Title Page

Changing perceptions about feminists and (still not) claiming a feminist identity

Suzette Dyer (Corresponding Author)

sdyer@waikato.ac.nz,

Phone: +64-7-8562889 ext. 8096

Fax: +6478384356

Waikato Management School

PO 3105

Hamilton, 3204

New Zealand

Fiona Hurd

Fiona.hurd@aut.ac.nz

Auckland University of Technology

Private Bag 92006. Auckland 1142

Abstract

We examine student perceptions about feminists and feminism, and the willingness to claim a feminist identity and engage in collective activism, as stated at the beginning and end of a Women's Studies course. Course participation simultaneously fostered more positive views towards feminists and feminism and entrenched the unwillingness to claim a feminist identity and engage in activism. These contradictory outcomes stemmed from the critical capacity to recognise that structural inequality is reproduced through disciplinary relationships. Thus, unwillingness was entangled with feelings of fear and vulnerability in relation to the national context whereby neoliberalism guides the governance of the self, and where gender equality has presumed to be achieved. The article highlights that developing the willingness to identity and act is intimately shaped and constrained by the socio-political context and personal relationships. We consider the implications of this insight in relation to pedagogical assumptions about developing feminist knowledge in the classroom.

Key words

feminist knowledge, pedagogy, feminist identity, structural inequality,

Introduction

One premise of critical feminist pedagogy is that through the process of uncovering structural inequalities, students may become motivated to engage in collective feminist activism. Prior research examining participation in Women and Gender Studies Programmes support this. Reid and Purcell (2004), for example, show that course participation raises awareness about sexism and structural inequalities, develops positive attitudes towards feminists and feminism, and enhances the willingness to identify as a feminist and to engage in collective activism.

Within the context of a third-year undergraduate elective course entitled 'Women and Management', we engage in a critical feminist analysis of New Zealand women's disparate employment outcomes. Throughout the course, we argue that gendered employment outcomes are embedded in systemic structural inequalities. The first author has taught the course for 16 years, and co-taught with the second author for six of these years. In this time, we have observed students making sense of the course in diverse ways, prompting us to design a four-year reflexive study to examine their learning experiences. The aspect of the research we report on here stems from our classroom observations that, despite developing a theoretical understanding of feminist issues, many students remain reluctant to assume a feminist identity. An observation that is at odds with both prior research examining Women and Gender Studies and with our pedagogical aspirations.

In this paper we set out to answer the questions: Does involvement in the Women and Management course affirm, challenge, or change student understandings of feminists and feminism? Does participation influence student willingness to identify as a feminist and to engage in activism? To answer these questions we present findings from 44 students who reflected on their understandings of feminists and feminism, and their willingness to identify as a feminist at the beginning and at the end of the course. These 44 participants also

reflected on which aspects of the course supported, challenged, or changed their understandings and willingness to identify; and who they thought was responsible for redressing gendered structural inequalities.

We begin with a review of how feminist knowledge is developed in the classroom. The particular focus is on examining the development of student willingness to claim a feminist identity and to engage in activism through the feminist pedagogical emphasis on intellectual, personal, and affective learning. Feminist backlash discourses and negative stereotypes are discussed as disciplinary relational community narratives that constrain the willingness to self-identify and to act. Then, a brief over review of the New Zealand context is given. Here we consider the perceived success of feminist activism, neoliberalism, and gender equality as specific New Zealand narratives that shape understandings of feminists and feminism. Next, a description of the Women and Management course and the methods used to gather the opening and closing positions is presented.

The findings show that course participation, with the emphasis on intellectual and personal learning, developed feminist knowledge and affirmed, challenged, and changed participant understandings of feminists and feminism. Paradoxically, having a theoretical understanding of the disciplinary relational processes that reproduce structural inequality left the participants feeling too vulnerable to publicly claim a feminist identity for fear of reprisal should they speak out. Moreover, this vulnerability and fear was exacerbated because of the participants' limited organisation experiences. This meant the participants continued to view gendered employment outcomes as an individual issue to be managed, rather than a feminist concern requiring a collective response. Course participation thus deepened the unwillingness to identify as a feminist and to engage in collective activism. Our analysis of the reflections suggest that we are able to develop deep theoretical insights about structural inequality within the classroom. However, the willingness to claim a feminist identity and to engage in

collective feminist activism remains very much influenced by personal experiences within social relationships. We now review the development of feminist knowledge within the classroom.

Developing Feminist Knowledge in the Classroom

Feminist educators aim to develop student understanding of the way patriarchal structures shape and constrain women's lives, with the expectation that these insights will lead to feminist activism (Stake 2007). Stake (2007, 53) argues that these goals may be achieved through the dual emphasis on 'cognitive, intellectual learning and personal, experiential learning' embedded in feminist pedagogy. The focus of cognitive, intellectual learning is to develop the theoretical capacity of students so they may recognise that gendered inequality is systemic, and embedded in and reproduced through social arrangements, institutional rules, and intimate relationships (Wagner 2014). Introducing multiple theoretical positions and careful attention to feminist course content particularly fosters the development of these deep insights. Multiple theoretical lenses also help expose that knowledge is tentative, historically contingent, and shaped by our experiences with others (Pinnegar and Daynes 2007). Developing a theoretical repertoire also builds the skills necessary to analyse course content and to deconstruct power, knowledge, intimate relationships, and social reality that reproduce structural inequality.

The emphasis on experiential learning is to help students recognise links between their own lives and course content. These links are fostered through participatory and collaborative feminist teaching approaches. Tang (2013) shows that participatory group discussions enable students to draw on theoretical insights to analyse personal experiences of gendering. Moreover, Nah (2015) shows that participatory discussions build a collaborative

learning environment. Thus deeper learning is achieved through combining the knowledge and experience of teachers and students. Gaining deeper insight from sharing experiences is founded on the presumption that women learn through their empathetic and sympathetic relational connections with others. It is these empathetic and sympathetic connections that motivate women to engage in collective feminist action.

Hemmings (2012) reflexively theorises her own pathway to feminist activism and suggests that without an emotional response to an incident of gender discrimination, learning about feminist issues is likely to remain an intellectual endeavour. Hence, theoretical knowledge, and feelings of empathy and sympathy is simply not enough. Rather, we must first experience gender discrimination, and then reflect on the gap between how we perceive our self and the way others judge, treat, or constrain us. It is the emotional response to these reflections that might facilitate the shift from learning about feminist critiques of social structures to knowing about patriarchal constraints imposed on women. Thus, Hemmings argues, it is through affective dissonance between who we think we are and how others judge us that may led to affective solidarity and the willingness to engage in collective feminist activism.

Regardless of these intellectual, experiential, or affective encounters, students still face many challenges to adopting a feminist identity. Ramsey et al. (2007) point out that women with feminist ideals may engage in distancing if they perceive others within their community have negative stereotypical views or align with backlash discourses about feminists. These negative stereotypes and backlash discourses are well rehearsed and suggest that feminism creates problems for women; while feminists are invariably framed as anti-democratic, anti-men, anti-family, and unhappy (Faludi, 1991); and as bra-burners and lesbians (Crossley, 2009).

In light of this, identifying with or distancing from a feminist identity is also a relational process bound by the politics and practices of social life. If we view negative stereotypes and backlash discourses as community narratives (Benwell and Stokoe 2006), then claiming a feminist identity comes with the risk of losing the support of the community. Within our own national context, the apparent success of New Zealand feminists, neoliberalism, and the achievement of gender equality form particularly strong community narratives. These narratives, along with backlash discourses, have been found to influence and shape young women's views about the relevancy of feminism, feminists and feminist activism (Baker 2008). Thus, we now turn to a brief overview of these narratives as played out within the New Zealand context.

Feminist Activism, Neoliberalism, and Gender Equality in New Zealand

New Zealand has a long history of feminist activism. New Zealand women were the first in the world to win the right to vote in 1893; an achievement that remains deeply embedded in our national identity (Nolan 2007). During the 1970s, feminist activists again challenged gendered constraints confining women to the home, and demanded equal access to higher education and employment, equal pay, and free childcare (Ministry for Women 2015). Since the 1970s, New Zealand governments have developed a range of social and economic policy initiatives as well as employment law to meet these demands. As feminist organisational scholars and educators, we present to students the aspects of these initiatives and laws that support or protect women's rights to employment. We then critically analyse the potentiality and limitations of these policy initiatives and legal rights within the socio-political and economic context of New Zealand.

In the Women and Management course, Equal Pay and Human Rights legislation is covered. Legislative and policy initiatives supporting and protecting maternal employment, such as unpaid and paid parental leave, employee rights to request flexible working arrangements, and universal childcare subsidies are also reviewed (Ministry of Education 2014). In addition, the New Zealand Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) framework is presented. This framework focuses on redressing employment barriers, including on the grounds of gender, through the voluntary development of merit-based, non-discriminatory employment policies and practices (Mintrom and True 2004).

Much of this protective and pro-equality legislation was introduced alongside the 1984 implementation and subsequent entrenchment of neoliberalism within the New Zealand political-economy. Indeed, throughout the 1980s, New Zealand gained an international reputation for implementing the most 'pure' version of neoliberalism (Kelsey 1995). While the majority of reforms were introduced between 1984 and 1991, neoliberalism, with the embedded assumptions regarding individualism, meritocracy, and user-pay ideologies, still underpin social and economic policy in New Zealand today (Nolan 2007). Gill and Scharff (2011) summarise the philosophy of neoliberalism as being founded on the belief that social wellbeing is best achieved through the voluntary interactions between individuals within a free marketplace. Under this logic, the role of government is to protect private property and individual liberty to ensure such freedom. In line with this, individuals are constructed as responsible, rational, capable, agendic subjects, who are free to make informed and meaningful choices.

In stark contrast to the espoused valuing of freedom, Phipps (2014) argues that within a neoliberal environment, individuals have become highly governed in almost every aspect of their life. Responsible, reflective individuals are encouraged to evaluate, amend, and re-create the self to fit marketplace opportunities. Meaningful choices are, therefore, already shaped

and constrained by prevailing social arrangements, cultural norms, institutional practices, and intimate relationships. Through the guise of empowerment, women's choices frequently reproduce rather than challenge structural inequality.

Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) describe this environment as institutionalised individualism. That is, State institutions, employment markets, and welfare provision have been redesigned to serve individual rather than group interest. Because of this redesign, individuals have become disembedded from historical social categories of class, race, or gender. Gill and Scharff (2011, 4) suggest that in this environment, 'feminist and anti-feminist ideas' have become entangled; women are offered particular individualised freedoms and choices in exchange for collective feminist activism.

The New Zealand anti-discrimination legislation and voluntary EEO framework certainly reflect Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (2002) and Gill and Scharff (2011) analysis. Indeed, since the 1970s, New Zealand women's participation in both higher education and the labour market has grown steadily. Women constitute around half of all tertiary students and the labour force, have advanced to senior management, and have made significant inroads in politics, including the achievement of two women Prime Ministers (King 2014). These gains are certainly worth celebrating.

However, these gains give the appearance that gender equality in employment has been achieved in New Zealand (McGregor 2013). This appearance of equality masks the deeper more conflicted reality of women's' organisational experiences and the continuation of gendered education and employment outcomes. Moreover, since the introduction of neoliberalism, New Zealand has become recognised as one of the most unequal societies within the OECD (Cingano 2014). Within New Zealand, systemic failings, whether based on gender, class, or race, have become obscured behind a neoliberal rhetoric of poor individual

choice (Cheyne, O'Brien and Belgrave 2000). Thus, while the anti-discrimination and EEO programmes have clearly assisted some women, the individualising focus undermines and overshadows the structural constraints that affect women as a group (Fitzgerald and Wilkinson 2010). It is within this entangled context of feminist activism, feminist backlash, gains and exchanges, and neoliberal individualisation, that we critically teach the Women in Management course, as described in the following section.

A Brief Overview of Woman and Management

Women and Management is taught in one of the eight public universities and within the third largest business school in New Zealand. The course is a third-year undergraduate elective embedded in a four-year management degree. While a component of the human resource management major, the course is available to all students enrolled in the management degree and to some students enrolled in the faculties of law and social science. The course is offered once per year, and this offering alternates between the full-semester and the summer-school programmes based on departmental timetabling needs. When taught in the full-semester, figures range between 20 and 30; and students are mostly New Zealand women enrolled in the business degree majoring in human resource management. Summer-school figures range between 40 and 50, and, while still primarily New Zealand women, typically there are more men and more international students, and a broader range of majors, degrees, and faculties represented. However, the majority of our students are women in their early 20s, enrolled in a four year management degree, and many formatively disclose their aspiration for upward mobile careers in their areas of study.

Throughout the course, we aim to develop student capacity to critically analyse the structural embeddedness of gendered employment outcomes, and to recognise how these

inequalities are produced and reproduced through organisational rules and practices and within the context of their own lives. We do hope these theoretical insights might lead students to engage in feminist activism. We pay particular attention to course content and teaching practice to achieve these aims; and use a variety of sources of information to invoke discussion and highlight contradictions in the lives of women. These sources include government statistics and reports, feminist organisational research articles, news stories, media clips, film, and guest speakers.

The course begins by reviewing theoretical debates around sex and gender, including biological determinism, social learning, and social constructionism. In addition, liberal, radical, and post-colonial feminist perspectives (Calás and Smircich 1996); and the debates surrounding first, second, and third wave feminism are introduced. To foster deep learning, the ontological and epistemological similarities and differences between these debates are highlighted and explored. These lenses are drawn upon throughout the course to frame small group discussions where students are asked to both critically analyse course content and to locate personal experiences within this content.

Government statistics and reports are used to demonstrate gendered employment outcomes. New Zealand women thus remain concentrated in a narrow range of industries and occupations associated with traditional care roles, are overrepresented in part-time and casualized work, are underrepresented within senior management and the judiciary, and are paid significantly less than men (New Zealand Human Rights Commission 2012). Moreover, women still perform the majority of unpaid work in the home, and especially child care (Statistics New Zealand 2011). Feminist organisational research articles are used to explore and analyse the many reasons for these gendered outcomes. Typically, we use articles that examine gender stereotyping, social attitudes, self-efficacy, differentiated first job placement, and family, social, and organisational-related barriers.

The course concludes with a critique of the potentialities and limits of initiatives designed to redress women's disparate employment outcomes. This includes an analysis of the individualised focus embedded in the New Zealand anti-discrimination legislation and EEO framework. Organisational initiatives, such as work-life balance and sexual harassment policies, and individual-level strategies, such as mentoring and networking are also discussed. Although this is a brief, and incomplete overview, it does highlight the content that the participants engage with throughout the semester. We now turn to the methods used to capture the opening and closing reflections.

Method

For this research, two discussion-based classroom exercises were specifically crafted to help students express their beliefs about feminism, and to consider the experiences that shaped those beliefs. These exercises were run in the first and final lectures over the four-year period of the study. In the first exercise, students were asked to list all the feminist achievements that they were aware of. The students were then asked to discuss in small groups: i) their understandings of the terms feminist and feminism, ii) what had informed these understandings, and iii) based on their understandings, whether they identified as a feminist. In the second exercise, students were asked to reflect upon whether engagement in the course had affirmed, challenged, or changed their initial understandings of feminists and feminism, and their willingness to identify as a feminist. They were also asked to discuss who they thought was responsible for creating positive change and if they would engage in feminist activism.

These opening and closing reflections were captured through a combination of focus group, reflective written accounts, and participant produced drawings. In Year 1, five women were involved in focus group discussions conducted immediately following the first and final

lectures. These discussions were taped and transcribed. In Year 2 and 3, students were invited to write a reflective account of the exercises and to submit these via e-mail within three days of each lecture; 23 of the 56 students enrolled across these two years did so. In Year 4, students summarised their thoughts by drawing a picture accompanied by a written reflective interpretation of their images; 16 of the 26 students submitted their narrated pictures.

The 44 participants were reasonably homogenous, in that the majority were women aged between 21 and 22 years, were enrolled in a management degree, and many had worked in low-wage student-typed jobs. Moreover, with the exception of Participant 17, they had no prior experience of Women and Gender Studies. Forty-one participants were women, and three were New Zealand men (Participates 17, 24 and 25). Of the women, 33 were New Zealand citizens and eight were international Chinese-students (Participants 19, 21. 23, 28, 29, 38, 42). Based on this limited demographic information it was not possible to conduct an intersectional analysis.

Instead, Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic approach was used to uncover emergent themes in the opening and closing reflections. The opening reflections were analysed to see if the awareness of feminist achievements, personal experiences, relational encounters, and wider socio-political narratives were embedded in and/or had shaped participant understandings of feminist and feminism, and their willingness to identify as a feminist. The closing reflections were analysed to see whether course engagement had affirmed, challenged, or changed initial understandings, and for patterns in relation to who ought to be responsible for redressing gender discrimination. Signs of whether course content, or intellectual, personal, or affective learning had influenced the closing understandings were also sought. Hence, we examined whether participants had developed their theoretical-analytical capacity; were able to relate course content to personal experience; had an

empathetic or sympathetic response to knowing that women as a group are treated differently; or had an affective emotional response to a personal encounter of gender discrimination. We also sought evidence of relational processes and broader socio-political community narratives influencing the closing positions on feminists, feminism, and the willingness to claim a feminist identity and engage in activism. We now turn to the opening reflections.

Opening Reflections

A number of issues emerged in the opening reflections in relation to participant understandings of the terms feminist and feminism. These issues were entangled within three themes. In the first theme, the issues surrounding the understanding of prior feminist activism, the belief in the achievement of gender equality, and a sense of individualised empowerment were closely entwined. The second theme wove together the issues of the perception of equal treatment, negative stereotypes and backlash discourses, and disciplinary relational encounters within the community. The third theme captured the issues of the individualisation and externalisation of discriminatory experiences, and disciplinary relational encounters with feminists. These entanglements manifest in all the participants rejecting a feminist identity.

We needed feminists' back then, but not now; I'm free to do what I want: I'm not a feminist

All participants were familiar with prior feminist activism that had secured women the right to vote, and they perceived that more recent feminist activism had secured women's access to a wide range of jobs. The participants also believed that gender equality had been achieved. A belief that was shaped by the small number of highly visible and successful New Zealand women, as poignantly illustrated below:

To me females being discriminated [against] seems like an issue of the past, maybe sixty or seventy years ago, but not now, especially not in New Zealand; we have had a female prime minister and some powerful women running important businesses and having great roles in the society, so how can we be not equal. (Participant 10)

Their confidence that gender discrimination had been redressed and more importantly, that gender equality exists, meant that all the participants understood feminism as an important historic movement that had little relevance to contemporary New Zealand society. It was alongside these understandings of equality and feminism, that the women participants viewed themselves to be both strong and capable, and free to make life-decisions based on personal interests over traditional gendered values. Many affirmed their sense of empowerment with proclamations such as 'I don't feel repressed!', and by simultaneously aligning with feminist ideals and distancing themselves from feminists, for example, 'I am pro-equality, but that does not make me pro-feminist'. This sense of irrelevancy and these distancing decisions were reinforced by experiences and observations of gendered treatment and relational disciplinary encounters, both of which shaped the participants constructions of feminists.

I am treated the same as men; Feminists want power over men: I'm not a feminist

Thirty-two of the women, including five international-students, believed that they had never been treated, judged, or constrained on the basis of their sex. Nor had these women ever felt that their sense of an empowered-self had been challenged. These experiences, in turn, shaped their belief that they had similar opportunities to young men, including their

15

brothers, and more opportunities compared to their mothers and grandmothers. These personal-level experiences also upheld their perception that both men and women, including themselves, 'are now free to make life choices'. The participants made it clear that they did not equate their sense of freedom with being a feminist. This reluctance to identify was shaped by the perception that feminists reject equality by seeking power over men, and indeed, overstate or fabricate gender discrimination:

> Feminism is a theory taken on by academics or students who acquire too much 'nonsense' at university and hence bring up and create issues that don't even exist. (Participant 43)

The participants readily reproduced negative stereotypes and backlash discourses to describe feminists as women who were lonely and unhappy, angry, man-hating, lesbian, and were inclined to wear masculine clothing and have an unkempt appearance. Indeed, feminist needed to 'chill out'. These negative understandings and the distancing decisions were reinforced through disciplinary relational encounters whereby the term feminist was expressly used as an insult and as a negative label to 'brand strong minded-women'. Two of the men also held these negative stereotypes and viewed that feminism was only relevant to women 'who hate men' and that feminists 'denaturalise the human condition'. In contrast to the women, they recognised that, as boys, they were raised differently to girls. However, they did not view this differential treatment as discrimination nor as restricting their lives in any way.

I've been or seen gendering; Feminists are political agents: I'm not a feminist

The remaining 10 participants had either personally experienced or had observed gender discrimination. The personal experiences included being treated and judged differently by men and women based on having blonde hair; as a girl, being treated differently to boys throughtout the education system; being expressly taught to dress and act in a feminine manner, and witnessing the grooming of a brother to take over the family farm. The gendered educational experience was analysed as setting the foundation for adulthood decisions, behaviours, and life chances, and the basis for which men and women are judged, rewarded, or punished. These processes were understood to have unfair 'consequences for women in the workplace'.

Those who had seen gendering more readily theorised their observations. These theorisations showed deeper understandings about the existence and consequences of gendered employment barriers, unequal pay, restrictive stereotypes, and the gendering of occupations. The gender pay gap was analysed as manifesting in 'women [still] being the possession of men…who control…their careers and bodies', (Participant 17, male, with prior WGS). Possession and control were also theorised as being secured through domestic violence, as illustrated by the comment 'make a sandwich for me bitch' and through marriage whereby 'accepting a man's name is effectively women succumbing to male domination'.

Based on their experiences and observations, these 10 participants understood feminists as political agents concerned with redressing gender inequality through the development of non-discriminatory organisational processes and protective legislation. Despite their experiences and obsverations, these participants also distanced themseves from claiming a feminist identity.The women did so because they either perceived their experience as uniquely personal and felt an individual responsibility to make changes; because the

encounter was too structurally embedded to do anything about; or because their theoretical insights did not reflect the reality of their own life. Two participants distanced themselves because of their relational disciplinary encounters with feminists. One did so because he felt feminists cast all men as perpetrators of gender discrimination, ignored the negative effects of gendering on men, and as such 'alienated men from becoming active' co-agents in making positive change. The other did so, because she felt that feminists had both developed and engaged in a specific from of discriminatory behaviour towards women who, by virtue of their natural physical appearance, resembled the prevailing idealised beauty standards. In her case, as a blonde women, she experienced a double stigmatisation.

Closing Reflections

The analysis of the closing reflections revealed that the participants had developed their theoretical-analytical capacity and were able to relate course content to their lives. Moreover, many had experienced an empathetic, sympathetic, or affective emotional response to the course content detailing gender discrimination. By the end of the course, their views about feminists and feminism and their sense of empowerment were affirmed, challenged, or changed. Significantly, the themes of individualism and disciplinary relational processes remained deeply embedded in the closing reflections. Individualism and discipline shaped their understanding of who should take responsibility to redress discrimination, and affirmed their unwillingness to claim a feminist identity or to engage in feminist activism.

Inequality exists! Feminists are pro-equality, and so am I

By the end of the course, participants believed that feminists held the same pro-equality values as themselves; and viewed feminists as political agents concerned with

18

redressing gender discrimination. Similarly, feminism was understood to be concerned with more than women rights and was still relevant today. Embedded in these changes in view, was the belief that feminists were 'individuals with legitimate concerns', rather than as a member of a political collective seeking to improve the lives of women.

These changing perspectives of feminists and feminism were particularly influenced by the course content revealing the aggregate gap between men and women's employment outcomes. The ten participants who had encountered discrimination felt the evidence of widespread inequality affirmed their belief that feminists are political agents. The course content also helped them to make sense of and locate their experiences and observations within broader social structures. The evidence of disparate employment outcomes also directly challenged the 32 women who believed that gender equality had been achieved in New Zealand. This in turn, changed their view on feminists and feminism. For some, this belief was so pervasive that they struggled to reconcile evidence to the contrary; for example:

> The only reason I believed the statistics provided was because they were from Census data. I still sometimes question the data provided because it just seems so unreal and I do not want to believe it. (Participant 7)

These participants turned to the theoretical insights presented throughout the course to make sense of the gap between their opening beliefs and the existence of inequality. Some did so by deconstructing the evidence that led them to believe equality existed. Thus, having more women in higher education and paid employment was no longer considered evidence of gender equality. Others deconstructed the very notion of equality, whereby, treating men and women the same was theorised as reproducing structural inequality. This was because they now understood that the standard of 'sameness' was based on 'male norms'. This sameness

was conceptualised as simultaneously silencing and ignoring women's difference; especially around pregnancy, childbirth, and childcare. The two men, who initially believed that raising boys and girls differently was non-discriminatory, had their views challenged by discovering the relationship between women's unpaid work and gendered employment outcomes. Their sympathetic response was to safeguard their partner's career by sharing the house work.

I feel so informed and empowered now

The participants encountered an affective distressful response to becoming informed about the pervasive and wide spread inequalities and organisational barriers. Despite their distress, many felt that course participation was rewarding, and as a result, expressed that they had 'grown as a person' or were 'more confident'. Without exception, all the participants interpreted the information about gender inequality as giving them a new sense of empowerment to develop their careers by designing strategies to overcome organisational barriers once they entered the workforce. This reaffirmed sense of empowerment was particularly evident in the way the participants reflected on the importance of finding the right mentor and joining the right networks to advance their career. Alongside this belief, that as an individual, they could overcome structural barriers, some participants openly resisted our critique of the limits of the equal employment opportunity framework within the New Zealand neoliberal context. In this way, the participants, continued to claim individual responsibility for redressing structural barriers to employment that affect women as a group.

Someone should fix the unfixable

The sense of individual responsibility carried through in the reflections on who ought to act to change gendering and gendered employment outcomes. Half of the participants believed that someone in a position of power or authority was responsible for change. Twelve participants identified the government or managers as responsible, and ten vowed to implement policy initiatives once they became a senior manager. In addition, some suggested that men needed to take more responsibility for housework, while women should take more responsibility to be like men. Two participants made a commitment to ensure they practiced gender-neutral parenting.

Based on the course content and their theoretical insights about structural inequality, ten participants thought that a radical and comprehensive effort was required; including a commitment from governments, organisations, men, and women. However, they then reverted to an individual-level analysis to tease out the danger, futility, and impossibility of attempting to change gendered social arrangements. Some argued that standing up for ones rights or challenging someone in authority could endanger a woman or ruin her reputation and career. Others felt that even if they did something, their actions would not affect aggregate gendered outcomes, so 'why rock the boat'. At times, it was understood that it simply is not possible to act differently, despite having the analytical skills to recognise how personal behaviour reproduces complex repressive relationships. These participants concluded that gender equality is unlikely to ever be achieved. Their reasons included that only a few people are fighting for equality, that the feminist movement is too fractured and people are confused about the intent and goals of feminism, that there is a general lack of awareness about gendered issues, and that feminists are 'simply being ignored'.

This futility was experienced by four participants who attempted micro-level forms of action. Two women, who raised pay disparity with a mother and colleagues, felt their concerns 'fell on deaf ears'. Participant 17 challenged his male partner about the gendering of unpaid work in their home, only to be laughed at and told he would be the 'woman' in their household. One woman conducted an online search of New Zealand Company dress codes; only to discover that feminised standards are still imposed on professional women. Only two women believed that it was unnecessary to change current systems because they viewed that gendered employment outcomes reflected women's different standards of success, which included negotiating balance between their work and family lives.

I'm pro-equality, but I wouldn't call myself a feminist

Despite aligning themselves with feminist ideals and their new found belief that 'fighting for equality between women and men is a valuable pursuit', only two participants in our study were willing to openly claim a feminist identity. The remainder continued to actively distance themselves from feminists and from claiming a feminist identity. They did so because they perceived that people within their community still hold negative views about feminists. One woman, for example, reflected that while she now 'privately claims a feminist identity' she would not do so publicly because 'I am too afraid [of] the repercussions and stereotypes that I may be labelled with'. Thus, the participants perceived that it was not in their best interest to raise concerns about gender inequality, and hence this fear simultaneously shaped, constrained, and informed their choice to remain silent. The members of the focus group were particularly cautious about self-labelling:

> I still think it is a label – I mean we have learnt in the last few weeks that the word feminist is not as bad as it has been portrayed, but there are another four million people in New Zealand who haven't taken this paper. (Participant 1)

The focus group deconstructed their discomfort by surmising that 'it is like people have put a name on feminism to keep us from wanting to associate with it'. Hence, they had re-conceived negative labelling as a distinctive discursive device that had prevented them from inquiring about gendered issues and served to alienate women from feminist activism. In the process, they perceived that the community narrative of feminists as 'man-haters' obscured structural constraints and invalidated concerns about gender inequality:

> I wouldn't label myself a feminist, but I think this touches on the problem, that if all women say 'I don't want to be a feminist' then we are moving away from the problem and…using words to make the feminist ideal seem invalid.

We now turn to a discussion of why this unwillingness to align with a feminist identity and to challenge gender inequality continued despite a significant shift in the participants' perceptions about feminists and feminism.

Discussion

In this paper we set out to explore why our students resist claiming a feminist identity even though they develop theoretical insights as a result of participating in our Women in Management course. And indeed, we did find that the combination of intellectual and personal learning did affirm, challenge, and change participant understandings of feminists

and feminism. More importantly, we discovered that the reluctance to publicly identify as a feminist or engage in collective activism was shaped and constrained by personal experiences of sexism and disciplinary relational encounters.

For example, the closing reflections revealed that the participants had developed a theoretical understanding of structural inequality as being hidden by, embedded in, and reproduced through social arrangements and interpersonal relationships. Moreover, the aggregate gap between women and men's employment outcome directly challenged participant beliefs that gender equality has been achieved in New Zealand. These theoretical insights enabled the participants to abandon negative stereotypes and backlash discourses, and instead affirm the legitimacy of feminist concerns and the relevancy of feminism.

While beliefs had been challenged or confirmed by the theoretical developments and course content, the participants had never encountered gender discrimination or felt personally constrained because of their gender within an organisational context. Because of this, the participant's theorisation of structural inequality bared very little resemblance to their lives. This lack of contradiction between organisational experiences and how they viewed themselves also meant that organisational gender injustice remained an abstract concept.

The participants drew on the familiarity of neoliberal discourses to reconcile the contradiction between their theoretical understanding of structural inequality and their own lack of discriminatory encounters in organisations. They did so by aligning the theoretical knowledge to their experiences. This alignment was evident in the way the participants translated gendered employment barriers in to worksite issues, and in the way they interpreted certain lectures as providing instructional advice on how to overcome these issues. The lectures on mentoring and networking, in particular, were interpreted in this way,

and thus were understood only as individualised, career enhancing strategies. This process of aligning theory to experience meant the participants felt better informed, prepared, and capable of taking charge of, and responsibility for their careers. This alignment also meant that the participants could continue to hold on to their neoliberal self-identity and to reconstruct feminists as individuals with legitimate concerns.

In the absence of experience, this process, however, entrenched the participants' inability to view structural inequality as being embedded in or reproduced through organisational policies, practices, or rules. Nor could they easily recognise women workers as a disadvantaged group, or themselves as potentially a member of such a group. Therefore, the participants were unable to recognise workplace practices as feminist concerns requiring a collective feminist response. Indeed, half of the participants viewed that someone in authority should take responsibility for redressing gender discrimination.

Paradoxically, the critical interpretation that structural inequality is embedded in, and reproduced through social arrangements and personal relationships also left the participants feeling too vulnerable to make an explicit and personalised challenge or to publicly claim a feminist identity. This vulnerability was partly due to their ability to interpret backlash discourses and negative stereotypes and their own experiences of being labelled a feminist as normalising discourses and relational disciplinary practices. Moreover, they understood that while their views might have changed, the majority of people still believed that gender equality has been achieved and still hold negative perceptions about feminists and feminism. Rather than put themselves at risk, the participants chose to distance themselves from self-labelling and remain silent.

Conclusion

As feminist pedagogues specialising in organisational studies, we do hope that by exposing structural inequalities, as manifest in the workplace, students might be willing to claim a feminist identity and engage in collective activism. Our study confirms that developing critical awareness of structural inequality can be achieved in the classroom. However, we also reveal that understanding how structural inequality is reproduced through disciplinary relationships entrenched student unwillingness to claim a feminist identity and to engage in collective activism. This unwillingness was embedded in the complex entanglement of theoretical insight, personal experience, and fear and vulnerability. Claiming a feminist identity or engaging in collective activism was deemed too risky within a community that predominantly believes gender equality has been achieved, negatively stereotypes feminists and feminism, and celebrates individual effort. Thus, the participants highlight that developing a feminist identity is intimately bound by the socio-political context and relationships that shape and constrain our lives. The role of formal feminist pedagogy in this journey is, perhaps, to provide an environment where intellectual, personal, and affective learning can take place. As teachers, our contribution remains in the hope, that by crafting a feminist learning environment, students may recognise discriminatory encounters and someday join with others to redress structural inequalities.

References

Baker, J. 2008. The ideology of choice: Overstating progress and hiding injustice in the lives of young women: Findings from a study in North Queensland, Australia. *Women's Studies International Forum* 31: 53-64

Beck, U., and Beck-Gernsheim, E. 2002. *Individualization: Instituionalized Individualism and its Social and Political Consequences.* London: Sage.

Benwell, Bethan, and Stokoe, Elizabeth. 2006. *Discourse and Identity*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Braun, V., and Clarke, V. 2006. Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology* 3, no.2: 77-101

Calás, M., & Smircich, L. 1996. From the woman's point of view: Feminist approaches to organization studies. In S. Clegg, C. Hard, & W. R. Nord (Eds.), *Handbook of Organization Studies:* 218-257. London, UK: Sage Publications.

Cingano, F. 2014. Trends in income inequality and its impact on economic growth. *OECD Social, Employment and Migration Working Papers No. 163*

Cheyne, C., O'Brien, M, and Belgrave, M. (2000). Social Policy in Aotearoa New Zealand (2nd edition). New Zealand: Oxford University Press.

Crossley, A.D. 2009. "When it suits me, I'm a feminist:" International students negotiating feminist representations. *Women's Studies International Forum*., 1-9. doi:10.1016/jwsif.2009.11.003

Faludi, S. 1991. *Backlash: The undeclared war against women*. London: Chatto & Windus.

Fitzgerald, T. and Wilkinson, J. 2010. *Travelling Towards a Mirage? Gender, Leadership and Higher Education*. Brisbane: Post Pressed.

Gill, R., & Scharff, C. 2011. New femininities: Post \feminism, neoliberalism, and subjectivity. New York; Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire;: Palgrave Macmillan.

Hemmings, C. (2012). Affective solidarity: Feminist reflexivity and political transformation. Feminist Theory, 13(2), 147-161. doi:10.1177/1464700112442643

Kelsey, J. 1995. *The New Zealand experiment: A world model for structural adjustment?* Auckland, New Zealand: Auckland University Press.

King, N. 2014. *Raising the Bar: Women in Law and Business.* New Zealand: Thomson Reuters New Zealand Ltd.

Maimunah Ismail and Mariani Ibrahim. 2008. Barriers to career progression faced by women: Evidence from a Malaysian multinational oil company. *Gender in Management: An International Journal.* 23 no. 1: 51-66

McGregor, J. 2013. Gender equality and social justice: Progress, paradoxes, and promise. *Address given to the Workers Education Association,* Christchurch, 7 November, 2013.

Ministry of Education. 2014. Education Count's. Participation in early childhood education. Ministry of Education. https://www.educationcounts.govt.nz/indicators/main/student-engagement-participation/1923

Ministry for Women (2015). History of the Ministry for Women. http://women.govt.nz/new-zealand-women/history/ministry

Mintrom, M., and True, J. 2004. *Framework for the Future Equal Employment Opportunities in New Zealand: Report Produced for the Equal Employment Opportunities*

Unit of the Human Rights Commission, as Part of the Equal Employments Opportunities Framework. Wellington, NZ: The Human Rights Commission.

Nah, Y. 2015. Rethinking the idiom for feminist pedagogy: The collaboration of theory and activism. *Asian Journal of Womens Studies 21*. no. 2: 147-165. doi:10.1080/12259276.2015.1062266

New Zealand Human Rights Commission. 2012 *New Zealand census of women's participation.* Retrieved from *http://live.isitesoftware.co.nz/neon2012/documents/hrc_womens_census2012.pdf*

Nolan, M. 2007. The Reality and Myth of New Zealand Egalitarianism: Explaining the Pattern of a Labour Historiography at the Edge Of Empires. *Labour History Review*, 72 no. 2: 113-134.

Phipps, Alison. Politics of the Body: Gender in a Neoliberal and Neoconservative Age. Oxford, GBR: Wiley, 2014. ProQuest ebrary. Web. 30 September 2015.

Pinnegar, S., and Daynes, J. G. 2007. Locating narrative inquiry historically: Thematics in the turn to narrative. In D. J. Clandinin (Ed.), *Handbook of Narrative Inquiry: Mapping a Methodology. 3-34.* Thousand Oaks California: Sage Publications Inc.

Ramsey, L R., Haines, M. E., Hurt, M. M., Nelson, J. A., Turner, D. L., Liss, M., and Erchull, M.J. 2007. Thinking of others: Feminist identification and the perception of others' beliefs. *Sex Roles* 56, no.9-10: 611-616. DOI 10.1007/s11199-007-9205-5

Reid, A., and Purcell, N.. 2004. Pathways to feminist identification. *Sex Roles* 50, no. 11-12:759-769. DOI 10.1023/B:SERS.0000029095.40767.3c

Savigny, Heather. 2014. Women, know your limits: cultural sexism in academia. *Gender and Education* 26(7): 794-809, DOI: 10.1080/09540253.2014.970977

Stake, Jayne E. 2007. Predictors of change in feminist activism through women's and gender studies. *Sex Roles* 57, no.1-2:43-54. Doi:10.1007/s11199-007-9227-z

Statistics New Zealand. 2011. *Time Use Survey 2009/2010.* Retrieved from http://www.stats.govt.nz/browse_for_stats/people_and_communities/time_use/TimeUseSurvey_HOTP2009-10/Commentary.aspx

Tang, W. 2013. Constructing and practicing feminist pedagogy in Taiwan using a field study of the twenty-five ladies tomb. *Gender Place and Culture 20*. no. 6: 811-826. doi:10.1080/0966369X.2012.731382

Wagner, Anne. 2014. Re-imagining the (un)familiar: feminist pedagogy in rural spaces, *Gender and Education* 26, no. 5: 553-567, DOI: 10.1080/09540253.2014.927836