class rebellion, whether recognised by the actor or not, is played out through reappropriation of what is considered by the more dominant class as simply knowledge or common sense. Rather than trying to frame an “either/ or” rhetoric between actual and imagined realities it is, accordingly, beneficial to understand these ideas through the theoretical lens of an *unresolvable tension*. The benefits of using this theory to interpret data will be further discussed in the following chapters.

Summary

Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham's focus on the differences, rather than similarities, between alignments to identity within a group, is useful for exploring how diversities of opinion and experience function, and the conversational tools used to navigate this.³⁶ Participants regarded people they knew as important sources and justifications for ideas about gender equality/ feminism that were discussed in the group, and there is also potential that the focus group provided a process for participants to reposition themselves to feminism in a different way to their normative friend group. However, the concept of *nonclass* processes that happen alongside processes of class was helpful for understanding how feminism can function as both a class-based signifier and have alignment with gender. Further, the way that participants described engaging with people with different opinions aligned with claims in theory that the *difficult process* of interacting with people from very different backgrounds was itself political change. Nevertheless, the "they" that participants repeatedly referred to as being unable to change could be understood as a class-based signifier, and Bourdieu's work adds a valuable dimension to the difficult change-making process by understanding class discourse as intrinsically embedded in language itself. On the other hand, it is undoubtable that these participants were also referring to some very real violent behaviour that needed to be changed. Accordingly, it is useful to practically adopt the notion of *unresolvable tension*, as opposed to trying to claim either the hegemonic

³⁶ Further research on this matter could focus on how personalised use of technology affects how young people understand negotiating difference of opinions during face-to-face communication with friends and acquaintances. This is in part addressed in chapter six.

language shaping imagined realities, or the inescapable embeddedness of present context in destructive behaviours, as more important.

This chapter has demonstrated how Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham's theory of collective identity formation as a *process* is a useful lens for understanding the complexity and richness of how young people discuss politics. Notably, participants are to some extent aware of the underlying tension between this notion, and the continued presence of conflicting material interests embedded in language itself. The following chapter will focus on how Hardt and Negri's theory on the *false duality* between public and private domains is important for understanding the complex relation between the concrete location of young people in relation to neoliberalism, and the construction of political agency.

Chapter 6: Political Engagement in Formal and Physical Spaces

The previous chapter focussed on how knowledge in focus groups was constructed by the way participants engaged with one another, and how participants more generally understood engaging with others to be political. This chapter is about how participants described political engagement within the formal and physical spaces where social connections were made. These concepts are traditionally understood as collective and public, and in opposition to political engagement that is individual, private, and informal. It has been divided into two parts. The first part addresses how shifts between accounts of reality “as it is,” and impressions of how things could or should be, relate to the theoretical blurring of the perceived divides between these spheres; the second part will make the case for the importance of Hardt and Negri’s theoretical tools, regarding how the nature of political agency changes along with production. This avoids the straightforward positioning of youth as the individualist neoliberal subject.

Participants in some groups indicated that there were distinct divides between paid employment and political action, and as opposed to fitting with Hardt and Negri’s claim that shifting to online-based forms of production leads to more dispersed forms of power, participants described control at work as being top down and authoritarian. Further, in some groups, work-related disputes were only discussed at an individual level, aligning with Weeks’ (2011) claim that the workplace is a separate domain to the political, where issues are individual as opposed to collective. However, these tendencies were conflicted in other groups with the notion that getting a good job was an important way to improve gender equality, meaning that in this sense the workplace was seen as political. Nevertheless, in this case being able to change the wider

structures once in a high-status position was not discussed, nor the structure of work itself. When gender disparities at work were discussed by any groups, it was in the context of being an individual with equal rights to compete as opposed to a collectively oppressed group. However, it is important to not portray young people as simply mystified victims of neoliberal oppression. In this sense, Hardt and Negri's work is useful for offering an alternative to this narrative. It allows participant descriptions of lower-level workers doing small things that are important for change, and critiques of the separate domains of work and politics, to be understood as political. Further, participants framed individual and collective forms of political engagement in less mutually exclusive ways than typically understood in theory. Careful negotiation between how the two interacted within each act of political engagement, as well as description of how "real life" actions need to accompany online ones, demonstrates that the political engagement of these young people is more complex than the reappropriation of traditional collective forms of engagement.

Work Time and Political Time as Separate or Interchangeable

Participant responses referred to a separation between paid employment and political action. For instance, Group E described having a job as potentially hindering the time available to be involved in change-making initiatives outside of work, and this could be interpreted as a practical example of Weeks' (2011, pp.2-3) claim that issues in the paid workplace were treated as individually-specific and natural, with any political action needing to take place outside this domain. For Group E, protesting and volunteering were considered the hardest ways to make change, due to the time involved.

Participants envisaged that as adults with a job they would be less likely to have a conversation with someone as a result of having less time, despite having conversations

being rated by these participants as a highly effective way to make change. This aligns with recent claims that the increasingly unstructured norm of paid employment, as happening in New Zealand and internationally (see chapter one), means that people have to become more committed to the workplace, and less involved in political engagement outside of work (Standing 2011; Aronowitz 2010). This indicates the notable difference between participants' discussion of imagined or ideal realities, and descriptions of how they perceive the present to be.

Additionally, participants described a top-down and authoritarian controlling dynamic at work that hindered their abilities to make political change, as opposed to the more dispersed channels of power conveyed by Hardt and Negri (2009, p.31). For example, in Group E, negotiating change in the workplace was seen as difficult due to the likelihood that the boss would fire you if you complained when other employees were sexist, or confronted them, especially if you were younger.

Sandra: Cause I reckon like with things like this, you've got a lot to lose talking to employer/

[...]

Tim: Yeah you've got a lot to lose

Sandra: Ya know like/

Beth: That's right

Sandra: Cause, like I would never do that at my job, because/

Beth: So true/

Jake: Oh no yeah

Sandra: They'd just fire me

Jake: It's true

Beth: But I feel like also because we're younger?

Additionally, in Groups D and E, some participants highlighted the vital role of management in each individual business to determine the nature of the wider workplaces' treatment of gender-related issues. A participant in Group D described how if any employer had "unconventional views," they might be happy to hear suggestions about improving gender equality in the workplace, but that this was not likely. Accordingly, it is apparent that the workplace was perceived to have a restricted level of scope for agency due to a concrete enforcement of power from a higher authority.

Participants also inferred that disputes in the workplace could only be discussed at an individual level, further suggesting a practical version of Weeks' (2011, pp.2-3) claim that issues in the paid workplace are treated in theory as individually-specific and natural, in opposition to any political action that takes place outside this domain. In Group D, it was described how if you told your boss they were being exploitative, they would most likely take it to mean that "you don't have the skills," meaning that the problem was directed back on the individual, rather than it being a wider problem. This was also perceived to affect how women could act in the workplace. On the topic of whether it was more effective to make change by talking to an employer as an adult than as a young person, a participant in Group E said

talking to your employer and all of that kind of stuff is seen as less effective because although it's like 'yeah, you're an adult,' but it's like, 'yeah you're a female, so that's what you think and you're coming from a biased point of view.'

Similarly, someone else in this group suggested that “if 70 percent of your boardroom are all men” then they would probably just laugh when a female claimed she was treated unfairly. These responses are perhaps indicative of the prevalence of neoliberal policies that remove support from unions, as described in chapter one, meaning that work disputes can only be addressed as an individual.³⁷ However, there is likewise evidence that prior to implementation of neoliberal politics in New Zealand, women were still side-lined in the paid workforce and unions. Evidently, these participants had a sense that people in control frame issues as individual faults, restricting change in the workplace.

However, the perceptions of how paid employment related to political change varied between groups. While participants in Group E talked about getting a good job as a method for making change that was the least likely and involved the most effort, Group C participants said that becoming someone in a position high enough to make change was what they should aim for. They were quick to answer that the best thing to do to make social change, “after finished being a student,”³⁸ was to “get good jobs and break the glass ceiling,” and it was something that each of them planned on doing. For instance, one participant said

I plan to go into law and politics, and hopefully end up working in the government... um... and like, I would love to use that position to actively make change, but I think even, like, being a woman in a high-level position in a law

³⁷ Although one participant in Group E briefly described unions as important and effective. It was also briefly mentioned in Group D, and participants deliberated over whether unions were useful or not. Some said they were, while others said it depended on the union.

³⁸ Question prompt, see appendix one.

firm or whatever is already making change? Cause it's like... beating the stereotypes? [...] And like, making it like, more accessible for like other women in the future.

Similarly, another participant said that becoming an engineer was going to make change in itself, as it was a high-status position, even though it was not going to directly “change the world socially.” This demonstrates that, for some participants, the workplace was thought of as politically empowering, but through the signifying of individual status rather than group actions. Participants described how as a result of being at a level that was considered “more accomplished,” people were likely to listen to you, because “it’s not really about who you are, it’s about your status that earns you respect now.” This mostly concerns individual identity,³⁹ and so aligns more closely with the theoretical categorisation of an individual political act than a collective one. Further, considering the previous description of the top-down enforcement of power, and the imposition of a highly individualised environment for making claims, it makes sense that this would be understood as an effective way to counter this.

Additionally, in contrast to Group E, the gaining of a high status at work was described as complementary to being involved in change-making initiatives outside of work, as opposed to work time overriding political time due to inflicting or overbearing time commitments. In fact, participants in Group C did not discuss being able to change the structure or conditions of work once they were in a high position, or even that there were any problems with these structures beyond the lack of females in higher professions. Interestingly, while the disparity between male and females’ pay was

³⁹ Participants also talked about how doing this made things easier for the women that followed them.

brought up by other groups as the issue they associated most with gender equality, and the most clear and concrete reason they identified for thinking there were still gender disparities (Groups A, B, D, E), Group C did not discuss this. This is despite the fact that these participants discussed gender oppression as being a very real and structural problem, with issues ranging from stereotypes to abortion rights; in fact, Group C were the only group to identify unanimously with feminism. Yet, the present issue of gender pay in New Zealand involves both the encouraging of more females into higher paid professions, and increasing pay of females to the same value as males for doing the same or similar skilled job (Ministry for Women, n.d.). While participants in Group C mentioned the more typically individual nature of the gender pay gap, they did not discuss the implementation of formal state-based intervention, and the collective organising of unions typically concerning matters for women already in jobs (E tū Union, 2017). This demonstrates that while other issues were discussed as being collective, matters concerning the workplace were not. This could, accordingly, demonstrate how mainstream feminist claims of “recognition,” that focussed on “cultural-discursive” issues such as identity, were no longer paired with claims of “redistribution” addressing political and economic matters (Fraser, 2013, pp.160-161). Without a simultaneous challenging of the “intrinsically gendered” nature of “the very concepts of citizenship, childrearing and paid work” (p.39), recognition in male-dominated professions arguably makes very limited changes.

Further, in the groups that did talk about the gender pay gap, disparities at work were often discussed in the context of being an individual with equal rights to compete with everyone else. For example, although others disagreed, one participant in Group E considered that

if you came to an employer and you showed a form of leadership and courage saying ‘no, actually I have the same right as an individual to be equal to this person,’ they might stand back and go ‘hang on this person’s got,’ you know, ‘the courage and the confidence to come to me and say something’s wrong.’

This comment infers that the workplace was a space where it was appropriate to encourage the rights of individuals to be equal, rather than the rights of women in particular. Similarly, a participant in Group A said

I think that everyone is individualistic so everyone's going to have a different view on it. Um, I don't think that women or men will necessarily be swayed either way based on their gender, so I don't see why you should eliminate them just on the fact that they are female.

This aligns with claims that an emerging group of people, born in the era of neoliberalism, are in favour of equal pay for individual entitlement, rather than for women's rights in particular (Zucker and Bay-Cheng, 2010, pp.1987-1918). From the 1980s, the aims of feminism allegedly “dovetailed all too neatly with a rising neoliberalism” (Fraser, 2013, p.5), with claims for transforming the wider patriarchal structure of the state itself thriving under this emergence of marketisation and dwindling state power. This meant the old messages took on new and ambiguous meanings that became unintentionally wrapped up in the “masculinist romance of the free, unencumbered, self-fashioning individual” (p.220). Participant discussions of the gender pay gap could, resultantly, be understood as neoliberalised and depoliticised, so restricted in their scope for change outside the marketised status quo. However, a challenging of this conclusion will follow.

Resistance at Work as Limited

As described in chapter three, it is important to avoid portraying young people as straightforward victims, or somehow born into neoliberalism as ready-made neoliberalists. Hardt and Negri's breakdown of the divide between individual and collective, and the resulting change in the nature of political engagement, is helpful. For instance, participants in Groups D and E recounted a similar breakdown in the divide between production and consumption to what is framed by Hardt and Negri (2009) as becoming increasingly ambiguous and intertwined under current modes of production. As they do not directly condone consumerism, it is useful to also consider Gibson-Graham's (et al. 2013, p.xxxii) notion that rather than condemning certain practices, or "unproblematically celebrating them," perspectives and practices of people making meaning of their lives should be taken seriously (also Dombroski, 2016, p.642). Accordingly, it can be viewed as important that participants described activities of consumption as potential sites for resistance. For instance, in Group D, there was indication of more success making change as a consumer; boycotting the product rather than boycotting a workplace. Similarly, a participant in Group E described how "especially in the private sector," businesses would adapt as a result of customers changing habits and not buying their products. These examples demonstrate how activities that would straightforwardly be understood within the marketised status quo can be seen as having potential for political appropriation when the public and private domains are considered to be blurred both in production and resistance.

Further, in both Groups C and E it was perceived that there was some scope for political change being enacted from within the workplace through individual and micro-level actions. In Group C, a participant described how even people in lower

status professions, such as teachers, were able to do *something* (in their job) to help to make change. An example given was one of their teachers giving empowering speeches in assembly. In Group E, participants inferred that small changes at work were possible if male colleagues acted differently and stood up for women against sexist customers, meaning that change could be made from the level of low-status worker. Through seeing identities as fragmented and relative, as Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham describe in their theories of collective identity formation as a *process*, these acts can be seen as political rather than solely neoliberal and individualised. As group identities are seen as constantly evolving and transforming, relating to several different parts of the class system at once, the subject can have relations to the neoliberal identity markers without their actions being solely and permanently neoliberal in nature. This means that the very individualising constructs that restrict change-making actions in the modern workplace are the tools that can bring about emancipation.

While the concrete realities were earlier described as limiting the extent of political engagement possible in the workplace, participants in Group E were critical towards some of the things that were taken for granted concerning divides between individual and collective domains. For instance, they discussed the ways that the workplace enforced gender norms that were restrictive and offensive, but were considered politically neutral, aligning with Week's (2011) claim of the assumed natural order at work. One participant described how at work, females were allowed to wear makeup and dye their hair, but if he did this he would get sent home; several participants (male and female) described how at work their bosses would ask for "strong men" to lift things that they were capable of lifting, undermining their ability to manage. The group then discussed how in their contracts (at part time, after school retail jobs) it specified

that they were not allowed to talk about political issues, and how this was hard.

However, some things were political, but so entrenched in common knowledge that they counted as non-political.

Sandra: Like, I really struggle 'cause at my work people will make comments like, 'oh feminazi' and I have to sit there with my mouth shut, and it's just like, ohmygod/

Beth: Wait, where do you work?

Sandra: Mitre 10⁴⁰, and it's just like, ohmygod/

Jessica: Ooo, wow/

Beth: That's, that's why that... It's a really male dominated like...

Jeremy: Yeah, but it's also like/

Sandra: But you can't, you can't say anything.

While participants understood the domain of paid employment to be largely separate from politics, they critiqued the falsified constructs of what fit into the domains of “political” and “non-political.” It can be seen how the subtle enactment of power through a hegemonic limiting of what can be said was a significant source of this oppression, as positioned in chapter three as being required alongside the less fixed constructs of power described by Hardt and Negri. This indicates that participants had a sophisticated understanding of the relationship between material and imagined realities,

⁴⁰ Hardware store.

and were perhaps in some moments equipped to make changes in alignment with the *rules of the game* as a result.

Reframing Individual and Collective Political Engagement

Participants framed individual and collective forms of political engagement in a less segmented way to what is often described in theory, which typically focuses on electoral-based forms of civic engagement while ignoring less formal forms of political action (Boulainne 2015, p.1844). Neglecting these diverse forms of engagement creates an incorrect image of disengaged and apathetic youth (Loader 2007). However, diverging from claims that young people's engagement with politics is typically more individual than collective (Sloam, 2012, pp.675-676), participants in this study blurred the lines between what were separated as traditionally collective or more recently individual forms of political engagement. For example, in Group E, protesting and volunteering were perceived as falling under the category of "changing personal habits," along with such acts as talking to someone with different opinions to you, demonstrating that the individual nature of these actions was considered alongside the collective aspects. Similarly, voting for the right political party was described as a "personal opinion."

Beth: Well if it's the right party

Jeremy: Yeah, the right party to use. Say, like me, if I could I would vote

Labour, but like I wouldn't know, say, who Tim or Jake would want to vote for, and I can't turn around and say to them 'the right party you'd vote for is this'

Jess: Hmm

Beth: Yeah

Participants also described voting for what you personally thought rather than being “swayed” by what others thought as important, as opposed to focusing on how voting was a collective and formal channel to make structural societal changes. The inner and outer worlds were, notably, understood as interacting in various ways, meaning that political engagement also involved a combination of these two worlds.

However, while also possible to interpret this as aligning with the claim that the second wave feminist notion that the “personal is political” has been twisted into “the political is personal” (Dean, 2015, p.31), it is arguably more useful to consider these responses through Hardt and Negri’s theory of the *false duality* between public and private, as described in chapter two. Careful negotiation was made between how these typically separate domains interacted in each act of political engagement. Aspects of what are typically described as collective political qualities were at times emphasised, including the power of groups of people to put pressure on organisations, and the value of physical or formal channels for making change. In Groups A and C, participants described how protesting was something people could do as individuals to make change, having no power to do anything as one person alone. In Group D it was similarly described as being a way to “get with people” and “show that there’s people,” and to let the government know this. This demonstrates a fairly traditional notion that collective action in physical spaces is the best way to bring about change, but with a clear reference to an individual within this. Similarly, other participants treated such actions as joining a union (Groups D, E) or voting (Groups A, B, E) as effective, with many groups clearly identifying the benefits of being involved in action that was collective and involving a presence in physical and formal spaces.

Similarly, typically individual qualities of political engagement were at times prioritised. In Group A and B, participants also specified that the inner change or cultural change that was most needed did not have to be a “government thing” (Group A), or to “come from a powerhouse or anything” (Group B). This is despite both groups emphasising the importance of voting or protesting, to some extent. Accordingly, it appears that participants envisaged several different levels of negotiation between inner and outer worlds, rather than a straightforward binary between individual and collective forms of engagement. Similarly, sociologist Anna-Britt Coe’s (2015) empirical study on youth feminists in Latin America demonstrated that participants did not think that changes to policy should be abandoned, but rather that “changes to cultural discourse and practices on gender” were “transformative change” that was needed to fill a “vital gap” in change-making initiatives overall (p.900). This indicates how theories that deconstruct the binaries of “public” and “private” domains are important for understanding the complexities of how young people engage politically. It is not a one-way shift of the political to the domain of the personal, but a multi-directional negotiation between them.⁴¹

Further indicating “levels” between individual and collective change rather than an opposition between them,⁴² participant comments often indicated that real-life actions were a more effective channel for political change than ones that took place online. In Group C participants described “ranting online” as the least useful way to make

⁴¹ Also see Bennet and Segerberg’s (2012) description of how new ideas in politics might resemble old ones, but people collectively organise for more personal reasons. This is claimed to be on account of social networking being “more than just communication systems,” but themselves very different organisational structures (p.16).

⁴² Similarly, Bennet and Segerberg (2012) talk about an overlap between the online-offline divide in activism, with “ecologies of action” becoming “increasingly complex” (pp.11-12).

political change, and in Group E it was described as the “barest of the bare minimum.” It was instead suggested that they were tools that were effective when combined with other actions, when used in the right way. In Group D, participants claimed that the usefulness of Facebook depended on the case, and it was described how it was useful to *make* a page on Facebook but not just to like an already existing one. “Liking as an act” was considered as not doing much, and rather Facebook was only helpful to tell you what to do next, such as signing a petition. This indicates that action on social media was considered useful, but only for leading to place-based action; traditionally individual and collective aspects of political engagement needed to be used in combination with each other. This aligns with the problematic overlooking of imagined versus concrete realities, described in chapter two as eventuating in response to Hardt and Negri’s emphasis on the prevalence of virtual technologies largely taking over the older forms of production and, accordingly, affecting the types of political engagement that were required. The critical treatment of actions involving Facebook also indicates that participants were aware of the tendencies to overestimate the reach of new software-based technologies, understanding the remaining tension between the material world that these tools were created by and for, and the technologies themselves.⁴³ This is, accordingly, another case whereby participant perceptions of politics are best understood as an *unresolvable tension* between the blurring of existing categories to create new ones, and the acknowledgement of the remaining present context, as discussed in chapter three (and the previous chapter).

⁴³ Jodi Dean (2009) claims that while networked communication can facilitate political resistance, it depends on the conditions, and often messages transmitted are lost in an abundance of information (pp. 24-26). Also, activism online, such as signing petitions, allows people to “feel political,” but without “building the institutions necessary to sustain a new political order” (p.47).

Summary

It is apparent that it was to some extent due to real and not imagined realities that participants understood the workplace as a separate domain to the political sphere, especially considering the prevailing increased commitment required in paid employment at present. Similarly, the concrete enforcement of power from bosses and business were seen to restrict the level of agency that an employee would have in the workplace. This also meant that issues were dealt with concerning only the individual, limiting the challenging of gender-related disparities. On the other hand, providing further insight into the ways that youth engagement with these issues align with the literature that describes individual versus collective approaches, the individualised domain of the workplace was seen as a separate space that did not impose on the time commitments of political action, and the lack of agency in this domain was seen as most effectively overcome by reaching a position of power. As a result of the context of work-related gender issues being understood as an individual's right to compete, it could be concluded that participants embodied these neoliberal ways of thinking. However, looking beyond the straightforward construction of young people as oblivious victims of this new regime, participant understandings of the cross-overs between individual and collective forms of political engagement are best interpreted through Hardt and Negri's notion of the *false duality* of public and private. Collective and formal types of political engagement are discussed from the perspective of the individual, while typical qualities of individual political engagement are prioritised alongside the collective potential. Accordingly, the negotiation between different "levels" within a political act, as described as entailing the use of social media, is an example of the *unresolvable tension* between existing and imagined realities.

This chapter has demonstrated how micro-level and individually-driven change-making actions can combine working within present realities and simultaneously imagined or idealised ones, and how present conditions of entrapment can be repurposed for resistance or framed as acts that are in part neoliberal but also something else. Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham's theories enable the complexities of young people's understanding of the space of political participation to be seen. The following chapter will focus on how participants related to identities such as feminism, aligning with theoretical discourse concerning *naming* and *not naming*, which further addresses how the theoretical concept of the *unresolvable tension* between imagined (relative) and existing (material) realities is useful for understanding young people's engagement with politics, work and gender.

Chapter 7: Identities and “Labels” to Choose or Overcome

The previous chapter focussed on how Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham’s theories were useful for understanding the imagined space of the workplace and the political domain. Hardt and Negri’s theory of the *false duality* between the individual and collective, and the concept of an *unresolvable tension* discussed in chapter three, provided tools for understanding young people as both embodying the changes of the present political context, and empowered to be change-making subjects. In this chapter, attention will be paid to how these theories are present in the concept of time; how both collective identity formation as a *process* (see chapter two) and the framing of identity through historical trajectory are relevant to how participants discuss the use of words, or “labels.”

The focus group participants discussed whether they should use feminism or another word to describe gender disparities, and this was closely connected to what they described as “labels”. On the one hand, the nature of their responses fitted with the notion of a distinct newly-eventuating group, born into the age of neoliberalism, that do not identify as feminists but who could potentially ally with feminists on some issues, but on the other hand, the term indicated a completely different understanding of the concept of group identity itself. As opposed to the inference of belonging to a static and defined group, this is better explained by Hardt and Negri’s and Gibson-Graham’s theories of the *process* of identities being reconstructed as a core part of the political change itself. Further, a tension was described between “labels” being imposed for commercial and economic gain of a certain group, and how people truly were. In this sense, it can be seen to align with the theoretical notion of the *unresolvable tension*

between avoiding contorting the future through fixed tales of history and rendering issues invisible through lack of *naming*. While some participants described the *naming* of historical trajectories as oversimplifying history in a way that hindered political change, others in contrast claimed that the word feminism was useful for linking the past with the present. They also discussed how the word itself was considered to be contentious and was avoided amongst the males, who did not want to accept any personal responsibility for gender inequalities. Uses of the term “feminazi” further aligned with the tension between process and fixed identities, demonstrating how the *naming* from groups with conflicting material interests can delegitimise, make light of, depoliticise and shift responsibility. While participant uses of the term “feminazi” varied, all used the word to refer to people who lacked knowledge, and this could itself be understood as the shutting down of less dominant views, as discussed in chapter five. The term feminism has been historically used by feminists to prioritise some women’s needs over others, and this is arguably still the case.

“Equality” or “No Labels” instead of Feminism

While participants in most groups talked about how feminism was about equality, and that gender equality was still needed (Groups A, B, C, E), there were discussions in Groups A, B and E about whether people should use feminism or another word. In Group E, some participants said that people could engage with a message of “equality for all,” as opposed to the immediate negative reactions to feminism, enabling a conversation about the issues “with their guard down.” They said that most people did not have a problem with this message, but rather had a problem with the word feminism. If the point of feminism was “the ideologies behind [the word]” rather than the word itself, they claimed that it made sense to just change the word. The term

“label” was important in this discussion, and was especially used by Groups A and E to describe use of the term feminism. Both groups claimed that “labels” were a prevalent and recent phenomenon.

For Group E, “label” was used in a way that could be in part interpreted as aligning with Zucker and Bay-Cheng’s (2010, pp.1987-1918) category of *non-labellers*. Some participants described feminism as a “label.” For instance, a participant suggested that rather than “labelling” someone as feminist, you could just say “equality for all.” The main thing that set this group apart from other groups was that the phenomenon of “labelling” was seen as avoidable rather than inherent to the process of staking a claim by having a name itself. For example, they discussed how it is necessary for people to categorise and make judgements because they needed “something to rally around.” Labels were described as “just a human thing,” and a participant considered that without party names like National and Labour, politics would be “too vague.” It could, accordingly, be said that this group would subscribe to the notion that *non-labellers* could make an alliance with feminists on some issues, as labels were considered as to some extent necessary. Nevertheless, participants in this group described it as “cowardice” to not identify as something due to it becoming a corrupted “label,” indicating that the discomfort around being associated with feminists prevented them from wanting to be in an alliance with feminists.

Jeremy: Yeah I guess it's just, yeah, it's that cowardice, because you don't wanna have someone completely yell at you or just put that label on top of you and be like 'oh, so you're a 'feminazi'⁴⁴ now' /

Beth: Hmm/

Jessica: It like discourages that

Tim: I just say it switches people off, I just...

Sandra: Yeah it is, it is really sad, though, that we can't say 'I'm a feminist' /

Beth: Comes up I'm just kind of like 'woah,' like 'I don't wanna be involved in this,' like.

In this sense, the theory of *non-labellers* is not a sufficient remedy for these young people's reservations towards the term feminism, as the stigma behind the label would likely put them off an alliance with feminists.

Further, for Group A *any* label was seen as contradicting with their concept of identity, which was linked to constantly shifting identifications rather than the fixed space required for self-identification as *non-labellers*. Participants saw labelling as more automatic than the last group, suggesting that it was an inherent and unfavourable component of anything with a name.

Jack: With everything, every sort of movement, people take it to the extreme and then get press about it and then that extreme becomes part of what...

Emma: The way you see it

⁴⁴ "feminazi" will be discussed in the next section of this chapter

Jack: Yup, part of what the thing is, so with feminism and ‘feminazis,’ they... people will automatically associate them with feminism even if they’re nothing to do with it.

As a result, for this group *non-labellers* would clearly fit their definition of a “label” in the same way that feminism did, and so would not be a useful term. I directly asked for clarification on this matter.

Me: If another label could be created that [...] didn’t have all the connotations of feminism, would you guys take it on board, if it was like... more specific?

Liam: Still not really changing anything

Olivia: No

Liam: It’s just another label to be honest

Me: So you guys would say yes to... needing to do stuff for gender equality but no to calling yourself anything? Is that sort of... the general thing people are saying?

Liam: Yeah

Olivia: Hmm

Emma: Mhmm.

This indicates how the concept of not using “labels” reaches beyond simply the need of a new grouping or category into a completely different concept of identity itself.

This also leads to a different notion of collective, and accordingly these participant responses align with Hardt and Negri’s focus on the blurring between “individual” and

“collective” forms of political engagement. Participant understanding of “labels” parallels Hardt and Negri’s and Gibson-Graham’s theories of collective identity formation as a *process*, as described in chapter two, whereby definitively categorising things in time and space⁴⁵ limits the scope for evolving new realities and the inclusion of narratives of diverse groups of people, reaching beyond the power imbalance of the status quo. These participants, similarly, understood identifying with feminism as a restriction to making wide changes in favour of gender equality. Further indicating parallels with theories of collective identity formation as a *process*, the discussed concept of “labels” better aligned with the theoretical notion that people connect to identities in multiple ways, as described in chapter two, as opposed to *belonging* to a group. For example, “classifying your views under a label” was described in Group A as being a reason not to associate with something such as feminism that had “created so many contrary views,” with a better alternative being to just live “how you feel that things should be.” Additionally, Group A used “label” to mean something that did not truly represent who you were as a multi-faceted and always changing individual.⁴⁶ When responding to Beyoncé’s quotation about feminism (see abstract one), participants described how record companies tried to “assign” labels to celebrities, and that these were different to who the celebrities (in this case, Beyoncé) truly were.

Olivia: In our society [...] we come to assign labels to everyone... so [...] record labels trying to assign that kind of image to her, and her just wanting to be who she is, and not having to label it, and not having to put some form of whatever

⁴⁵ See chapter two

⁴⁶ Participants in Group C discussed how females were multifaceted individuals that were often expected to act only one way, but they did not use the term “labels”

on herself and to be upheld to that. Because everyone changes, that's the thing. That's the huge part of growing as individuals.

This demonstrates how people in general were understood to be naturally always in the process of changing, as opposed to having static identity markers and groupings, but that this was at odds with the aims of society and record companies.

The Meaning Behind a Word

However, the discourse between record labels, which try to “assign” an image, and the person actually “just wanting to be who she is” with room to change, could also be interpreted as a tension between commercial agendas and the reality of how people should be able to be. It parallels the theoretical discussion in chapter three concerning the *naming* required to avoid the overlooking of the realities of the present, and the *not naming* that is needed to imagine more inclusive and structurally different futures that are not constrained by the current categorisations. In this case, the *naming* is presented as the superficial, marketised framework that hinders the natural development of things. In these examples above, the *not naming* was the concrete reality while the *naming* was the imposition of marketised policies. Similarly, some participants described the act of *naming*, in the context of a historical narrative, as a simplified representation of reality. For instance, a participant in Group E compared the debate about whether to use the word feminism with the New Zealand flag referendum,⁴⁷ describing how some people said that we had to drop the past, and that he “kind of” agreed, but also wondered “why do we need a label on it to just believe in it?” Accordingly, both issues were framed as

⁴⁷ Citizens were asked to vote on whether New Zealand should change their flag in 2015-2016.

concerning whether words (such as feminism) and symbols (such as a flag) held important signifiers of the past, or whether they were inaccurate or unnecessary distortions of the complexity of true feelings. This demonstrates how *not naming* within a historical narrative may enable the emergence of more transformative futures. While acts of *naming* restricted the types of identity that could be communicated, *not naming* allowed the space for nuances and transformations.

On the other hand, fitting with Hardt and Negri's theory of historical narrative and *ungraspable events*, as opposed to reaching to Gibson-Graham's level of *not naming* in history (see chapter three), there was also an indication of a clear historical break between the past and present, with the word "feminism" needing to be seen according to the new reality rather the old one. Other participants described how people were not keeping up with the realities of the present, and rather thinking of feminism in a way that was outdated and no longer accurate. For instance, a participant in Group E described Beyoncé's quotation, "I guess I am a modern-day feminist. I do believe in equality. Why do you have to choose what type of woman you are? Why do you have to label yourself anything?" as being a deliberate separation from the past. This was needed because feminism could be threatening to people, especially if not defined in the "modern sense of the word." This was perhaps referring to the more protest-based and militant branches of what is sometimes called first wave feminism (Liddington, 2005, p.196), or the militant and radical aspects focussed on in the history of the second wave (Daley, 1994, p.7). These are, reportedly, also focused on in films, as they are most interesting to recount (Teele, 2015). As participants described,

Sandra: they look at the past, though, and think that feminism is about violence
and about, you know/

Jake: But they're dumb and it's not actually brainwashing

Jessica: Brainwashing

Sandra: Brainwashing, yeah stuff like that/

Jessica: Yah, yah

Jake: All the girls marching down the street

[Laughs]

Sandra: Yeah, with torches, fighting people like

As a result, this could align with Hardt and Negri's notion of historical narrative, whereby the changing realities warrant a parallel altering of how political action operates. It reflects how *naming* is important to counter automatic assumptions and common perceptions. In this sense, *naming* refers to the context where political engagement starts. However, in an attempt to counter the tendency for reductive *naming*, "labels" are what the word feminism can become. The complexly interacting presence of both indicates how it is useful to understand participant responses through the lens of an *unresolvable tension* between *naming* and *not naming*.

Further, other participants in Group E claimed that the word feminism was necessary in order to uphold all that had been achieved in the past, because the words were themselves complex for acknowledging the very material realities that the previous group saw as restrictive. In Group B, one participant saw that there was a benefit to associating with feminism, because while there was stigma, there were also good things that it was associated with historically. Similarly, in Group E, participants discussed how

Sandra: feminism has a whole heap of other stuff that comes with it that, like, my personal view is I would say I'm a feminist because I don't only believe in equality. I believe in all of the other stuff that's come before me, as [in] from people who are feminists, so getting the vote... you know, like, when there was a massive gap in society, feminists were the people who brought the gap closer.

Beth: Hmm

Sandra: And so by saying 'oh I don't wanna use the word feminism anymore,' like you're discounting all of the work that they have done to bring women up.

Beth: Yeah.

Considering the many things that feminism stood for and the history behind it, this participant said that to change the word would be easy, but that "it's not about being easy." This means that the meaning attached to the words themselves, because of their history, is perceived as significant. It contrasts with the earlier claim that symbols are inaccurate and unhelpfully stagnant, which better aligns with the concept of *process*. This perception, rather, fits with the notion of *naming* within historical narrative. However, it is notable that in this account, *naming* is a sphere that is complex and shifting, as opposed to earlier claims that it is simplified and stagnant.

Additionally, others suggested the word feminism itself to be controversial and so avoided, claiming that there was a gendered component to whether it was used. A participant in Group B explained how people complained because it included the "fem" prefix, and pointed out that people say "mankind" without questioning that it included the word "man." Participants in this group compared this to Black Lives Matter, because the point of it was that everyone's lives matter, but that white people had more

privilege. Feminism was described as the same because it started at the point when a group were not equal, emphasising that the minority or oppressed group mattered. As previously described (in chapter five), a participant in Group E pointed out that the only people in the group who had a problem with the word were men. Additionally, with regards to use of the word in particular, it was described how avoiding the use of the word feminism

Sandra: makes it easier to swallow for men, which completely defeats the purpose of feminism.

Tim: Does it? /

Jeremy: Does it really? Cause it/

Sandra: It's, it's not about men.

Although it must be remembered that others in multiple groups responded that not only males had a problem with the term, and that in fact males needed to be involved for full equality to happen, the debate around the use of feminism clearly represents how Karen Offen (1988) snidely remarked that the contested nature of the term, which continues to “inspire controversy” and “arouse a visceral response,” even evoke fear in many, must clearly represent “dangerous concepts” (p.119). It is for this reason that Offen (1988) declared it problematic to let people get away with saying “I’m not feminist but...” (p.120). In this sense, *naming* is similarly complex. A word represents an important concept of a material reality that has not yet come into fruition, but which has underlying motives that conflict with the current reality. This aligns with the discussion in literature of “conflicting material interests” (Wright, 2015, pp.164-169) and the notion that language itself is an important signifier of the power struggle of present

realities and how it could be (Mills, 2008). Accordingly, it indicates a connection between participant debates around *not naming* feminism and critiques of Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham's theories of collective identity formation as *process*, as described in theory.

What "Feminazis" indicate about the Stigma Behind Feminism

Providing further insight into the how the notion of *dangerous concepts* is in tension with the discourse between *process* and fixed identities, at some points the word "feminazi" was described as having the function of stigmatising feminism. It was sometimes used to prevent important issues from being discussed seriously, or perhaps to describe the way that the threat of these supposedly *dangerous concepts* were extinguished. Referring to group discussions on Facebook, a participant in Group B described how "they're feminist and they're proving their point, and that's what a lot of people just label them as, 'feminazis.'" Participants in Group E said that it sometimes functioned to de-legitimise or make light of the very topical issues that feminism brought up. Interestingly, in Group B, a participant talked about the comical way she had seen "feminazi" being used, describing a YouTube figure called "Humongous Rant:" "she's like... psycho and starts screaming sexual harassment. She's been labelled as a 'feminazi' all over the media" (laughs). It is hard to know whether "Humongous Rant" was purposely exaggerating feminist behaviour for entertainment, or whether it is other people interpreting this YouTuber's behaviour in this way, but this appears to be an example of Group E's claim that the word is used to depoliticise serious issues. Further, in Group B, there was also some suggestion that the term was used to avoid men accepting that they were themselves part of the problem. For example, one participant challenged another with the question "do you think that you refer to them as

‘feminazis’ because you don’t wanna, like, agree, that the reason to some things is... because of men?” Accordingly, this demonstrates how the notion of *naming* can itself become a domain of the conflicting material interests. This highlights the multi-faceted nature of the relationship between *naming* and *not naming*, as it can represent both the exclusion and inclusion of certain groups, as well as how words can become hijacked by empty signifiers that unwillingly draw them into the category of *not naming*.

On the other hand, while the term “feminazi” was used in distinctly different ways between Groups A, B and E, referring to either a group of people themselves or those who use the term, common across all the meanings was an attachment of this word to the notion of lacking knowledge. In this sense, discussion of the use of “feminazi” helps with further understanding potential for traces of class hegemony in use of the phrase “just knowledge,” as explored in chapter five. “Feminazis” were those who represented an ultimate example of people without enough knowledge. In Group A, a participant described them as “misunderstand(ing) the viewpoint,” and they were referred to as “so called feminists” rather than real feminists. In Group B “feminazi” was described as a term used at “the point where people get confused about feminism,” and in Group E, by people who are uninformed. This is interesting because a single and correct definition of feminism is inferred by focus group participants, and “feminazi” sits outside this. However, the word feminism itself has always been contested, with different factions trying to claim that they are the real feminists (Offen, 1988, p.128). Narratives of feminist history from the global North have tended to position straight, white, middle class feminism at the centre, while other movements are ignored or sidelined as isolated or parallel with so-called mainstream feminism, rather than “in conversation” (Hewitt, 2010, p.6). As described in chapter one, there is a long history,

in middle class-led factions of feminism in New Zealand, of prioritising some women's needs over others (James and Salville-Smith, 1989, p.33); similarly, the United States media has reportedly tended to focus on the limited types of feminism that advance the needs of white privileged women, leaving behind the truly revolutionary goals that black women need to pursue in order to access the same opportunities for advancement (hooks, 2014, p.4). Accordingly, use of a single definition of the term could be the hegemonic claiming of only one branch of feminism as legitimate. On these grounds, it seems possible that the term "feminazis" is also used by groups or individuals that at a conscious or subconscious level perceive themselves to be excluded from the claims or identities that feminists project. This is another example of how *naming* can be used to perpetuate the construction of realities that continue to prioritise the ideas of socially dominant groups over others.

Summary

The concept of "labels" featured in participants' discussion about whether to use the word feminism or replace it with a less controversial term. In some cases, it was apparent that "labels" represented an alignment with identity that could not be sufficiently explained through the concept of *non-labellers*. Some talked about how people would be deterred from being in alliance with feminists due to the stigma behind the word feminism. However, others described any "label", whether it was feminism or another word, to automatically become corrupt as a result of being a static and inaccurate representation. This means an entirely different notion of collectivity and individuality is understood. In these cases, participant understandings better aligned with Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham's notions of class formation and identity as a constantly variable *process*. However, the notion of an *unresolvable tension* was

nevertheless present in discussions that suggested a *dangerous concept* underlying avoidance of the word feminism. This can also be seen in how use of the word “feminazi” can function to shift the political relevance of the word into an empty signifier, carried by those not wanting to position themselves within the narrative of possibly changing power structures. It could be understood as shifting *naming* into the domain of *not naming*. By the same token, it can be used to legitimise certain types of knowledge over others, perhaps enforcing the class discourse that takes place under the notion of a single feminism. This is a concrete example of how *naming* can serve a similar function to Gibson-Graham’s notion of creating a space imagined to be full of certain meanings, when it is in fact void of the true meaning of material realities (see chapter three).

This chapter has demonstrated how the theoretical concept of *process* was useful for understanding the complexity of young people’s rejection of the term feminism. The concepts of *naming* and *not naming* used in chapter three also helped with understanding the wider consequences of these perspectives, with each offering both benefit and harm towards future ideals that include currently side-lined groups. As a result, the theory of an *unresolvable tension* is a useful way to keep the complexities and multi-faceted nature of young people’s understandings of these issues intact, allowing for insight into the ways that young people are both change-making agents and subjects intertwined in the concrete material realities of neoliberalism.

Conclusion: Young People's Engagement with Present Realities

An exploration into how feminist issues intersect with matters of the economy and the state, and how New Zealand is situated within a global historical context, set the scene for further discussion concerning political engagement and the valuation of unpaid work in the home. While on the one hand early adoption of what is called first wave feminism indicates the inclusion of women in the egalitarian culture of early settler New Zealand, there is also a significant middle-class dominance. It could be said that a parallel working-class movement was happening under the surface, indicating the multi-faced nature of interactions between feminism and class. While the state has claimed to have a focus on gender equality from this time, wider economic changes also had a significant effect on gender equality. Further female involvement in employment indicates a mix of escaping from domesticity, no longer understood as wholly liberating, and the erosion of family assistance making it a necessity for both parents to work. It is clear that work and welfare policies are a racialised and gendered issue. Yet, while some initiatives from the state suggest questioning what counts as work itself, there is overall a lack of connection between increased employment for women and the associated value of unpaid labour. The influence of both local movements and policy needs to be positioned within the framework of marketisation and the wider global context.

Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham's work enables understanding resistance of the neoliberal, marketised status-quo, while tuning in to the new ways of being in the present world, acknowledging how perceivably outdated constructs can restrict the theorised scope of resistance and its transformative potential. Autonomist Marxists

interpret Marxism according to the notion that production has fundamentally changed since the time of Marx, which is useful for enabling the breaking down of separate spheres, such as the domain of the “private.” This challenges the divide between work and *nonwork*, increasing the potential sphere for resistance. An aspect of this, as found in the work of Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham, is the theory of collective identity formation as a *process*, which is similarly more suited to the newly precarious workplaces. Their framing of class identity enables a diverse range of different and changing identities to stay whole within this new framework, rather than being reduced to the shared aspects of a whole group, like the working class. Moments of interaction between people from very different backgrounds is in itself understood as important change for breaking down the very divides that generate structural oppression in the first place. The fact that this process is described as difficult, and that political action is of vital importance to its success, emphasises the seriously transformative nature of actions that more people are in the position to be a part of.

However, a critical analysis of these aspects of class as a *process* draws attention to the complexity of negotiating between the subject identifying with fixed categories of the present versus potentially alterable conditions, specifically concerning the potential for subordination of traditionally feminine forms of labour. This warrants further exploration of the tension between identifying the present and leaving space for evolving futures. Limitations found in Hardt and Negri’s works are further seen when compared and contrasted with Gibson-Graham’s theories, and some theoretical tools that are useful for understanding the tension between material and imagined realities, and *named* and *unnamed* concepts, were introduced to build on the discussion concerning different ways of being individual and collective. While Hardt and Negri

claim that new forms of production are the most prominent rather than taking over altogether, they are critiqued for their lack of focus on material realities and the implicit control behind language, and for underestimating the difference between the ongoing energy required by affective labour and the infinitely replicable nature of the work online. This is a mismatch between the infinite power of the machine and the limited energy of human experience. Additionally, including unpaid care work in Autonomist Marxist discussions on the changing nature of production is vital to understanding the blurring of the divide between work and leisure, and requires a further deconstruction of the divide between work and *nonwork* than what Hardt and Negri provide in these theories.

Accordingly, Wright's (2015) theory of the *rules of the game*, which acknowledges concrete material realities, and Mills' (2008) interpretation of Bourdieu's theory concerning how informal attempts at change are governed by these rules, are useful accompanying theoretical tools. They maintain the benefits of increasing the sphere of political action while acknowledging those aspects that were not sufficiently discussed through Hardt and Negri's and Gibson-Graham's theories of *process*. Nevertheless, the question remains how change can be measured across time. Gibson-Graham's theory allows for an examining of this blind spot, reconstructing the binary of the individual and collective to a further extent than Hardt and Negri by properly embedding the reproductive nature of labour in the wider historical narrative. This means that even the most seemingly capitalist practices have *noncapitalist* aspects. However, Gibson-Graham's solution to the historical narrative is similar to the notion of collective identity formation as a *process*, which was previously described as problematic by itself. This arguably makes the case for a paradoxical relationship between *naming* and

not naming specific moments in history. Harvey's theory of an *unresolvable tension*, between different concepts of economics in time and space, is useful for making sense of how Gibson-Graham's notions of "relative" and "absolute" space relate to *naming* and *not naming*. This helps with understanding the interaction between how things are, and imagined or alternative realities; for instance, how young people engage politically. It is important not to portray young people as lacking agency, even in the cases when they willingly embrace new technology and ideas or behaviours specifically characteristic of neoliberalism, and the discussed theory is useful for addressing this difficulty.

This empirical research set out to understand how the future and emerging workforce interpret changes to work in the context of engagement with social issues and gender equality. As the nature of work has significantly changed, the intersection of these things is important but often neglected. Accordingly, young people's attitudes to gender equality and work, and how the capacity for engagement with these issues is perceived by young people, were investigated. Understanding the context in which the data was gathered, as well as limitations of the data that has been collected, allows for the findings to be interpreted in a balanced and adequately critical way. In order to highlight the socially constructed aspects of knowledge, and the perspective of young people themselves, focus groups were conducted with secondary school students. Attempts were made to create a relaxed but lively discussion, with limited intervention from myself as moderator. However, actual intervention varied between groups. This is because the recruitment process inevitably affected the social connections between participants that agreed to take part, and the kind of data that was collected. Human Ethics Committee approval required that participants agree to certain guidelines and

conditions of participation, including confidentiality, and methods of thematic data analysis outlined by Braun and Clarke (2013) were followed. The initial processes involved a conscious prioritising of data over theory, but in the writing stage there was a shift from a data-driven approach to more explicitly research-driven organising of data, and so the end result is a combination of both. While it is important to be aware of the limitations of thematic data analysis for fully capturing the power dynamics behind the way that participants interacted, awareness of the socially-generated nature of the knowledge happening under the surface of the thematically-coded responses enables a rich analysis. Further, while the data collected was qualitative rather than quantitative, and a small sample size, it is necessary to be aware both that the socioeconomic backgrounds of most participants in this study are generally higher than New Zealand's average according to the measuring of deciles, and that an accurate sense of background of participants can only in part be captured by the demographics collected. The findings of this research were divided into three chapters, initially based off the themes generated through data-generated analysis and then adjusted to more closely resonate with the theory discussed in the previous two chapters.

Initial research questions about attitudes to gender equality/ feminism and work were: “how do young people today perceive feminism/ gender equality, and what are the main issues they consider important?” and “what types of information regarding gender equality/feminism and work are youth influenced by most and why? How do they read the information they are exposed to?” Research indicated that these young people were very influenced by the connotations behind the words themselves, and the stigma surrounding feminism. Participants described friends or older role models as influencing their ideas about gender equality/ feminism, and in a couple of groups there

was a clear link between older role models and identification with feminism. Social media was also widely discussed as a major source of both information and stigma around the word feminism. The way this stigmatisation was discussed varied between groups, with some describing feminism as becoming a marketed brand, or highlighting the false interpretation that women were better than men, and others claiming that it was stigmatised by people who did not want to accept their own part in persisting gender disparities. There were also a range of viewpoints concerning how to react to this stigma, with some young people concluding that the word feminism should be avoided altogether, while others described the stigma as evidence that it was a powerful term to identify with. In the cases where the word feminism was seen as needing to be avoided, participants had views ranging from the notion that nothing like feminism was needed, to the idea that another word should be used instead, and the belief that words should be avoided in favour of ideas or embodiments of the behaviours that the ideas entail. However, most participants understood gender inequality to be a prevailing issue, with the gender pay gap a widely mentioned example. Groups also mentioned things such as rape culture and stereotypes. Overall, the failure of others to understand or willingly accept new information was considered to be the main barrier to moving beyond these issues. Interestingly, males were often referred to as not understanding or accepting feminism, although it was not exclusively male participants who rejected the word, and a male participant also highlighted his own experiences with sexism.

Some research questions concerning engagement with social change amidst the changing nature of work were: “to what extent does the way young people perceive work affect their prioritisation of everyday tasks and activities, including acts promoting or advancing social change?” and “in what ways are youth perceptions of

their capacity to affect social change in the future influenced by their imagining of a life trajectory that is tied to job prospects?” For many participants, work was understood as affecting the time available to be involved in actions that were effective for making change politically. However, responses to this topic varied. In one group, participants described their own experiences of after school employment in the retail sector as providing little scope for speaking up against gender inequality, and these participants had the impression that only limited aspects of this sexism would change when they were older. They also described getting a good job as too difficult for making change. On the other hand, for some female participants in another focus group, the workplace was understood as a place where issues of gender inequality could be improved by gaining a high-status job, and either using the position to make change or simply creating space for other females to enter these professions. However, these participants did not discuss other issues of gender disparity within the workplace. Participants in this, and several other groups, expressed the notion that the workplace was a place where individuals were promoted according to merit. Additionally, some participants were explicitly in favour of gender equality on these grounds. The question “in what way does youth engagement with these issues align with the literature that describes individual versus collective approaches and are there any new conclusions to be drawn within this context?” was addressed through the synergising of data with theory, and this discussion follows.

Some interesting conclusions were drawn when combining data with theory. Firstly, the chapter “Engaging with Others as Vital but Hard” highlights how Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham’s theory of class as a *process* is a useful lens for understanding the complexity and richness of how young people discuss politics. Hardt and Negri and

Gibson-Graham's focus on the differences, rather than similarities, between alignments to identity within a group, is useful for exploring how diversities of opinion and experience function, and the conversational tools used to navigate this. Mentioning people that they knew outside the group was a tool that participants used to legitimise their association with the term feminism in a diverse group setting, and this provided a process for participants to reposition themselves to feminism in a different way to their normative friend group. It also demonstrated how a class-based alignment with people of status may function to legitimise or delegitimise certain stances towards feminism. Further, Gibson-Graham's concept of *nonclass* processes that are different or contradictory, but simultaneous nevertheless, and happen alongside class, helps with understanding how feminism can function as a class-based signifier but also have an alignment with gender in the sense that some males reportedly refuse to identify with the term. Further, aspects of Hardt and Negri's and Gibson-Graham's concepts of the *difficult process* of everyday reconstructions of class can be used to understand how participants discussed the importance of engaging with people with different opinions. The process was considered to be change in itself, and was described as inherently difficult, involving the self changing as well as others. Participants were to some extent aware of the underlying tension between this notion and the continued presence of material realities embedded in language itself. While the discussed navigation between the context that created a person's beliefs and the possible striving for different futures can to some extent be seen as a participant embodying of the theoretical aspect of the *difficult process* of making change, there is nevertheless the embedded knowledge of a dominant class that can be seen in use of the word "they." Bourdieu's work adds a valuable dimension to the difficult change-making process, as it focuses on how class discourse can be intrinsically embedded in language itself. The insight into more

implicit class processes, invisibly connected to present material realities, allows for a thorough understanding of the complicated power dynamics involved in engaging with people with different opinions. But at the same time, in mentioning rape culture, participants were referring to some very real violent behaviour that needed to be changed. This indicates that it is useful to practically adopt the notion of *unresolvable tension*, as opposed to trying to claim either the hegemonic language shaping imagined realities, or the inescapable embeddedness of present context in destructive behaviours, as more important.

Secondly, the chapter on “Political Engagement in Formal and Physical Spaces” highlights how Hardt and Negri’s theory of the *false duality* between public and private domains is important for understanding the complex relation between the concrete positioning of young people towards neoliberal perspectives, and the construction of political agency. Micro-level and individually-driven change-making actions can combine working within present realities and simultaneously imagined or idealised ones, and present conditions of entrapment can be repurposed for resistance, or framed as acts that are in part neoliberal but also something else. As a result of the context of work-related gender issues being understood as an individual’s right to compete, it could be concluded that participants embodied these neoliberal ways of thinking. However, looking beyond the straightforward construction of young people as mystified victims of this new regime, Hardt and Negri’s work provides a more complex and multi-faceted interpretation. Treating production and forms of resistance as similarly transcending previous divides is useful for avoiding the understanding of micro-level changemaking actions at work as solely individual. Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham’s framing of the individual as relating to many different identity

markers at various levels, as opposed to *being* one thing, allows the meanings of these identities to be constantly changing. Also, the combination of Hardt and Negri's work with theories of more subtle language-based exercises of power, as discussed in chapter three, highlights how participants are aware of the implicitly dispersed powers inflicted inwardly through the hegemonic discourse of language. Understanding this provides a theoretical potential for resistance. The negotiation between different "levels" within a political act, as described as present in the use of social media, is an example of the *unresolvable tension* between existing and imagined realities.

Lastly, in the chapter on "Identities and 'Labels' to Choose or Overcome", aligning participants' perceptions of identifying as feminist with theoretical discourse concerning *naming* and *not naming* further addresses the theoretical concept of the *unresolvable tension* between imagined (relative) and existing (material) realities. This enables an understanding of young people's engagement with politics, work and gender that is useful for allowing young people to be seen as both changemaking agents and subjects intertwined in the concrete material realities of neoliberal policy. The concept of "labels" was important to participants' discussion about whether to use the word feminism or replace it with a less controversial term, and an entirely different notion of collectivity and identity can be understood when considering Hardt and Negri and Gibson-Graham's notions of class formation and identity as a constantly variable *process*. Similarly, the theoretical concept of *naming* aligns with restricting types of identity being communicated, while *not naming* allowed spaces for nuances and transformations. However, there was a constant tension between these two ideas, which could be a case of the *unresolvable tension* discussed in literature. Further indicating this paradoxical relationship between *naming* and *not naming*, some participants

legitimised feminism on the grounds of a historical break, more like Hardt and Negri's concept of *naming* in historical narrative than the less defined narrative of Gibson-Graham. However, others considered the word feminism necessary for maintaining the complexities of history. In this sense, *naming* was complex and transitory in direct contrast to how it was understood by other participants. Presence of a *dangerous concept* indicates how *naming*, like *not naming*, can become a space that is void of certain ideas and signifiers and that is too a domain with potentially conflicting material interests. This is also seen in how use of the word "feminazi" can function to shift the political relevance of the word into an empty signifier, carried by those not wanting to position themselves within the narrative of possibly changing power structures. It could be interpreted as shifting *naming* into the domain of *not naming*, or alternatively be used to legitimise certain types of knowledge over others, perhaps enforcing the class discourse that takes place under the notion of a single feminism. This is a concrete example of how *naming* can serve a similar function of creating a space that is actually void of material context.

Overall, it was difficult to maintain an even balance between the theory and research components of this thesis, and at times the balance was skewed towards the theory. A large portion of the empirical research collected was not able to be used due to the word limit, including an omission of data answering research question "what aspects of youths' perceptions of the nature of their own agency for change are considered unique to their stage in life and which aspects do they attribute to their generational cohort?" Further, the data that was used could have been explored with more depth. Empirical research chapters ended up focusing more on discourse around political engagement and less directly on impressions of the changing nature of work, which was partly as a

result of a decision to leave out some sections of the data, but also due to these topics not being discussed as much by participants. However, chapter one described the intertwinement of work, politics and gender equality in New Zealand; similarly, Hardt and Negri and Gibson Graham's theories are built on the premise that due to the change in the central nature of production, and prevalence of precarious work, it is necessary that concepts of political engagement and collective identity also change. Aligning with these theorists' claims that approaches to feminism/gender equality and politics are fundamentally shaped by the changing nature of work, participants similarly understood identities to be changing and fragmented, and change most powerfully implemented through talking to those from a very different background to oneself. These can, accordingly, be thought of as political viewpoints adequately taking effect of the changing nature of work into account.

The young people in this study were clearly informed critics of the messages they received both online and offline, in contradistinction to claims that young people today are politically disengaged, and their viewpoints varied widely amongst participants. While this research does not primarily focus on definitive examples of how young people applied their political agency, it draws attention to the place of theory for selecting or suppressing what is understood as political engagement, as well as how young people have viewpoints that only make sense when considering the specific nature of their present environment. Additionally, further conclusions could have been drawn from the strong divide that many saw between themselves and those who lacked knowledge, especially considering the range of different definitions that emerged from discussions about "feminazis". This research demonstrated that the *unresolvable tension* underlying *conflicting material interests* is a useful tool for theorising polarised

beliefs, especially in this time of increasing inequality and intense marketisation. It enables an adequate execution of the notion of communication with those from very different backgrounds to oneself, as described by the notion of collective identity formation as a *process*, while maintaining an awareness of the extent that we each are in some sense embedded in the well-established power imbalances of the present. This application of theory to empirical research allows for an investigation into the way that young people are positioned within wider theoretical discourse, and draws out the complexity and richness of young people's understanding, making the case for a further merging of the changing nature of work and politics, and feminist research, in theory.

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Appendix 1: Focus Group Activities 2018

Handed out to each participant prior to start of discussion: Participant Information

Sheet, Consent Form, Focus Group Rules, Demographic Slip

Activity One: Interpretations of Statements from Public Figures

Each participant handed photo with quotation on back- present day and suffrage day

feminists:⁴⁸

Katherine Wilson (Kate) Sheppard (NZ)	Beyoncé (Singer)	Kristen Stewart (Actor)
Joseph Gordon-Levitt (Actor)	Lorde (Singer)	Emmeline Pankhurst (UK)

**** Katherine Wilson (Kate) Sheppard, New Zealand:** "... there is still a... barrier of prejudice to break down, before the public mind will consent to women having equal electoral privileges with men."

**** Emmeline Pankhurst (Photo of being arrested), England:** "Men make the moral code and expect women to accept it. They have decided that it is entirely right and proper for men to fight for their liberties and their rights, but that it is not right and proper for women to fight for theirs."

**** Beyoncé:** "I guess I am a modern-day feminist. I do believe in equality. Why do you have to choose what type of woman you are? Why do you have to label yourself anything?"

⁴⁸ The name of the person in the photo was not listed in order to sense whether this was a celebrity that participants already followed, or if they were aware of who the historical figure was. The figures were chosen to provide diversity in gender and ethnicity, as well as both New Zealand and international representation.

Lorde: “I think I’m speaking for a bunch of girls when I say that the idea that feminism is completely natural and shouldn’t even be something that people find mildly surprising”

*** Joseph Gordon-Levitt*: “There were some people that were saying that feminism made sense in the past but it doesn’t anymore because men and women are equal now... I’m no expert, but I think the facts are pretty contrary to this.”

Kristen Stewart: “A lot of girls nowadays are like, “Eww, I’m not like that.” They don’t get that there’s no one particular way you have to be in order to stand for all of the things feminism stands for.”

***=* Cards handed out first when less than 6 participants

Questions asked:

First of all, can you please read these quotes in your head and think about why you think they said that.⁴⁹

Do you know who your person is/ do others?

Can you please read your quotes and answer aloud? (After each)

Prompt: What do you think?

Prompt: What do others think?

⁴⁹ Following suggestions in the literature regarding conducting focus groups with young people (Stewart et al., 2007), it was decided to ask the students to think about why the comment was made rather than what they thought, and then to share this with the group. The reasoning is that this approach would be less direct, ideally allowing for a wider context of contemporary perspectives on gender equality while leaving students less exposed to having to directly talk about their opinion if they were not comfortable or had not formed an explicit opinion.

Activity Two: Brainstorming Key Problems and Solutions

Questions on laminated card placed on the table one-by-one to encourage open discussion. Participants given a felt pen to write the answer to encourage a focussed, negotiated discussion towards a final consensus.

1) ‘The most significant issue concerning gender equality today is...’

Group asked to choose an answer to this question (likely drawn from discussion during previous activity). In cases of diverse opinions, multiple answers permitted.

2)

a) ‘What we can do about this problem now (as students)’

b) ‘What we can do about this problem in the future (when finished being students)’⁵⁰

Laminated cards placed on table, with range of illustrated options⁵¹ for taking action,⁵² as well as blank cards for participants to fill in:

Joining groups/ liking pages on Facebook

Protesting

Changing own habits

Voting for the right party

Supporting/ not supporting certain businesses

Preparing for getting a good job

Joining a union

⁵⁰ The “as students/” “when finished being students” wording was chosen in order not to explicitly infer that participants would be talking about jobs, and so that a specific timeframe for the future was left open to discussion

⁵¹ Visual representations were included alongside the given examples to encourage easy identification.

⁵² A mixture of collective and individual, traditional and more recent forms of political engagement were included to foster discussion about how they were categorised and what they signified

Talking to employer

Approaching government officials

Approaching local MPs

Approaching older adults (teachers, parents etc.)

Meeting with like-minded people

Donating to charity

Volunteering

Participants instructed to arrange cards into below categories, discussing/explaining why they were chosen.

Most useful	Kind of useful	Least useful

Appendix 2: Demographics

2016

Honours Internship with Ministry for Culture and Heritage

Project titled "Young People's Attitudes towards Civic Engagement and Gender Equality"

Activity One: Interpretations of statements from public figures (gender equality/ feminism)

Activity two not discussed in this thesis

GROUP A:						
Self-selected group from a class at a co-ed state school, decile 5 (moderate socioeconomic status) with a uniform.						
Age: 17. Gender: F. Ethnicity: - Born in NZ: N. Been in NZ 15 years.	Age: 18. Gender: F. Ethnicity: NZ/European/Canadian. Born in NZ: N. Been in NZ 12 years.	Age: 17. Gender: M. Ethnicity: NZ/ European. Born in NZ: Y.	Age: 17. Gender: M. Ethnicity: English. Born in NZ: N. Been in NZ 10 years.	Age: 17. Gender: F. Ethnicity: White. Born in NZ: Y.

GROUP B:						
Entire senior class at a co-ed state school, decile 9 (higher socioeconomic status) without a uniform.						
Age: 17. Gender: M. Ethnicity: European. Born in NZ: Y.	Age: 18. Gender: F. Ethnicity: NZ European. Born in NZ: Y.	Age: 17. Gender: F. Ethnicity: NZ European. Born in NZ: Y.	Age: 17. Gender: M. Ethnicity: Chinese-mixed. Born in NZ: N. Been in NZ: ~2 years.	Age:- Gender: M. Ethnicity: NZ/Pacific. Born in NZ: Y.	Age: 17. Gender: F. Ethnicity: Indian? Born in NZ:-	Age: 18. Gender: M. Ethnicity: Asian. Born in NZ: Y

2017

Master's Thesis

Activity One: Interpretations of statements from public figures (gender equality/ feminism)

Activity Two: Brainstorming Key Problems and Solutions (political engagement/ work)

GROUP C:

Interest group of acquaintances at an all-girls state school, decile 8 (higher socioeconomic status) with uniform.

Age: 15. Gender: F.
Ethnicity: NZ European.
Born in NZ: Y

Age: 15. Gender: F.
Ethnicity: Columbian. Born
in NZ: N, 10

Age: 17. Gender: F.
Ethnicity: NZ European.
Born in NZ: Y

Age: 15. Gender: F.
Ethnicity: Maori/ New
Zealander. Born in NZ: Y

Age: 16. Gender: F.
Ethnicity: NZ European.
Born in NZ: Y

GROUP D:

Group of self-selected participants from a free after school programme in a low socioeconomic area, with council and private sponsors and a focus on providing mentoring in various areas of creative technology. Participants seemed to be compiled of almost all those attending who were of the required age of 16 or over.

Age: 17. Gender: M. Ethnicity:
Samoan. Born in NZ: N-5

Age: 16. Gender: M. Ethnicity:
Samoan. Born in NZ: -

Age: 16. Gender: M. Ethnicity:
Maori. Born in NZ: -

Age: 16. Gender: M. Ethnicity: NZ
European: Born in NZ: Y

GROUP E:

Group who elected to take time out of their scheduled class to participate. More than 6 had put their hands up, so the teacher chose a mix of male/ female, and got 2 students to do 'paper, scissors, rock.' Decile 10 (highest socioeconomic status) school, no uniform, students chosen from senior anthropology class (a subject not offered in most NZ schools).

Age: 17. Gender: F.
Ethnicity: NZ/
European. Born in NZ:
Y

Age: -. Gender: -.
Ethnicity: NZ Euro.
Born in NZ: Y

Age: 17. Gender: F.
Ethnicity: NZ
European. Born in NZ:
Y

Age: 18. Gender: M.
Ethnicity: NZ
European. Born in NZ:
Y

Age: 17. Gender: M.
Ethnicity: Euro. Born in
NZ: Y

Age: 16: Gender: F.
Ethnicity: New
Zealander. Born in NZ:
Y

Appendix 3: Graphed and Coded Responses

A number was given for each selection of text coded into each sub-theme for Groups A-E.

Theme 3: Engaging with Others as Vital but Hard

Theme 4: The Past, The Future and Where We Fit

Appendix 4: Ethics Approval

Phone 0-4-463 5480
Email susan.corbett@vuw.ac.nz

MEMORANDUM

TO	Victoria Thompson
COPY TO	Rhonda Shaw
FROM	AProf Susan Corbett, Convener, Human Ethics Committee
DATE	2 May 2017
PAGES	1
SUBJECT	Ethics Approval: 24596 Young people's attitudes to civic engagement and gender equality amidst the changing nature of work

Thank you for your application for ethical approval, which has now been considered by the Standing Committee of the Human Ethics Committee.

Your application has been approved from the above date and this approval continues until 1 March 2018. If your data collection is not completed by this date you should apply to the Human Ethics Committee for an extension to this approval.

Best wishes with the research.

Kind regards

Susan Corbett
Convener, Victoria University Human Ethics Committee

Appendix 5: Participant Information Sheet

<p>SCHOOL OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL STUDIES, FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES TE KURA MAHINGA TANGATA VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON, PO Box 600, Wellington 6140, New Zealand Phone + 64-4-463 5317 Email sacs@vuw.ac.nz Web www.victoria.ac.nz/sacs</p>
<p>Participant Information Sheet:</p>	
<p><i>Young people's attitudes to civic engagement and gender equality amidst the changing nature of work- Victoria Thompson</i></p>	
<p>This letter is an invitation to take part in a study I am conducting, as part of my Master's degree in Sociology. I am interested in young peoples' views about important issues concerning gender equality, and thoughts about being involved in societal issues, today and in the future. This research intends to help policy and educational initiatives concerned with gender and/or work to effectively consider the needs and perspectives of the emerging workforce.</p>	
<p>Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. The focus group discussions will be in July-September 2017, and if you agree to participate, the study will involve activities and discussion around these topics. Groups will be made up of 4-6 friends/classmates between the ages of 16 and 20. They will take 50-60 minutes at an agreed upon time and will be held in a quiet room at either your school or my university campus. The discussion will be audio-recorded, with your written consent.</p>	
<p>The Victoria University of Wellington Human Ethics Committee has granted ethics approval for this project (#42596 02/05/2017). The focus group discussions will be transcribed by me, all details that could identify you will be removed from the transcripts and the data will be published in such a way that you, and your school, will not be able to be identified. Information which could identify you personally will be kept on a password-protected computer and in a locked filing cabinet at Victoria University of Wellington. Only me and my supervisor, Associate Professor Dr Rhonda Shaw, will view this information, and it will be destroyed after three years.</p>	
<p>You will be given the opportunity to request a copy of the summary results at the end of the research. If you decide to do this, you will need to provide me with contact details, which will be kept in a separate file from the audio- recording and transcripts. The finished research will be published in a Master's thesis, and could also be used in journal articles, academic presentations and the media.</p>	
<p>To my knowledge, the nature of the questions I will be asking are not overly personal, so are unlikely to cause you any discomfort. But if you do feel uncomfortable, you can withdraw immediately from the focus group or stop the discussion for as long as necessary. Please note that focus group participants will not be able to withdraw data once the discussion has been recorded, because of the interactive nature of the discussion.</p>	
<p>If you would like to be involved in this study please email me at victoria.thompson@vuw.ac.nz. I will also need you to sign a consent form at the start of the focus group discussion, confirming that you agree with the above information. Light snacks will be provided, and you will also be given a café voucher as a thanks for your time.</p>	
<p>I look forward to hearing from you and thank you for your interest in this project.</p>	
<p>Kind regards</p>	
<p>Victoria Thompson</p>	
<p>If you have any concerns about ethical conduct of the research you may contact the Victoria University HEC Convener: Associate Professor Susan Corbett: susan.corbett@vuw.ac.nz, 04-463-5480. You can also contact my supervisor Associate Professor Rhonda Shaw: rhonda.shaw@vuw.ac.nz, 04-463-6314.</p>	

Note: Name of school was not kept confidential in Groups A and B, completed in 2016, in accordance with the Human Ethics Committee approval 2016 application. A Focus Group Rules sheet was not provided in 2016 research either. However, other key information was the same.

Appendix 6: Consent Form

<p>TE KURA MĀHINGA O TE TIOHIO O TE WAIKARE VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON</p>	<p>SCHOOL OF SOCIAL AND CULTURAL STUDIES, FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES TE KURA MĀHINGA TANGATA VICTORIA UNIVERSITY OF WELLINGTON, PO Box 600, Wellington 6140, New Zealand Phone + 64-4-463 5317 Email sacs@vuw.ac.nz Web www.victoria.ac.nz/sacs</p>
<p>Young people's attitudes to civic engagement and gender equality amidst the changing nature of work- Victoria Thompson</p>	
<p><u>CONSENT FORM:</u></p>	
<p>I have been given and have understood an explanation of this research project. I have had an opportunity to ask questions and had them answered to my satisfaction.</p>	
<p>I understand that I am not able to withdraw my data once the discussion has been recorded but that I can immediately stop participating in the discussion if I feel uncomfortable at any stage.</p>	
<p>I understand that this discussion is confidential. All details that could identify me will be removed from the transcripts and the data will be published in such a way that I will not be able to be personally identified. Research will be used in a Master's Thesis, journal publication, for presentations at academic conferences and in the media.</p>	
<p>I understand that the audio recordings and transcripts will only be accessible by Victoria Thompson and her supervisor, and will be destroyed after 3 years.</p>	
<p>I consent to take part in this focus group discussion and for the discussion to be audio-recorded.</p>	
<p>I have read a copy of the Focus Group Rules provided, and agree to follow them.</p>	
<p>Name:</p>	
<p>Signed:</p>	
<p>I would like to receive a copy of summary results at the end of this research: YES/NO</p>	
<p>Email:</p>	