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Significant Others?

Friendships between women and neoliberal relational life

Maree Martinussen

A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of
Philosophy in Psychology, the University of Auckland, 2019.

Abstract

Friendships between women are a significant site of knowledge production for intimacy, gender and sexuality. Yet, despite the unprecedented re-shaping of the landscape of personal life over the last half-century, academic interest in friendships between women remains rare. In this thesis, I analyse data from interviews, group discussions and vignette methods, carried out with women in 'early midlife' (late twenties to late forties), in Aotearoa New Zealand. I detail how subjects are recruited into gendered technologies of self through the practices of friendship.

Sketching out the trends within the current era of 'liquid' modernity where the gendered norms of emoting and intimacy can be difficult to read, I demonstrate why interdisciplinary research is needed which bridges critical social psychology and a sociology of personal life. Through my use of discursive affective practice theory, I explain why the forms of affect imbuing friendships between women are best conceived of as social practices. These collaborative performances are creatively constructed in the heat of a moment but can be nevertheless be studied systematically, contextualised across a range of social scales, including historical, interactional and personal. In the first of the three empirical chapters, I examine how participants wrestle with the dilemma of needing to carve out a space for friendships, while living out the hierarchical ordering of personal life where long-term sexual relationships are prioritised. The second analysis chapter investigates the gendered operations of the psy-complex, demonstrating participants' flexible use of individualising sense-making resources which denote 'healthy' friendships between women. Although the gendering of neoliberal subjectivities remains a concern in the third analytic chapter, I suggest that when 'just hanging out', women friends contravene hegemonic postfeminist injunctions to self-manage and self-transform.

This thesis contributes to a politicised mapping of the competing assemblages that make up women's intimate relating today. Although the contradictions bound up within neoliberal discursive formations make the relational-scape of women's friendships challenging to operate within, I propose that the tensions between the everyday experiences of friendships and the dominant knowledges about how to develop one's relational self, may be a fruitful place to seek out creative becomings in novel directions.

In memory of

Sturla Martinussen, Nooti Katipa and Patricia Katipa

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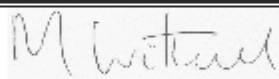
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Name	Nature of Contribution
Margaret Wetherell	Supervision of research, contribution to research planning and design, detailed feedback on manuscript drafts, advice regarding submission

Certification by Co-Authors

The undersigned hereby certify that:

- the above statement correctly reflects the nature and extent of the PhD candidate's contribution to this work, and the nature of the contribution of each of the co-authors; and
- that the candidate wrote all or the majority of the text.

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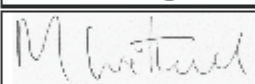
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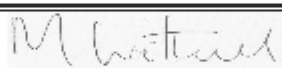
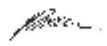
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PART I: INTRODUCTION, AIMS AND LOCATING THE RESEARCH

Chapter One: Introducing the research context

How do women organise their friendships in contemporary Aotearoa New Zealand? How do cultures of friendship influence the organisation of women's personal lives? Moreover, given the positive connotations typically associated with friendships between women, including for the advancement of feminist politics, why am I bringing a critical eye to women's friendships?

In this thesis, I sketch out some of the main features of friendship relating between women, noting their inseparability from other forms of self that are produced in the spheres of care and intimacy. I engage with wide-ranging debates in critical social psychology, sociology, cultural studies and queer theory, but ensure coherence through empirical study of the tacit, lived knowledges and realities of women's friendship relating. My goal in this thesis is three-fold. With the empirical analysis, I bring new insights to women's friendships, a field of practice that is often either idealised or overlooked in qualitative research. Secondly, these empirical contributions allow me to stretch the boundaries of contemporary theory regarding women's friendship and management of intimate life. Lastly, there is methodological significance in my demonstration of modes of analysis that are systematic and oriented to the everyday, while maintaining a focus on affect women's meaning-making around their friendships. Although the research is set in Aotearoa New Zealand, I put the thesis in dialogue with debates about social change that has occurred throughout the West, which includes a heightened awareness of discontinuity, fluidity and autonomy. To begin introducing some of these debates, I will use some autobiographical accounts of friendship experiences available through online news and entertainment websites, which provide situated accounts of cultures of women's friendships.

Friendship, feminism and the relational self

The first two short extracts I discuss are taken from a personal essay by the columnist Rebecca Traister (2004) that featured in Salon.com, a digital media news outlet. The piece is entitled 'Girlfriends are the New Husbands', and the author uses a story of her own best-friendship to animate what she sees as a wider, contemporary problem. In the subtitle of the piece, Traister asks: "Women no longer become adults within the context of marriage — we grow up with our friends. So what happens when they leave us?"

What sacrifices are worth making? What chances are worth taking? How do you balance scales when your job, your home, your friends and your city are on one side and a man you love, a relationship you want to work, is on the other? I pushed her again and again — to move. What we wanted, after all, were not just good jobs and good friends, but fun, functional relationships with men, sex and, someday, families of our own. And we knew that all of those things meant choice and compromise and sacrifice.

Our time as single women allowed us to build a strength and self-awareness that would help us make healthy choices. We were spending playful, selfish years hammering out what we wanted from life until we knew our own desires well enough that we could take chances — like moving to Boston for a boy — and not risk losing our sense of self. So here we are. Sara's sacrifice is giving up her home, her job. Mine is giving up her.

This extract illuminates some of the dilemmas of personal life, and the messiness of living out and doing ‘good’ women-friends. The directions of the tugging and pulling are manifold. Not only does one have to consider work life, home life, maintaining connections with friends and dealing with stressors of urban life, but also, with the prospect of losing it all, to remake a life elsewhere with a partner. While good jobs and good friends sit on one side of the scale, men, (hetero)sex, and children of one’s own sit on the other. Through this balancing act, another pull becomes apparent: a potentially precarious sense of self must be secured in the process of finding the right man; a self who makes “healthy choices”. Indeed, choice is a recurring theme. Being a capable woman entails making *considered* sacrifices, calculating chances and managing balancing acts. All of this they do, ideally, through continual cultivation of a reflexive “self-awareness”.

Later, the narrator makes sense of a bout of anger and upset at her friend leaving, claiming a societal lack of recognition of the depth of female friendships.

What I'm saying as I let my friend go — is that the alliances single women form with each other are profound and lasting. What we're mourning, when we yell at those friends who are about to depart...is that on some level, these relationships demand recognition.

In these two extracts, there is a fascinating vacillation between two sets of emotions. There are those emotions which relate to the friend and friendship itself, which range from nostalgia about the playfulness of days gone by, through to anger at the departure. The second group that jostles for recognition are those linked to resignation and ambivalence about the sacrifices that must be made. Although a sense of unease and frustration about the compromises women must make permeates the piece, there is also acquiescing to the heteronormative imperative to “[know] our own desires”. Despite acknowledging the pitfalls involved, the author seems to accept the normative ordering of personal life laid out here, where one ‘ascends’ from friendships to long-term sexual relationships.

This conundrum, and accompanying sense of frustration, is something I share with the narrator, and was a motivation for bringing the research into being. I too, accept the relationship formations on offer with great reluctance, feeling ensnared at the lack of alternatives. How much choice is involved in ‘graduating’ to coupledness when there is only one socio-culturally sanctioned option? Working to an assumption that these experiences and feelings are not unique, in this thesis I ask

what resources are available to ameliorate these dilemmatic circumstances. How do we make sense of these compromises and disappointments? How do we make them liveable? As an early indication, the narrator demonstrates how acceptance of the status quo can be justified through mobilising notions of moral obligation. Remaining loyal to friends in this situation means helping them make difficult transitions into new lives, insisting they “take chances”, and by remaining confident that shared long friendships will fortify friends with the tools they need to leave (“I pushed her again and again — to move”). On the other ‘side’, newly partnered friends are positioned as having responsibility to steel themselves, and bravely ‘move forward’ in prioritising long-term sexual relationships. Conversely however, what kind of bravery would be required to refuse this form of ‘development’ in the current context? Are liveable alternatives available, and if so, what role does a feminist politics have in finding them?

Similar questions have emerged in recent decades, through Sasha Roseneil’s (2000, 2004, 2006b, 2006a; Roseneil & Ketokivi, 2015) and Shelley Budgeon’s (2006, 2008, 2015) nuanced, sociological investigations of personal life (Budgeon, 2011; Budgeon & Roseneil, 2002, 2004; Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004). Echoing earlier ‘families of choice’ researchers (Nardi, 1992; Plummer, 1995; Weston, 1991), Roseneil and Budgeon’s empirical work demonstrates that non-conventional friendships and elective communities are becoming a reality for some individuals (Budgeon, 2006; Roseneil, 2006c; Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004). They have maintained a clear message that a queered sociology of personal life is needed, which they have underpinned with claims that there is increased fluidity between friendships, kin and other relationship types in some communities. Almost twenty years ago, they noted that popular television shows such as ‘Friends’, ‘Seinfeld’, ‘Ellen’, and ‘Will and Grace’, were doing more in-depth explorations of diversity in contemporary practices of intimacy beyond the heteronormative family than the field of sociology (Budgeon & Roseneil, 2002; Roseneil, 2000). Although there have been continued attempts to decentre the family from studies of personal life since (Morgan, 2011, p.71; Roseneil & Ketokivi, 2015), Roseneil and Budgeon’s point remains pertinent. There is a dearth of research and theory seeking answers about how friendships work in concert with other parts of relational life.

Yet, whilst acknowledging that there are some individuals or communities who are managing to diversify meanings of intimacy in their personal communities, where does the focus on non-conventionality leave those of us struggling with the dilemmas of being forced to choose between friends and ‘settling down’? In a rare example exploring the tensions of managing the different strands of intimacy in our lives, Anne Cronin (2015) demonstrates how delicate manoeuvres are required when friendships loom as threats to heterosexual couples. Cronin (2015, p.12) goes on to show how decisions about (de)prioritising friendships are typically dealt with using zero-sum game logic: ‘investing intimacy in one form of relationship such as friendship necessitates a parallel

reduction of intimacy for other relationships'. Today, Cronin's (2015b, 2015a, 2015c) research stands out within a sociology of friendship for taking seriously the co-constitutive nature of relationship types. Yet, her claims resonate with earlier sociological studies centring on the friendships of married women and mothers that emerged in the 1980s (Gullestad, 1984; Harrison, 1998; Oliker, 1989; for an overview, see O'Connor, 1992, pp.56-89). Overall, this important, earlier work built up a picture of friendships as creating a rich sense of personal space, in a life often crowded with demands to attend to the needs of husbands and children. It also demonstrated how friendships were understood to promote the institution of marriage and family.

My research sits somewhere between these two canons in sociological studies of friendship relating. I too forward an agenda for queering studies of personal life. However, given the continued dominance of heterorelationality, in this empirical research I am more concerned with exploring the patterning and effects of heterorelationality than new kinds of community. In this respect, my research more closely aligns with feminist projects of friendship that pre-date the 'chosen family' literatures. For instance, the thesis can be seen as responding to Janice Raymond's (1986) philosophical calls for theorisations of women's friendships that challenge a persistent 'heteroreality', where women's existence is defined in relation to men's. In the extract that introduced this section, the narrator's framing of singleness as temporary, is indicative of the ways heteroreality organises personal life. Without men, women's time together becomes "playful, selfish years [spent] hammering out what we wanted from life". My task in this thesis is to ask how heterorelationality manifests today, how it is negotiated, and with what effects. What kinds of relationship orderings do my participants reproduce? At the same time, is there evidence of new communities and the queering of everyday intimate life? I will now introduce the second set of overarching debates with which I engage, via an excerpt from another personal narrative.

Women's friendships and the shifting landscape of neoliberalism

The following extract appeared in 'The Cut', a subsidiary magazine of the New York Times, in an article entitled 'The Secret to Staying Friends in Your 30s' (Calhoun, 2015). In a way, it follows on from where we left the last story characters; the extract allows exploration of anxieties of friendships after friends 'settle down'. What occupies and captures the attention of women friends, once settled into the normative life-stage of coupledness?

There is no good time to see people, no friend equivalent of the candlelit dinner and rose-strewn canopy bed. To stay friends is to make do with the social equivalent of a taco truck and bathroom quickie. As the opposite of a sensualist, I actually prefer this. There's something both efficient and exciting about having friends woven into the texture of daily life. It feels almost illicit when we manage to steal time together, like we are cheating on our grown-up lives.

[...] Friendships these days require both recklessness and ingenuity — the willingness to try hard, but also to settle for scraps. So you see friends when and where you can: say, at a coffee shop around the corner from a drop-off birthday party while working side by side on laptops. 'I only have friends who will go to CVS with me', my best friend, Tara, once announced while we were making our way through Chelsea. I had picked her up at Penn Station... and I was walking her to a meeting. We covered a lot of emotional territory as we marched downtown carrying heavy bags. 'How much time do we have?' she will ask most days when we get on the phone. 'Six blocks', I will say. 'Okay', she'll say. 'Go'.

[...] The way Tara and I have stayed close for something like 15 years is that long ago we lowered the bar, accepting that so-called quality time is for other people and that it is our lot instead to tell each other stories one bit of dialogue at a time in ten short phone calls spread out over a week.

In comparison with the previous extract, a rather more flippant set of characters are set in motion. For these successful, privileged, busy, urban women with children, fitting in friendships around the demands of work and families are described in less rueful terms. They sardonically accept the limitations on their modes of being together.

Yet, in amongst the irreverence or lightness of carrying out friendship in efficient and breezy terms, the notion of “having friends woven into the texture of daily life” points to the vital, fundamental place of friends in each other’s lives. Another contradictory feature apparent here, which repeats across popular accounts such as this, centres on confidence. There is firstly an assumption that friends “require... [a] willingness to try hard”, and anxieties about making and keeping friends “in your 30s” are naturalised. Conversely, a self-assured confidence in doing friendships is also evident. The contradiction of the work required to maintain friendships, versus taking them for granted, extends beyond friendship management, spilling over into a more generalised sense of contemporary identity-making. Themes of time-pressure and exhaustion are invoked, but the account also plays out in an affective register akin to an action film. The characters are debonair, plucky and keep their cool whilst swiftly executing their assignments. The survival of friendships requires “recklessness and ingenuity”, which serves to set up the broader environment as an endurance test. Notably however, the trials are deeply prosaic: the birthday party drop-off, trips to the pharmacy, or remote working in coffee shops.

Also presented as a task for execution, to keep the daily stressors from developing into more serious wounds in this battlefield, is the perfunctory coverage of “emotional territory” with friends. The sentimentality normatively associated with emotional self-revelation in the West is stripped away in this description of our protagonist providing a progress report of her emotions while forging on to the next encounter. Another stark push against sentimentality is articulated through the pragmatism of ‘settling for scraps’ in friendships, due to time commitments elsewhere. Friends

who are not willing to combine friendship interactions with achieving other assignments are not long-term friendship material (“I only have friends who will go to CVS with me”). The valuing of pragmatism and efficiency in friendship interactions explains why, later in the article, the narrator claims “low expectations can be liberating”.

This thesis engages with complex and contradictory everyday knowledges such as these, formed around surviving and thriving as a woman friend. When contextualised within and through debates about the neoliberalisation of emotional life and intimacy, they become rather troubling. For example, although it has been argued for some time that women’s emotionally expressive ‘style’ of intimacy, has come to stand for the only style of intimacy of value (Cancian, 1986; Swain, 1989), maintaining relational capital in this way is potentially a signifier of women internalising and regulating neoliberalism from within (Hochschild, 2011). As such, it is not the high value of emotionality as form of care in itself that I problematise, but the individualising frameworks upheld in the process. As the quote illustrates, providing ‘emotional support’ — if understood as another part of life to choose, to make happen, get right and control — risks inducing further pressure.

Similar accounts of friendships, or friendship management, can be found easily in the public domain, in lifestyle genres (Brooks, 2015; Goodman & O’Brien, 2000; Hopper, 2016; Lally, 2015; Libbert, 2015; Petersen & Maciak, 2014; Traister, 2016) and in self-help guides to friendship (Levine, 2009; Nelson, 2016). Some popular accounts, like the two above, are biographical, while others involve more ‘expert’ advice. Although the two brief accounts I have provided are not from experts, they are nonetheless suggestive of a policing of the personal. While the first central line of enquiry I outlined for the thesis centred on exploring meanings of friendships in the broader ideological sphere of care and intimacy, a second is to investigate how caring in friendships might be inflected through a discourse of endurance and improvement, characteristic of the postfeminist sensibility (Gill, 2017b).

A third aim is similarly related to the forms of self-making possible under late-capitalism. For these explorations, I lean on theorising which suggests emotions have become a tool for commodifying aspects of everyday life, though the popularisation of psychology (Rose, 1996b). What are the gendered implications of the psychologisation of desires? In what ways do friendship practices intersect with a version of selfhood oriented to maximising all elements of life (Rose 1996)? As is clear from these biographical stories however, everyday negotiations about the significance of women’s friendships are not straightforward. My entry into these explorations is women’s everyday affective meaning-making, through Margaret Wetherell’s discursive affective practice theory (2012, 2013a, 2013b, 2014, 2015), discussed further in the next section.

Friendships with feeling: friendships as discursive affective practices

I begin this section with a very short extract, which was written for a private rather than public audience. It provides a vivid contrast to the previous excerpt, which disparaged sentimentality in friendships. Maria Richmond's words, below, were written to her closest friend when departing England in 1852, to begin life in Aotearoa New Zealand as a missionary.

Once in every 24 hours I shall think of you and all our love, and dwell on the thought of our meeting again and possessing each other when earthly troubles are over. (Richmond 1852, as cited by Marcus 2009)

This quote is drawn from Sharon Marcus's *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (2009). It captures an intensity, distress and romanticism that seems to be an uncommon feature of contemporary female friendships. Marcus outlines how, for many middle/upper-class Victorian women, friendships were central to their relational-scapes. Friends were *the* main characters of the life stories told through letters, diaries and autobiographies. Marcus (2009) goes on to demonstrate how women friends carried out public displays of physical affection and exercised spontaneity in ways disapproved of for husbands and wives. Through the process of heterosexual marriage, bonds between women were fostered, rather than suppressed (Marcus 2009). The ordering of personal life, the meanings of friendship in relation to sexual life and family, seem to have shifted. But how should we go about exploring and explaining these shifts, and their significance?

This thesis sits within the broader relational sociology of personal life, which sees friendship as an essential component of flows of relations, encompassing colleagues, family, kin, neighbours, flatmates or long-term sexual partners (Chambers, 2006; May, 2013; Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004; Roseneil & Ketokivi, 2015). Using Wetherell's discursive affective practice theory, however, allows for a rather more detailed and context-sensitive analysis suited for studying personal life. It provides tools for showing what is at stake in women's everyday friendship relating — the resentments, sadness and joys and the indifferences, boredom and the mundane. Moreover, as I explain in Chapters Two and Three, I advocate a more radical form of relationality than is typically found in sociological studies of personal life, which often reproduce the binaries of discourse versus practice, (individual) subjectivity versus (social) identity, and emotion versus knowledge. I place greater emphasis on multiplicity, and the interweaving of multiple moral orders and discursive regimes through practical sense-making in friendships.

In this respect, the current research most closely resembles two other ethnographies of feminine subjectivity in friendships, both of which concern, not women's friendships, but girls' friendships.

With attentiveness to lived experience and the psychological implications of the politics of girls' interpersonal relating, Valerie Hey's *'The Company She Keeps'* (1997) and Valerie Walkerdine, Helen Lucey and June Melody's *'Growing Up Girl'* (2001) both drew attention to the importance of female friendship for understanding girls' and women's place in society. Like the present undertaking, both of these bodies of research have an impetus towards translating ordinary, everyday experience of female togetherness into tools for understanding subjectivity and power, which are analysable in social, historical, material and biographical terms.

With this impetus in mind, my study orients to a gap in literature about the meanings available to women for making sense of their friendships with other women, and the implications of these friendships for gender politics today. Although there have been recent contributions from cultural studies (Kanai, 2016, 2017c, 2017a; Winch, 2013), in addition to Cronin's (2015a, 2015b) sociological work, there is virtually no research in critical social psychology explicitly exploring women's friendships in contemporary times (although they are not very recent, for exceptions, see Griffin, 2000; Zukas, 1993). I hope therefore to 'open out' the topic of women's friendship to the discipline, and Chapter Three provides more detail on how this might be put into effect. Additionally, however, I aim to bring a discursive psychosocial approach to sociological studies of friendship. I understand affect and emotion as intrinsically, deeply implicated in the machinery of the social life, through psychologies which are intersubjectively and discursively organised. This allows for a multi-layered account of friendship — personal, interpersonal and social — that is missing from recent sociological accounts (Blatterer, 2015; Chambers, 2006; May, 2012). The field of sociolinguistics has also produced a rich body of work on women's friendship (Coates, 1996, 1997, 2017; Evaldsson, 2007; Holmes, 1997; Tannen, 1990), highlighting women's very active sense-making about women's place in the world, and providing counters to popular conceptions of women friends as neurotic, hostile gossips, and concerned with overly trivial matters (O'Connor, 1992; Raymond, 1986; Simon & Nath, 2004). Yet, a sense of women's investments in their identity-as-friend is missing. An explanation is not provided for how particular discursive resources become powerful for individuals.

With this research, I provide a critical, qualitative investigation of friendships between women in Aotearoa New Zealand. The sample group are women in 'early midlife', aged late twenties to late forties. I have taken a multi-layered approach to the research design, which consists of using three methods. First, to capture patterns in the cultural resources at the broad-social scale of social practice, I have used vignettes, and analysed patterns in the written responses provided by 145 participants. The possibilities for collaborative, interactional sense-making about these cultural resources were then explored through pair or small group discussions, with 17 participants, via 6 data collection sessions. Finally, 16 individual interviews were carried out, with a focus on how

‘society’s common sense’ becomes personalised (Edley & Wetherell, 1995, p.165). One of my aims in this research has been to ask how social action that takes place within the cultures of women’s friendships gets packaged up into ongoing identity projects, and turned into psychological resources that are enduring, but which can be used flexibly. My corpus of data from the three methods is text-based, transcribed audio-data, and participant responses to a written research method. As I discuss in Chapter Three however, an inclusive treatment of discourse is used, where discursive social action organises text and talk, but also physical, visual and tactile forms of human activities (Wetherell, 2008, p.74).

Researcher reflexivity: making myself visible

Before moving on to the overview of the thesis, I want to discuss my role as researcher in relation to my participants and the research topic, and to make myself visible as the driver of this, always subjective, research project. When doing so, I take seriously Beverly Skeggs’ (2002) point that telling the self in research risks bolstering researchers’ power. In particular, Skeggs (2002) demonstrates vividly how researchers’ reflexive statements often fix participants in place, to particular categories, while researchers maintain the ability to move flexibly around these designated positions. My reflections about how my decisions have affected the research process are located in the account of my methodology in Chapter Four, while here, I focus on my positionality and personal reflections¹.

The task of knowing exactly how and when we occupy positions of power as researchers is difficult for multiple reasons, but one of these is that we move in and out of positions throughout the research process (Skeggs, 2002, p.369). Indeed, although I too am a woman-friend in early midlife, an insider, I have experienced my role as researcher as an outsider during the research at times. Many women came forward to participate because, like me, they are highly invested in celebrating their female friendships; many discussed their friends as saviours and heroines. Another motivation I share with participants is a fascination with women’s friendships, and an eagerness to learn more about them. Yet, in the chapters to follow, we, my participants and I, do not go on a learning journey together. When analysing material, it did not feel like I was appreciating my participants’ narratives through my experiences as a woman-friend. It felt like I was studying them from the outside. In pronounced ways, I have fixed my participants’ places, in relation to the cultural formations I discuss. To borrow from Skeggs (2002, p.363) once again, however, although I have

¹ Although I have already suggested how some of my observations and feelings about my own friends and other personal relationships have informed the research, I have refrained from providing any depth of detail about my own relationships for ethical reasons (to avoid affecting those relationships).

access to knowledge and interpretations that give me ‘epistemological authority’, I believe it is a merging of my knowledge, with participants’ everyday knowledges about friendships and relational life that have produced my analyses.

Further, although my active re-construction of participants throughout my analyses have been done from the outside, because of my (partial) insider status, in fixing my participants in place, I am also fixing myself in place. For example, like most of my participants, I am a cis-gendered woman in a monogamous relationship, and, resonating with the story I reproduced earlier, I recently left my friends to start another life with my partner (and my doctoral studies). I was sad, but I was not heartbroken, and I will no doubt leave other friends again in the future. I am enmeshed in the same norms and cultures as my participants. While my interpretations were primarily in the name of directing attention to ‘the stranglehold of oppressive metanarratives, [to] open up possibilities for social change’ (Chase, 2015, as cited by Foley, 2012), I include myself as a potential beneficiary.

Overview of thesis

This work follows a thesis with publication format. It includes five journal articles submitted for publication, two of which are single authored, and three that are co-authored². The thesis also includes additional literature review material, and a detailed overview of the methods adopted for the empirical research, along with related discussions about procedural and ethical considerations of data collection and the overall methodological framework. In addition, the discussion and conclusions comment on the import of the work as a whole.

The thesis consists of four parts. Part I, which includes this introduction, details the location of the research in disciplinary terms. While the material preceding this section provided an introduction to some of the background social theory, further work to locate the research can be found in Chapter Two, which includes the first of the five articles in the thesis. There, I advocate blending different traditions of sociology, critical social psychology and queer studies, to address current challenges of studying personal and intimate life in the current social moment, where norms of emoting, intimacy, gender and sexuality can be difficult to read. Also included in Chapter Two is additional literature which helps locate the research problems in a longer and broader history of studies of personal relating and friendship research.

Part II provides the theoretical and methodological scaffolding for the research. Chapter Three is the second article included in the thesis. It provides a similar emphasis on fluidity between

² At August 2018, two articles have been accepted subject to minor revisions, two have been accepted subject to revisions, and one is under review.

disciplinary borders, as Chapter Two does, but through justification of my use of discursive affective practice theory. I demonstrate my theoretical approach, contrasting it with other queer-influenced affect theories, through analysing a sample of the research data. At the same time, I signal something of my ethical commitments as a social scientist, both to the treatment of people as agentic and creative in my efforts to capture their lived, embodied experiences, and in developing an empirical research agenda for studying them. In Chapter Three, I also illustrate how the theoretical position I advocate is intertwined with the methodological underpinnings of this research. This includes, for example, an understanding of discourse as productive, emotions and affect as dependent on context, and people, or the identity practices they carry out, as key sites where cultural conditions are (re)made. Due to the self-contained nature of the chapters that have been submitted for publication, there is some unavoidable repetition throughout the thesis, particularly the research aims and methodology. Chapter Four is dedicated to providing a full account of the methodology, methods and procedures, including reflections on ethical considerations.

In Part III, I present the empirical analyses in the form of three journal articles. Each of the three articles identifies a collection of patterns that are part of the relational-scape of women's friendships. In the first of these, Chapter Five, I respond to debates about a changed landscape of intimate relating as a result of individualisation and the pluralisation of family and kin formations in the postmodern. Cautioning against the uniform application of notions of flexibility across the field of personal relationships, I suggest that long-term sexual relationships are treated as rather less pliable than friendships, including in the intensity of affective investments in them. As a result, they remain the centre around which the rest of intimate life turns.

In Chapter Six, I investigate one element of neoliberal subjectivity, and its effects on the common-sense of everyday friendship relating. I show how the emotional labour associated with feminine relating becomes valorised through the technologies of therapy cultures. I speculate that, at times, an Aotearoa New Zealand habitus guides the specific forms through which therapy cultures manifest in my sample. An intermixing of older and newer cultural formations becomes clear in the patterns identified, where the emotional regimes of the psy-complex clash with the gendered emotional regimes that preceded them. Overall, I suggest that friendships are a significant form of support for women, but that they potentially contribute to a culture of relentless transformation, through the technologies of psy.

In Chapter Seven, I turn attention to another form of neoliberalising subjectivity formation, in the form of postfeminism. However, I offer up a rather complex picture about how the ideologies of friendship interact with the demanding regimes of postfeminism. Identifying ideologies which

construct friendships as leisurely escapes, I suggest that the low-key pleasures of contemporary women's friendships allow a brief but important relief from regimes of productivity, perfection and transformation, mandated by postfeminist sensibilities.

Finally, Part IV is made up of the discussion and concluding remarks. A key motif that comes into view when reviewing the empirical work as a whole is the multiplicity of contradictions between gendered discursive formations of both heterorelationality and neoliberalism. Although I acknowledge that the double entanglements and double binds in which these contradictions manifest represent intense labour for women today, I close on a note that shifts attention to the human activity involved in managing tensions. I sketch out a critical feminist agenda that centralises a view of women operating at the 'middle ranges of agency', grounded in a dialogic imagination.

Chapter Two: Locating a critical social psychology of women's friendships

Chapter overview

The focus of this chapter, firstly, is to locate my research within the literatures of friendship and studies of personal life, and secondly, within the disciplinary boundaries of sociology and critical social psychology. The chapter is made up of two parts reflecting these tasks. The more substantial component makes up the second part, where, in the first of the articles included in the thesis³, I discuss the contribution critical social psychology might make to a sociology of personal life. The sociology of personal life has accumulated many decades worth of empirical research on the intimate practices and identities of relational life. I suggest though, that critical social psychological methodology needs to be woven into this investigative effort. In justifying my plea for greater collaboration and cross-fertilisation between these two disciplinary fields, I begin to draw from various threads of queer theory and studies of affect and emotion, which are developed in more detail in subsequent articles. Due to the necessarily limited scope of the article and the specificity of the arguments I make, I omit much of the wider literature I engaged with when setting up the research project. Therefore, in the prelude section to follow, I review some of the main developments in studies of friendship which provide further context for the empirical chapters to come.

Prelude: reviewing studies of friendship and personal life

Historical accounts of female friendship

Some of the richest, most beguiling, literatures of friendship are historical. As has been noted elsewhere (Yalom & Brown, 2015, p.3), for the first two thousand years of Western history, men wrote about and documented friendships, lauding friendship as a male enterprise. Aristotle in the fourth century BC (Lynch, 2005), Cicero in the first century BC, and Michel de Montaigne in the sixteenth century (Yalom & Brown, 2015), are often noted for their expansive, and sometimes effusive, philosophising on friendships, from which they explicitly exclude women. Even in 1960, C.S. Lewis (1960, p.89) pronounced that women's friendships involve 'an endless prattling...[which] replaces the intercourse of minds'. Despite attempts to delegitimise women's friendships, the sixteenth century is thought to have marked a shift towards the social recognition

³ The articles that are co-authored are written in first person plural while the sole-authored papers are written in first-person. The article abstracts have been removed to fulfil thesis format regulations. Where I reference these articles, I also provide the corresponding thesis chapter references.

of women's friendships in Europe (Yalom & Brown, 2015), and there have been many fascinating studies of middle and upper class Victorian women's passionate friendships across Europe and the United States in the nineteenth century (e.g. Faderman, 1981; Fitzgerald, 2003; Gorham, 1992; Herbert, 2014; Marcus, 2009; Oulton, 2007; Schweitzer, 2016; Smith-Rosenberg, 1975). Some trace the demise of passionate Victorian friendships to the emergence of the field of sexology, and to the fear and anxiety of homosexuality that accompanied it (Faderman, 1978; Oulton, 2007). Others note that waning intimacy between friends is also linked to the diversion of women's attentions to husbands, with the rise of companionate marriages (Oliker, 1989; Simmons, 1979). Raymond's (1986) development of the concept of heteroreality, which I referred to in Chapter One, can be seen as an expansion of the theme of women attending to men's needs, at the expense of women's friendships. Similarly, Adrienne Rich (1980) argued that the neglect of women's togetherness was linked to 'compulsory heterosexuality'.

Contra much social theory which neglects friendship, or portrays it as a static construct (Gurdin, 1996), these influential analyses made clear that female friendship is a productive site for exploring women's freedoms, constraints, and the wide latitude of emotions and affections in between, within particular socio-historic cultures (see also Roseneil, 2006a). Yet, studies of women's friendships did not maintain popularity past the 1980s. In part, interest in the topic related to a key question about Victorian women's passionate friendships, which fuelled intense debate: were they homoerotic, homosexual, or platonic (see overviews in Marcus, 2009; Moore, 1992)? Finding answers to this question is out of scope for my research, but I mention it because it represents a pinnacle in productive debate within studies of women's friendships. Since then, despite feminist voices rising up intermittently to highlight the value of women's friendships for the study of gender and sexuality (e.g. Bertram, 2000; Chambers, 2006; Coates, 1996; Comas-Díaz, 2014; Cronin, 2015b; Diamond, 2000; Ghisyawan, 2016; Green, 1998; Harrison, 1998; Heimtun, 2012; Kanai, 2017b; Marcus, 2009; Miller, 2016; O'Connor, 1992; Roseneil, 2006a; Schweitzer, 2016; Tannen, 2017; J. Taylor, 2016; Winch, 2013; Yalom & Brown, 2015; Zukas, 1993), the topic has never been able to regain the prominence or interest it held thirty to forty years ago. Pat O'Connor (1992, p.193) ends her insightful, comprehensive meta-analysis of studies of women's friendships suggesting that 'friendships lie at the heart of our understandings of key issues in women's lives' and that the way that power is enmeshed in friendships 'has only begun to be appreciated'. A quarter of a century on, although women's friendships remain an under-utilised field for investigating gender, sexuality and intimate life, in this thesis I argue that yet still newer debates have emerged which require investigation.

Sociology of friendship

The marginalisation and trivialisation of research relating to women's friendships is also common to broader studies of friendship (Pahl, 2002). Nonetheless, the emergence of dedicated field for a sociology of friendship in the late 1980s was an important intervention (e.g. Adams & Allan, 1998; Allan, 1989, 2001; Pahl, 1998; Silver, 1997; Spencer & Pahl, 2006). Scholars suggested that one reason friendship was overlooked was because it was relegated to the private sphere, and researching the public was understood as a more appropriate object of study (see Adams & Allan, 1998, p.1; Allan, 1989, p. 1; Pahl, 2000, pp.13-14, 2002; Spencer & Pahl, 2006, p.1). Sociology of family scholars, and feminists, had been dispelling the notion of a divide between the private and public spheres for some time, and sociology of friendship researchers used this work to also demonstrate how the distinction does not hold in empirical, theoretical, analytical or ideological terms (Allan, 2001, pp.326-328; O'Connor, 1992, p.2). They argued convincingly that friendships cannot be separated from the social and economic formations of which they are a part (e.g. Allan, 2001; Silver, 1997)⁴. The establishment of a sociology of friendship was significant in promoting friendship as a valid object of study. However, asking at the outset how social change has affected friendships set a direction for research that omitted how friendship practices themselves may carry social change. When the main research activity is centred on delineating categories of friendship types, mapping out personal networks (Allan, 2008, pp.5; Spencer & Pahl, 2006), distinguishing between kin and non-kin friendships (Pahl & Pevalin, 2005), or where 'structural variables' such as gender are not treated as achievements, but given locations or properties (Allan, 1998, p.689), the ways people are enabled or constrained in their negotiations are overlooked.

As I mentioned in Chapter One, there has been a small surge more recently in sociological studies of friendship, producing thoughtful, provocative examinations on a wide range of aspects of contemporary life. Todd May (2012) and Harry Blatterer (2015) both explore how friendships represent a form of freedom from neoliberalism from philosophical and social theory standpoints. Cronin has produced a suite of work, including analysis of how women friends who are mothers enact a particular form of intimacy, flowing through the spaces they do mothering (Cronin, 2015b). She has also investigated emotions in workplace friendships (Cronin, 2014) and the negotiations required of women when managing their friendships and long-term sexual partnerships (Cronin, 2015c). Both Cronin (2015a) and Deborah Chambers (2013) ask hugely relevant questions about how social media impacts on practices of friendship. Vanessa May's (2013) recent book on social

⁴ Critical discursive psychological theory provides further grounds for refusing a private/public distinction — the most intensely private elements of any relationship are treated in this field as intersubjective social practice, where shared, discursive resources are used to do 'private' sense-making, and may inform a durable sense of self, or 'personal ordering' (Wetherell, 2007).

change focuses on the broader meanings of belonging, where she usefully cautions against both grieving for the ‘sense of community’ of yesteryear, and overlooking exclusion and marginalisation in ‘chosen communities’ (pp.122-126). Chambers’ (2006) earlier publication on belonging raised similar concerns, but with a stronger feminist inflection. I return to Chambers’ insights again in Chapter Seven, but she too points out that there is a lot of work yet to do to unpick the contradictory phenomena of a) moral panic over social decline, and b) the optimism about the role friendship plays in offsetting uncertainties in current era. For example, Chambers (2006, p.6) posits that “friendship is being used as a metaphor to express people’s aspirations for new, non-hierarchical personal ties”, and that for women in particular, friendships are increasingly used as a pathway to power and as a resource in life-style projects of self (2006, pp.71-90). However, Chambers’ thoughtful analyses are principally generated via reviewing existing research, and therefore, my empirical analyses provide a different kind of detailing about when and how female friendship becomes a form of power for women, which is drawn from everyday experience.

Friendships and the sociology of postmodern intimacy and personal life

One major topic of interest throughout the sociology of personal life more broadly centres on how changes from modernity to postmodernity (or ‘liquid’ (Bauman, 1995), ‘late’ (Giddens, 1991) or ‘new’ (Beck, 1992) modernity⁵) have changed patterns in friendship relating (for overviews see Adams & Allan, 1998a; O’Connor, 1998; Spencer & Pahl, 2006). This literature offers two contrasting accounts of the role accorded to friendship in a new climate of shifting values, demographic change and neoliberal precarity (Budgeon, 2006). In the first, a changing gender order is strongly implicated. It is claimed that in this ‘post-traditional order’ (Giddens, 1992), there has been a loosening of the duties and obligations of ‘traditional’ roles (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002). This, rather positive, reading of the prevalence of discourses of choice, posits that today’s highly individualised, self-reflexive do-ers of relationships manage and arrange their relationships according to the changing needs of self and others. In line with the emphasis on fluidity and permeability, and leaning on characterisations of friendship as flexible, some suggest that friendships are the personal relationship du jour, as they feature the temporality and conditionality required as people move and change (Rebughini, 2011).

The second, alternative explanation posits an increase in the importance of friendship in busy and mobile contemporary lives because friendships function as unchanging anchors. Friendship is purported to provide steadfastness and security in an environment where other relationships, place

⁵ I use these terms interchangeably, but see these references for outlines of differences between the terms. ‘Late-modernity’ and ‘postmodernity’ seem to be the most common in the literatures I draw on and dialogue with, so I use those most commonly.

of residence or employment can change often (Pahl, 1998, 2000), and friends ease the difficult task of telling a coherent story of self (May, 2016), aiding the maintenance of a 'do-it-yourself life-history' (Beck-Gernsheim, 1998, p.57). These tracks of arguments are well-trodden in sociology (Allan, 2001; Chambers, 2006, 2012; Jamieson, 1998; V. May, 2011, 2013; Smart, 2007), and remain relevant. But how do they translate into critical social psychological terms? How do grand narratives play out as identities through the social practices of women's friendships?

Both the newer and older bodies of sociological literatures on friendship and belonging, which take into account morphing shapes of community and self-as-project, are all immensely valuable and fruitful. Yet, throughout this body of work, any unpicking of the specific, contextually contingent ways people's friendships are affected is omitted. How do these changes organise mundane emotional attachments, modes of resistance or constraint, and personalised understandings of self? There is little attempt to promote the voices and concerns of those grappling with the daily negotiations of intimate life. We do not get a strong sense of how different aspects of social change become lived out, played with, or pushed away, and the cultural resources mobilised to enable this everyday work remain obscure. For instance, while the collection of articles that makes up the Friendship and Emotions special issue of Sociological Research Online (see Allan, 2011; M. Holmes & Greco, 2011) are fascinating in detailing aspects of friendship practices from a range of European contexts, they often reproduce modernist, top-down conceptions of power (Beasley, 2012), rather than focusing on when and how negotiations play out. Further, uninterrogated common sense understandings of emotions are forwarded ('the types of emotion with which the papers principally engage include: trust, anger, love, affection, pride, sorrow, happiness, compassion, shame, envy and feelings of security' (Allan, 2011, p.1)).

In contrast, as Chapter Three (in Part II of the thesis) will make clear, I consider it crucial to include the study of affect and emotion in studies of friendship. Affect and emotion are a central driving force in sense-making, and key enablers of identity constitution. As Sara Ahmed (2004) argues, evaluations loaded with affect make certain patterns 'stick' to self and others. The current undertaking therefore differs from recent sociological studies of friendship for two key reasons. Firstly, by taking an identity practice approach, I focus on how women construct ideologies of friendships and personal life, as they use them in context. Secondly, I centrally include affect and emotion as part of my theoretical and methodological tool-box, where emotions denote relationships, often reinforcing, but sometimes disrupting patterns of power and privilege (Burkitt, 2014; Wetherell, McCreanor, McConville, Moewaka Barnes, & Le Grice, 2015).

Communication and interpersonal research on friendship

It is due to methodological differences of a different nature that a large body of social psychological research on friendship is not more fully considered within this thesis. The contributions of Steve Duck and colleagues to friendship studies over the past forty years have been considerable (e.g. Duck, 1977, 1994, 1995, 2001; Duck & McMahan, 2012; Duck & Wright, 1993; Sprecher & Duck, 1994). Despite including a focus on dialectics, everyday talk and interactional context (Duck, 1990), this work as a whole adopts the positivistic framings of the relationship sciences, where there is little attention to power and privilege. People's perceptions are treated as variables and numerical scales are used to measure values (e.g. Duck & Wright, 1993). Similarly, there have been other social psychological publications which review a wide range of material but are more interested in, for example, the 'stages' of the 'friendship cycle', where caring and emotional support are reduced to rigid 'types of exchange' (Fehr, 1995, p.4). Friendship processes over the adult life cycle are defined as encompassing 'cognitive, affective, and behavioural categories as well as proxy measures' (Blieszner & Adams, 1992, p.61). A recently published volume closes by drawing up a pro and con list, which discusses the perceived versus 'actual' positive and negative aspects of friendships (Perlman, 2016, p.289). William Rawlins' (1989, 1992) communication studies work is more sensitive to how friendship is affected by '[c]ulturally sanctioned activities and feelings across the social spectrum' and describes friendships as requiring 'achievement' (Rawlins, 2016, p.xi). His dialectic view of friendships has also been blended with a narrative analysis (Rawlins, 2008). However, Rawlins' approach maintains a positivistic position, where categorising certain types of friendships and analysing 'contextual determinants' are prioritised (Rawlins, 2016, p.xi).

Friendships in Aotearoa New Zealand

Research investigating friendships in Aotearoa New Zealand is sparse. Notable exceptions concern friendships between Māori and Pākehā⁶ (Brandt, 2013; Fitzgerald, 2003; Tilbury, 2001), and friendships between gay men (Brickell, 2008, 2012, 2013). I have also carried out research investigating the intersections of heterosexual men's friendships and changing masculinities (Martinussen, 2014). There, I set out to explore the possibilities of increasing diversity in heterosexual men's togetherness, against a backdrop of the 'bromance' phenomena and claims of 'decreasing homophobia' (Anderson & McCormack, 2015; Anderson, 2009). My analyses however showed that diversity in masculinities does not guarantee a disruption of privileges and power relations. One of my conclusions was that discourses of intimacy could not be taken at face value,

⁶ Pākehā are New Zealanders of European descent.

as ‘truths’ that conveyed unproblematic forms of care. Investigating the power dynamics of intimacies in the field of women’s friendships is a task taken up in this thesis.

Similar to the interest in the friendships of Victorian women in Europe and the United States, there have also been investigations of the friendships of women who made up colonial settler populations in Aotearoa New Zealand (Porter, Macdonald, & Macdonald, 1996). Intriguingly, despite describing sisterly bonds, imperialism and patriotism, are sometimes the key themes for these relationships (Fitzgerald, 2003; Pickles, 2005), rather than European Victorian romanticism. The intersection of friendship and religious zeal for Victorian New Zealand women has also been explored (Marcus, 2009, p.66). Although research is rare in which contemporary women's friendships in New Zealand are *centralised*, much can be *inferred* from research on other themes where friendship practices go unacknowledged. When introducing a book in which New Zealand women writers pay tribute to their friendships, Jane Westaway (Westaway & Copland, 2003, p.13) describes the hidden-in-plain-sight characteristic of friendship this way:

I believe the reason a book like this hasn't been published before in New Zealand is that friendship between women is like clean air — vital, yet taken for granted and almost invisible.

Although much of the detailing contained within Westaway and Copland’s (2003) collection of essays have an undeniably 'kiwi' inflection, mobilising a quintessentially Pākehā New Zealand, many of the most poignant observations, such as the one above, could be applied to other Western contexts. Likewise, although I discuss a specific national character in Chapter Six, as I have indicated previously, in this research I am primarily concerned with identifying patterns and dialoguing with theorising which relates to Western contexts more broadly.

Critical Social Psychology and Interdisciplinary Studies of Personal Life⁷

Introduction

An important advancement of second wave feminism was to establish studies of care and intimacy on the social science agenda, demonstrating the centrality of ‘private’ matters to the functioning of every aspect of social life. Contributions to studies of families, intimacies, care and personal life can be found throughout geography (Nash, 2005; Wright, 2010), social policy (Henderson & Forbat, 2002; Daly, 2011), mainstream social psychology (Fagundes & Diamond, 2013; Meyers & Berscheid, 1997), cultural studies (Berlant, 2013; Lee, 2007), queer studies (Park, 2013; Stacey, 1996) and law (Bornstein, 2012; Rosenbury & Rothman, 2010). Likewise, largely due to feminist influences, topics of personal life have always been central to critical social psychology, evidenced today in research investigating relationships (Meenagh, 2017), communities (Johnson, 2012), support networks (Gibson, Wilson, Grice, & Seymour, 2017), or the experiences of love (Watts, 2017). Even in critical social psychological research whose focus may not be primarily oriented to matters of personal life — perhaps gendered constructions of cigarette smoking (Triandafilidis, Ussher, Perz, & Huppertz, 2017), interactional organisation of threats (Hepburn & Potter, 2011), or Muslim women negotiating further education (Hussain, Johnson, & Alam, 2017) — participants’ identities as people in meaningful personal relationships are inherently at stake. Critical social psychologists have excelled in outlining how our sense of ourselves as daughters, sons, parents, siblings, friends, sexual beings or carers represent some of the identities in which we are *most* invested. While there are touchpoints with many other disciplines, sociology’s contributions to studies of personal life are perhaps the closest to the interests of critical social psychology. Sociology has a long history of housing various sub-disciplines from which to explore issues of personal life, often linked to social justice issues. Further, comprehensive, theoretically and empirically oriented research agenda and methodologies have been developed and the need for greater interdisciplinary working has been elaborated upon (Gabb, 2010; Roseneil & Ketokivi, 2015). In this article I ask what a sociology of personal life and a critical social psychology of intimate relating might offer each other, acknowledging distinct histories, specialisms and trajectories.

The development of a more interdisciplinary-capable critical social psychology of personal life is timely. It is important to ask how neoliberalism, understood across the social sciences as the most

⁷ This is a lightly edited version of a sole-authored article, which has been accepted subject to minor amendments, by *Social and Personality Psychology Compass*.

powerful metanarrative of the moment (Peters, 2001), intersects with the organisation of personal life. A focus on neoliberalism, along with associated motifs of individualisation, responsabilisation, globalisation and (im)mobilities, provides the background for sociological claims that we have entered an era in which intimate life and associated identities have an unprecedented gravity and salience in the West (Bauman & May, 2001; Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 2002; Giddens, 1991; Rose, 1999). If we take these claims seriously, we cannot hope to provide answers about who we are in the twenty-first century without greater understanding of how close relationships are carried out and organised. Similarly, there is a need for further interrogation of changing formations of subjectivity and emerging emotional regimes relating to intimacy in these neoliberal times.

The remainder of this article hones in on three distinct areas of sociological studies of personal life, and puts them in dialogue with forms of critical social psychology that include subjectivity-making and the process of becoming part of their methodological base. First, I examine David Morgan's concept of family practices; second, the politicisation of non-conventional family formations and a queering agenda for the studies of personal life; and third, new forms of intimacy and emotional subjectivities in late-modernity. I acknowledge that including such wide-ranging discussions compromises depth of engagement. However, my aim here is to give something of a flavour of the multitude of touchpoints between existing bodies of knowledge and identifying where cross-fertilisation could take place. The resonances and divergences between sociological and critical social psychology traditions will be explored, with the aim of finding complementary expertise, and points at which both disciplines might mutually buttress existing weaknesses and fill knowledge gaps.

Family practices: a tool for organising studies of personal life?

David Morgan's 'family practices' concept has been a hugely productive line of sociological enquiry (D. Morgan, 1996, 2011). Here, I provide an outline, highlighting the potential of the family practices approach as a useful tool-kit in and of itself, but also as a point of connection that could bring together critical social psychologists and sociologists working on topics of personal life. I go on to discuss how critical social psychology theorising on managing plural identities can shore up shortcomings in the family practices concept.

A key premise of the family practices approach is that it is intended to 'show how "family" is implicated in a whole range of other social institutions and sets of practices' (Morgan, 2011, p.2). Rather than beginning from family per se, one typically starts asking questions about, for example, social class, employment, or religion. From there, the analyst enquires about the family dimensions which might be involved. One benefit of this approach, is that we are pushed towards thinking in terms of plurality, contradictions, multi-modality and relationships between various domains.

Attention is drawn to the possibilities of people's assembling of meanings, the blending, juggling, or contrasting of everyday expertise and knowledges from different areas of life.

Morgan uses an analogy of a painter blending colours to describe how fields of practice interact. If primary colours are useful to a painter, not just in themselves, but to make new colours, family can be considered a primary colour to blend with others, such as class, gender, or education. When mixed, this site of activity, 'family + gender' for example, is distinct from its constituent parts; parenting, for example, becomes mothering or fathering, which carry the weight of a vast range of meanings and evaluations. Time, space, embodiment or ethics may also stand for such 'primary colours' that become co-constitutive with elements of personal life (D. Morgan, 2011). Using the parenting example, how might practices be affected by identity as step-parent? Or LGBTIQ+ identity? How might divorced parents' practices taking place in two homes, differ from other parents? Nested within these, perhaps we might consider other topics, 'secondary colours', that could be blended in, for example, eating, nudity, democracy, exercise, social media consumption, dating, fashion and so forth. If interdisciplinary studies of personal life were organised in this way, reflecting fields of practice, critical social psychologists could then 'zoom out', and analyse cultural shifts from a high-level view, but not lose sight of situated psychological accounts in more specific domains.

The family practices approach resonates with critical social psychology through its core premise of working *between* the social and the psychological, and in treating people as both subject and object. One of Morgan's key points was to emphasise that the family is a process, something we do, and he impresses that family and personal life have an intrinsically everyday character (D. Morgan, 1996). Evaluations of self as a family member are pervasive in mundane social life, including in situations when family seems very distant or absent, and in situations where these assumptions are unwelcome, oppressive or irrelevant. In studying the routine, taken for granted, practical knowledges articulated in everyday accounts which characterise practice theory approaches more generally (Molloy, 2008), the field of sociology of personal life is effectively pushed into closer alignment with what might be considered process-oriented critical social psychology approaches (e.g. Brown & Stenner, 2009; Taylor, 2015; Wetherell, 2006). Underpinning such approaches are a commitment to notions such as becoming and emergence, where social formations and identity-making follow patterns, but are inherently contingent, because reflexive, inter-subjective meaning-making is perpetual. Other shared goals between these two traditions is the resistance to binaries of micro/macro, discourse/practice, and structure/agency, and the positioning of people as agents who strategically negotiate resources that are both material and ideological in nature (Morgan, 1989).

Before going further, it seems sensible to clarify what family practices are, and what makes them family practices, as opposed to other social practices. Although family practices are ‘inescapably relational’ (Morgan, 2011, p.24), unsurprisingly, they simply concern those designated as family by social actors. What distinguishes between different classes of family practices is the particularity of a relationship at a point in time, whether it be a “parent’s terminal illness... a daughter’s achievements at university [or] the break-up of a brother’s marriage” (Morgan, 2011, p.173). That is, the specifics of the engagement with whatever aspect of intimate life people are engaged with matter, because practices are contingent and contextual.

So far I have focused on the points of convergence with critical social psychology. Next, I want to highlight some points of divergence, and to suggest that emphases more usual in critical social psychology would add texture to the study of family practices. Morgan is interested in biographical influences, in relationality and the dynamic cultures of families. Together with Clare Holdsworth, Morgan (Holdsworth & Morgan, 2005) draws on Lefebvre to suggest the complexities of family performances are constituted through the realms of the practical (material), the symbolic (discourse) and the imaginary (individual constructions). Nonetheless, as befits a sociology, most space is given to bounded social identities understood in a relatively categorical way. The relational self, sometimes conceived as an unbounded (Gergen, 2006), distributed (Wetherell & Maybin, 1996) or dialogically (Billig, 1996) formed self in critical social psychology, is muted in the work of Morgan and his colleagues. Similarly, there is much less attention to the development of a meaningful sense of self accruing over time. How do people use socio-cultural resources available to them, personalising them, so that they come to stand for highly invested aspects of self?

Similarly, although Morgan highlights that “[a]ction is [always] conducted in relation to others”, the idea that action is conducted in relation to *imagined* others is missing. Or, at least, concepts such as positioning, or identity theory linked to everyday ideologies are not utilised (Billig, Condor, Edwards, Gane, Middleton, & Radley 1988; Harre & Moghaddam, 2003; Wetherell, 1998, 2003). Further, although Morgan provides rich examples of interactions in different dimensions of social life, and does at times describe them as potentially creating contradictions (e.g. Morgan, 2011, p.112), critical social psychology’s emphasis on plurality and the messiness of lived experience is also largely missing from family practices theory. Contradiction (Billig et al., 1988) or moments of interactional or cultural trouble (Wetherell, 2005a), can be used as analytic devices, helping us become more attuned to what social actions are being performed, and what dilemmas people are working through. As such, there are opportunities for critical social psychologists to demonstrate how contradictions at the psychological level fundamentally propel social life (Billig, 2009), and to carry out personal life research that attempts to focus on the identity work involved in achieving a sense of unified self as contradictory discourses are mobilised (Edley, 2001). There is a resemblance

between this focus on contradiction and some sociological work has set out to ask how ‘new’ and ‘traditional’ practices are blended within couple relationships using the concept of bricolage (Carter & Duncan, 2018; Duncan, 2011; Morris, 2015). The conclusion that people hold, for example, ‘shifting positions, moving between heteronormative, romantic couple-centred ideals, “traditional” versus egalitarian gender roles and experimentation... simultaneously’ (Morris, 2015, para. 7.2) is useful. But from here, using critical discursive psychology, we might be able to put more attention on the specifics of the figuring, composing, entangling or recruiting processes in which psychologies become implicated (Wetherell, 2012, p.15). These suggestions do not compete with a family practice approach, but extend it with a different emphasis.

Addressing these theoretical shifts may have methodological implications, which represents another area ripe for collaboration. The goal of developing methodological innovation in high quality qualitative research found in critical social psychology (Braun, Clarke, & Gray, 2017) is shared with many sociologists working in the personal life field. As Jacqui Gabb’s (2010) coverage of methodologies used in sociological studies of family life demonstrates, the field is innovative, and attentive to the challenges of researching sensitive field sites. Recent contributions have focused on the mediated intimacies of our ‘polymedia environments’ (Chambers, 2013), on mixed methods approaches designed to capture non-verbal expressions of ‘ordinary emotions’ (Brownlie, 2014) and uses of visual, graphic, photographic or activity-based elicitation devices (see Gabb 2010, pp. 43-46). An area where synergies have been capitalised upon is the use of psychoanalytic inspired psychosocial frameworks in sociology of personal life research (Gabb, 2010; Roseneil, 2006; Roseneil & Ketokivi, 2015). As yet however, there has been limited development of psychosocial research based on everyday practice approaches, such as the family practice approach. Further, the implications of using interview data, which remains the most utilised method in sociology of personal life, are often omitted in sociological research. Although Morgan puts some emphasis on auto/biographical research, in his own words, ‘[t]he relationship between what is said in an interview situation and what is actually done (the core of a practices approach) remains a complex issue within qualitative family studies’ (Morgan, 2011, p.169). Critical social psychology’s long history of generative debate on language, lived experience and identity could provide methodological and theoretical clarity for sociologists.

Family practices to practices of intimate relating - queering studies of personal life

One of the very few sustained critiques of the family practices concept is that the specific focus on family, and not personal life more broadly, is restrictive. Social ties in the contemporary era are often characterised by increased flexibility, inventiveness and transience (Chambers, 2012). A focus

on ‘family’ alone does not seem adequate for capturing the fluidity of our emerging relational-scape, evident in the rise in single-person households (Lahad, 2017), blended families (Allan, Crow, & Hawker, 2011; McCarthy, Edward, & Gillies, 2003), living apart together relationships (Levin, 2004; Roseneil, 2006b), polyamory relationships (Barker, 2005; Haritaworn, Lin, & Klesse, 2006) or inclusion of friends as family (Budgeon & Roseneil, 2002; Weeks, Heaphy, & Donovan, 2001; Weston, 1991). The impetus behind calls for more inclusive terminology for personal relationships also comes from sociologists who point out that the diversification of new forms of belonging has been accompanied by moral panic about social decline, within and outside the academy (Chambers, 2001). Others have emphasised the need for caution in our assessments of how much things have changed, arguing that empirical investigation invariably tells a complicated story where old and new forms of togetherness can blend in ways that reproduce existing inequalities (Gross, 2005; Jamieson, 1999). In light of these debates, small-scale intensive critical social psychological research, could enter into greater dialogue with sociologists who are also detailing the subtleties, complexities and ambiguities of contemporary intimacies. In particular, critical social psychologists’ expertise could be used to show how the contradiction involved in doing intimate-self identities gets lived out, including how people juggle with ‘older’/‘traditional and ‘new’/‘non-conventional’ late-modern intimacies. Recent studies have asked, for example, how discourses of empowerment are being used by women to construct their sexual selves (Meenagh, 2017), how practices of casual sex affect the ways individuals can construct themselves as adequately skilled in ‘emotional intimacy’ (Farvid & Braun, 2017) and how celebrations of ‘ladette’ culture are changing what is considered intimate friendship between women (Martinussen, Wetherell, & Braun, 2018; see also Chapter Seven).

Secondly, and the main topic I want to tackle here, thinking beyond family practices is not just useful to capture heterogeneity, but is necessary to avoid reinstating a heteronormative view of family and coupledness. Sasha Roseneil and Shelley Budgeon have been instrumental in a movement to queer studies of personal life; principally, this has entailed challenging the field to cast a different gaze on the practices of care and intimacy that fall outside the domain of heterosexual couples and family (Budgeon, 2006, Roseneil, 2000, 2006a; Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004). Other sociologists have found that using terms such as personal life (Smart, 2007), intimacy (Jamieson, 1998) and personal communities (Pahl & Spencer, 2004) have provided more flexibility in studying a variety of intimacies than is possible than using the concept of family.

How can critical social psychologists help to build a queered studies of personal life? Interdisciplinarity is a key part of the answer. For example, in her calls for a queered psychology, Katharine Johnson (2015) suggests that hybrid theorising and transdisciplinarity are central. João Manuel de Oliveira, Carlos Gonçalves da Costa and Nuno Santos Carneiro (2014, p.42) similarly

argue that establishing a queer feminist critical psychology will require coming together at ‘an intersection of knowledges... from other disciplines and sources’. In particular, there is opportunity to bring theorising from cultural studies, sociology and psychology that is more explicit about its queer focus, together with existing process-oriented critical social psychology of personal life. Existing research has, for example, problematized the normalising imperatives of marriage, cohabitation and coupledness (Braun, 2003; Burns, 2003; Sandfield & Percy, 2003; Jeffreys, 2004), and relationship categories and sexualities linked to ‘life-stages’ (Abeyasekera, 2017; Reynolds & Taylor, 2005; Sandfield, 2006; Ussher, Perz, & Parton, 2015). These are not found under the rubric of queer research, but they are nonetheless queering. One area that has queering potential, but receives little attention in critical social psychology is studies of friendships and chosen families (for exceptions see Griffin, 2000; Zukas, 1993), which has long been explored in sociology (e.g. Budgeon, 2006; Nardi, 1992; Roseneil, 2004; Stacey, 1996).

By bringing queer and process-oriented intimacy research into dialogue, we would then be broadening out the focus on *sexual* citizenship often found in queer research, to investigating the heteronormative assumptions bound up in everyday ideologies of *intimate* citizenship (Plummer, 2001). This could prove invaluable in becoming a vantage point, enabling us to see opportunities for queering our imaginaries. Critically, it would also signal that varieties of ‘personal life identities’ should be included as an important aspect of intersectional analysis (Stokoe, 2003; Addie & Brownlow, 2014; Lahad, 2017). As mentioned previously, it is in these identities we are likely to hold the deepest of investments. Yet, at present, the significant capacity that relationship statuses have for ordering life (e.g. single, mother/father, married, friend, or non-parent) is not recognised alongside sexuality, class, education, race or health and so forth, in critical social psychology.

Emotional subjectivities and changing cultures of intimacy in late-modernity

The debates surrounding pluralising intimate practices go hand in hand with questions of how intimacies have changed as a result of ‘liquid’/‘late’/‘post-modernity’, where critical scholars of neoliberalism posit that there are “heightened levels of discontinuity and fluidity in social and personal life, increased individual autonomy and weaken[ed] social bonds” (Binkley, 2018, para. 12). There has not been the same emphasis on the relationship between neoliberalism and broader cultures of intimacies in critical social psychology that has captured sociologists from the 1990s onwards. For example, as has been noted elsewhere, investigations of contemporary constructions of sexual/romantic love tend to come out of sociology rather than critical social psychology (Burns, 2000; Watts, 2017). We might ask then, how can critical social psychology help investigate questions about cultures of individualisation and the psy complex, which encourage us to understand ourselves as unique, autonomous and authentic? And, how do these mooted changes in subjectivity

affect our personal relationships? Has the salience of romantic relationships increased to the extent that it is akin to a new religion (Beck & Beck-Gernsheim, 1995)? Simultaneously, do we experience an aversion to the permanency of these romantic relationships (Bauman, 2003)? Is this contradictory push and pull experienced in our friendships (Bauman, 1995)? In their detailed studies, critical social psychologists can take a lead from sociologists by considering the significance and scale of cultural shifts in intimacy. Sociologists in turn might want to borrow from the toolbox of the critical social psychologist in elaborating on emerging forms of intimate subjectivities. Next, after detailing a small selection of Nikolas Rose's theorising on neoliberal intimate subjectivities, I put forward some suggestions about how sociological research could be bolstered by psychosocial theory. As Stephanie Taylor (2017) demonstrates, the field of psychosocial research is diverse, but is brought together through an interest in the connections between subjectivities and societies. In what follows, I make use of and explain the advantages of discursive and narrative traditions of psychosocial analysis (Mcavoy, 2015; Scully, 2015; S. Taylor, 2015; Wetherell, 2008), but there are other forms of psychosocial research which sociologists could use (S. Taylor, 2017).

Whilst Rose's analysis, in common with other sociological texts (Giddens, 1992), makes links between individualisation and therapy discourses, his work stands out in its emphasis on the changes in subjectivity required to enable psy-societies (Rose, 1996b, 1999), as well as other factors such as globalisation or technological changes (for example, Beck, 1992). Rose asserts that a therapeutic ethic has only been effective in instilling neoliberal aspirations of constant improvement through inspection and regulation of self, *because people have re-formed particular relations with the self* (Rose, 1999). The knowledges of psy are diffuse, but our personal relationships are a primary site for exercising the choice and flexibility that is bound up in the neoliberal mandate, and confessions in the private sphere are understood as a key route to an authentic self (Rose, 1999).

While changes in neoliberal subjectivities have been approached through various critical social psychology fields, including health (Crawford, 2006; see Lyons & Chamberlain, 2017, p.535), organisational psychology (McDonald, Wearing, & Ponting, 2007), race theory (Salter & Adams, 2013), gender (Evans, Riley, & Shankar, 2010), and education (Bansel, Davies, Gannon, & Linnell, 2008), to name just a few, a focus on intimacy is often omitted. Psychoanalytic concepts such as trauma and shame have been productively re-worked to explain how neoliberalism has taken a hold in contemporary Western society (Layton, 2009, 2010), and to show the stubbornness of gender inequalities through women's internalisation of them (Seu, 2006). However, the ordinary quality of affective practices that reproduce neoliberal subjectivities tends to get lost in such work (Wetherell, 2012, p.155). Another generative body of work showing the prevalence of neoliberal sensibilities can be found in studies of postfeminist cultures and sensibilities (e.g. Gill, 2017b; Riley, Evans, Elliott, Rice, & Marecek, 2017; Scharff, 2016). Yet, foci on intimacies and personal relationships in

studies of postfeminism tend to be on various aspects of sexual relationships or disciplinary body practices, with the intersections with other types of (pluralising) intimacies remaining under-explored (for exceptions, for research on friendship see Kanai, 2017b, 2017a; for singleness see A. Taylor, 2012; for mothering see Wilson & Yochim, 2017).

In contrast, and although not responding to Rose exclusively, a growing cohort of sociologists are producing nuanced, situated accounts of the influence of therapeutic and individualising neoliberal cultures in a range of relationship settings (Adkins, 2002; McLeod & Wright, 2009; Swan, 2010; Wright, 2008). Similar to Lynn Jamieson's earlier, ground-breaking work examining 'disclosing intimacies' (1998), they emphasise the messiness, ambivalence and inconsistent use of technologies of psychologised selves. For example, Julie McLeod and Katie Wright (2009) interpret desires for disclosure as part of complex emotional strategies carried out by economically marginalised mothers and daughters. Julie Brownlie (2014) demonstrates the incomplete nature of the psychologised knowledge of 'talking cures'; she finds that 'getting on with it' and *not* disclosing in personal relationships, is just as prevalent an aspirational ideal for many alongside mutual self-disclosure. What then, might critical social psychologists add to these detailed, situated and thoughtful accounts?

While there is attention paid to biographical narratives and embodiment throughout these analyses, there is less detailing of the processes of identification and subjectification involved. Discursive and narrative psychosocial studies could provide the theoretical and methodological tools to extend analysis in this direction (Reynolds & Taylor, 2005; S. Taylor, 2010; S. Taylor & Littleton, 2006; S. Taylor & Mcavoy, 2014; Wetherell, 2008). Brownlie's (2014) account in particular shows common ground with psychosocial analysis. For example, in her use of the concept of 'practical consciousness' there is a wish to avoid treating knowledge and affect as oppositional (Brownlie, 2014, pp. 18-21; see Falmagne, 2016). Brownlie also centrally engages with a concern circulating in psychosocial studies (S. Taylor, 2017) — the problems of studying affect and emotion in the unspoken. As Stephanie Taylor (2015) points out however, suggestions that non-narrated aspects of 'interiority' go unacknowledged in discursive analysis have been challenged as relying on a narrow interpretation of discourse. That is, discourse can capture the unsaid and non-textual affective practice if discourse is conceptualised as produced through all forms of meaning-making, including body actions and material contexts (see also Wetherell, 2013a). In addition, the act of silencing or asking what is 'unsayable' can be a powerful tool in identifying affective practices, through discursive analysis.

Similar to my suggestions about how the family practices perspective in sociology could be extended, sociological work examining changes in emotional subjectivities could usefully include

more developed theorising on the plural and distributed nature of identities (Bruner, 2001). It could also make use of available critical social psychology tools designed to put a spotlight on the management of multiple discursive positions, such as those found in poststructuralist influenced, or repertoire-based (Wetherell, 1998) discursive psychology. Likewise, theories of narrative-discursive (S. Taylor, 2010) or personal order (Wetherell, 2007), investigating re-tellings of self, could be blended in. These shed light on how different versions of self become shaped by multiple histories, that layer, are performed through character, motives, intentions and beliefs, and are psychological and emotional in character (Wetherell, 2008). Future explorations of individualisation and therapeutic ways of being in personal relationships might begin by outlining patterns in identity practices — by tracking the negotiation of imagined positions, the context-specific re-shaping of discursive resources and the dilemmas involved in intimate identities. In this way, people can be treated as inseparable from the (neoliberal) contexts in which they are produced, whilst recognising capacity for resistance, engendered through a discursive psychosocial approach and a focus on process and emergence (S. Taylor, 2015).

Discussion and conclusions

My aim has been to promote discussion about existing nodes, intersections and divergences between critical social psychological projects related to personal life, and across into a sociology of personal life. It was not my goal to provide a comprehensive overview of existing work, or a prescriptive proposal for critical social psychological studies of personal life. Although, I have suggested that practice-based theories, including elements of a family practice approach, represent a useful model on which interdisciplinary studies of intimate practices might be loosely based. I cannot offer a tidy definition or a set of characteristics to define the practices or psychologised activities in the realm of personal life, and as Margaret Wetherell notes in relation to studying emotions as affective practices, this can feel unsatisfying (2012, p.97). Nevertheless, it is important that practices be defined through the common-sense ways that people construct such practices. Despite uncertainty and messiness, it is my hope that pockets of knowledge will form around different types of social practices, carried out by researchers with various similarities or differences in standpoints and disciplines, which intersect with other interests (e.g. education, health, gender, class, disability studies, relationship studies etc.). As well as making distinct critical social psychological impacts more visible within the increasingly interdisciplinary field of intimacy and personal life, conceiving intimate life as linking fields of practices would improve our abilities to track change or stasis between our local study sites, leveraging their significance.

Through three interrelated fields of practice and neighbourhoods of literature, I hope to have demonstrated why it is important that we put emphasis on the assumptions about the organisation

of personal life, and their effects. Our identities as sexual beings and family members matter. But we must always keep in mind that they matter in a range of non-sexual, non-familial contexts; they need to be contextualised within the broader ideological sphere of intimate relating. In addition, increasingly, new forms of togetherness also require our attention. Keeping disciplinary boundaries porous can help us to be responsive to emerging intimate formations and subjectivities and to modes of relational selves. As per my discussions on building a queered, interdisciplinary agenda for personal life, how we imagine our disciplinary boundaries and our academic communities can have significant effects in increasing inclusivity in various ways. I have focused my discussions on how blending discursive and/or practice theory into our psychosocial accounts of relational selves resolves some key debates that have emerged within sociology. Underpinning my suggestions, however, are more fundamental principles, central to both critical social psychological thinking and queer thinking — plurality, creativity, reconfiguring, blending, and the porosity of discourses or distinct ways of being. Dynamic intermixing should be a focus, even when examining regimes as omnipresent and pervasive as neoliberalism.

Of course, there may be times when we wish to emphasise elements of our work that are unrelated to matters of care, intimacy and the organisation of personal life, and others still when it is more appropriate to emphasise interdisciplinary differences rather than similarities. But given the important contributions critical social psychologists make to studies of intimacies and personal life, the overlaps with sociological work, and our emergence into a changed landscape of intimate relating and emotional formations, there is also good reason to cast a different eye on current disciplinary boundaries.

PART II: THEORETICAL AND METHODOLOGICAL CONSTRUCTION

Preface for Part II

So far I have introduced the topic of women's friendships and the research questions that animate this thesis. These centre on asking when and how heterorelational logics affect women's friendship relating and what their effects are on the organisation of intimate life, while also investigating how changing understandings of the self may intersect with ideologies of women's friendships. In Part I, I also outlined the literatures contributing to my thinking when developing my research, pointing out how my project differs. I emphasised the need for more research on women's friendships oriented to everyday experience and I advocated for a queered, relational sensibility for sociological and critical social psychological research on intimacy and personal life. In particular, I argued that the identities that are mobilised to do intimate life are under-investigated. I went on to suggest that the need for more detailed empirical research on intimacy and personal relationships is urgent, considering the scale of the theorising on changing cultures of individualisation and changing subjectivities and the largely abstract and hypothetical nature of this theorising.

Part II of the thesis now describes how my research questions and orientation to the field were translated into an empirical project. In Chapter Three, I introduce a way of working with affect-imbued discursive data from critical social psychology. To clarify my perspective and the theory behind my methodology, I develop a dialogue with the rich, fascinating and enigmatic work of the queer theorist Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick. In many respects, critical affective discourse analysis could be seen as instantiating Sedgwick's call for greater attention to affect, emotion and experiential possibilities. To flesh out this claim, I analyse one data example from my corpus, looking at how friend-identities were mobilised by a participant to make sense of a disagreement with a friend. Chapter Four then focuses on methods, and outlines the procedures I undertook to collect and analyse the data, including discussions of how I addressed ethical considerations during the research. While Chapter Three was written for publication, Chapter Four is an account just for this thesis.

Chapter Three: A theoretical framework for finding discursive subjectivities with feeling⁸

Introduction

Sedgwick's bold pronouncements that stale, circular and 'paranoid' habits of analysis have a stagnating effect on the humanities and social sciences remain influential two decades on (Sedgwick, 1997; Sedgwick & Frank, 1995). Her proposal that critical scholars seek out 'reparative' interpretations imbued with feeling, relinquishing their quests for knowledge, make her a forerunner of a paradigm shift in critical theory — towards affect and emotion. Sedgwick's discontent was grounded in the notion that critical projects are orientated to dualisms (self/other, active/passive, nature/culture, lack/plenitude, and most insidiously, repression/liberation), and as a result, analysts allow themselves just two options throughout the interpretive process, accepting or refusing (Sedgwick, 2003). The ability to observe, and experience a range of textures is purportedly lost, removing the 'middle ranges of agency that offer space for effectual creativity and change' (Sedgwick, 2003, p.13). Sedgwick's oeuvre was intended to free critical analysts from over-reliance on binary conceptualisations of power, which they wrongly assume they have escaped, and to offer alternative methodological, theoretical *and experiential* possibilities.

Sedgwick's propositions were innovative and astute, but we suggest that there is still work to do to realise her aims, particularly in relation to how we, as analysts, along with the subjects/objects of our studies, are *relatively* empowered and disempowered (Sedgwick, 2007). A third reading strategy, neither paranoid nor reparative, opens up emotional and relational possibilities in ways Sedgwick valued, providing tools for celebrating the quirky and unexpected possibilities she advocated. We argue that practice-based approaches, particularly critical discursive psychology, might achieve Sedgwick's goals with more methodological coherency, and through emphasis on the sites and modes in which we spend most of our lives — banal, everyday life.

We firstly examine how Sedgwick stitches together her rich and multi-layered theorising on paranoia, reparation and affect, and review its impacts on critical theory. We then follow with an empirical demonstration of the sort of 'practical' reading that we are proposing.

Unpacking reparation: learning from Sedgwick's theorising

Given the scope of the transformation to critical theory Sedgwick proposes, and the complex blending of the theoretical influences she employs, it is useful to identify some key elements of her

⁸ This is a lightly edited version of a co-authored article, which has been accepted, subject to revisions, with *Subjectivity*.

thinking. Re-purposing Paul Ricoeur's thesis concerning the hermeneutics of suspicion was one of Sedgwick's first moves (Sedgwick, 1997). Sedgwick (1997, p.124) deduced that creative modes of thinking are neither valued nor encouraged, because the process of chasing down and exposing 'bad' knowledge is the end goal for the paranoid analyst. In the process, they miss subtle, local and contingent relations. In addition, Sedgwick, with Adam Frank (1995, p.512), claimed that the paranoid methodologies which she saw as dominating critical theory are overly obsessed with language and include an 'automatic anti-biologism', which results in the body being written out of analysis. These criticisms are levelled at a wide range of social constructionist undertakings and methodologies, but poststructuralist projects that focus on the analysis of power through genealogy, performativity and discourse are targeted specifically.

A second element of critique brought in comes via Melanie Klein's object relations theory. Sedgwick suggests contemporary critics are unable to imagine an object of study as a whole that is both good and bad. Analysts operating in the paranoid/schizoid position ('paranoid' in Sedgwickian vernacular) maintain a "terrible alertness to the dangers posed by the hateful and envious part-objects that [they] defensively project into" (Sedgwick, 1996, p. 278). Sedgwick's analyses of the circular psychology of the paranoid critic is effective in justifying her claims that paranoid epistemologies are stubbornly resistant — the rancour, envy and self-righteousness of the paranoid are born from pre-empting future violence.

As a corrective, Sedgwick (2007) suggests analysts seek out paranoid's counterpart, the depressive position; occupying it gives rise to sadness but also nourishment and comfort. Reparative practices facilitate an acceptance of good and bad, the reassembling of part-objects, and a rethinking of the causes of negative effects, enabling a shift from the anticipatory practices of paranoia (Sedgwick, 1997). Although occupying the depressive position will be brief, as the shift between paranoid and depressive positions is perpetual, these interludes may be enough to reconstitute painful pasts, and engender more hopeful futures (Sedgwick, 2007). Displacing critical attachments requires a re-articulation of analysts' affective habits, explaining Sedgwick's prioritisation of ontology and embodied experience over knowledge and epistemology (Johnson, 2015).

Also central to Sedgwick's oeuvre is her work with Adam Frank on Silvan Tomkins and his '[s]ublimely alien' affect program theories (Sedgwick, 2003, p. 99). Despite proposing that there are just eight or nine innate programs stored in the brain, for Tomkins, affects are also created in relation to a near infinite range of phenomenon, objects, ideas, activities or people, and are therefore unpredictable. Shame, interest, surprise, joy, anger, fear, distress or disgust may become attached to any object, or another affect: "one can be excited by anger, disgusted by shame, or surprised by joy" (Sedgwick, 2003, p.19). Sedgwick and Frank admit it would be easy to discredit

Tomkins' hypotheses, but they prioritise the potential for learning from Tomkins over the accuracy and logic of his formulations (Sedgwick and Frank, 2003, p. 521). Indeed, being mistaken is a valuable process:

Freedom, play, affordance, meaning itself derive from the wealth of mutually non-transparent possibilities for being wrong about an object-and by implication, about oneself. (Sedgwick and Frank, 2003, p. 511)

Sedgwick's arguments are caustic and compelling, and the popularity of the 'reparative turn' coincides with the recent 'turns' to affect and new materialism, and a concomitant scepticism concerning earlier turns to language, which links also with a growing dissatisfaction with poststructuralism (Hemmings, 2005; Wetherell, 2014). Unsurprisingly, many have been enthusiastic in exploring reparative ways of working. Feminist critics based in literary studies and postcolonial theory have been most eager to take up Sedgwick's calls (Cvetkovich, 2012; Facundo, 2016; Love, 2014; Muñoz, 2006; Shahani, 2012; Wiegman, 2014), although, a number of recent publications have sought to recondition psychology with reparative readings. Katherine Johnson (2015) proposes that the development of a queered psychology could learn from Sedgwick's reparative impulses, and like Rachel Jane Liebert's (2017) creative blend of philosophy, poetry and affect theory, is inspired by community psychology settings. Through reinvigorating Sedgwick's theories of shame, Wen Liu's (2017) aim is to undo the binarism of psychology through interdisciplinary curiosity. Our article joins these wider discussions, and while we agree that something is missing from poststructuralist critical theory, we propose a different solution.

Why a third reading strategy is needed

Although Sedgwick points to the "flexible to-and-fro movement implicit in Kleinian *positions*" (Sedgwick, 1997, p.8, author's own emphasis), if our goal is to avoid binarism, beginning with a concept that is inherently dichotomous seems counter-intuitive. Sedgwick herself seems unable to engage in the to-and-fro movement she values when depositing analysts using performativity and discourse methodologies into the paranoid camp. Similarly, Sedgwick assumes that feelings consistently bring about positive change, whilst the impacts of knowledge are purported always to be harmful. Affect does engender possibilities for 'thinking otherwise' but it can also represent dogged persistence, as minority groups whose relative oppression is galvanised through emotion and affect recognise (Hemmings, 2005). The recent use of emotion to whip up racist sentiment in political campaigning across the Western world is a stark reminder of the damage affect can do.

In our view, Sedgwick's call for depressive ambivalence and reparation is undermined by her own conflation of reparative versus paranoid with good/affect versus bad/knowledge. We agree with

Sedgwick (2007, p. 631) that getting further away from “all-or-nothing understandings of agency” is necessary, but something else is needed to realise the push towards:

a form of relationality that deals in, for example, negotiations (including win-win negotiations), the exchange of affect, and other small differentials, the middle ranges of agency — the notion that you can be relatively empowered or disempowered. (Sedgwick, 2007, pp.631-632)

Finding ways of exploring the gradation between paranoid and reparative would allow a better view of the middle ranges. But foregrounding relative empowerment requires more elaborated accounts of how we move this insight into research practice. Without further directives from Sedgwick about how to incorporate reparative tendencies into research, we risk inducing both political inertia and methodological incoherence. So, what should replace our critical, interpretive work efforts? Or in more Sedgwickian terms, what or whom deserves our ambivalent love? Heather Love (2014, p. 236) asks a similar question: ‘I am enabled — but to do what?’ Love (2014, p. 239) goes on to interpret Sedgwick as not intending for analysts to read in a purely reparative mode: ‘allowing for good surprises means risking bad surprises’. Robyn Wiegman (2014, p.19) also proposes a more selective reading, pointing out that, like paranoid analysts, those working in a reparative mode cannot escape the fact that the search for interpretations drives their analyses.

Like Wiegman and Love, we suggest that sustenance can be found through varied academic practices. In particular, we are unconvinced that studies of affect must come at the price of empiricism. A great deal of creative, empirical work, whose authors play with ambivalences, already exists. How does poststructural-inspired research that charts social transformation fit into the reparative/paranoid framework? For instance, in contrast to the frequently depressing outlook presented in masculinities literature on the stubbornness of toxic masculinities, Eric Anderson (2009) has amassed an impressive catalogue of studies charting a declining ‘homohysteria’ and increasing intimacy between young heterosexual men. Octavia Calder-Dawe and Nicola Gavey (2016) detail how their teenage participants deftly manoeuvre a tangle of good and bad feminist discourses in order to successfully present themselves as reasonable feminists. And where would we place the work of those such as Carla Willig (2013), who likens the critical qualitative research process to an adventure where one sets out to be unsettled, opened up to possibilities, and changed in the process?

There are also parallels between the queer reparative theorising that centralises forward-backward movements in time (Freeman, 2010; Love, 2007), and recent emphases on processes of becoming. Stephanie Taylor’s (2015, p.12) elaborations on ‘emergence’ suggest that retrospectivity is necessary to carrying out discourse analyses.

[Emergence] indicates a linear rather than a cyclical pathway of change. However, this is not a linearity which admits of prediction (e.g., through cause-effect laws or relationships)... emergence implies an unknown future of perpetually unfolding novel outcomes. Correspondingly, it draws attention to the present as a unique, never-before-experienced conjunction of circumstances.

Connecting a line between past and present is to give an indication, not a prediction, of future trajectories. Analysts' attention to past patterns does not necessarily signal an obsession with repression but with the uncertain formation of the present. In addition to its orientation towards contingency, this mode of reasoning has greater potential for situated accounts of individuals and locales. For example, as Sun-ha Hong (2015) points out, we come to make sense of our worlds recursively; conversation is one mode through which our seemingly automatic knee-jerk responses and scrambling for words, or passive agreements, are part of feeling our way through everyday life.

Asking whether our current epistemological and ontological research attachments might be more infused with reparative moves seems to run alongside Sedgwickian-inspired emphasis on mixedness (e.g. Johnson, 2015; Muñoz, 2006). It perhaps answers to Sedgwick's (Sedgwick, 2003; Sedgwick and Frank, 1995) disappointments that readers too readily dismiss theory that at first seems incompatible, overlooking material that might be creatively interweaved together. Critical discursive psychology is a good candidate from this perspective because, as has been detailed extensively elsewhere, it is an eclectic blend of theoretical impulses including post-structuralism and more fine grain modes of discourse analysis (Wetherell, 1998, 2012). Insights from ethnomethodology that stress the significance of situated accounts of ordinary life are deployed across social psychological discourse theory, which is pertinent if one conceives people to always be immersed in an affective medium.

Key to our approach, particularly in our attempts to treat the complex dialectics between culture and subjectivity even-handedly, is our reliance on practice theory. Practice approaches are transdisciplinary and diverse, but are brought together by a commitment to the logics of situated human action, and to understanding how routine ways of doing and being become meaningful to individuals (Schatzki, 2001). Practice theory departs from most cultural theory in how the body is treated. Here, activities of the 'mind', such as talking, are bodily performances (Reckwitz, 2002). Although studies of social practices are more likely to focus on the collision or settling of complex assemblages than a back-and-forth oscillation, there is orientation to movement. Practice theory also aligns well with Sedgwick's aspirations for critical theory in attempting to bridge repression/liberation or structure/agency dichotomies (Scheer, 2012).

Overcoming binaries is also a cornerstone of critical discursive psychology, where it has been argued that it is practically and theoretically impossible to pull apart discourse and practice, identity and subjectivity, or social and psychological, as selves are conceptualised as constituted in and through the use of meanings created in discourse (Edley and Wetherell, 1999; Edley, 2001). Attention to affect is increasingly becoming part of the repertoire of those employing critical discursive psychological theory, and contention that discourse is difficult to separate from affect (Mcavoy, 2009, 2015; Wetherell, 2012) stands in stark contrast to Sedgwick's attempts to extract feelings from language. Outside critical discursive psychology, history of emotion scholars' enthusiastic use of practice approaches is suggestive of their suitability for the notoriously difficult study of affect and emotion (Gammerl, 2012; Reckwitz, 2012; Scheer, 2012). We will now develop these lines of argument further through an empirical demonstration of the approach we are advocating.

Friendly Talk

The extract below is drawn from the research of the first author on friendships between women aged late twenties to late forties, in Aotearoa New Zealand. In this part of the study, sixteen individual interviews, two dyad interviews, and four small group discussions were carried out, with a total of thirty-three participants. The invitation to participate came through mainstream media publications (see for example, Fletcher, 2015). Approximately one third identified as non-heterosexual. Most identified as New Zealanders of European descent (Pākehā); five participants identified as of non-European descent. Pseudonyms have been provided for both participants. The first author is the interviewer.

One focus of this research was to ask how discourses of individualisation and the psy-complex play out in the site of friendships between women. Those working in reparative modes could argue that this focus is a classic instance of paranoid critical theory, suspiciously interrogating hegemonic discourses, and contributing only the easiest of critiques. Reparative theorists might suggest also that studies of friendship focused on women's talk and conversation in individual and group interviews indicate a wilful obsession with language, ignoring the lived, affective experience that should be at the heart of critical research. Through turning to ongoing identity practices as the unit of study, this work seeks to demonstrate that the analysis of everyday events does, on the contrary, allow for exploration of the texture of affective practices, whilst acknowledging the effects of doing culture. To return to Love's (2014) question, 'what am I enabled to do?', we suggest that the analyst is enabled to explore the multi-modal spaces of everyday meaning-making, the ways in which people actively create their worlds, deal with pain and joy, and construct solidarities and divisions.

Analysts can be enabled to explore the potential negative and positive effects of this meaning-making *and* trace out the ways in which threads of hegemonic discourses are creatively crafted.

In the excerpt, Leeann (Pākehā, 38 years old, working class) is picking up on a preceding discussion between herself and Harriett (Pākehā, 45 years old, middle class), the other participant in this dyadic interview. There, they talked about friendships typically ending amicably, through drifting apart naturally and easily. However, here, Leeann provides an example of when there was a lack of agreement about what the future of one of her friendships was, and explains what happened after confronting a friend whom she felt had offended her.

Leeann: I just feel like I am on my journey and a certain pathway and I am dealing with my life and so I invest in trust and shared some issues of fear and anger and anxiety but instead of it being accepted like I thought it might be because of what our past conversations had been around trust issues and relationships and boys and so forth, yeah I was insulted, so for example with the word weirdo or 'oh god I can't even relate to feeling like that'. And so-

Harriett: Wow and you thought you knew this person.

Leeann: Yeah.

Harriett: You probably anticipated how they would react or hoped that they would be supportive.

Leeann: That's right, yeah. And so I guess it just shows that like for me I was able to have the courage and have the confidence and feel comfortable to confront it but then once I confronted I didn't feel like I could go to the next step.

Maree: What's the next step?

Leeann: Well because of course from her reaction of 'weirdo' and 'I can't relate to you' it was like 'What do I do now? That's not what I was expecting'. I was expecting her to cry or give me a hug. My body just couldn't cope with that kind of a reaction and so I mean that is my issue and that is all part of what's going on with me.

Harriet: So did you choose flight?

Leeann: No I chose fight.

Harriet: You stood up.

Leeann: Yeah and I swore and I got really angry.

Harriet: And that just escalated it did it?

Leeann: For a moment yeah and then it calmed down and-

Harriet: So where is the relationship now, where is the friendship?

Leeann: Um talking and basically avoiding that issue- topic and maybe we might get to the point where it comes up again because I just feel like we've had a couple of conversations that in the past where we have shared and we have been able to get to what I thought was the next level and just hold each other for a long time and cry and so I sort of felt like we were moving to the next step but it's sort of gone backwards because of that response. Again don't over-analyse it.

Emotion as practical knowledge

Leeann is puzzling over what seems to have been a painful episode, one that has probably been the subject of much previous rumination, accounting and affect as she tries to frame and place the rupture with her friend. Her narrative takes us through feeling courage and confidence, shock, sadness, a ratcheting to anger, a more ambivalent position of avoidance, appreciation (of a level of intimacy), anxiety (over potential loss of intimacy), and guilt at feeling anxious. Compressing and compartmentalising these into a handful of categories of basic emotions or affect programs would close down opportunities for studying each of their varied shades in depth. It would block our view, for example, of Leeann's account of how her flash of shame turned to indignation in a second, and that a mix of these emotions may be felt concurrently.

In our analyses of these kinds of narratives, we try to examine how episodes of affect and accounts of affect are crafted through the skilful shaping of social material. We see participants as active experts in the management of everyday life. This is one way in which critical discursive psychology constitutes a method for carrying out Sedgwick's recommendations for a greater focus on the 'middle ranges of agency'. For example, when Leeann attributes her anger to "what's going on with [her]" at this point in her "journey", she puts a recognisable narrative resource to creative use. Effectively, she positions herself as undertaking an arduous journey of self-betterment, which it is inferred, should be honoured, thus justifying the blame she lays on her friend for her part in jeopardising that task. Although she admits culpability for her anger and evaluates it as unacceptable, she simultaneously exonerates herself from it. Underlying our interpretation is the treatment of affect as action oriented, as part of getting social life done both in the episodic moment and also subsequently in the retelling and accounting. As a result, Leeann's relative empowerment becomes visible, by bringing her creative use of available, intelligible formations into view.

The middle ranges are also brought centre-stage if we understand affect and emotion as practical knowledges, conceived as distinctly patterned rather than random eruptions. Sedgwick is a

forerunner of a movement that puts a new twist on centuries-old conceptions of affect as mysterious, uncontrollable, and as oppositional to knowledge (see Wetherell, McCreanor, McConville, Moewaka Barnes, and le Grice, 2015). In the extract above, however, listeners are provided with a practical context and a way of making sense of how and why the event made Leeann angry. Listeners hear the potentiality of the pain and embarrassment through the action of *admitting* called a 'weirdo' by a friend. But in confessing details about this moment of shame, Leeann simultaneously positions herself as a wronged victim, which comes with social sanction to be angry. Therefore, Leeann's victimhood invokes, not any kind of anger, but *reasonable* anger.

The texture of the affective event is not lost by pointing out the ways Leeann's anger is crafted as reasonable. We are certainly not suggesting that Leeann is not really feeling anger, nor indignation acutely, or that the work she is doing to develop this narrative is unusual or overly self-interested. We propose quite the opposite. The nuance in her emoting is only possible because of the complexity of practical knowledges put into practice. Leeann's anger becomes powerful, not because it is irrational, but because she has knowledge about how to contextualise its meaning (Burkitt, 2014). Note also that although Leeann's anger is validated through experiencing a wrongdoing, the occasional self-reproach about this anger, also visible in this extract, is an embodiment of frameworks of meaning in which anger (especially perhaps women's rage) should be kept within prescribed limits. Although analysing discourse in this way brings into view the limits of what is 'acceptable' action, it is also a way of exploring how people play with those very limits.

We are proposing that methodologies where participants' own activities and concerns become the foci represent more compassionate and respectful ways of interpreting social life, than, for instance, classic poststructural analyses of discursive formations and docile subjects. These orientations are a way of instantiating Sedgwick's appeals for a wider range of readings but with a methodological history that offers a well-developed range of techniques and concepts for examining patterns in discourse. The next section develops the argument that looking to individuals' orientations and accounts opens the door to empirical analysis with some of the feeling that Sedgwick was looking for, and further demonstrates the significance of identity practices in the negotiation and arrangement of affective material.

Relationality and co-construction of intimate selves

As we begin to focus on the identity making evident in this extract, again the intertwining of affect and knowledge, discourse and emotion, becomes discernible. Leeann's practical sense-making about how and why she is affected, is part and parcel of the sorts of identity-making talk that we all engage in habitually. As has been argued for some time now, the overemphasis on individual

subjectivity and the power of the dynamic unconscious that characterises psychoanalytic approaches leads to a re-inscription of an inside/outside binary (Wetherell, 2005b, 2008). Instead of beginning with Leeann's unconscious, and then moving outwards, we ask 'what versions of self are being made?', or 'how are they (not) achieved?' To illustrate, we will focus on one element of Leeann's identity-making prevailing in this encounter, the version of self involved in doing intimacy and relating to people in certain ways. We conceive of Leeann's 'intimate self' as partially figured, through her unique experiences, but at the same time, the present cultural contexts she engages with in this particular interaction provide materials for (re)configuring. One of the materials that Leeann works with, and which generates much of the affectivity generated in this scenario, is based around dealing with the difficult position of being rejected.

Just as rejection is experienced as emotional difficulty, managing it in an interactional sense is not a simple procedure either. What resources, then, does Leeann use to make sense of it, and how can she continue on, in a hopeful way? One feature of practical knowledge that Leeann can rely on concerns the 'proper' sequencing of events relating to both the friendship itself, and the recent breakdown. Notice, for example, Leeann's use of "next step". This use refers to two different imagined and currently socially authorised and validated trajectories: a) what should happen after a friend who has been offended confronts another i.e. apologise and offer a hug, and b) moving to increased intimacy in a friendship after sharing personal information, which, it is inferred, entails greater self-disclosure. In both cases, Leeann's friend is positioned as disrupting these trajectories, allowing Leeann to recoup loss of face. At the same time Leeann crafts an identity for herself as reasonable in her confusion, and as a competent do-er of intimacy.

Leeann's proficient use of these identity procedures, as well as the potential positive consequences she can carry forward from her experience of rejection, provide another option for thinking about how one may occupy more liveable positions in difficult times, without recourse to paranoid/reparative contrasts. Conceiving routine identity procedures as resources that people make use of requires that our theories of subjectivities are able to account for the psychological processes that are carried out *between* as well as within people (Wetherell, 2006). Selves are created intersubjectively through a "communicative medium of immersion", as co-produced meanings are shifted between and around us (Wetherell, 2006, p.67). We have discussed the usefulness of the notion of 'becoming' as a reminder of the possibilities for reconfiguring and solidifying simultaneously, and these remain relevant for understandings of self-making processes with a focus on intersubjectivity. However, notions of becoming can be misleading if the messiness of social life is not immediately invoked. A discursive approach attempts to take into account the often contradictory and non-linear nature of identity making, which includes playing with, or re-forming various cultural resources. Sedgwick's emphasis on ontology is honoured as we come to see that

analysts' tracing of patterns of discursive-affective effects engages with the making of ontological realities.

Indeed, the process of ascribing affects and emotions as social actors put them to use is central to the relational practice-based approach of psychosocial studies we advocate. Exchanges between social actors operate as negotiations about what can be felt and by whom. Clear demonstration of how Harriett and the interviewer's responses fundamentally shape Leeann's emoting can be seen in the quicker exchange in this excerpt. When Leeann reports that her "body just couldn't cope", although she makes clear the strength of her emotional response, it is ambiguous what she was feeling. Harriett's subsequent request for clarification, which makes use of the popularised evolutionary psychological concept of 'fight or flight', shapes the feeling position that Leeann occupies. In this question, Harriett mirrors and fosters the gravity of situation that Leeann has been crafting, as well as places limits on how Leeann can respond. Leeann's affective response is guided by the possibilities of choosing a) fight, b) flight, or c) something else that would not follow the options presented to her, potentially causing interactional difficulty. Echoing Leeann's indignation in choosing 'fight', Harriett then lends Leeann's anger an element of bravery with the affirming "you stood up". Again, this feedback provides an identity possibility for Leeann to work with, and she uses it to orchestrate the peak of the narrative and affective trajectory with confirmation that she "swore and got really angry". This unfolding is only possible by social actors interacting with an already populated space of distributed social material, and we (our bodies and psychic realities) cannot be 'hit' by an affect that is unmediated by social meanings (Burkitt, 2014; Hemmings, 2005; Wetherell, 2012). Using some of the same examples already discussed, we now move on from analysing them at the level of social interaction, to analysing them from the perspective of a slightly longer and larger scale.

Embodying psy regimes

In this section, we turn attention towards questions of how discursive regimes become embodied and lived out. We have mentioned already that these discussions on friendship operate as a vehicle to craft an intimate and relational self. It is therefore somewhat unsurprising to see that 'psy complex' knowledges (Rose, 1996b, 1999) are drawn on throughout the extract. Leeann's presentation of herself, where she is 'comfortable' and 'confident' going to calmly talk a problem out with a friend, 'makes sense' in a cultural context where therapy technologies are valorised, and where there are imperatives to verbalise relationship problems. Leeann's descriptions of reaching the 'next level' in their friendship is also reminiscent of therapeutic discourses, where relationships are posited as, ideally, continuously improving (Illouz, 2009). Note too that the version of intimacy constructed here rests on showing vulnerability, and 'investing' in relationships, which are further

hallmarks of management of relationships as per psy technologies. We would argue that this encounter is an example of how therapy discourses are lived out in the everyday. There is a common sense quality to Leeann's constructions of intimacy, which are accepted as 'truths' by Maree and Harriett in the conversational moment. Although always partial and unstable, an ideological hegemony of psy-influenced intimacies is accomplished as Leeann puts them to use.

But such claims invite questions. Does recognising the prevalence of individualising, psy discourses place this analysis in the paranoid camp? How can opportunities for moving in other directions be brought into being if all we have done is pin down another manifestation of our paranoid object? Whilst there have been many critiques of the individualising nature of therapeutic discourses, one might nonetheless choose to remain ambivalent about it and accept, as has been argued elsewhere (Wetherell and Potter, 1992), that the lived consequences and political effects of hegemonic discourses are varied and contextual rather than automatically disempowering. The circumstances of accomplishment need to be examined to explore power effects, simply pointing to hegemonic discourse is only a preliminary in the work of critique. One might focus on the use of psy discourses in creating intimacies, and highlight how the instrumentalising techniques that they enable aid the management of a complex, contingent intimate life (Martinussen & Wetherell, 2018b; or, see Chapter Six). Or one might, as Julie McLeod and Katie Wright have done, interpret them as tools for recognising gendered inequalities (McLeod and Wright, 2009; Wright, 2008). However one evaluates the therapy talk, the emotional tenor created and experienced during the interaction between Leeann, Maree and Harriett is best conceived as defined through historically specific sense-making. Even if a more critical line were taken about the individualising and responsibilising effects of psy discourses, and the ways in which Leeann must take on the burden of working through 'her' issues, paying attention to the cultural specificity of Leeann's experiences surely is a way of doing justice to them. It also better acknowledges her creative, agentic work in constructing affective experiences, her personal histories and her identities relating to a particular friendship. We move now to yet another dimension characteristic of critical discursive psychological investigations, and begin thinking about how affect becomes personalised.

Personalising affect: psycho-discursive practices of friendship

For Sedgwick, one of the main problems with critical theory is the attempt to study the experience of actual life, through generalising, canonical discourses. However, if we understand embodied affective practices to build over time, the inevitability of intertwining between the personal and the conventional becomes clear. We might think about how Leeann's personal style of friendship has been crafted and shaped over the years, with some affective routines and sense-making procedures repeating and becoming more habituated than others. These 'psycho-discursive practices'

(Wetherell, 2007, 2008; Wetherell and Edley, 1999) constitute a psychology and provide Leeann with a repertoire of personal identity practices; they are a bundle of resources she can draw on, befitting different contexts.

To illustrate, we can point to one pattern in this group of personal discursive affective resources that Leeann draws on, which signals both trouble and opportunity for how she may carry on into the future. Doing so requires that we provide a bit more detail about conversations that preceded the stretch of talk already reproduced. As mentioned, this conversation is linked to other discussions, where Leeann and Harriett agreed that drifting away from friends is a common experience. It aligns with a discursive affective repertoire, outlined elsewhere in this research project, which promotes the idea that friends come into one's life for a particular 'reason' or 'season', before paths amicably diverge (Martinussen, 2018a; or see Chapter Five). However, at another point in the discussions, Leeann provides an account of her belief that she finds this process of drifting more difficult than other women do, and understands herself to have had a long history of worrying too much about her friendships. To quote part of Leeann's earlier talk:

For me I am terrible with thinking 'what have I done wrong? Why haven't they texted? Why haven't they called? It's been a month. Why should I call them? Why should I text them? It's two-way friendship'. So for me I'm terrible at just thinking of all the negative and thinking 'there must be a problem, what did I do wrong?'

These durable constructions of self explain the final line shown in the earlier, main stretch of talk above where Leeann states, "again, don't over-analyse it". Although this discursive act may have multiple meanings and functions, it seems in part an instruction to self. Perhaps the kind of self-instruction Leeann may have also carried out in solitude as she questions why friends have not been in contact more. Although there is a self-disciplining element to it, we might also interpret it as part of a development of a newer set of psycho-discursive resources, in which she avoids blaming herself for a lack of communication from friends, and a resultant loss of intimacy. Through our alternative route, we come to a Sedgwickian interpretation in which we witness and support Leeann re-assembling fragments which might form a more hopeful future (Sedgwick, 1997).

Sedgwick's understandings of Tomkins' theorisation of shame are useful here, but again, we provide a slightly different interpretation. For Tomkins, shame is on the same axis as joy and excitement, and feeling the sting of shame indicates that positive affects are *incompletely* reduced (Sedgwick, 2003). Even expectations that do not come to fruition, as a result of the thwarting and hostile gaze of others, remain linked to a positive expectation. To put it another way, shame, for Tomkins and Sedgwick, signals that there was some initial interest, and Leeann's deliberations could be read as a classic evocation of the dependence of feelings of shame on her prior interest

and investment in her friend. Sedgwick's elevation of Tomkins' affect theories, however, overlooks their shortcomings characteristic of the general psychology of the period, particularly his oversimplification of complex assemblages and identification of some emotions as 'core' and 'hard-wired' (Wetherell, 2014). Shame and the routes to it are more multi-faceted, with more functions and manifestations, than Tomkins suggests. We agree though with Tomkins's emphasis on the *simultaneity* of mixed feelings, of good and bad, and we would further point to the loops involved in the constant translations between feeling and knowing.

By zooming in and out of different aspects of social and personal contexts, we can see that Leeann's localised affective responses and changing psycho-discursive practices are demonstrable of her inseparability from a longer cultural history of gendered personal relating. We do not view this as an overemphasis on culture, but rather, simply accounting for the context which is part of the process of Leeann's emergent being in the world. Something we have not yet touched upon in our discussions is the thorny issue of embodiment. Here it is useful to treat the individual as a site, which is both subject and object, where affect becomes organised through social action. The individual-as-a-site concept is a heuristic device that links personal affective responses to discursive histories without neglecting psycho-biological processes. The person becomes a site for the re-assembling of 'body-brain-narrative-feeling-response-context-history' (Wetherell, 2012, p. 75), where affective practice sediments and takes on patterned, but constantly refiguring, forms of order (Wetherell, 2012, p.138). Thus, the notion of individuals as sites that are recruited by affect, better acknowledges the omnipresent and ontoformative nature of affect, and of its role in self-invention — of creating personal histories that stick.

Conclusion

Sedgwick's reparative oeuvre was a double pronged approach that simultaneously sought to impact the theorising of affect and subjectivity, whilst prompting academics to inject feeling into their work. We hope that our analysis has demonstrated how discourse-based methodologies might still invoke empathetic engagement and excitement for discourse analysts. Witnessing people's deft and creative use of cultural narratives is heartening. We can feel alive to new possibilities and more positive about social transformation, and look towards working with the contingency of social life in enabling ways. We can simultaneously practice more eclectic discourse analysis and respond to Sedgwick's reparative call, continue to be critical and seek out hopeful spaces, admire human creativity and the textures of everyday life, as well as gnaw over and worry about some of the trajectories.

The modest context of the everyday may not generate the excitement and mystery that 'phantasies' hold and paying attention to the regular ways in which people are recruited by affective practices

is unlikely to stimulate those who prefer to treat affect as an intensity or excess (Anderson, 2009; Massumi, 2002; Thrift, 2008). However, Sedgwick and Frank (1995, p. 521) praise the ‘rich life of everyday theories’ in Tomkins’ work, and we believe that the meaning-making bound up in the discursive activities of research participants illuminates these theories, as much as any phenomenologically-inspired interpretation. Humanness, feeling and quirkiness can be sought out in practical sense-making, whilst also increasing opportunities for spotting or tracking transformation. But doing so necessitates that emotions and affect are conceived as inextricably social. Discourse research of the kind advocated here explores modes of talk-communication, but is of a piece with the making of meaning in a broader sense expanding out to include semiosis in general and the physical, visual, felt and tactile (Wetherell, 2008, p.74).

Affect and emotion are challenging to study because they are constituted through a range of social contexts and scales — chronological, cultural, historical, interactional and personal, which interact in complex ways (Wetherell, 2014, p. 7-8). But analysts can attempt to read social action from these various perspectives, even if they are not assumed to be discrete. Developing methods that aid in the identification of patterns is no easy task, but we are arguing that detailed epistemological enquiries are crucial to understanding the unfolding of emotional performances.

Sedgwick’s assertions rightly highlighted the risks involved in using the methodologies typically associated with poststructuralism and critical theory, particularly in relation to assuming discourses are over-determining and inevitably control docile bodies. There are risks too, when relying on discursive methods, in accounting for materiality. Likewise, the temptation to pursue objects in order to change them, whilst universalising, diagnosing and judging them (Wiegman, 2014, p.16), may strike a chord with feminist analysts. However, Sedgwick presents these risks as *always already realised* in discourse analysis, omitting reference to the possibility of mitigation. We have tried to demonstrate that her criticisms of poststructuralist discourse analysis do not extend to practice based discourse research. In many ways, these modes of analysis predate and have long exemplified her call to focus on the middle ranges of agency, human creativity, and the relatively empowering. We hope we have shown that all is not lost for critical analysts, and that future investigations of affect can be ‘touchy feely’ (Sedgwick, 2003), generative and methodologically sound. It would be a shame to dismiss the opportunities for nourishment and surprise that can be found in orientations to unfoldings, and in the new attention given to possibility and becoming. Equally, though, we believe that there are risks in omitting questions of epistemology, because patterns of slowly bending norms (van Lenning, 2004) are likely to be overlooked without them.

Chapter Four: Doing research craftwork - methods, procedures and ethics

Chapter overview

In this chapter I provide the rationale for the research design and discuss its implications for the data generated, which is analysed in the empirical chapters that follow (Part III). Qualitative psychological researchers must find a balance between two broad sets of methodological activity. Firstly, positioning themselves within particular world views and philosophical theory, and secondly, pragmatically engaging with a toolkit of research techniques for different purposes (Shaw, Dyson, & Peel, 2008). I primarily dealt with the former, and explored the links between the theory and methodology I am using, in the previous chapter (Chapter Three). I introduced the analytic tools of discursive affective practice theory, including the identification of subject positions, contradiction and trouble, discursive affective repertoires, and elucidated the affect theory that motivates the impetus towards investigating people's common sense-making. My task in the current chapter is to deal with the second set of methodological activities, to detail my engagement with different research techniques and explain why I have used them.

First, I outline my research design, including the rationale for sampling women in early midlife, and the three modes of data collection used: a) qualitative vignette methods, which generated written responses; and talk-data from b) small group discussions and c) interviews. Second, I discuss the recruitment and the demographic make-up of my participants. Third, I follow this with an overview of some of the procedural steps I took for collecting the data, including a discussion of relevant ethical considerations, and the reasoning behind the questions and prompts that aided data elicitation. Fourth, I describe the process for analysing the different types of data. Finally, with hindsight, I close with some suggestions for improvements, and a discussion on the messiness and richness of qualitative research.

Research design

Here, I provide rationale for my sample group, before moving on to explain why I opted for a research design with more than one method of data collection. I then provide further details of each of the three methods in turn.

Why women in early midlife?

At the beginning of this research, neither the focus on women, nor the age grouping of early midlife had been developed. Although I was centrally interested in how ideologies of friendship operate in

the context of a hierarchically organised field of relational life, the wish to understand the experiences of women in this ‘stage’ of their lives came with thinking about how friends’ positionings within heterorelational orders might affect friendship practices. That question developed from Michael Warner’s (1991) conceptualising of ‘reprosexuality’. Warner demonstrates how heteronormativity exceeds the realms of sexual identities through a society-wide privileging of reproduction and starting families. While the term ‘pronatalism’ similarly describes the socio-cultural valorisation of reproduction, and particularly motherhood (Morell, 1991; Ulrich and Weatherall, 2000; Graham and Rich, 2014), reprosexuality more effectively links it to the affective force of a heteronormative imagination.

In developing the concept of reprosexuality, Warner (1991) is, justly, concerned with how queer-identified people are targeted as transgressing the norms of reproducing. However, the analytic purchase that might be gained from reprosexuality has not yet been realised, and the concept remains underutilised in studies of personal life. There has been little development of research asking how people situated across spectrums of gender and sexuality are differentially affected by reprosexuality’s injunctions (for exceptions, see Bertilsdotter Rosqvist & Lövgren, 2013; Park, 2013). To provide a brief example of some of the intersections the concept engenders, in relation to some of my own relational life identities, as a straight, cis-gendered woman, I am protected from the force of reprosexual discourses of transgressing ‘naturalness’ that are entwined with other forms of heterosexist hate speech to which Warner refers. Yet, I identify as voluntarily childless. And, in my mid to late-thirties, I am not young nor old enough to be ‘exempted’ from the surveilling powers of ‘repro dogma’, (Warner, 1991, p.10), and at times, I feel that gaze keenly.

The rationale for the sample of women in early midlife came out of my interest in asking how (non)heterorelational or (non)reprosexual identities — (non)mother, (non)partnered, or other related identities — might represent tensions with friendship ideologies. I also began to question how, in what specific ways, friendship operates as a field of power, transmitting some of these knowledges. How might practices of friendship make visible or conceal women’s relations to self in (non)reprosexual terms? It seemed to me that friendship might be a point of connection between different parts of personal life, where plural and complicated relational identities get worked on. Further, the highly gendered, demands of reprosexuality also have ramifications for expectations along the lines of age (Bertilsdotter Rosqvist & Lövgren, 2013). The decision to put age boundaries around participants, ‘late twenties’ to ‘late forties’⁹, was largely based on a supposition – that managing changes in personal life, or expectations relating to them, might intensify in this (approximately) twenty year period. As well as having to account for relationship status (Lahad,

⁹ I let participants interpret these loose age categories; the youngest participant was 22, and the oldest was 49.

2017) and parent status (Morell, 1991), I wondered also if pressures to manage ideologies about successful careers might also be interwoven with accounts of personal life. I theorised that this age range might best capture those women who correlated with the pervasive representations of ideals of womanhood centring on 'having', and juggling, it all (Negra, 2009). How would women use these abundantly available discursive resources in relation to stories of friendship?

Three-pronged approach for studying one set of phenomena

From the outset, I intended to make use of more than one method of data collection and I settled on vignettes, individual interviews and small focus groups (I explain why I term these 'group discussions' when providing my rationale for using them, to follow). As indicated in Chapter Three, this research adopts a constructionist epistemology and discourse analytic focus that, although synthetic in nature (Wetherell, 1998, 2012), has consistently informed how the three research methods have been designed and implemented. The decision to use the three methods was motivated by a wish to examine multiple constructed realities, and to put the focus on the situated work of accounts, rather than by assumptions that it would strengthen my analytic claims through triangulation (see Silverman, 1993, as cited by Seale, 1999). More specifically, the vignettes, group discussions and interviews allowed me to attend to my research questions through different social-psychological lenses.

As was demonstrated in Chapter Three, I am interested in the macro discursive, where participants' talk draws on more global cultural resources and ideologies, and discourse analytic activities might include genealogical (Carabine, 2001) or poststructural (Wetherell, 1998) influenced methodologies. At other times, ethnomethodological insights are relied on to a greater extent (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell & Potter, 1988, 1992), and the more fine grain patterning evident in the organisation of interaction become the focus. In other moments, I am more attentive to psycho-discursive dimensions (Wetherell, 2008; Wetherell & Edley, 1999), or personal ordering (Wetherell, 2007), where particular modes of practice become embedded in narratives of self, and become 'a guide for how to go on' (Wetherell, 2007, p.668). This multi-focal undertaking is congruent with an identity practice approach, where 'big' identity categories might be the overall topic of the research, but the identification of the ways multiple subject positions are configured or abandoned, becoming variously culturally and interactionally troubled, form the basis of analysis (Wetherell, 2005a). As such, the methods I used were designed to elicit a range of different types of data, and social action. I now describe these more in detail.

Rationale for using vignettes

For the first stage of the research I designed a written research activity for participants that made use of vignette methods. This entails presenting participants with a vignette, a hypothetical story,

and then asking for responses to the vignette via open-ended questions. This part of the research responded to the need to generate data about the discursive resources available with which to construct the category of woman friend in a broad sense, and about how women's friendships are ordered within the wider ideological context of friendship, including its relationship to other forms of care and intimacy.

Vignettes can be used in conjunction with other research methods, such as interviews or focus groups (e.g. Barter & Renold, 2000), but I used them as a stand-alone method in this part of the research, and collated written responses. Vignette methods are a very flexible research tool, and can be used to explore a wide range of topics or aims (Gray, Royall, & Malson, 2017), while also isolating aspects of a particular social problem (Barter and Renold, 2000, p.312). This was useful for me as the scope of the project was relatively broad, but I could use the vignettes to focus on different, specific tensions relating to contemporary friendship relating. Another significant advantage of using vignettes is that they can be effective in accessing assumptions, because participants are required to make suppositions about a situation for which they do not have all of the details (Kitzinger & Powell, 1995). Some of the stories are deliberately left ambiguous in order to facilitate this. Using a method that accesses assumptions was important for the current research. As I mentioned in Chapter One, women's friendships have a taken for granted character, where their qualities are known, but often not in overt or explicit ways. Therefore, I used vignettes to access women's perceptions of different aspects of friendship relating, with the goal of articulating patterns often presumed to be already known.

Vignettes can also be useful for eliciting negative assumptions, and therefore have potential to elicit a wide range of responses i.e. negative and positive assessments of the characters (Braun & Clarke, 2013). There are at least three reasons for this. Firstly, participants are provided less overt clues about what responses researchers might consider desirable or undesirable (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This is the case for the vignettes I constructed in that, although they represent tensions in managing friendships, they are relatively prosaic in character. They depict problems that many people could encounter in their friendship relating. Second, in a similar vein, it has been argued that vignettes access socially undesirable responses because participants are commenting on the lives of only fictional characters (Kitzinger & Powell, 1995). Thirdly, vignette responses can be collected anonymously (Clarke, Braun, & Wooles, 2014), as was the case in the present research, further alleviating difficulties in reporting on negative evaluations of the characters.

I decided on a vignette design with one unfolding story, an 'incremental vignette', with each new vignette involving the same characters, and with questions following on after each vignette. Incremental vignettes were apt for this research because I was interested in participants'

evaluations of the motivations and actions of different characters (Gray et al., 2017). In each unfolding, the vignettes depicted a different problem that three characters encountered over a nine-year period of their fictional friendship. By using the same characters across the set of vignette scenarios, participants could gain ‘familiarity’ with the characters as the story developed. This perhaps meant that participants could better focus on the new elements of the story, intended to raise different, troubling or provocative scenarios.

In terms of distributing the vignettes and collecting the written responses, participants accessed the research via an online platform normally used to deliver surveys (Qualtrics). One of the key advantages of administering vignette research online is that providing written responses to fictional stories and characters requires comparatively little time and personal investment of participants; therefore, a lot of data can be collected (Gray et al., 2017). See Appendix A for the vignettes and questions participants were presented with for the online exercise. I discuss the data collection and the specifics of the vignettes and questions in more detail later.

Rationale for using group discussions (small focus groups)

The benefits of using focus groups are well established (for overviews see Braun & Clarke, 2013, pp.110-113; Morgan, 1996). Focus groups can be valuable for understanding collective experiences of inequalities (Madriz, 2000; Pollack, 2003). They are useful for eliciting a wide range of perspectives and understandings (Underhill & Olmsted, 2003), and participation in focus groups can be empowering (D. L. Morgan, 1996b; Poorman, 2002). In addition to these advantages, a main reason for using focus groups for this research was to provoke discussion that mimics everyday conversation (Wilkinson, 1998a, 1998b, 1999). As a result, they may help to address issues of decontextualising people from social contexts (Wilkinson, 1999), because participants are responding to each other, rather than a researcher, and may feel less pressure to find the ‘correct’ terms or responses (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.110). Having access to everyday ways of sense-making on friendship experiences was important for answering questions about how friendships are arranged and articulated within the broader sphere of personal relating. Also of central relevance for this project is that interaction generated between participants can provoke rich, elaborated accounts of identity (Wilkinson, 1998b). I aimed to generate data which showed how the identity positions of ‘self’ and ‘other’ were created, or valorised and abject friend positions, as participants co-constructed versions of women friends during the focus groups.

I opted to term the focus groups that I ran ‘small group discussions’, when thinking about how to communicate this element of the research to potential participants. I felt the term ‘small group discussion’ better described the environment I wanted to foster, compared to ‘focus group’ where

the most common use in the public domain relates to market research¹⁰. In contrast, speaking to participants in groups of three to four participants was intended to create an environment of informal discussion where people would have more time to converse about their personal experiences if they wanted (Toner, 2009). Braun and Clarke (2013, p. 115) have found that smaller groups tend to produce richer data, and have the advantage of being easier to manage.

Rationale for using interviews

There is a vast amount of literature available detailing different styles of interviewing, and assessments about what they achieve and how (e.g. Elliott, 2005; Gubrium & Holstein, 2012; Hollway & Jefferson, 2013; Wengraf, 2001). As such, there is a need to specify what I was hoping to gain by including interviewing in the research design for this project. Firstly, I saw them as congruent with the vignette and group discussions, as interviews are also suited to exploring participants' understandings, perceptions and constructions (Braun & Clarke, 2013). However, given the importance of identity practices to my methodological approach, I was hoping to stimulate talk concerning participants' *personal investments* in their understandings, perceptions and constructions of friendships. My principal aim with the interviews was to include a method for exploring personal histories of friendships, psycho-discursive practices (Wetherell, 2008; Wetherell & Edley, 1999) and personal ordering (Wetherell, 2007). These concepts capture something of the process of how particular discursive practices become part of individuals' psychologies. Through everyday talk about the self and through the repeated use of particular discursive resources, people "acquire a vocabulary of motives and a character with particular emotions, desires, goals and ambitions" (Wetherell & Edley, 1999, p.353). I wanted to elicit talk which allowed me to piece together how previous interactions with friends may have informed the development of participants' unique 'identities-as-friend', or other forms of personal order. I treated the interviews as events in which the (re)ordering process of personal order would occur in talk, which I then could analyse as a form of social interaction. Asking why people might be invested in particular identities would allow me to link individuals to assemblages or discursive formations in which they are embedded; speakers identities, are always nested within a "complex aggregate of contexts" (S. Taylor & Littleton, 2006, p.26).

Informal data sources: personal archive and a pilot

In addition to the three main methods, there were two other informal types of data I drew on in developing my analyses. The first was an unsystematic archive of notes which includes entries on

¹⁰ Wikipedia, for example, defines a focus group as "a small, but demographically diverse group of people and whose reactions are studied especially in market research or political analysis" (see https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Focus_group). This is not an accurate description for the data collection sessions that I ran as small group discussions.

my own experiences of friendship and reflections about my engagement with participants. A part of this archive was also devoted to collecting articles about friendships between women found in popular media. The excerpts that I used in Chapter One are drawn from such media.

A second minor data source which informed the development of the methods, as well as initial, embryonic themes for the research, was a pilot study I ran, soon after I began the research in March 2015. This pilot was a precursor to the vignette-based data collection of written responses. My initial intent had been to use vignettes as a prompt for problem-solving pair conversations. Although vignettes have been used successfully in conjunction with focus groups (Barter & Renold, 1999, 2000) and interviews (Jenkins, Bloor, Fischer, Berney, & Neale, 2010), and despite the pilot indicating the possibilities for the collection of rich data, I decided to not scale up this combination of a participant-interaction research activity using vignette methods. Instead, the research tasks performed via the pilot were split. Given that the vignettes in this study were to function as providing breadth rather than depth, investigating the availability of discursive affective resources about women's friendships, I decided that shorter text-based responses via the online platform would suffice. Face-to-face time with participants, in interviews and group discussions, could then be devoted to answering questions about how discursive resources could be flexibly put to use in social interaction.

Recruitment and data collection

In line with the broad sample group, women aged late twenties to late forties, my recruitment methods attempted to reach a wide audience. In December 2015, I was granted approval from the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee (ref 016328) for the multi-part research design and to recruit via mainstream media. With the help of a media advisor at the University of Auckland, I put out a press release about the research in December 2015, and contributed to a newspaper article that was circulated in one of Aotearoa New Zealand's main Sunday newspapers. I was interviewed by a reporter which formed part of a story about women's friendships which circulated in print and online (see Fletcher, 2015). The newspaper article framed the research as primarily investigating the "extent women base big life decisions on the opinion of their friends" and included the testament of a woman who was quoted as relying on her friends to help her make decisions about her (male) romantic partners and houses to buy. It was headed by a photo of the woman and one of her friends. The combination of the photo and the description of the thirty-five year old buying a house meant that the research in this setting had a rather middle class, white, heterosexual 'face'. Although the article was a positive framing of a woman positioned as having unusually close friendships, the final quote from the woman captures the hierarchies of personal relating that I was seeking to problematise: "Even when I do find Mr Wonderful, having

this broad group of friends to guide me will make my life so much richer". Thus, although it was noted that the research would "focus on the positive and negative effects" of friendships, the article framed the research as fundamentally focused on celebrating women's friendships. I also promoted the research via a short interview on the University of Auckland's student radio programme during a regular segment in which academics talk about their research ("Ready Steady Learn," 2018). I did not formally collect information about how participants heard about the research, but from exchanges with the group discussion and interview participants, I believe the newspaper article was the most effective recruitment method.

Those interested in the research were first directed to a website which I built using a template provided by the company who I used to host it (I provided the details of the website during the radio interview and in the newspaper article). This website contained the online vignette research activity, which was created using Qualtrics, software designed to host surveys. The website where volunteers provided their written responses has been decommissioned, but see Appendix B for screen shots of the website. On completing the activity, participants were presented with a request for demographic data (see Appendix C); it was made clear to participants on this page and in the participant information page that completing this was optional. Participants for the interviews and group discussion data collection methods were also recruited via the website and vignette activity. After the request for demographic data, participants were asked if they would like further information to be sent to them about additional research activities in which they could take part (this can also be found in Appendix C). The flow of web-enabled activities or information through which participants were guided can be summarised as such:

1. Introduction and participant information
2. Vignettes and questions
3. Request for demographic data
4. Invitation to take part in an interview or a small group discussion

I emailed 77 people who requested more information, which included a summary of the two options, interviews and group discussions. I also attached the participant information sheets for these activities, which provided more information about what was entailed. Further, I provided links to the website, which contained more information about me and the research. From the 77 people who I emailed, 16 took part in an interview and 17 took part in a group discussion. The majority of these 33 participants said they did not mind whether they took part in a group discussion or an interview. Primarily, I organised group discussions with participants in cities other than Auckland (where I lived) so that the data collection could happen over a shorter period of time, thereby reducing costs associated with being away from home. However, I also carried out

three individual interviews outside Auckland. As part of the email dialogue to organise the interviews and group discussions, I asked participants to give me a very brief statement about why they were interested in participating, if they were happy to supply this. On some occasions, if participants indicated that they had specific friendships or difficult experiences they wanted to share, I suggested they take part in an interview rather than group discussion, so that there was more time and 'space' for them to elaborate on their experiences.

I have discussed my concerns about the newspaper article, the primary recruitment resource for the research, presenting a rather white, heterosexual version of friendship. I have noted that this 'advertisement', did not signal very effectively that I was interested in difficulties women might have in their friendships, in addition to the advantages and pleasures of friendship. One benefit of having all participants contribute to the research via the vignettes was that I was able to give a more accurate and detailed indication of what the research was about than the newspaper article could provide, before participants committed to volunteering to take part in an interview or group discussion. Similarly, by giving the characters the names 'Laila', 'Chun' and 'Aroha', my intention was to signal that ethnic diversity was welcome. Lastly, as will be discussed in more detail soon, the vignettes were centred on problem-solving changes or issues the vignette characters were experiencing in their friendships. Therefore, I hoped that the vignettes went some way to signalling the research was about the good and the bad of friendships, and provided an opportunity to add complexity and diversity of representations of friendships, over and above the relatively narrow and positive representations of friendships portrayed in the newspaper article.

Sample and ethical considerations

In this section, I discuss the collection of the demographic information of participants, and the make-up of the sample.

Collecting demographic data

For the vignette method, as I have mentioned, the participant information was provided on the opening page of the research activity. This informed participants that a request for demographic data would be presented to them at the end and that completion was optional, but useful to me as the researcher. Volunteers had to click a button to confirm that they had read and understood the participant information presented to them before continuing to the vignettes (see Appendix D for the participant information in a Word file format, which was translated into a web-page format).

For those participating in an interview or group discussion, I initially gave participants the form as part of the debriefing. However, I decided that including this with the other de-brief activities, especially if participants needed to get to other appointments, meant that it did not give participants

sufficient time to work through it and ask questions. As such, for the majority of the interview participants and group discussion participants, I distributed the form to complete with the consent form, during the briefings. See Appendix E for the form requesting demographic data that I used for both the group discussions and interviews. See Table One for a summary of demographic information.

Table One: summary of demographic data

	Vignettes	Interviews	Group Discussions	All Participants
Age				
25-30	34	6	0	40
31-40	53	5	8	66
41-50	36	3	6	45
Unanswered	22	2	3	27
Ethnicity				
Pākehā	94	9	14	117
Other European	10	1	2	13
Māori or Māori/Pākehā	11	2	0	13
Pasifika or Pasifika/Pākehā	2	2	0	4
Other non-European	7	0	1	8
Unanswered	21	2	0	23
Social class				
Working	18	1	2	21
Middle	82	9	13	104
Upper-middle	4	0	1	5
Both working & middle	9	2	1	12
Don't know/ don't agree/ don't identify	10	0	0	10
Unanswered	22	4	0	26
Parent/ caregiver				
Yes	66	8	10	84
No	56	6	7	69
Unanswered	89	2	0	91
Relationship status				
Single	22	2	5	29
Separated	6	1	4	11
Partnered/ in relationship	86	10	8	104
Other (e.g. "complicated" or in transition)	8	0	0	8
Unanswered	23	3	0	26

Sample

Apart from the two characteristics, identifying as women and the age range of late twenties to late forties, sampling was non-purposive. This was not an investigation of ethnic differences in friendship practices. I did not seek to compare Māori and New Zealand European women's friendship patterns, for instance. Research of this kind would require a very different recruitment process and the development of a design based on kaupapa Māori methods, attentive to tikanga (customary practice), and contribute to a sense of self-determination for Māori through participatory methods (Pihama, 2012). It would be a fascinating project to undertake with a bicultural research team and appropriate cultural mentoring, but given the paucity of work on friendship practices in Aotearoa my concern in this study was to focus on the general cultural politics of women's friendships.

Population-based representativeness is relevant in discourse research but, more crucially, generalisations from the data are based on confidence that the cultural resources used by the sample have been adequately investigated. My aim was to develop some conclusions about how the taken-for-granted sense-making on friendships are put to use in everyday, collaborative social action (S. Taylor, 2001). As it turned out, the sample was broadly representative of the Aotearoa New Zealand population in terms of ethnicity with one exception. Of the 150 participants who provided demographic data, 117 (78%) identified as Pākehā, while 13 (9%) identified as European but not New Zealanders. Seventeen (11%) identified as Māori or Pasifika¹¹. Three participants (2%) identified as neither New Zealanders nor European, which indicates that the sizable minority group identifying as Asian in Aotearoa New Zealand, 12% of the total population (Statistics New Zealand, 2015), was not well-represented.

Five of the vignette participants replied as something other than affirmative to the question 'Have you always described your gender identity as you do now?' All of those who took part in a group discussion or an interview described themselves as cis-gendered women. The average age of participants across the three methods was 36 and the median was 35. Although this research does not attempt intersectional or comparative analyses, my original plan was to compare differences in friendship experiences between women-friends who are mothers/non-mothers, partnered/single, or other more complicated in-between or culturally intelligible positionings within heterorelational orders. Participants were informed that this was one focus of the research, and I completed some initial analysis on the intersections of friendship and motherhood, and then between friendship

¹¹ I am reporting on these two ethnic categories together here because although Pasifika (from Pacific island nations) and (New Zealand) Māori peoples and cultures are enormously diverse, in Aotearoa New Zealand, these populations often face similar challenges in terms of structural discrimination.

and singleness. Approximately three quarters of participants for the vignette exercise reported being partnered or in a relationship, but this was less the case for those who took part in interviews (10 of 17), and group discussions (8 of 17). The spread between those who reported being caregivers or parents, and those who were not, was quite even; approximately half (or just over half) of participants were parents or caregivers for each method.

Despite having participants represented in a range of categories relating to partnership/relationship status and caregiver/parent status, in the end, I found that the coherence, commonalities and consistency between women's stories and evaluations of what good friendship entailed were more compelling. Well before I reached my original estimation of the numbers of participants I thought I would need, I was reaching saturation on some key themes, three of which now make up the empirical chapters. My decision not to carry out any comparative analysis according to relationship status or mother/non-mother positions does not mean that there are no interesting comparisons to be made, but rather, that I have opted to tell different stories. As I worked with the data, particular themes that coherently related to each other came to dominate my attention instead, and these felt like the most important in grasping some key aspects of contemporary relational life. I selected to shift my attention to examining the ways women-friends are imbricated in gendered, neoliberalising, psychologised cultural formations.

In a similar vein, I found descriptions of what count as 'good' in friendship remarkably similar between heterosexual and non-heterosexual participants in the group discussion and interview data. Eight of the thirty-three participants who I spoke to in group discussions and interviews identified as gay, lesbian, bisexual or pansexual. Unfortunately, I omitted to enter a question on sexual identification into the request for demographic information for the vignette method, so I have no comparative data for that portion of the sample. However, with regards to the interview and group discussion participants, although many used phraseology about friends being like family, only two participants described friendships resembling what queer scholars describe as 'chosen families' (Stacey, 1996). One of these participants was gay and one was heterosexual. It is perhaps significant that both of these special friendships ended because of the complications of the friends' sexual relationships. The only two participants who explicitly talked about the need to protect long-term sexual relationships from friendships that had become 'too close' did not describe themselves as heterosexual. As such, my research deviates from related literatures (Nardi, 1992; Plummer, 1995; Stacey, 1996) that set out to show how LGBTQI+ friends will have greater cultural resources available to construct high levels of commitment and community than heterosexual people. Further theoretical implications related to these points can be found in Chapter Five.

One possible explanation for the commonalities of friendship practices across sexuality and relationship/mother status could be linked to the desirability of the category of woman-friend. Being able to maintain very close friendships in particular carries with it a form of cultural recognition. Perhaps, then, the importance of making and retaining close friendships flattens-out other differences in discourses of friendship. As I discuss in Chapter Eight, the 'goodness' and social capital made available through having good friends potentially cuts across lines that divide us, such as our positionings in heterorelational orders, sexualities, ethnicities and class. I am not suggesting that there are not, for instance, classed differences between how women-friends carry out their friendships. Rather, what stands for 'good' in women's friendships, is accessible to most women, regardless of other social identities. Qualifying as 'good' woman-friend might rely on being loyal, caring, funny or understanding friends' dispositions, qualities which most women attribute to themselves. To provide a comparison, women feeling they have access to the qualities that make them a 'good', or valued, woman, may be more contingent and loaded with questions of sexuality, size/shape, experiences of mothering, wealth, ethnicity, or social class etc.

Some of the participant responses to the question about social class on the demographics forms were surprising; they indicate that many New Zealanders are not familiar the concept of social class, and there is not always consensus about how the categories break down. The responses from the anonymised vignette exercise reveal that some found the idea of social class repugnant, with nine participants strongly resisting the idea. For example, one person responded "I don't believe in social class. It doesn't exist, is an entirely social construct, and a reprehensible one at that"; others said they 'loathed' or 'disagreed' with the question. As part of the interview and group discussion data collection, some participants asked for guidance on how to answer the question. There were a handful of participants who entered 'middle class' on the form but whose descriptions of their lives and background matched my understandings of working class. A point I make in the methodology sections within the empirical chapters to follow, is that these discrepancies and uncertainties perhaps reflect changing notions of class in Aotearoa New Zealand. In 2009, more New Zealanders believed that their society was predominantly middle class than in the previous two decades (despite rising inequality and numbers of people in lower wage brackets) (Gendall & Murray, 2010). There is a possibility the endurance of the social democratic ideal of a classless, harmonious society in New Zealand, ushered in with the introduction of the welfare state in the 1930s (Kelsey, 1997), affects views on class. Future qualitative researchers based in Aotearoa New Zealand may want to preface the question of class with more information for participants about what the information is used for, and give assurances that they are not being judged.

Given that all of my participants were based in urban areas, I am not sure how relevant my analyses might be for women in rural communities. I spoke to one participant who identified as being from

‘the country’ but who lived in a city. She spoke vehemently, at length, about the relatively short-term friendships that could be cultivated in cities compared to rural areas. Yet, I would not evaluate her talk as operating outside of the types of discursive affective practices I identify in the empirical chapters. Although I offered four participants ‘virtual’ interviews, in areas that I could not travel to, using Skype or Facetime, only two participants agreed. One of the participants who agreed mentioned in passing during the interview that she “hated” Skype. As such, although I found these video-call enabled interviews to run smoothly, and comparable to face-to-face meetings in terms of participants’ engagement (Hanna, 2012), I suspect the prospect of a video-call interview was off-putting for participants.

Procedures: carrying out and collecting data from vignettes, group discussions and interviews

I have already described some of the process of collecting the vignette data, but here I provide more detail about how the vignettes and questions were constructed, and offer some evaluations about this method overall. I go on to discuss some of the procedures for collecting the interview and group discussion data. This includes an outline of procedures relating to ethics, such as the video-recording of these two talk-based data sets.

Collecting vignette data

The vignette data were collected between December 2015 and June 2016. Almost 200 people read through the participant information and gave consent to participate. However, many of the responses were incomplete or too brief to offer useful material for analysis; approximately 145 responses were complete. Participants were asked to provide a minimum of three to five sentences for each question; most were roughly of this length. Each of the 145 participants answered five questions, combining to a dataset of about 725 responses of a few lines each.

Vignettes allow for comparisons of different social groups, as researchers can include details of the characteristics they want to generate commentary and evaluations on (Gray et al., 2017). In my case, when I was designing the research, I was aiming to compare friendship experiences of mothers/non-mothers and single/partnered etc. This is why the overarching story being told through the vignettes was designed to mimic normative life-course development. Each of the five vignettes represent a different point in the story, and involves the perspectives of either two or three of the vignette characters. The progressive story told across the vignette scenarios required participants to problem solve around the following scenarios:

1. A new friend joining two very close friends after spending their years at university together

2. A friend becoming partnered
3. A friend becoming a mother
4. A friend getting annoyed with another about not 'growing up' and taking life events seriously
5. A friend asking another to move overseas with her.

In different ways, the vignettes were oriented to singleness/partnership, motherhood/non-motherhood and other markers of 'settling down' (or not settling down). The final vignette also deals with these issues, via prompting responses on a non-normative example. For two of the vignettes, there were two versions of the vignette and accompanying questions, which were allocated randomly to participants. The second vignette concerned two friends who become close when they were single, but then one of the friends starts a long-term sexual relationship. Some participants read a vignette that was written from the perspective of the friend starting a relationship, and other participants were allocated a version written from the perspective of the single friend character. Similarly, the third vignette required some participants to do their problem-solving from the perspective of a mother, and others from the perspective of friends who did not have children. However, asking for responses from the two different perspectives did not seem to provide great differences in the evaluations of the characters.

As I have mentioned, my aim for this form of data collection was to provoke the rehearsal of commonly drawn on accounts of friendship and its relationship to other forms of care and intimacy, including those that signalled trouble between contradicting constructions. The vignettes were very effective in eliciting assumptions and evaluations about a range of topics; as hoped, participants clearly felt comfortable in stating their negative assessments of particular characters. The vignettes were incredibly important to the development of my initial analysis, however, I ended up relying more heavily on the data from the interviews and group discussions in the final analyses presented in the empirical chapters that follow.

Others have noted that to elicit rich data, on targeted research problems, vignettes must be constructed very carefully, and it can be a challenging task (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Each of the individual vignettes, the overarching story arc the vignettes contributed to, and the accompanying questions, all required careful wording (and frequently, many iterations and rewording). I found writing the unfolding stories and questions in ways that were clear, engaging, believable, and also targeted the topics I wanted to cover, a difficult task, and some of the vignettes and questions did not elicit as much depth or variation as I would have hoped. In retrospect, if I were to write them again, I would try to leave greater ambiguity in the vignettes or perhaps not ask questions so

directly. Although it is advised that vignettes need to be clear and devoid of unnecessary details (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.145), including greater complexity to some of the scenarios may have prompted the inclusion of a wider variety of discursive resources and, potentially, greater diversity in their use. Conversely, however, the relative conformity across some of the vignettes meant that I felt sure in some of my interpretations and lines of analysis.

Process and ethics of talk data through small group discussions and interviews

Between January 2016 and April 2016 I carried out fourteen semi-structured individual interviews in three cities in Aotearoa New Zealand, and two further using video-calling (Skype and Face Time). Those undertaken in person took place in University of Auckland offices, or bookable offices in public spaces such as libraries, community centres or at another university. One took place in a participant's home. Interviews generally ran for about one hour, but some were longer, with one interview running for almost two hours.

I carried out six small group discussions between April and August 2016. These occurred in two cities in Aotearoa New Zealand (four in a public library and two in a woman's centre), each running for approximately one hour. Overall, the group discussion and interview data were collected from participants who were located in five cities (in person or by video-calling). In many respects, the process for carrying out the group discussions and interviews were similar. For example, the briefings and debriefings followed a similar format; I describe some of these procedures now.

Before turning on the recording equipment I carried out a briefing in which I explained the key points from the participant information sheets and consent forms. Appendices F and G show the participant information sheet and consent form for the group discussions. Appendices H and I show the participant information sheet and consent form for the interviews. The participant information sheets and consent forms had previously been emailed to participants. During the briefings, it was explained to participants that only myself, my supervisors, and transcribers would have access to the recorded materials and transcripts. I transcribed one interview, but the remaining fifteen, as well as the six group discussion sessions, were transcribed by a third party (with ethical approval, see Appendix J). Total recording time for the interviews was almost twenty-one hours and there was just over seven hours for the group discussions.

I also informed participants that although the focus of the study was primarily about friendships with women, discussions about other personal relationships and friendships with men was also welcome, if they wanted to include them. During the briefings for the group discussions, I suggested that participants might want to be mindful about what they include in the session about their friends, given the public setting of the group discussion, and suggested that they try not to

include material they thought their friends might consider private. I also requested that participants not discuss the contents of the discussions with other friends or family. For both the interviews and group discussions, I explained that although the research was not designed to explore particularly sensitive topics, there was possibility for us to cover topics that were distressing. Participants were therefore told that they could request for the interview or discussion to be stopped at any time (this never occurred). It was rare for participants to have questions throughout the briefings. Consent was given by all.

Participants were informed that they could self-select a pseudonym and note it on the participant information sheet, or alternatively, that they could leave the space blank to indicate that I would provide one for them. Only a handful of participants who took part in an interview or group discussion self-selected a pseudonym. Although I agree that reflexive engagement for choosing pseudonyms is important, that there is “power in participant naming and confidentiality” (Lahman et al., 2015, p.445), this area of research ethics did not present itself as a particularly thorny issue for me. Although I was planning on matching the pseudonyms for those names that were not European, all participants had European names. As such, all of the pseudonyms that I selected were European. Secondly, for the most part, the themes of the story-telling in the chapters are centred on elucidating and elaborating upon the cultural context of everyday meaning-making in relationships. I was told stories which contained specific and extra-ordinary, events, but for the most part, my focus remained on banal facets of the everyday. I believe that where I have removed identifying markers, such as a particular industry someone worked in, or the type of event friends went to, has not shifted the meaning of the texts to a great degree. This issue would carry with it greater ethical risk if the research was intersectional, or participants were linked to particular institutions or organisations.

During the de-briefing, I asked if participants had any other questions about the research process or the research more generally. Sometimes participants had questions about whether I had developed any findings but there were rarely questions about the process. I confirmed that I would send the transcript to participants for checking if they had requested it, and that I would send a summary of findings at the end of the research. I gave all participants information about support and counselling services they could access after the interview or group discussion in case something we covered in our discussions triggered distress following in the interview or group discussion (see Appendix K).

Most participants requested to be emailed a version of the de-identified transcript (which they indicated on the consent form). Asking participants to confirm their agreement with my use of the de-identified transcripts was an opportunity to deal with any participant discomfort about the

pseudonyms I provided, and was a further way to work through issues of confidentiality. One participant provided corrections for minor details. A second participant raised more substantial concerns about the detailing of a particular friendship trajectory — the ending of an extremely close friendship. I have not quoted this participant's story in the analyses to follow and have given her assurances that if I do quote the material in future publications, I will work with her to come up with a level of de-identification that she is comfortable with.

Video-recording talk data

Another commonality with the interviews and group discussions was that, in addition to recording the audio for transcription, I also video-recorded them. Video is typically used for recording naturally occurring ethnographic data in 'the field', frequently in workplaces, classrooms, or the home (for an overview see Jewitt, 2012). Video is also often employed for participatory methods (Mitchell, 2011). However, counter to these more common reasons for making audio-visual recordings, I did not use video as a method in itself. However, I have found video-recordings to be an incredibly useful resource for developing my analyses of situated interactions in interview and group discussion sessions.

A key analytic focus for the interviews and group discussions was interactional order, including those which produce intersubjective, unfolding, affective practices, between myself and a participant, or between multiple participants. Video-recordings were made to better capture the detail of the interactions, with the video directed at myself and the participants. Although I have not included any formal analyses of these visual data in the empirical chapters, they were extremely useful for interpreting participants' meaning-making. For example, particularly for the group discussions, I could get a better idea of reactions to talk from facial expressions or bodily comportment of participants as they were listening (such nodding, or looking bored), even if they did not end up verbally confirming or disagreeing with what was said. I could also see what was happening in long pauses, for example, participants gauging if someone else was going to speak before they did, 'digesting' a comment or question, or simply taking a moment to reach out for a snack; again, high and low engagement in particular interactions was often quite easy to read. As such, although the research is not multimodal, in the sense that talk generated from interviews and focus groups remains the main data source, I was able to use multimodal methods as a supplementary resource. In particular, having audio-visual records allowed me to ask how linguistic meaning-making was embedded in other modes of discursive practice (Jewitt, 2014). Other practical benefits of having the video data related to the transcriptions. Namely, talk being attributed to the wrong speaker in the group discussions in the transcripts could be identified easily using the video-data. Similarly, when adding more details into the transcripts that the third-party provided, being able to view the video-data was very useful.

Carrying out and collecting group discussion and interview data

Although there were similarities between how the group discussion and interviews were designed and carried out, as well as the data elicited from them, there were also differences. First, I discuss the group discussions, before moving on to the interviews.

Group discussion data collection

During the briefings for the group discussions, participants were informed that although I had prepared some questions, as much as possible, they were to guide the topics for discussion, within the broad topic of women's friendship. Participants were also asked to address each other, rather than myself, and were encouraged to offer alternative positions or perspectives to those given by others when needed (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.127). Although these small group discussions were successful in generating social interaction among group members, a core principle of running successful focus groups (Wilkinson, 1998a), there were many instances of the participants telling relatively long personal stories in the group discussions. This is perhaps partly due to the small size of the groups. Frequently, other participants actively fostered these biographical accounts.

Although participants were encouraged to lead the discussions I did try to lightly guide the groups/pairs across a range of questions under each of the broad areas that I had identified. These were: a) what makes friendships with women a good and a positive element of life; b) how changes in friendships are typically managed; c) the kinds of things which signal that friends are close; and d) how being single, partnered or (not) being a parent affects how friendships are typically carried out. A version of my question guide for the group discussions can be seen as Appendix L. I ordered the questions with general topics nearer the beginning, and those I thought might be more sensitive towards the end (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015), such as the questions about how relationships or pressures on mothers affect friendship relating. However, after beginning with a section about positive aspects of friendships, for the most part, I did not follow the guide in order, and followed participants' lead. Earlier, I had piloted the guide by running a discussion group made up of my student colleagues, as a practice run. Although I did take some notes while listening to the audio-recording that I took, I did not transcribe these discussions and they are not included in the formal analysis. Only minor adjustments were made to the guide I used as a result.

I tended to rely on the guide more in the first sessions; as I became more familiar with what was in the guide, I was able to prompt on particular topics when someone had made reference to them in more 'natural' ways. I began the sessions by asking participants to introduce themselves, explaining that this would help the transcriber identify their voices. As part of this introduction, participants were invited to either say something about what drew them to volunteer for the research, or to tell the group something about a friendship from their past or present. Once

everyone had responded, I usually began the discussions by asking a participant to elaborate on a point they had used in their introduction, because they often fitted into the topic of positive aspects of friendship (the broad area I started with).

In two instances, for discussions I had set up for three people, one volunteer was not able to make the session. These two discussions then ran with just two participants. Although I agree that dyadic interviews offer specific opportunities and challenges (D. L. Morgan, Ataie, Carder, & Hoffman, 2013), my lack of preparedness for running such sessions meant that I ran them as miniature focus groups, and treated the data as such. Although it was accidental, in line with the limited research about dyadic interviews with strangers (D. L. Morgan et al., 2013), I found the dyadic discussions to be beneficial. The dyadic format seemed to contribute to a research environment that fostered more intimate discussions between participants, who had greater opportunities to tell personal stories.

The small group discussions produced the most diverse range of interactions out of the three methods, including long, personal stories, the coverage of sensitive topics, disagreements between participants about the best ways to do friendship, and elaborated accounts of participants' understandings of 'typical' representations of women friends. They were particularly helpful in producing material from which I identified common subject positions of different woman-friend 'characters'.

Interview data collection

In the participant briefing for these semi-structured interviews, I told participants that I was interested to hear anything they wanted to tell me about their friendships. However, I also provided them with the headings of the groups of questions I had prepared which included topics such as: a) what role friendship plays or has played in their lives; b) instances of particularly good or difficult experiences of friendships; and c) different ways of defining intimacy or being close with friends. See Appendix M for the schedule of questions I used as a guide. Although I used the prompt questions flexibly, I generally started off with the same question: 'I am going by the assumption that friendship has meant different things to you over the course of your life, what does friendship mean to you at this point in your life?' From this point, rather than attempting to cover off all areas of the interview schedule, I prompted participants to discuss experiences of friendship that they found problematic, puzzling, or significant in other ways. Although Wendy Hollway and Tony Jefferson's (2013, pp.27-54) treatment of participants as 'defended subjects' comes from a different tradition of narrative-based methodologies, I found their advice on structuring questions that operated as 'story-telling invitations' very useful. By beginning questions with, for example, 'tell me about a time you felt...' or 'can you tell me an experience you've had which...', it helped to anchor

open-ended responses to particular events. Participants are then being asked to begin a story, rather than say everything they could possibly say or to think of a 'correct' answer.

Analysing the data

Here, I give a brief overview of what the main activities and strategies I undertook during the process of analysis. The process for analysing the data from the group discussions and interviews was similar, and I discuss these together. The steps I took when analysing the vignette data were however quite different, as such, I provide a separate outline.

Analytic procedures for vignettes

All of the responses were uploaded to Nvivo, a form of computer assisted qualitative data analysis software (Welsh, 2002). While Nvivo does not in any way automate analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013, pp.218-220), I found it useful in helping me be more methodical in my coding; this was important because the vignette data could be quite repetitive. I began reading and coding the vignette data before the interview and group discussion data, and at this early stage of the analysis, where the possibilities seemed endless, and daunting, I found Nvivo extremely useful in keeping my notes and coding labels organised. I could more easily retrieve notes and link sets of the responses using Nvivo, compared to more manual management systems. For example, I was able to restructure the hierarchies of themes and sub-themes that I was developing very easily (on-screen, the codes resemble files in a computer file management system, which can be moved around and slotted under one another). Once I had worked my way through all of the responses to one of the vignette questions, I could print out all of my notes, or get a visual report of which codes I had used most. I could then make comparisons between my analyses relating to other vignette questions. For instance, I could look at how I had coded differently when analysing responses from vignettes focused on the perspectives of two different characters.

Particularly during the earlier data familiarisation phase of analysis, I did sometimes use semantic codes, picking out repetitions of particular words or phrases. Principally however, the codes were interpretive and researcher-derived (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.207), where I asked what versions of reality were being constructed, how rhetorical devices were being put to use, and what subject positions were being created. During the first few rounds of familiarisation and coding I read through the responses relating to each of the questions in turn. I then did some analysis comparing the responses of different participants, to see if I could get a sense of vignette participants' friendship identities. Although this helped with data familiarisation, it was unsurprising that this strategy was largely unsuccessful, because apart from the few questions which asked participants directly what they would do in the situations depicted in the vignettes, the vignette method was not

designed to access data on participants' own identity positions. When I was more familiar with the data, I found it useful to select responses in less methodical ways, by letting my attention roam over the responses. I think this meant that I was not so focused on my expectations of the responses, and to be open to seeing how patterns cut across the vignettes, regardless of the question they were answering (see also Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.227 for similar observations, but relating to analysing qualitative survey data).

Analysing talk-data

In this section I provide an overview of the activities I undertook when analysing the interview and group discussion data. Although the rationale and data collected from the group discussions and interviews differ, there was overlap in the ways I analysed the data. As is evident in the empirical chapters that follow, I tried to analyse by codes and themes rather than by the individual methods and the type of data I expected them to produce. For example, although group discussions were included in the research design to promote social interaction between participants, some of the analysis of the group discussion data orient to histories of particular friendship identities, and the developments of sedimented understandings of self (Chapter Three provided an example of this). Conversely, there are instances where I investigate interactional trouble using data from interviews (there is a good example of this in Chapter Six).

The theory sitting behind my analytic approach for the interviews and group discussions is similar to Stephanie Taylor's narrative-discursive approach (Taylor, 2009; Taylor & Littleton, 2012), which is designed for use with interviews. Taylor similarly utilises Wetherell's synthesized critical discursive psychological methodology. However, she uses it specifically to focus on how individuals' experiences and unique biography are used as discursive resources. Taylor (2009, p.37) makes the distinction that she is less interested in how subject positions are made available turn-by-turn in interaction, in order to more fully engage with participant reflections on previous and ongoing identity work, including the possibilities and constraints constituted in those prior makings of self (S. Taylor & Littleton, 2006). My use of the concept of psycho-discursive practice (Wetherell and Edley, 1999; Wetherell, 2008), makes for a discursive approach that allows for analysis of ongoing identity work, and infers a sense of continuity, through understanding participants' re-using and layering of prior constructions of self. Investigating psycho-discursive practices is congruent with a narrative-discursive approach, where prior constructions of self gain "affect-laden associations through the personal contexts in which they have been encountered" (Taylor, 2015, p. 15).

A distinction between my approach and Taylor's then, is that I am interested in subject positions that are made available turn-by-turn in interaction, *in addition* to those associated with biographical

and psychosocial accounts of identity-making. For example, as I discussed near the beginning of this chapter, a complex discursive assemblage might be viewed with a focus on psycho-discursive practices in one type of analysis, but tools for analysing interactional positioning might be used to take a different 'cut' using the same data. As I discussed in Chapter Three, and will further illustrate throughout the empirical analyses, a discursive affective practice approach can consider both person-in-interaction, and personal biography, in ways that demonstrate their intertwined but distinguishable natures. Moreover, conceiving interactional positioning and psycho-discursive practices as intertwined can help us acknowledge agency and constraint simultaneously (as I outlined in Chapters Two and Three). This is compatible with Taylor's (2009, p.36) observations that identity is both a construction and a resource, done creatively and flexibly, albeit constrained by local and global social relations.

In pragmatically applying some of this theory, there were two main phases of analysis. The first included becoming familiar with the data, and then more in-depth analysis; the second part related to the writing up phase. These two phases overlapped and were not entirely distinct but I attempt to describe them as separate for clarity. The following lists a range of activities that made up the first phase of analysis. I have laid them out roughly in the order in which I attempted to complete them, for each set of interview or group discussion data. However, often I would be working with more than one transcript in the same time period, so in practice, I would often be 'occupying' multiple points in this process, relating to different data.

- As soon as possible after the group discussion or interview data collection took place, I watched the video-recorded material, in some case repeatedly, and took notes. My notes were primarily focused on developing analytic ideas and interpretative directions. I used the audio-visual data to add to my impressions and experiences of the interviews and group discussions. I looked out for scenes or interactions that were difficult, significant or meaningful to participants, and fed this into my developing analyses. At times, I also included reflections on procedural aspects of the data collection process, which I used to improve the process for interview or group discussion collection that was yet to take place.
- Once a transcript was received, I read it in conjunction with re-watching the video-recorded material, adding in typed commentary to the transcripts using comment boxes.
- I re-read hard-copies of these annotated versions, and began to select sections of interest which I thought represented an example of a (repeated) pattern I had begun

to identify. In these sections of the transcripts, I often added further orthographic detail to electronic versions, using the audio and video data.

- I re-read the transcripts, collating my accumulating notes or data excerpts into separate documents that began to constitute initial themes. Activities during this stage included:
 - Identifying instances of trouble and contradiction (Wetherell, 2005a), and carrying out more detailed analyses focusing on the interactional level, making use of ethnomethodological and discursive psychological methods (for useful guides, see Edley, 2001; Horton-Salway, 2001).
 - Creating a file for each interview participant and mapping out the psycho-discursive resources that I interpreted as significant in their constructions of self-as-friend, using narrative-discursive (Taylor, 2009) and discursive psychosocial approaches (Mcavoy, 2015).
 - Creating a spreadsheet which mapped out constructions of common subject positions, which was integral for developing interpretations of, and identifying, interpretative repertoires.
- I frequently referred to a list of questions provided by Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2013, p.286) when refining themes and sub-themes. These prompt analysts to ask how the following relate to identified patterns of meaning-making (re-produced in an abridged format):
 - What are the meanings, ideas or assumptions constructed?
 - What are the implications for the participants, the research problem(s), for society, or for scholarship?

The second part of the analysis took place once the themes and sub-themes were firmer in my mind, and I had generated some worked-up data examples to support them. When writing up the developing the analyses, and making choices about which themes to present and how, I engaged in two different forms of analytic activity. Firstly, in some cases, my initial analysis of particular data excerpts resembled those from a discursive psychological tradition, and I re-wrote and simplified these, reducing the analytic detail, rendering them more descriptive and illustrative. Therefore, much of the discursive psychological analytic detailing that has informed my analyses is now less visible, because I have subsumed them into theme-based analyses, often using the concept of interpretative repertoires (Edley, 2001; Wetherell, 1998; Wetherell & Potter, 1988). One reason for deciding on a more pattern-based analysis in presentation is for accessibility of my readership. As Sue Wilkinson (2000, p.444) notes, fine-grained transcription of talk can be both daunting and difficult to read. Whilst my re-writing and shifting the level of the analysis risks

potential criticisms about not being clear about my methods, I believe it is in line with the synthetic approach I have taken.

The second additional activity I undertook as I began to write up my analyses, but which links to the points made above, was to engage with literature relating to the topics of my developing analyses. Wetherell's (1998) synthetic discursive affective practice approach allows analysts to capitalise on what can be observed in the context of the interview or group discussion, as a discursive psychological analysis does, but is not limited to those observations. I am interested in how construction of selves in everyday talk link to broader socio-political and historic context. As mentioned previously, in addition to sequences of turn taking, I aim to identify patterns at meso and personal levels, such as patterning of justifications, defence and the maintenance of more local hegemonies (Wetherell, 2015, pp.317-318). Particularly for Chapters Six and Seven, whose specific topics were not part of the original research scope, I used existing literature to locate my participants' sense-making methods with formulations of self that are characteristic of particular epistemic regimes. I had knowledge of some of these literatures, but others were discovered through searches I did about the patterns I was identifying. As well as being able to talk about the significance of the research in relation to existing literature, this abductive, reiterative process allowed me to deepen my analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.257).

Reflections on methods, and the task of tidying up after messy research craftwork

I have pointed out already some things that I would do differently if I were to carry out this research over again. For example, I would try to give vignette participants a bit more space to lead the direction of their stories. I would also plan better for participants not attending group discussion sessions as planned (or, given the rich data generated from the two sessions with dyads, perhaps my efforts would also be well-spent by formally including dyad discussions into the research design). An issue I touched on earlier but want to expand upon now, is the need to be careful in dealing with issues of class. I have suggested that social science researchers in Aotearoa New Zealand may want to provide context for why class is useful demographic data for the research(ers). This could be part of the text provided on the forms requesting demographic data. Something that I think may have given interview and group discussion participants a better idea of why I was interested in different aspects of participants' demographic characteristics, and the social class with which they identified, might have been a longer and more detailed introduction of myself. In detailing why I was carrying out the research, I typically discussed my personal reasons for studying friendship. However, I could have provided more information about myself and my cultural and socio-economic background. Although I am educated, I do not easily identify as middle class. I

present as white, and have British and Norwegian ancestry. But I also have Māori ancestry and grew up in an urban Māori family, in a working class (or ‘under-privileged’) household, raised by my single (Māori) mother and other whānau (extended family). Research carried out with working class women who experience themselves as never quite good enough strongly resonates with me (Skeggs, 1997; Walkerdine et al., 2001). Therefore, I wonder if my often automatic doubts in myself meant I was not as attentive to my power as a researcher as I could have been. Providing a longer and more personal introduction may have built rapport, as well as helping participants ‘locate’ me.

Also on the topic of remaining aware of researcher power and concerns, there is an aspect relating to my construction of the vignettes which troubles me. The first vignette begins: “Chun and Laila met at university and have been friends for five years”. I based this part of the scenario on stories in popular culture that I had read, and when discussing the research with a colleague, where friends from university seemed to hold a special place. Thus, I hoped that the inclusion of these two old friends who met at university would make the scenario believable and relatable for participants. In retrospect however, particularly as this is the opening of the research activity, I think starting off with a different scenario might have been better. Potentially, this set the three characters off in a rather middle class setting.

These few examples of things I wish I had done are perhaps inevitable in a qualitative research project of this size. Before closing this chapter, and while highlighting the messiness of qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2013), I want to point out that my reporting and reflections in this chapter on why or how decisions were made, have been moulded to fit the current telling. Although the development of the research design and problems were recursive and nonlinear, for the purposes of brevity and clarity, I have tried in this chapter to isolate some of the processes informing the research, and to lay them out in a rather more linear shape.

While my reliance on discursive affective practice theory remained constant throughout the research process, leaving the underlying epistemological and ontological basis of my approach largely unchanged, the research questions and associated methods underwent transformation as the project developed. Moreover, congruent with my claims in Chapter Three, one might say that my execution of the research procedures and resultant data collection are based on emotionally invested ‘practical knowledges’, based on senses that are not always accessible to myself in articulable formats. This chapter then, can only be a partial account of the twists and turns of the research. In addition to this research being guided both by my understandings about how critical, qualitative research works, my personal logics and assumptions will have significantly shaped the research. My predilections, ‘truths’ and blind-spots, are all factors that constitute the research, as much as the analytic objects, data collection and analysis. As such, I accept that in the process of

writing I have made new meanings, 'tidying up' my descriptions of my past actions, as if they were always firmly set. Nevertheless, I hope that my lack of certainty signifies my aspirations towards the 'slow craft' of qualitative research (Brinkmann, 2015), where researcher 'goodness' is of a variety that is both epistemic and ethical (Brinkmann, 2007).

PART III: EMPIRICAL ANALYSES

Preface for Part III

In his book 'Intimate Citizenship: Private Decisions and Public Dialogues', Kenneth Plummer (2003) reflects on the difficulty in characterising contemporary life in the West. Public discourses promulgate the decline of civility and the rise of violent inequalities, as well as greater prosperity, health and choice about how to live our lives. Plummer (2003) goes on to explore how these schisms filter down into people's intimate lives. He characterises people's negotiations with newly available choices as 'intimate troubles'. These intimate troubles relate to, for example, family life, sexuality, genders, fertility and reproduction, and emergent forms of intimacy, which would not have seemed imaginable in previous eras, and that have resulted from technological advances and a 'newfound fascination with interior life' (ibid, p.7). In different ways, the empirical chapters that follow investigate aspects of such intimate troubles.

The three empirical articles that constitute Part III are presented in the order in which they were written. Chapter Five explores the intimate trouble associated with diversifying family forms, where 'alongside traditional marriages we find a proliferation of new "families of choice"' (2003, p.5). Plummer is not suggesting there is or ever will be a clean shift, from traditional to intimate relating without boundaries or constraints. Indeed, Plummer is eager to discourage accounts of 'intimate citizenship' that are based on metanarratives, advocating instead for 'everyday moralities' (ibid, pp.95-116), brought to light through storytelling. It is the space between the dichotomous (heterorelational) 'traditional coupledness' and 'families of choice' that I seek to open out and investigate in Chapter Five. The personal stories I began with in Chapter One, both my own and the journalist mourning the 'loss' of her friend to coupledness, potentially tug on threads of meaning-making which sit between these oppositional 'choices'. The purpose of Chapter Five, however, is not just to discuss what choices are available, or even which choices are made. Rather, the task is to detail how the friendship positions on offer are taken up, which may be fleeting or durable in nature, and to demonstrate how they become implicated in organising personal life.

It is through some of these processes of implication that I was drawn to the patterns which became Chapter Six. The theme of therapised intimacies was not originally a main point of investigation for my research. However, I began to notice how understandings of self-development became implicated in constructions of friendship intimacy. For example, in one of the vignettes, which was designed to explore how participants deal with changes associated with a change in a friend's relationship status, I put forth the following scenario:

Over the past few months Chun's relationship with someone she has been dating has been getting serious. Although neither Chun nor Aroha have mentioned it, they're both feeling that Chun's serious

romantic relationship might change their friendship. Chun has noticed one change already – she has been avoiding talking to Aroha about her new relationship.

To elicit responses about the vignette characters, I posed the following question, ‘What might the impact be of Chun not talking to Aroha about her new relationship?’ Participants routinely constructed the absence of discussion about the relationship as both a failure and inevitably leading to a spiralling loss of intimacy. Illustrative of many responses, one participant wrote “Aroha may feel out of the loop. Excluded or deceived. This may worsen as time progresses”. Omitting information about a sexual relationship was often constructed as a severe act, and likened to a form of deception. The gravity of the ‘problem’ of not talking to a friend about the development of a ‘serious relationship’ could be linked back to heterorelationality, and its pre-eminence in relational life. But the *intertwining* of the primacy of long-term sexual relationships *with* the imperatives to tell oneself, or share the self, in this way, seemed significant in how ‘good’ friendships were constructed by the research participants. My interest in constructions of intimacy through self-disclosing talk grew as I waded deeper into the analysis process, which I did while engaging with the wide literature on what has been termed the sociology of therapy cultures (see Swan, 2010).

Although the final article in Part III, Chapter Seven, draws on elements from both the chapters that precede it, the analysis is complexified on two counts. Firstly, I present a range of discursive affective practices that make up a different part of the terrain of friendships, where dealing with intimate troubles are either less integral or less visible; in part, this occurs through constructions of friendships as escapes from intimate troubles. Secondly, I ask how these practices, which are fraught with contradictions, and represent a challenge for feminist scholars in articulating women’s agency and empowerment, might affect the study of postfeminist sensibilities. In retrospect, it is unsurprising to me that I began to identify the patterns that make up the article in Chapter Seven later in the analytic process. These affective discursive practices seem to epitomise Westaway’s (Westaway & Copland, 2003, p.13) claim that ‘friendship between women is like clean air — vital, yet taken for granted and almost invisible’. Making more visible that which is frequently unseen, has brought to light how intimate troubles that have come with emergent femininities are implicated in the taken for granted pleasures of women’s friendship relating.

Chapter Five: Heterorelationality and the limits of intimacy between women friends¹²

Introduction

This article explores some ways women in early mid-life (late twenties to late forties) position their relationships with female friends. How important is friendship for this group? What place is it assigned in the normative trajectories of life? I report on data from critical qualitative research with women of various backgrounds in one western liberal democracy — Aotearoa New Zealand. My concern in this research was to explore the resources women had available to make sense of this aspect of their relational lives, examining their accounts and narratives to understand the multiple, intersecting, cultural agendas that organise practices of intimate relating.

Sociological research has long suggested there will be considerable complexity in women's navigation of friendship norms in relation to long-term sexual relationship identities and mothering (Cronin, 2015c; Gullestad, 1984; Harrison, 1998; O'Connor, 1991). Reflecting these negotiations, instances of tension in friendships between women can also be found in popular culture, and the following excerpt is one such example. It is from an agony-aunt style newspaper column from *The Guardian* (Frostrup 2016) and responds to a reader who wrote in feeling neglected by a recently married friend.

The best friendships evolve over time and picking up where you left off should be as easy after a decade as it is after a day. The depth of a friendship can't be judged by proximity, the regularity of your communication or occasional disappointments, but by your compatibility and the generosity with which you accept each other's foibles. Celebrating good fortune and sustaining each other in times of trouble is the way to move forward, not stamping your foot and waving your fist when you're not getting the level of attention you're used to.

Note that whilst "depth of friendship" is emphasised, contingency is simultaneously promoted. Friends should sustain each other, but it is taken as fact that friendships "evolve", and lack of proximity must be accepted. The distress that the letter-writer felt about her newlywed friend not having time to see her is invalidated by the agony aunt. Instead, feeling neglect is positioned as an immature response, accompanied by the suggestion that an opportunity to celebrate a friend's good fortune is being lost. By contrast, in the case of a sexual partnership relationship, it might be predicted that an agony aunt would deem less involvement in one another's life as a sign of troubled

¹² This is a lightly edited version of a sole-authored article, which has been accepted subject to minor amendments, by *Sociological Research Online*.

relationship. In addition to hinting at how prioritisation is managed, these contrasting sentiments signal the different ontological statuses given to the relationship types.

Queer perspectives provide a rich set of theoretical tools for thinking about the differing affective investments in friendships and long-term sexual relationships. Effectively, they question the naturalness of the inevitable decline of friendship intimacy in order to ‘develop’ long-term sexual relationships. For example, Adrienne Rich’s concept of ‘compulsory heterosexuality’ elaborates on how a range of structures inhibit women’s togetherness (1980). Likewise, Michael Warner’s ‘reprosexuality’ highlights how heterosexuality is privileged through the expectations and idealisation of reproduction and starting families (1991). Through reprosexuality, homosexuality is devalued because of its non-reproductive status, and parallels can thus be drawn with heteronormative framings of friendship. In another, key contribution, Sasha Roseneil and Shelley Budgeon problematise the privileging of family, for which heterosexual couples are the starting point. They point to the dominance of ‘heterorelationality’, or the rigid norms of heterosexual relationship order – “of co-residence, romantic love, monogamy and the primacy of the conjugal couple” (Budgeon & Roseneil 2004, p.129). However, Budgeon and Roseneil’s more recent investigations have focused on exploring ‘alternative’ forms of friendships and family, and opportunities for working *outside* heterorelational orders (Budgeon 2006; Budgeon & Roseneil 2004; Roseneil 2006; Roseneil & Budgeon 2004; Roseneil & Ketokivi 2015). This important body of work follows in the tradition of other ground-breaking research that showed how non-heterosexual communities promoted friends as chosen families (Nardi 1992; Plummer 1992; Weeks, Heaphy, & Donovan, 2001; Weston 1991). As such, Budgeon and Roseneil’s work is a potent renewal of investigations where friendship is treated as an ethical project, by demonstrating the possibilities of blurring of boundaries between friendship, coupledness and family. Fuelling their project is a wish to decentre the family and the heterosexual couple in our intellectual imaginaries (Roseneil & Budgeon 2004, p.135; see also Cronin, 2015).

Why then, am I returning to ask how heterorelational orders are reproduced? Firstly, queer forms of togetherness have not stemmed the flow of assumptions of the sanctity of heteroromantic love (e.g. Arend 2016; Illouz 2013; Martin & Kazyak 2009). It may even be increasingly difficult to challenge heterorelationality, as traditional family ideals are promulgated within postfeminist logics (Gill, 2009; McRobbie, 2013). Secondly, although the prospect of reworked kinship formations represents a challenge to heterorelationality, we need to be careful that we do not overstate the degree of change occurring. As Graham Allan (2008, p.14) puts it:

The shifting structural context in which family and friend relationships are constructed inevitably influences their patterning, but the increased relational flexibility of contemporary society does not signify that the solidarities they involve are thereby becoming synonymous.

Despite the blurring between categories of family, friends and partnership, people continue to maintain distinctions between them. Roseneil and Budgeon (2004, p.153) make the valuable suggestion that intimate life should be studied as networks or flows of intimacy. I agree with this framing, but wish to reflect for a moment on the flexibility intimated in this reconceptualisation. Flexibility, fluidity and relationality are often used when describing diversifying kinship and family forms in late-modernity. But we need also to bear in mind that 'traditional' distinctions may be used flexibly and fluidly, potentially reinstating heteronormativity (Speer & Potter, 2000). For example, scholars of postfeminism have demonstrated that women's re-engagement with 'traditional' or conservative forms of sexual/romantic love and motherhood are flourishing via discourses of choice and empowerment (Evans et al., 2010; Gill, 2009; McRobbie, 2013; Orgad & De Benedictis, 2015). Therefore, studies detailing how relationship categories are used in different contexts are needed.

Methods and procedures

The data analysed are drawn from research investigating practices of intimacy between women friends, aged late twenties to late forties, in Aotearoa New Zealand (see Chapter One). All participants gave written, informed consent, and the study received ethics approval from University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee. Pseudonyms have been provided for participants.

I hoped to provide insights into a range of processes involved in doing women's friendship by using three data collection methods, which attempt to direct analytic attention to three different scales – broad/social, interactional and biographical (see Chapter Four). Firstly, 145 participants took part in a written exercise, based on vignette methods (Braun & Clarke 2013; Clarke, Braun, & Wolles 2014). The participants for this part of the data collection volunteered in response to a newspaper article I contributed to about women's friendship (Fletcher, 2015). Using an online platform normally utilised to deliver surveys (Qualtrics), participants were asked to think about and respond to a series of five vignettes presenting the unfolding story of a friendship involving three fictional characters. Each vignette depicted a problem that the characters encountered over a nine-year period of the fictional friendship. Participants worked through the vignettes at their own pace, and were asked to puzzle over elements of the predicaments the three friends encountered through questions that accompanied the vignettes. This method was used primarily to generate data that would answer questions about how women's friendships are ordered within the broad ideological

context of friendship, including its relationship to other forms of care and intimacy. As such, my probes for this part of the research needed to provoke the kinds of received wisdom of friendship the women had available to draw upon.

At the end of the written activity, participants were invited to take part in further research activities. Those interested indicated a preference in taking part in an individual interview or small discussion group. Group discussions were designed to focus attention on identity processes at the interactional level. It was intended that they be made up of three to five participants. However, in practice, it was often difficult to bring participants together in one place at the same time and two of the scheduled group discussions became dyadic. This turned out to be advantageous; with the dyad interviews there was greater opportunity for participants to share and become invested in one another's stories. Thus, as has been found elsewhere (D. L. Morgan et al., 2013), a more intimate research environment was created with the pairs. For the third method, it was hoped that individual interviews would aid understanding in the processes involved in doing cultures of women's intimacy at the psychological level, as a one-to-one interview allowed the opportunity for women to develop longer uninterrupted accounts of their own personal biographies and experiences of friendship. In both the group discussions and interviews, conversations were wide ranging, and were guided by a loose schedule of open-ended questions.

In total, sixteen individual interviews, two dyad interviews and four small group discussions were carried out with thirty-three participants, two of whom opted not to provide demographic information. Of the remainder, nine participants identified as non-heterosexual. All were able bodied. Most identified as of European descent, but six participants identified as mixed ethnicity. The study was not designed to investigate indigenous, Māori, perspectives on friendship patterns and was located within the culture of the majority 'Pākehā' group (non-indigenous peoples, primarily European). The practices of intimacy explored can be more broadly located within 'Western' frameworks of intimacy (Jamieson, 2011). Although most self-identified as 'middle class' on the participant demographics form, it became clear that not all participants were working to the same class distinction systems. Some participants asked for advice on answering this question. These discrepancies perhaps reflect changing notions of class in Aotearoa New Zealand. In 2009, more New Zealanders believed that their society was predominantly middle class than in the previous two decades (despite rising inequality and of people in lower wage brackets) (Gendall & Murray, 2010).

However, with one exception, the research was not set up in a way to provide intersectional analyses. One aspect of intersectionality that I originally intended to interrogate related to identities associated with heterorelational and reprosexual orders. Yet, as I demonstrate in the material

presented in this paper, in defining the limits of intimacies in friendships, there were more similarities than differences across the participants, despite variability in partnered/non-partnered/parent status and sexuality. Although I did not target specific groups during recruitment, it was useful that there were a mix of partnered (including polyamory) and non-partnered (single, divorced/separated, temporarily asexual), and parent (twenty one participants) as well as non-parent participants. Because one of the aims of the research was to ask how women dealt with possible conflicting demands on their time and attentions, particularly relating to long-term sexual relationships and motherhood, a loose category of women in ‘early midlife’, late twenties to late forties, informed the age range. Younger and older women can of course be mothers and partners and face similar challenges. However, positioning within heterorelational orders is more visible for women in this age range (Lahad, 2017).

My theoretical and methodological approach makes use of discursive affective practice theory developed by Margaret Wetherell (2012, 2014). The analysis phase consisted of providing ‘thick’ description of the entanglements and relationships between various spaces, ideas, bodies, objects, memories, broad cultural factors and personal histories and asking what forms of order and pattern can be discerned (Brown, Cromby, Harper, & Johnson 2011; Wetherell 2014). I am interested in the mobilisation of discursive resources located within imagined positions (Edley & Wetherell 1999), personal orders (Wetherell 2005), interpretive repertoires, everyday ideologies and canonical narratives (Wetherell 1998; 2012). Efforts were made to track trouble and contradiction, as well as absences — topics and positions that seemed unspeakable or unintelligible. As has been argued extensively (Wetherell 1998; 2012), a key advantage of critical discursive psychology, upon which an affective practice approach draws, is that it allows analysts to attend to multi-level foci including: a) micro- to mid-level analysis of the reflexive accomplishment of identity work in conversation; and b) how the resources for this identity work are constituted through the broader discursive field. Asking ‘what does this do as a form of social action?’ I (re)read transcripts, moving between micro, personal/mid and macro analytic foci.

Analysing talk-data on friendship practices

The analysis is organised around three interpretive repertoires made use of by participants which show how these culturally recognisable discursive practices are used to justify the prioritisation of long-term sexual relationships. The first is centred on ideologies of autonomy in friendship. The second reproduces expectations of the impermanence of friendship. Lastly, potentially painful deprioritisations of friendships are smoothed over, through embracing assumptions of necessary flexibility in the management of friendships.

The age and research activity participants attended to is provided in parenthesis introducing each data excerpt.

Freedom, flexibility and autonomous friends

Over the first set of examples below, I investigate the affective evaluative work involved as participants develop distinctions between friendship and long-term sexual partnership. Here, Dee (34, dyad interview) is responding to a question about how friendship qualities that exist within a long-term sexual partnership compare to those within a (non-sexual) friendship, with a woman friend.

That was the reason why my marriage fell apart really, was because it was only a friendship and we didn't really realise [...] we should have just been friends [...] But it's completely different because if you are a partner with someone you are living together and you are running your life, even if it's parallel train tracks, you know, you are running two separate lives together. If my friend suddenly decides to invest in an investment property that has no effect on me but if my partner does, it does. When she is really, really busy and away on business, I go and see other friends, but if my partner was going to be away on business for six months I have then got to work out- I'm going to be a single person for six months and the structure of my life and keep in touch with him and things like that. It's quite different because you are running your lives together whereas friends can run their lives in their own little circles and then pull together when they need to.

The relative devaluing of friendship is put in motion when Dee proposes her marriage ended because they realised the relationship was “*only* a friendship”, that they “should have *just* been friends”. But Dee's analogy of different 'tracks' then crystallises contrasting felt experiences for the relationship types. She formulates a pressing need to run tracks in parallel within a partnership. The very “structure” of life is understood to change, even in a temporary absence of a partner, requiring maintenance work to keep the tracks running side by side. Intensity is invoked. Conversely, the coming together of the separate activities of friends is seen as more discretionary. Reunions are brief, occurring as needed, each in their own ‘little circle’. The needs of women-friends are posited as fewer, and more easily fulfilled by a rotating cohort. For Dee, investing in property or moving away for six months impacts friends minimally. As Lucy, another interview participant, put it “what works really well for me is that I can tap in and tap out as I need to”. While not implying that friendships are unimportant to Lucy or Dee, I am suggesting the ideological effects of these vocabularies of flexibility and ease construct friendships as essential, but accessories, within personal lives.

I will stay with the question of what it means to run lives ‘on the same tracks’, but here, for women friends, rather than long-term sexual partners. Data were prompted for this when participants were presented with the following vignette.

Aroha and Laila have now been close friends for nine years. They still socialise together regularly and they share a house with two other flatmates. Aroha has just started seeing someone romantically but she’s much closer to Laila, and they often talk about how great it is living under the same roof. When Laila came home today she told Aroha that she had been offered a job overseas, and asked Aroha if she wanted to move overseas as well.

Participants were then asked how Aroha would respond to the question of moving overseas with her friend. Before reviewing the responses, it should be noted that although some aspects of the situation were left ambiguous intentionally, allowing space for participants’ evaluations, the vignettes determined the accounting frame, and required participants to problem-solve a relatively narrow scenario. This is rather different from the openness characteristic of everyday conversation or even those of unstructured interviews and group discussions, where varying contexts for accounts emerge as the conversation flows. Nonetheless the vignette format was useful for exploring common understandings about the affective practices of friendship.

A great majority of responses to the vignette put the closeness of the friendship as just one of many considerations for the Aroha character. The possibility of her long-term prospects with someone “she has just started seeing” was often put forward as the factor most likely to influence her decision. For example:

“I think Aroha will stay behind and continue her new relationship. Relationships start to become more important than friendships to many people.”

“It completely depends on how she sees her new relationship panning out. If she thinks it could be serious she will probably not leave.”

“Depends on how she feels about her relationship.”

In many responses, the range and breadth of considerations that someone in Aroha’s position would need to weigh up was striking. For instance:

“That completely depends on Aroha and her situation. If she's a spontaneous person who's always been interested in travel then she may go for it. It depends on so many things - how she thinks her relationship is likely to pan out, how close she is with her family and whether it's important for her to be geographically near them, whether she's likely to get a job fairly easily overseas etc. Their age is also a big factor.”

“It depends on a lot of unknown variables. If being with Laila is more important to Aroha than the things tying her to her current country, or if she's unsatisfied with her life in this country and thinks starting afresh overseas might be good for her, if she's not particularly invested in the person she has just started seeing, then she may say yes. But if Aroha has family, other friends, hobbies, a satisfying job etc. where she is now, and/or would like to continue to pursue a relationship with the person she's started seeing, she is unlikely to want to sacrifice all that for an almost-complete unknown.”

Although such responses suggest it would be a possibility that Aroha would move overseas with Laila, her needs and expectations as a family member or worker, her appetite for change, and long-term sexual partnership are presented as the main considerations. While it is assumed there will be attempts to chart how job opportunities and a long-term sexual relationship might pan out, it is not suggested that similar predictive techniques should or will be applied to the friendship. There is also a vocabulary of instrumentalisation and rational management apparent here, reminiscent of the postfeminist mandate. Rosalind Gill (2017) writes of women working in a register which sets up daily life as a challenge that must be managed; in personal life, women have become responsibilised, intimate entrepreneurs (Gill, 2009). In the context of this scenario, in amongst the compartmentalising and assessing of various life components, Aroha's special relationship with Laila becomes a variable that is considered secondarily. This is implied through omitting considerations of any grave consequences for the friends. However, a few responses go further and effectively warn against including the friendship in the decision.

“Aroha has her own life etc where she is. She would have to look at the pros and cons and what she really wants with her life, not what Laila wants with Aroha's life.”

“Accept the offer for the intent as genuine but want to lead her own life.”

“She needs to decide what she wants her life to look like in the future to inform her decision.”

“I don't think Aroha should go, I think she should live her own life. In my view she would decline the offer. Both friends will be better off for the time apart.”

Although the vignette implied the friends' lives were heavily intertwined, these responses construct the friendship as outside Aroha's “life situation”. What is included in Aroha's “own life” is unclear, but, linking with the responses provided up to this point, the expectations relating to family, job, geographical location, or the *potentiality* of a long-term partner more readily constitute ‘life situation’, than friendship. Again, I am not proposing friendships are insignificant in women's relational-

scape, or that there are any 'right' answers to this vignette. However, the data suggest that the concerns of friendship occupy a position as outside other, 'integral' components of life.

The idea that friendship can fill the spaces between 'primary' parts of life was also produced in the responses to a question asking participants why Laila would ask Aroha to move overseas with her. A minority of participants cited the strong bond of the women and Laila's desire to not live apart from her best friend as the main reasons. In many examples though, although the Laila character was evaluated as reasonable, and the friendship as significant, participants suggested that her motivations were of an instrumental type:

"She doesn't want to lose her good friendship, and she might even be scared about going alone, so the thought of going through it with a friend might make her feel safer and happier, and less nervous."

"Because she wants her friend to be with her overseas - she probably sees it as a bit of a security blanket for herself, also an adventure for them both, and an opportunity for Aroha."

In the most extreme cases of "security blanket" discourse, there was suggestion that the friends were too close. For example:

"Because she scared to be without her and the relationship had become co-dependant which is not really cool."

"She can't see life without Aroha. I think she is being selfish in her question to Aroha about moving."

"She is socially and emotionally dependent on her."

Although brief, the accounts indicate the pervasiveness of psychologised knowledges, where it 'makes sense' to understand women who prioritise the development of their friendships as having 'unhealthy attachments'.

Similarly, some participants put forward the idea that a decrease in the intensity of the friendship would be a positive development. The following extracts are in reply to the question 'what happens to the friends over the next couple of years?'

"I think Laila goes overseas, leaving Aroha behind. Aroha builds a life with her new partner. The friends remain close and talk frequently. The distance has made their relationship stronger."

"Maybe Aroha and Laila do move overseas together. As they get older I think that they will be able to value and maintain their relationship whether they are in the same country or not."

“They will all remain friends if they accept and respect that the tides of life may sometimes pull them in different directions and that each person will grow and change themselves, as well as within their friendships.”

As friendship is discounted from acting as one of the “tides of life” with the power to pull women “in different directions”, the organising logics of heterorelationality come into view. Notions of flexibility, autonomy and contingency become the guiding principle. Needing to “grow and change” the self is presented as incompatible with continuing intertwining of lives of friends, the fate of which is positioned as outside one’s control. Over the next data examples, from interviews and group discussions, I detail how some of the discursive repertoires identified through the vignette data are used in interaction.

Temporal and unpredictable trajectories

This talk follows Denise’s (demographic details unavailable, interview) explanations of how moving often affected her friendships. She mentioned becoming aware that she would not “invest” in new friendships if she knew she was moving soon after, because she “would feel some loss with it”. In answering a follow up question about staying friends after moving away, Denise discusses how some of these friends were more superficial, because they were associated with her children’s activities.

Denise: They go to play groups and they go to kindergarten and so circumstances around how that friendship developed changed. And you know, school, once school- you have a school-aged child, again you develop relationships with people in, within that sphere, you know, and so, and some of those other friendships that had been there and related to that situation, they change and I wouldn’t want you to think that I’m being casual around friendships because I’m not. But I believe that sometimes people come into our lives for a particular reason and they support us or we support them and sometimes, I mean I realised in my late twenties and thirties that sometimes those friendships are there for that time and they’re not a friendship that you would have lifelong, they’re different, they’re just a different type of friendship.

Maree: And so you don’t necessarily feel that loss that you mentioned earlier.

Denise: Not always. No. It was just a growing apart. It was a coming together and then a growing apart. And yeah I think it’s quite a natural part of our life, to have people come in and out and I think as a younger person I felt that quite keenly, that I had to hold on to friendships, you know, but moving around a lot probably influenced how I saw them and it changed my thinking on them.

The excerpt illustrates the types of identity work involved in reproducing expectations that friendships will always change, with Denise's account legitimating short-lived friendships. In addition to starting off by linking changes in her friendships to her children's inevitably changing activities, the next unfolding in talk sees Denise provide another view, where short-lived relationships are validated through a fate narrative — friends come “into our lives for a particular reason”.

As mentioned, in an earlier conversation Denise said that if she knew she was about to move from an area, she avoided deeper involvement with new friends. Here, she uses the same resource from her personal life story, moving a lot, to support a different position — a realisation that she need not feel loss, nor “hold on to friendships”. This growing apart is linked with ‘changed thinking’ and self-development. The language of ‘investment’, ‘development’, rationality of the reflexive assessments about what should (not) be felt are all traces of neoliberal subjectivities. This rational management is perhaps one explanation why there are relatively few narratives outlining distress at friendships’ decreasing intimacies across the corpus. The dominant picture constructed is of relatively easy re-orderings of friendships, which can, retrospectively, be thought of as self-development.

Relevant here is an accounting strategy for the re-working of friendship practices that came up in a few of the interviews. Some participants referred to an adage from a poem (unknown author) that begins:

People come into your life for a reason, a season or a lifetime. When you figure out which one it is, you will know what to do for each person.

Although the ‘lifetime friend’ trumps shorter-term friend categories, the trope nevertheless legitimises ‘reason’ and ‘season’ friends. This rationale aids in de-prioritisations of friendships, because women-friends may choose to designate the friendship a ‘reason’ or ‘season’ variety, rather than construct it as a friendship failure. And because that person remains a friend, albeit a less valued one, upset is not warranted.

The reason-season-life logic is made use of in the next stretch of talk. Here, Maya (28, interview) responds to my question, “Can you think of a particular experience you’ve had when you’ve stopped being friends with someone?” She originally replied she could not think of anyone but I prompted further with: “[is there an example] where there were questions in your mind about what the terms of the relationship were?” Maya then explained that there was one example that stood out because it “went from burning the hottest to now being the coldest, not cold, like we are still friends”. (Pseudonyms have been provided for Maya’s friends.)

If you asked me [...] seven years ago ‘who is your best bud?’ [...] I would be like ‘oh Kendrick. Kendrick, Kelly and Nell are my buds’. Whereas now it’s kind of like ‘yeah Kelly and Nell still definitely but Kendrick didn’t make it through’. But I wonder if that was very much there’s that reason-season life thing, someone for a reason, for a season or for life. I think she was definitely like a season thing. She was like an undergrad uni season, you know. And I very much hold true to that, to that whole reason, season, life thing. I think I’ve got some life friends for sure. I’ve got some friends that were in my life for a reason for a little while and then like kind of work or whatever and then there is kind of my season, like my [graduate] friends, my undergrad friends, my [postgraduate] friends.

Maya’s long description of her weakening friendship with Kendrick, of which this excerpt is a small part, did not contain many certainties about why the friendship lost its force, but neither were there claims of animosity or distress. Marking out friendships as passing seasons is presented as typical, and Maya confirms that in addition to Kendrick, many of her friends are categorised this way, including friends from different stages of study and work. Also, presenting the reason-season-life metaphor as a “whole... thing”, infers that it is an accepted and established framework. Maya’s pointing out that she does retain “life friends” indicates their high value, categorising friends as season friends is normalised.

So far, I have outlined a range of discursive repertoires and accounting strategies that construct friendship as a part of life to be rationally managed, but underscored by assumptions that friendship trajectories are more contingent than long-term sexual partnerships. I have shown also how participants produce repertoires of growing into ‘healthy’ levels of autonomy, where carving out and managing an individual trajectory is a main life task. Categories such as reason or season friends, construct various forms of relationship losses as successful re-workings, and not relationship breakdowns. In the next section of the analysis, I briefly turn to investigating other patterns where participants *do* acknowledge that these re-organisations of intimacies might be difficult. Yet, as I demonstrate, low affect responses take discursive priority.

Freedom and low affect in friendships

Evaluations of friends who were worried about their friendships changing were sought when participants were presented with the following vignette.

Chun’s relationship with someone she has been dating has been getting serious. Although neither Chun nor Aroha have mentioned it, they’re both feeling that Chun’s serious romantic relationship might change their friendship.

Participants were then asked ‘Are Chun and Aroha right to be worried about their friendship changing?’ Most participants agreed that this was a common predicament. For example:

“Well, it’s just part of life, relationships have to evolve, and if they are good enough friends, they will continue to prioritise time with each other.”

“Yes, friendships can easily change when each person's circumstance changes. But this can change again at any point, so it's important to try harder during these times to show interest in what your friend is going through.”

“Yes they are. Friendships are forever changing and that's a good thing. They need to find their new normal.”

“Yes. It’s only natural for things to change when a relationship starts and grows into something more serious. You typically start to hang out with your partner more.”

In part, these responses simply reflect the vignette set-up, which makes a link between partnered status, changed friendship practices, and worry. However, they also show how participants construct and reconcile two contradictory positions: a) the inevitability that friendships will change, and therefore some validation of worry, versus, b) a good friend’s changed partnership status not affecting the closeness of friends. The solution offered by participants is that a ‘new normal’ must be found by friends, to stretch so as to accommodate partners. Additionally, feelings of worry are constructed as natural but temporary, and therefore not deserving of dwelling on further.

In a minority of the responses a different position was taken up, where ‘worry’ was highlighted as being an inaccurate description.

“Worried isn't quite the right word but aware of it certainly. Friendships change- they do come and go. The hope is that that they will stand the test of time and change.”

“Maybe... However, when a relationship becomes serious it becomes no longer appropriate to discuss intimate matters with other people, even your closest friends. I think they are right to be attentive to their friendship at such a time, but should also be mindful that it is the nature of friendships to change.”

“I don't know that worried is the correct word. Friendships do change when other relationships change - particularly new romantic relationships. I think they are right to acknowledge that the friendship might change.”

Why is the position of worried friend avoided? Why is “attentive” or “acknowledging” instead advocated, when feeling distress over tensions that are purported to be inevitably present? As has

been evident in previous responses, whilst advancing long-term sexual relationships is assumed a valid way to develop the self, a similar vocabulary to understand self-development through deepening friendship does not seem to exist. The features of a postfeminist disposition — confidence, resilience and positivity — play out in a heterorelational relationship-scape. Whereas it would be expected for a woman to be worried and troubled about the potential loss of a long-term sexual partner, it is unreasonable to feel worry or concern if a friendship is under threat. The promotion of each other's healthy autonomy within friendships results in having to "hope... that they will stand the test of time", with no guarantees they will.

Discussion and conclusions

I set out to investigate how friendships between women can be valued today. I did so against a backdrop of pluralising forms of relationships and family units, which potentially offer a more ambiguous space for women to develop deeper friendships and a disruption to the sanctity of matrimonial and maternal imperatives. My analysis also oriented to showing how changing technologies of self and increasing self-reflexivity might affect evaluations about what counts as doing good friendship.

Despite flexibility being a key theme here, normative orderings of life-stages were not just left unchallenged, but were instantiated through repertoires of friendship. Activities associated with "getting on with life" included growing out of intense friendships of youth, meeting a long-term sexual partner, becoming a mother, travelling overseas or laying out plans for a career. A factor intersecting with heterorelational orders was the reliance on modes of rational management and autonomy. The movement between closeness and distance in friendship was constructed as relatively unproblematic and straightforward to manage. Within this set of logics, the long-term compatibility of friends was judged upon the ability to fit one another into changing lives, and less about the affinity of the friends themselves. The reason/season categories are exemplary of the 'get out clauses' that Zygmunt Bauman (2003) suggests relationship participants always have at the ready. In this case, they may be administered to lifetime friends who could not flex to accommodate other shifting parts in life. While a 'successful' progression through life for women as long-term sexual partnership was treated as calculable, it was constructed as impossible or undesirable to carry out similar calculations regarding friendships, whose trajectories were imagined as contingent.

Heterorelationality was brought together with the impulse towards authoritative compartmentalising of friendships through yet another everyday ideology. The things that *really* matter in life, that form the pivot around which decisions are made, occur *outside* the realm of friendship. This echoes the words of the agony aunt in the introduction, who insists that it is unacceptable to be disappointed when a friendship has 'evolved' (read: decreased in intimacy). Such

sentiments, and the ethic of autonomy on which they appear to be based, pathologise intense friendships, thereby reducing possibilities for more sustained intertwining. The spectre of the needy, underdeveloped friend invoked by the participants acts as a warning for those who are insufficiently autonomous in their friendships.

It is difficult to pull apart the intermixing of moral orders and discursive regimes that produce these patterns of negotiations over categories of care, and correlating intensities of feelings. My analysis is indicative of the complex ways that the logics of heterorelationality, entrepreneurial life-management and neo-liberal autonomy intersect. It is possible that heterosexist imperatives and concerns about preserving constructed lines between sexual and non-sexual relationships might also be influential in decreasing opportunities for more sustained intertwining between the lives of women friends. However, it is worth noting that lesbian, queer and polyamorous identified participants in the sample shown here made use of heterorelational sense-making repertoires in an equivalent way to the heterosexual participants. My analysis suggests that heterorelational orders may also be part of living out LGBTQI+ identities. As such, we need to be careful not to tie together queer identities with an increased intensity of friendships too tightly; this may blind us to heterorelational continuities that emerge in shifting forms. For this sample, what is considered good or healthy within the affective repertoires for friends is radically different from those with long-term sexual partnership. Taking an identities practices approach, which deals with ‘smaller’, identity positions that people routinely move through in talk, has allowed me to show how subtle but pervasive heterorelational assumptions are, regardless of sexuality.

The privileging of long-term sexual relationships evident today might at first seem like a straightforward continuity. For example, even the intense friendships of Victorian women, which flourished throughout heterosexual marriage, were marked by a privileging of long-term sexual relationships (Marcus, 2009). However, despite Victorian women encouraging one another into and through marriages, their friendships kept a passion (Marcus, 2009; Smith-Rosenberg, 1975) that is absent for a sample of twenty-first century women. In this study, affective practices that signalled intensity were downplayed or omitted, and there was an absence of everyday ideologies that would allow women to maintain strong investments in both friendships and long-term sexual partnerships. Moreover, a sense of a welcome freedom was frequently implied when downplaying the possibilities of feeling intensely about a friendship in adulthood. I am not suggesting that friendships should always be long lasting, or that there would be value in conceiving friendships as constitutive of a successful progression in life, as it is for long-term sexual relationships. However, it is significant that when faced with the suggestion, a trajectory of female friends living successful lives together ‘on the same track’ seemed to be unthinkable, or undesirable.

Fundamentally, that women do not seem to be able to imagine a 'discovery of self' in friendships, as in other facets of their identity, provides explanation for the distinct lack of possibilities of sustained intertwining. Where Foucault argued that it is through sexuality that one is encouraged to explore, master and 'know' oneself, Nikolas Rose (1996) suggests all dimensions of life have become rationalised, instrumentalised and subsumed within 'life-style'. He proposes the self itself has become the most valorised object, not the sexual-self (Rose 1996, p.30). But, for my sample at least, finding an 'inner self' remained more firmly linked to explorations of sexuality, and the knowing or making of self through friendship seemed to be part of a lower order dimension of life-style.

However, perhaps these light investments generate some of the pleasure in doing women's friendship today, which seem to align with a postfeminist-styled confidence. With this framing, women friends can understand themselves to be successfully (re)assessing and managing this part of their lives, and avoid feeling failures even when it does go wrong. If neoliberal marketing techniques put the onus on women to feel confident in all areas of life, and change themselves if they do not (Gill & Orgad 2015), perhaps friendship has become a technology of self where women demonstrate their relational competencies. Longer trajectories of women's experiences of friendship of care and deep bonds are refracted through an ideal 'enterprising self', and women can aid each other in maximising available life choices. Yet, like a supporting act that plays before or between the headliners, women's friendships are constructed as important, but ancillary, in the quest for fulfilment in personal life.

Chapter Six: “You won’t believe what happened today!”

Women’s Friendship Practices in Psy-Times¹³

Introduction

This article is concerned with friendship practices and understandings of intimacies. We report on data from a qualitative investigation conducted with women in ‘early mid-life’ in Aotearoa New Zealand (Martinussen, 2018a/Chapter Two; Martinussen & Wetherell, 2018a/Chapter Three; Martinussen et al., 2018/Chapter Seven). We discuss one pervasive set of in the sample’s accounts of their friendship experiences which reflects the contemporary ‘cultural push’ towards the therapeutic, and commensurate with current attentiveness to psychological norms and ways of formulating self and others. We demonstrate how good friend and bad friend identities emerge in this context along with normative trajectories for friendship, but also how the push towards therapeutic modes becomes customised by local and situational cultural imperatives, in this case in dialogue with national, Antipodean notions of the ‘good person’.

At least since the 1960s and Philip Reiff’s classic account of the emergence of psychology and the accompanying remodelling of the self and social relations, sociologists have been concerned to document what has become called ‘therapeutic culture’ (Swan, 2010). Definitions and emphases are wide-ranging, but pivot around questions about how psychological ways of thinking and being are affecting Western culture, and whether they are serving capitalism (Madsen, 2014). There is general agreement that shifts in affective practices, modes of self-making and notions of authenticity have been substantial. But there is disagreement about the reach and effects (e.g. Brownlie, 2014; Jamieson, 1999). Some find a new narcissism (Lasch, 1980). Others have noted the benefits of new public ways of voicing formerly private troubles and suffering (e.g. Wright, 2008).

We read therapeutic culture through the lens provided by Nikolas Rose, who extends Foucault’s interest in governmentality, and in the practical and institutional techniques forming the self’s relations with the self. Rose (1996b) argues, convincingly, that contemporary self-making occurs under the rubric of wellbeing. Minds and bodies are managed through the apparatus of therapeutics, such as via the advice of medics, clinics, guides and counsellors, operating at school, in the home and work (Rose, 1996a). Within this ethic, the inner person is legitimised as authentic through exposure to the outer world via psychologised talk. Although judgments of conduct are

¹³ This is a lightly edited version of a co-authored article, which is currently under review, with *Journal of Sociology*.

of an ‘internal’ variety, an audience is encouraged for this self-making. Our changing relations with ourselves, therefore, necessitate a re-articulation of our bonds with others, including, friends.

As Ole Madsen (2014) notes, attention on the therapeutic ethos is turning from questioning the existence of therapeutic culture to empirical explorations of its characteristics. For example, Julie McLeod and Katie Wright (2009) interpret the use of therapeutic knowledges by economically marginalized young women and their mothers as productive emotional strategies that engender a sense of competence. Elaine Swan’s (2010) analyses highlight the diversity of understandings of transformation and emotion in the practices of personal development workers. Jean McAvoy (2009) investigates how women’s negotiations of what it means to be a successful person have been inflected by psy imperatives. The research reported in this article extends this body of work to friendship practices. To what extent is therapeutic culture visible in women’s formulations of this aspect of their relational lives, how, and with what effects?

The development of a sociology of friendship in the late 1980s established the study of friendship as an important site in which to explore belonging in late-modernity (e.g. Allan, 1989, 2001; O’Connor, 1992; Pahl, 1998). Although friendship studies remains a relatively neglected area, recent contributions demonstrate that the insights to be gained from a sociology of friendship are far from exhausted (Blatterer, 2015; Chambers, 2006, 2013; Cronin, 2014; T. May, 2012; V. May, 2013). Yet, there has been little research examining the intersections between therapeutic cultures and friendship (for exceptions see Brownlie, 2014; McLeod & Wright, 2009). The current research provides focused attention on the ways psy imperatives inflect friendship practices and the vocabularies and norms through which friendship is imagined and understood.

For macro-sociological investigations of therapeutic culture and the psy-complex, the aim is to record and articulate major trajectory shifts in the constitution of subjectivity and the apparatus of governing (Rose, 1996b). As more fine-grain empirical work on therapeutic culture accumulates, however, the independent effects of everyday practice become more evident. We get a view of how psy operates in different contexts, on different bodies, in potentially unpredictable ways. Attention is directed to identity management and *in situ* meaning making processes. Our focus on everyday practice indicates a stronger emphasis on people’s activities and the flexible, often only loosely determined, trajectories these can follow. In this respect, our approach is in tune with the recent reinvigoration of the sociology of personal life and, in particular, its ‘relational turn’ (May, 2013; Roseneil & Ketokivi, 2015). In common with David Morgan’s (1996, 2011) process-oriented approach and work on ‘family practices’, for instance, our interest is in how individuals carry regulatory techniques forward through their agentic take up of the cultural resources available to them in any moment in history.

To realise our emphasis on everyday practice and to translate our themes into empirical research, we have adopted a form of discourse analysis commonplace in critical social psychology (Potter & Wetherell, 1987; Wetherell, 1998, 2007; Wetherell & Potter, 1992), recently extended to the affective-discursive (Martinussen & Wetherell, 2018a/Chapter Three; Wetherell, 2012, 2015b; Wetherell et al., 2015). In our analyses, we identify the discursive units of ‘interpretive repertoires’ – routine and recognisable evaluations, tropes and arguments of everyday talk (Wetherell, 1998; Wetherell & Potter, 1988). We also investigate how participants create, and invest in, socially sanctioned images of ideal selves, ‘imagined positions’ (Edley & Wetherell, 1999) and explore what is revealed about these through moments of hesitation and trouble. We see interpretive repertoires and imagined positions as reflecting broader patterns in collective sense-making, but also as responsive to and tailored for the local context. Applying this approach to women’s accounts of their friendships, we extend Rose’s proposal that the power relations mediating psychological knowledge are diffuse, and become routinised through the minutiae of everyday life.

Data and procedures

The data analysed are drawn from a research project investigating practices of intimacy between women friends, in early midlife (late twenties to late forties), in Aotearoa New Zealand. All participants gave written, informed consent, and the study received ethics approval from University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee. The scope of the research was broad, aiming to sketch out the landscape of women’s friendship against a background of social change in forms of individualisation, purported blurring of ‘traditional’ gender roles in public and private life, and changing practices of intimacy (Martinussen & Wetherell, 2018a; Martinussen et al., 2018; see also Chapter One).

Linking with the broad, exploratory nature of the project, the recruitment method was designed to reach women of diverse backgrounds in terms of class, sexuality and ethnicity and parent/caregiver and relationship status. Potential participants were invited to volunteer via a newspaper article the first author contributed to about women's friendship (Fletcher, 2015). The initial step for participants was to complete a written exercise using vignette methods (Braun & Clarke 2013). This exercise required participants to problem-solve around particular friendship dilemmas. At the end of the written activity, participants were invited to take part in either open-ended individual interviews or a small group discussion. Although the written vignette exercise generated useful material (Martinussen, 2017; see also Chapters Four and Five), including the assumed, unquestioned, nature of self-revealing talk in maintaining women’s friendships, the data analysed in this paper come from the more open-ended, second stage of the research since the wide ranging

accounts the interviews and group discussions generated are more suited to examining the flexible use of psy resources.

The individual interviews were guided by a loose schedule, covering topics such as good or difficult experiences of friendships and different ways of defining intimacy. Although it was intended that the group discussions be made up of three-five participants, it was often difficult to bring participants together in one place at the same time, and two of the scheduled group discussions became dyadic. We hoped to provide insights into a range of processes involved in doing women's friendship, and the small group discussions were designed to capture interactional sense-making, while interviews would aid in understanding how the cultures of women's intimacy are done at the individual psychological level, through longer uninterrupted accounts of experiences of friendship.

In 2016, sixteen individual interviews, two dyad interviews and four small group discussions were conducted by the first author, with a total of thirty-three participants. Each session ran approximately sixty to ninety minutes. Two participants opted not to provide demographic information. Of the remainder, eight participants identified as non-heterosexual. All were able bodied. The median age of the group discussion and interview participants was thirty-six. Most identified as Pākehā (New Zealand European) or European descent, but five participants identified as mixed ethnicity, including New Zealand Māori, Fijian, Cook Islands Māori and Indian. The study was not designed to investigate indigenous, Māori, perspectives on friendship patterns and was located within the culture of the majority 'Pākehā' group. Twenty-five participants self-identified as middle class on the participant demographics form, two as working class, and two as both.

The audio data from the interviews and group discussions were transcribed by a third-party, non-verbatim. Greater orthographic detail, such as pauses and fillers, were added to sections of the transcript that were identified as of interest, such as repeated patterns in participants' discourse. Following a period of re-viewing the audio-data while reading the transcripts, more detailed analysis and coding was undertaken. This consisted of providing 'thick' description of the entanglements between broad cultural factors and personal histories, and re-sorting the material into themes (Braun & Clarke, 2013). This paper represents what became of one of the main themes.

Analysis

The analysis is presented in four sections. Firstly, we show some of the criteria participants used to define good friendship. These confirm the extent to which exercising deep disclosure is key to understandings of intimacy in friendship. Secondly, we examine subject positions participants commonly set up which enact the paired positions on offer in therapeutic culture, of therapist and patient. Our reflections on the effects of therapeutic culture include examination of how this

normative climate can create trouble for friendship identities. Finally, we consider how therapeutic culture is customised for local conditions, in this case, a potentially Australasian-inflected ‘telling it straight’, which intersects with gendered norms.

Pseudonyms have been provided for participants. Details of participant age and the research activity engaged in are provided in parentheses. Where words or sentences have been omitted from quotes, it is indicated as ‘[...]’.

Friendship trajectories and maturing as a friend.

In this first section, we provide illustrative examples of a pervasive construction found across the data corpus — that women’s friendships are created and maintained via practices of emotional talk. The specific patterning we discuss here centres on the everyday ideology that intimacies accrue in friendships over time through emotional support.

The talk below is from the beginning of an interview with Dianne (29, interview); she is responding to the question ‘What role does [friendship] play for you at this particular point in time?’

I think for me, and I think this is a change, it’s much more about emotional support. When I was a teenager it was about doing things together and it was like a really active sense of having things in common, whereas now that is still, the things in common still matter but it’s more about making time to just talk about what’s going on in your life and that kind of yea sort of care aspect of friendships. Rather than the kind of experiences part.

Dianne’s understanding of her development of friendships, and herself as an improved friend, includes a change from doing activities with friends to placing a greater emphasis on taking the time to talk. “Emotional support” becomes prioritised as an ethical ideal, where discussing daily life is equated with care. The repertoire of higher quality friendships post-young womanhood was similarly developed by Leah (31, interview). Here, she responds to a question about whether her friendships have changed throughout her life.

I think they’ve probably grown I guess a little bit deeper and things I guess. You could say that ten years ago friendship might’ve been a little bit superficial, it was convenient and you worked together with them or you lived together with them and they were nice and you hung out together. Whereas I guess now there’s a little bit more, you see how and you spend time with the people you actually want to spend time with not just because they’re free to go to the pub on a Friday night.

Typical of responses across the data corpus, there is no explanation accounting for the transformation to become a mature friend, rather, it is presented as a rite of passage to progress

into being a friend who has deep connections. This construction is strengthened by drawing on a counter-position — friends with whom one simply shares circumstances, which was evident in the previous extract also. We gain a better idea of some of the logics of deep friendship by returning to another point a little later in the interview with Leah where she discusses similar changes in her friendships.

Yeah so I guess, that word superficial springs to mind. Like I would've been an ok friend [before] and if someone had rung me and said, 'there's something going on in my life', I would probably have gone, 'oh no. I hope you're not going to cry'. Whereas I think now, so if that's ten years ago, now I've got a lot more compassion, empathy for that.

Leah positions her past self as “superficial” in her unwillingness to engage with friends’ emotions and upsets. She compares Leah of old to the friend-self she is today, who is compassionate and empathetic. In these extracts, we can see the intertwining of the ethical ideal of self-disclosure in women’s friendships with other biographical narratives about developing a caring self. As Jamieson (2011) points out, the valorisation of emotional self-disclosing has become linked with intimacy in the West. Arguably, depth of engagement and empathy have long been features of women’s friendships (Cancian, 1986), but newer understandings of this as ‘emotional support’ is perhaps an inflection from psy-styled mantras of wellbeing.

Patient and therapist friends

We now move to illustrate how particular imagined positions bear resemblance to the ‘quasi-professionals’ Rose (1999, p.264) depicts, who deliver services to aid individuals’ self-management. Rose (1999, p.244) suggests that therapists’ responses range from appreciation, judgement, to consolation. From a critical discursive psychology perspective however, attentive to the action orientation of talk, whether one appreciates, judges, or consoles is significant. Through attention to the way participants actively use psy-knowledges, juggling them with other discursive formations, we reveal the contradictory expectations involved in being ‘tellers’ and ‘listeners’ of therapised friendships.

The following extract comes from a dyadic group interview conducted with Harriet (45) and Leeann (38), and was preceded by Harriet talking about her interactions with her close male friend, which she claimed were unemotional.

Harriet: Whereas my bestie I would ring her up and go ‘oh you won’t believe what my son did today’, ‘you won’t believe what happened today’, all of the details, and she just sits and listens but she knows him and she knows me and she knows just to let me go and that’s it. Whereas with him I am like ‘oh I’m not going to burden him with that’.

- Leeann: Or something- it could be that gender- with females tend to just listen and give empathy and sympathise whereas males want to solve it.
- Harriet: Yes, I know yeah. And he is very much like that. Sometimes you just need to sound off don't you?
- Leeann: Yeah, you just need to get it out of your mouth so it's not in there anymore.

Harriet constructs herself as unable to stem the flow of talk detailing the stressors in her life, whilst her bestie is positioned as patiently enduring these outbursts. These descriptions of dramatic but routine venting mobilise signifiers of mutual intimacy-making. When Harriet states that her bestie “knows just to let me go and that's it”, a familiarity is invoked that comes with knowledge of a loved one's foibles. This version of a listener-teller event is confirmed as typical when Leeann agrees that sometimes friends need to “get it out of [their] mouth”. Leeann also introduces the contrast between women who “tend to just... give empathy” and men who want to solve things. These constructions seem to be a continuation of gendered associations that emerged in the nineteenth century — of emotion as natural, wild and feminine, but where unruly feelings can be controlled by masculine rational thought (Dixon, 2003). In this therapised environment, uncontrollable emotions are met with quiet empathy — outpourings get soaked up by women friends as they are unbridled from the inside.

In the second extract, Stacey (age not provided, interview) describes the make-up of her closest friends, with whom she has never met, and interacts with online. Stacy described her friends as “on the margin of society for one reason or another”.

We pretty much are these very much very honest with each other, very open. We talk about the crap that is going on in our lives. Because we are all scattered we have created our own online space that is just us and we can go there at any point and talk about stuff, good, bad, whatever, sound off things, no judgement, yeah without worry that you are going to get people turn around and say you are stupid, you are a freak, whatever. And among all the group of us we usually come up with either a way to help each other or just be there for each other.

Stacey's history of face-to-face friendships was punctuated with rejection, and she very effectively contrasted these old friendships with her current, close, online friendships. This example is one of many where Stacey promoted her friend group through mobilising psychologised knowledges, particularly in relation to managing feelings of vulnerability. For Stacey, when being the recipient of ‘sounding off’ talk, lack of judgment is paramount. Doing this type of care makes sense in

conjunction with Stacey's and her friends' histories of marginalisation. However, it also makes sense in a culture of selfhood where people understand themselves as bounded entities who self-manage through the exercise of choice, what Rose terms the ethics of autonomy (1999). In this setting, sage counsel is delivered through helping friends choose ways to help themselves. Being good friends is expressed through being "very honest... very open", aiding one another in self-discoveries in the process.

In the following excerpt, psy knowledges are put to use in conjunction with an understanding of life as a high-pressure environment. This is achieved through Rebecca (28, interview), taking up the quasi-therapist role.

I've got this one friend who, we go on these walks together [...] We will rant on about something that is annoying us or whatever [...] this particular friend gets quite wound up, like she sort of holds a lot of things inside and gets quite cranky about people and doesn't sort of express it, like I used to. And I've gotten to the point now where I can feel it in her before she lets me know. So all I really need to do is say 'what's going on?' like 'why are you angry?' and then she will sort of stop and be like 'oh yeah' and then just bursts into tears or deal with it straight away. But I have to be there to prompt her because she can't feel it herself.

Similar to Harriet's constructions, emphasis remains on enabling the process of getting the problems out, rather than fixing them. However, here, emotions are presented as needing to be coaxed out, and Rebecca positions herself as helping her friend find relief from being "wound up". Rebecca's account is indicative of the extent of the normalisation of popular psychological interpretations of daily life through depth notions, such as repression versus expression and the value of emotional catharsis. These framings are reinforced through linking them to more durable identities about capacities for emotion talk, such as Rebecca's positioning of her 'old' self as being unable to get emotions out (which infers traits of her current, emotionally-competent self). What then might the effects of prioritising such emotional problem-solving work as core to being a good friend, where being a skilful therapist carries such weight? From the outset, we can suggest that one effect is that trouble might be created when people also carry identities that clash with the imperatives to wield psychological diagnostic story-lines in convincing ways. This is what we explore via the next set of quotes.

Troubled identities

Form is given to another type of non-disclosing friend in the next excerpt, again from Rebecca, which follows soon after the stretch shown above.

And then another one of my really good friends is- she's completely the opposite. She is very unemotional and never tells me anything that is really going on in a deeper level, but we're still really, really, close. And I just think that for her like she doesn't need that in a friend. She doesn't need to really like overly discuss her emotions [...] And so I don't really tell her all my sort of deep, dark emotions because I know I am not going to get that back from her.

Rebecca maintains that a friendship without emotional self-disclosure can be good, but her emphasis signals that a counter-argument is running in the discursive background. The claim "we're still... close" points to their closeness *despite* a lack of self-disclosing, without which, they cannot achieve "deeper level" talk. Moreover, although Rebecca earlier aligned herself with a position of emotional talk as essential, here, her reference to keeping silent about her own "deep, dark emotions", because of a lack of reciprocity, justifies *not* discussing her own emotions. The tension between self-disclosing as a burden, but indicative of good friendship, is also apparent in the following excerpt, which follows on immediately from the one above. This is Rebecca's response to the question "so what is [the friendship] instead do you think?"

It's more of an activities based kind of thing. Me and her started that [initiative]. We go [shopping] a lot and then we go to the beach [...] we just do a lot of things and we talk and we tell each other what's going on in our lives and everything but it's just not, it's not so heavily emotional, which is nice sometimes. Like sometimes you don't want to go into all that stuff, you just want it to be easy. Yeah and I still consider her to be like one of my really close friends [...] She doesn't do it with any of her friends and I just kind of choose to respect that and go with it.

Although Rebecca gives assurances that their friendship is close, without emotional self-disclosing, it becomes "an activities based" friendship. This has semblance with the repertoire outlined in the previous section, where doing activities with friends was associated with the superficial friendships of youth. Indeed, non-disclosures are treated as an insufficiency Rebecca must contend with: "I... choose to respect that". Despite contradicting ideals of psy-styled intimacy, it is important to note that Rebecca finds ways to account for her friend's unemotional style. The hegemony of therapist intimacies is incomplete.

The stretch of talk considered next shows in more detail the contradictory and non-linear procedures of identity-making in women's friendships and the active puzzling involved in deciding whether one can present oneself as a 'good friend' in terms of the ideals set by therapeutic culture. Below, Naomi (44, interview) finds ways of making sense of her failures to disclose, whilst keeping the position of being the kind of friend who could engage in therapist/patient type interactions. The talk below follows on from a question about what characterises Naomi's style of friendship.

Naomi: I think I'm probably a really loyal friend, like I'll always be there. I'm quite, and I'm straight up with, I'll tell them the truth if they want it. Um, oh and like I'm probably, like with [my close friends from high school] I'm good at keeping in touch and you know, I round them up and we always do lots of stuff together [...] Yeah, um, so I don't know if I'm like, when other people are going through bad times I don't know how helpful I am really. You know, I try but I don't know, you know, we all get so caught up in our lives, it's- I don't know, I don't- sometimes you don't always tell the people that you think you would, you know.

Maree: Sorry- do- say again?

Naomi: You sometimes, you don't always turn to the people that you think you would which means that they don't necessarily always turn to me when I thought they might. It depends, you know, and I think too, the older I've got the more I've kind of really kept things to myself until I, I'll choose the way I'll reach out to people. Don't need everyone either.

Naomi confidently begins by asserting that she is a “really loyal friend”. She starts listing the things that make her so — she is good at bringing her old friends together, keeping in touch, and she will be straight up with them. But then her account becomes more hesitant and troubled as she wonders whether she is all that helpful. There are a number of signals that this admission is troublesome for Naomi: the uncertainty she begins with “yeah, um, so I don't know if I'm like”, continues with “I don't know” repeated four more times. Hesitatingly, she describes a breakdown of reciprocal disclosure — “you don't always tell the people that you think you would”. The sequence departs from the standard stories of successful therapist/patient pairs recounted through most of the interviews, which is perhaps partly why Maree, as interviewer, seems to find this sequence hard to follow.

Naomi's narrative switches direction in the second part of this sequence, and justification for non-disclosures are stronger; the affective register becomes laced with defiance. First, Naomi puts failures to self-disclose down to her getting older. Then, a more controlled decanting of emotions is valorised: “I'll choose the way I'll reach out to people”. Meanings of failure of around non-disclosure are rejected as she states “[d]on't need everyone either”. Thus, although the haunting presence of the therapist friend figure remains, a more stoic character enters the fray.

We have discussed this example in some detail to show how the regulatory force of therapeutic culture infiltrates the minutiae of everyday friendship. The wider social meanings of failing to be a good therapist friend have become so powerful that it takes considerable discursive work to avoid the trouble caused by non-conforming, and to find another source of value as a person. In contrast to the more even pictures painted in global discussions of the historical shifts fuelling the rise of

therapeutic cultures, we can see the creativity and messiness involved as people inhabit a cultural agenda, puzzle over it, personalise it, and use it as an ethical basis for evaluating self and other.

Pragmatic therapy and women who are ‘too nice’

Although our participants were recruited from diverse backgrounds, we did not identify any discernible differences in their attentiveness to psy injunctions that could be related to sexuality, social class, parenting status or ethnicity. However, as usual in qualitative research, the overall sample size inhibits confidence in generalising. Yet, we did discover one intriguing and distinctive pattern or customising of the therapist friend which we speculate could be attributed to the ways in which psy imperatives intersect with the identities on offer in national culture. Aotearoa New Zealand is a Western state with a neo-liberal economy (Kelsey, 1997), promulgating neoliberal models of human subjectivity, including the ‘enterprising self’ (Nairn and Higgins, 2007). The colonial history ensures that masculine homosociality dominates Pākehā/European New Zealand cultural identity (Bannister, 2005), such that it has been proposed that Aotearoa New Zealand femaleness is coded as a misperformed masculinity (Brady, 2012). We demonstrate now how therapy technology may intersect with quite local national self-understandings as independent and pragmatic.

In this excerpt, Cathy (45, group discussion) is describing how interactions with her closest friends are different from other friendships.

And I guess they are the ones that if I walked in and said you know ‘how are you?’ and I go ‘fine’, people are ‘bullshit, what’s really going on?’ [...] We are the ones that can see through. And I guess those are the ones who have become family at that deeper level.

Whereas Rebecca’s gentler version aligned with Rose’s account of psychoanalysts’ ‘technologies of voices’, which includes making encouraging ‘mhm’ noises (Rose, 1999, p.250), Cathy’s version of encouragement exposes an imperative for friends to call out friends on their “bullshit” non-disclosing behaviour, and demand that upset friends put down any façades. Note that despite the different technologies of voices, the overall goal is unchanged — to uncover what is ‘really’ going on. A similar, no-nonsense position is crafted by Leah, below. This is a continuation of a narrative that we saw earlier in the first section, where Leah described how she has developed greater capacities for emotionality.

You’ve got to have a certain level of empathy but you’ve also got to be able to have that ability to go ‘you know what? You’re just being stupid now’. So I guess there’s that balance of being able to- and to recognise what hat to wear when [...] yeah the best friend is

probably someone who's got yeah, that balance of empathy but that certain amount of black and whiteness there as well, that's gunna tell it to you straight.

A further example of this pragmatic approach can be seen in Naomi's emphasis, in the previous section, that telling the truth and being "straight up" are signs of a loyal friend. What might explain such constructions of a good friend - as someone who knows how to be both empathetic, and know when to "tell it to you straight"? In addition to linkages with valorised identities in Aotearoa New Zealand, Leah's talk demonstrates also how the therapist friend positions intersect in complex ways with locally inflected discourses of gender. It has been suggested that prior to the emergence of the psy-complex, emotional self-disclosing tended to be denounced as the domain of neurotic gossiping women (Raymond, 1986), who easily become overwrought (O'Connor, 1992). Indeed, Swan (2008) finds that the cultural feminisation of therapy knowledges persist. Similarly, Adkins (2002) shows that while men are encouraged to do 'feminised' psy-styled relating at work, earlier, non-psy identity positions remain available to them, while there are high expectations for women to remain gentle and amenable at all times. Notable in this Australasian sample, women seem to be able to access these 'masculine' positions in the setting of women's friendships, without being deemed domineering. In the process of exploring the interplay of these intersections over the next few examples, we demonstrate how the no-nonsense therapy friend position works to offset some of the risk that comes with doing self-disclosing work. The following excerpt is from a dyad discussion, where Nancy (38) responds to earlier discussions of women self-disclosing more than men.

I have a good friend and we're both interested in emotional intelligence and that sort of stuff and so we like to pick things apart but also- we don't- and I'm not the kind of person that would be like 'oh there, there, that sounds terrible', I am more like [[bangs table]] 'how are we going to fix this problem?' [...] so we have a lot of conversations that are like that. We're also supportive but we are very sort of problem-solving orientated.

Distancing herself from women who she constructs as too gentle, Nancy engages in voicing imagined reported speech to position herself as a co-analyst-friend who is driven by needing to find solutions. This problem-solving friendship is lent authority with mention of her interest in the psychological model of emotional intelligence. The next example is more overt about the value of 'straight up' friends, where Kristen (39, group discussion) positions her friends as providing uniquely sage counsel.

We can say 'hey look, think about doing this' or 'hey went and had this one night stand' and they are going to say 'duh' or whatever, but it is about that trusting. That we trust them to be honest with us because they would expect nothing less from us. If you don't want to know

don't ask but if you are going to ask then I will tell you. You need friends like that because your family generally won't. They will only tell you what you want to hear, 'it's okay we still love you dear'. But your friend is going to go 'What the? Still love you but are going to slap you too'.

The tacit assumption here is that contemporary life takes a lot of navigating and sorting out how to act for the best; friends work with you to help find solutions to problems. But, for Kirsten, friends also bear the responsibility of passing judgment. In her words "You need friends like that", to aid in your self-monitoring. Indeed, Kristen posits that the act of making judgments on confessions is synonymous with being a trustworthy friend. An equivalent conflation is made by Elaine (44, group discussion), and she also constructs worthy friends as arbiters that aid by passing judgment.

The other thing I found with female friendships is that [...] the ones who are actually a little bit too nice to you in a way and say 'oh no you look great' and actually it really would help you know 'you would probably benefit from doing a little bit more exercise' and not necessarily challenge you in a way [...] they don't ever tell you actually 'no that is not, everything you do is always fine'. I can get that from my mum. If I want someone who is totally and utterly without question on my side who will not 'whatever they did they were bastards and they were wrong and that was nothing to do with you and you are lovely'. If that is what I want I'll ring mum but if I want somebody who is actually like 'oh hang on a minute Elaine, what did you say in this situation?' I would probably talk to my partner or my dad. Or some of my friends, you know, because some of them will actually go 'mmm you could look at it in such in such a way' and I am like 'okay yeah'.

Like Kristen, Elaine uses formulations of family relations to define ideal friendship interactions by contrast, with her mother representing women who are "too nice". Those who do not challenge are presented as both meek and disingenuous. The straight up friend may not resemble the distanced professional typically associated with therapists, but there is nonetheless confidence expressed here in their abilities to get to the gritty truth. Reminiscent of Nancy's descriptions, good friends are presented as providing even-handed perspectives through their capacities to analyse.

Without comparative data we cannot argue definitely that the formulations we have just unpacked indicate the intersection of Australasian cultural concerns with therapeutic culture, but the notion of the non-nonsense woman friend is an interesting construction. It would be intriguing to investigate whether the straight-up friend is a character mobilised in similar ways by other social groups. Overall, we can see that a dialogic puzzling over various potentially inconsistent friendship norms is likely to arise as key elements of therapeutic culture and the psy-complex become

entangled with other cultural commonplaces, including, in this case also, emerging patterns of responsibilisation, and gender norms about niceness, weakness and passing judgments.

Discussion

In this article we have focused in fine detail on how therapeutic culture is instantiated as women discuss and make meaning around their experiences of friendships, as they imagine (non)ideal friends. We have tried to listen carefully and attentively, and report the nuance faithfully, as women invoked therapist/patient styled pairings, talked about deep connection and emotional sharing, and trod a delicate path between being unconditionally supportive and telling it like it is. We have seen how they try to walk the line between being useful and being too nice, and between using friends for catharsis and not burdening them with ‘deep and dark emotions’.

The privileging of psy vocabularies and techniques was very evident in this data set. Fine-grain work is unlikely in itself to confirm or refute more macro-sociological analyses of long-term shifts in the constitution of subjectivity and social relations. But what it can deliver is a sense of the lived texture as new patterns are played out in mundane life. We can see the likely practical consequences for women’s lives, such as the impacts for what women friends do together, and for emerging hierarchies of friendship activities. We witness the new skills which are increasingly an essential part of friendship as women friends make complicated judgements about how to deal with others’ emotions in the most productive ways, working out how to best to empower and problem solve. Congruent with Pākehā New Zealand’s colonial culture imbued with meanings of self-reliance, the participants of this study took pains to avoid being perceived as over-wrought, amidst psy imperatives which demands the explorations of all of one’s fears and vulnerabilities.

This is the psychologised terrain Rose predicts. However, it is also clear that psy influence is not singular nor absolute. Our sample juggle with different, inter-related cultural imperatives, including older gendered notions of ideal femininity, new assertiveness and, possibly, forms of femininity inflected by Antipodean national notions of ‘good women’ who are like ‘good blokes’. We agree that expanded theorisations of relational persons are critical for the study of personal life in the current era (Roseneil & Ketokivi, 2015). However, we advocate a focus on practices, implying an active negotiation of cultural resources that better captures the inconsistent and variable take-up than broad picture seamless accounts of interpellation and subject constitution. Our use of a relational practice approach has been important for highlighting the non-linear effects of psy in mediating cultures of women’s friendships. Rather than attempting to provide a tidy response on the direction of individualisation and autonomy in women’s friendships, our analysis complexifies the terrain of what it means to confess, support, self-transform and do self-surveillance in friendships.

We focused on the contestation of meanings relating to forms of support based on emotional self-disclosure. Refusals to engage in these confessional vocabularies were possible, but required accounting work. There is another set of negotiations relevant here, which play out on a larger-scale, and have been explored by critical scholars of postfeminism. Rosalind Gill (2017) and Shani Orgad (Gill & Orgad, 2018), for example, outline how neoliberal tropes of survival and resilience are increasingly associated with contemporary ideals of womanhood in mainstream media. In the process of always ‘bouncing-back’, the emotional and psychological labour required to downplay difficulties are often occluded (Gill & Orgad, 2018). These interactions and cultures of emotionalisation risk friendship becoming a vehicle for postfeminist cultures of resilience, and a push towards greater self-responsibilisation. Yet, as has been found elsewhere (McLeod & Wright, 2009), our participants seemed to gain a sense of control from their therapised friendships. These understandings of self, as capable and enabled, permeated both friendship relating itself, and the management contemporary life more generally. Thus, there is a fine line between responsibility to the self and self-responsibilisation (McLeod, 2017). Another postfeminist dynamic that has potentially double-edged effects relates to self-surveillance. Akane Kanai (2017) and Alison Winch (2013) demonstrate how women’s togetherness in their friendships can become a symbol of feminine empowerment, whilst at the same time bolstering practices of self-monitoring. In a similar vein, we have shown how demands for mutual self-monitoring can be positively valued, as they become intertwined with notions of honesty and loyalty in friendship.

Alternative constructions of support in our sample however emphasised how outpourings of bad emotions are restorative. Take for example this statement by Aurora (28, interview) who, through tears of joy said:

That is what makes me- the happy part of it- it makes me emotional. Yeah. She changed my whole life. I mean helped but she kind of opened that door for me to go through and keep going by myself, assisted me by that so yeah.

Aurora easily conveys her friend’s importance, upholding her as a heroine. Yet, the togetherness is one of individuals – Aurora’s friend enabled her to “keep going *by [her]self*”. Self-disclosing talk between women friends fosters a process of subjectification that ties friends to each other at the very moment they affirm their own, ‘true’ identities (adapted from Rose, 1999, p.244). Rose (1999, p.258) might suggest friendships offer an opportunity to become part of the ‘project of our biography, creat[ing] a style for our lives’, and, that they do so by shaping ‘our everyday existence in terms of an ethic of autonomy’. Our analysis signals that friendship practices are a vehicle for actualising the self through exploring ‘inner realities’ (Rose, 1999). Extending this with a gendered analysis, in line with other literature on neoliberalising feminine subjectivities (Gill, 2017b), we can

see there is alignment between our participants' favouring of *transforming* self over simply *knowing* self. While friendships are a significant form of support for women, they potentially contribute to a neoliberal culture of never-ending transformation and productivity.

Chapter Seven: Just Being and Being Bad - Female friendship as a refuge¹⁴

Introduction

This article contributes to literature on gendered neoliberal subjectivities, by investigating how feminine identities are articulated through sentiments of ease and lightness in close-friendships between women. The data analysed are drawn from interviews and group discussions with women in early mid-life (late twenties to late forties), on the topic of their friendships, in Aotearoa New Zealand. We make use of discursive affective practice theory (Wetherell, 2012) to explore how affect and emotion are mobilised in the identity practice work of close friends.

In the first part of this paper, we draw on critical studies of postfeminism and ‘girlfriending’ literatures, which expose how a neoliberal structure of feeling incites women to constantly develop and enact resilient femininities. In other strands of the broader research from which the data in this paper are drawn (Martinussen, 2018a; Martinussen & Wetherell, 2018b; see also Chapters Five and Six), there is alignment with the neoliberal technologies of self detailed through these literatures. However, in this article a different set of patterns is explored. After outlining the methodology, we identify discursive affective repertoires that construct women’s friendships as allowing relief from a) expending energy in doing intimacy, b) being productive, and c) feminine expectations of being ‘nice’. In the discussion we suggest that resistance to neoliberal demands can be found in these ambivalent practices of intimacy via the emergent femininities crafted between close women-friends.

Productivity, perfection and neoliberal intimacies

Increasingly, we are seeing a shift from investigating the existence of neoliberalism as a political and economic rationality, to charting the different forms, shapes and effects of gendered neoliberalism in specific contexts (Gill & Orgad, 2018; Madsen, 2014). In alignment with this, within studies of postfeminism, in addition to charting the shifting connections between neoliberal subjectivities and the repudiation of feminism (e.g. Calder-Dawe & Gavey, 2016; Gill, 2017b; Gill, Kelan, & Scharff, 2017; McRobbie, 2004, 2015; Negra, 2009; Riley, Evans, Elliott, Rice, & Marecek, 2017), a growing body of empirical research orients to the intensification of self-regulation via the promotion of self-resilience (Gill & Kanai, 2018; Gill & Orgad, 2018; Kanai, 2017c). A psychological register of survival shapes this affective terrain. Resilience is conveyed as necessary

¹⁴ This is a lightly edited version of a co-authored article, which has been accepted subject to revision, by *Feminism & Psychology*.

to counter ever-present anxieties over not doing enough for oneself - to beautify (Elias, Gill, & Scharff, 2017), increase sexual capital (Gill, 2009), educate or get ahead at work (Kanai, 2017c), or to find an 'authentic self' (Gill, 2017a). Yet, these ideals are also typically understood to remain out of reach. An entrepreneurial spirit ensures that the idea of the perfect is the driving force, not its attainment. Positioning women as resilient survivors invites women to constantly seek to 'achieve' more, whilst normalising the sense of anxiety that accompanies the goal-oriented activities entailed. Further, in some readings, a particular version of feminism is co-opted so that yet another layer of regulation is added. The postfeminist sensibility requires an optimistic and agreeable persona, to match the confidence one is supposed to have (Gill & Orgad, 2015; Kanai, 2017c). Like Rosalind Gill and Shani Orgad (2018, p.478), we locate the resilient and optimistic strands of the postfeminist sensibility within a psychological turn within neoliberalism.

Women's friendship in neoliberal times

This paper contributes to a small but growing body of work investigating the effects of neoliberalism on the practices of friendships between women. Elsewhere, Alison Winch (2011, 2012, 2013) has shown how, in a relentlessly visual landscape, heterosexual women are encouraged to aid one another in their self-regulation techniques and navigate a myriad of choices about what to eat and wear, through celebrations of female friendship (Winch, 2011). And through a rich analysis of young women's online identity work, Akane Kanai (2017a, 2017b, 2017c) demonstrates how 'girlfriending' intimacy is created through exchanges about the labour of *managing* - the daily struggles of avoiding, for example, falling behind at work, getting fat, or losing a man to more attractive women (Kanai, 2017b). In line with postfeminism's injunctions, 'imperfections' are dealt with in ways that promote anxiety as a natural feature of womanhood. Although the young women who are the focus of Kanai's research astutely pinpoint the pitfalls of postfeminist regulatory frameworks, they are limited to expressing their frustrations through humorous 'upbeat quips' (Kanai, 2017c). As such, a complex mixture of warmth and dread characterises girlfriending relatability.

While we similarly explore emerging meanings of friendship in this paper, and the significant role humour plays in them at times, the data are drawn from a project carried out by the first author oriented to broader questions about the role of women's friendships today. For example, by investigating how one preeminent ideal of friendship relies centrally on individualising therapy discourses (Martinussen & Wetherell, 2018b; see also Chapter Six), or how ideologies of friendships aid in regulating heterorelationality (Martinussen, 2018a; see also Chapter Five), the normative ordering of personal lives, where maintaining long-term sexual relationships are sanctified as the main goal in life (Budgeon & Roseneil, 2004). As such, despite the wider scope of the research,

there is much resonance between this project and other studies detailing the neoliberal thrusts at play in cultural representations of (postfeminist) friendships (Kanai, 2017b; Winch, 2013). Notably, despite the radical potential of friendships between women (Roseneil, 2006a), female togetherness performed through tropes of empowerment and individualism is a significant part of the machinery of contemporary patriarchal capitalism. As mentioned however, the sense-making resources explored in this article contrast the tendencies of relentless self-management. The formations discussed are by no means a panacea, but they offer up some hope for feminist goals. The themes explored centre upon constructions of friendship as an escape from demands felt elsewhere. While the low-key modes of friendship identified do not directly counter a postfeminist sensibility, these moments of satisfaction are significant in showing that friendship is a space for challenging regimes of productivity, choice and self-development, if only in rather oblique and indirect ways.

Methods and procedures

The data analysed are drawn from a larger research project investigating practices of intimacy between women friends, in Aotearoa New Zealand (Martinussen & Wetherell, 2018a; Martinussen et al., 2018; see also Chapters Six and Seven). The aim of the project was to sketch out the social psychological landscape of women's friendship, against a background of social change in the form of individualisation, purported blurring of 'traditional' gender roles in public and private life, and changing practices of intimacy, for example, increasingly pluralised family formations (see Chapters One, Two and Five). One theme identified for investigation centred upon a dilemma: friendship relations are considered necessary and good, but other demands on women's time and affections result in friendships becoming de-prioritised. This provided the rationale for recruiting the sample of women aged late twenties to late forties, when demands around partnership, motherhood/caregiving, or employment may intensify dilemmas about the significance of friendship.

Three data collection methods were used, and material from two of these make up the analysis in this paper - small group discussions (three to five participants), and interviews (with dyads and individuals). These sought to direct analytic attention to interactional and biographical identity practices. Linking with the broad, exploratory nature of the research, the recruitment method sought out women from diverse backgrounds in terms of class, sexuality and ethnicity, parent/caregiver and relationship status. Participants were invited to volunteer for the study via a newspaper article the first author contributed to about women's friendship, which circulated in print and on an online news website (Fletcher, 2015), as well as speaking on a radio programme ("Ready Steady Learn," 2018) about the research. The initial step for participants was to complete a written exercise using vignette methods (Braun & Clarke 2013). Although this part of the study

generated useful material (Martinussen, 2018a; see also Chapter Five), the patterning discussed in the present paper was not evident, as the written activity required participants to engage in problem-solving about specific social phenomena. In contrast, the interviews and group discussions were wider ranging, with participants guiding the direction of conversations.

In 2016, the first author conducted sixteen individual interviews (two through Skype), two dyad interviews and four small group discussions, with a total of thirty-three participants. Each session ran approximately sixty-ninety minutes. All participants gave written, informed consent, and the study received ethics approval from University of Auckland Human Participant Ethics Committee. Pseudonyms have been provided for participants (and their friends if named). Two participants of the thirty-three opted not to provide demographic information. Of the remainder, the median age was thirty-eight. Most identified as of Pākehā (New Zealand European) or European descent, but five participants identified as mixed ethnicity, including New Zealand Māori, Fijian, Cook Islands Māori and Indian. Approximately half of the participants were parents or caregivers. Approximately half were partnered. Approximately one third (eight) participants self-identified as a sexuality other than heterosexual. All were able bodied. In the analysis that follows, the age of the participants, along with the research activity type they participated in, are shown in parenthesis as the excerpts are introduced.

Twenty-four participants self-identified as middle class on the participant demographics form, two as working class and two as both. Although it is suspected that the majority would align with British understandings of middle class, it is possible that there is more variability in the group than these proportions suggest. Some participants asked for advice on answering this question, and two left it unanswered on the demographics form while completing the remainder. These discrepancies perhaps reflect changing notions of class in Aotearoa New Zealand. In 2009, more New Zealanders believed that their society was predominantly middle class than in the previous two decades (despite rising inequality and of people in lower wage brackets) (Gendall & Murray, 2010).

An initial analysis was conducted by reading the transcripts (transcribed by a third-party using an audio recording) alongside watching video recordings made of the interviews and group discussions. The purpose of this was to get a sense of the affective texture of the evaluations of friendships being made, before going on to doing more detailed coding and analysis. From this point, the analysis phase consisted of providing 'thick' description of the entanglements between broad cultural factors and personal histories and re-sorting the material into themes. A key tool made use of is the identification of interpretive repertoires, recognisable and culturally intelligible discursive affective practices (Wetherell, 2012). These can be thought of as units of analysis whose patterns can be identified across a range of social formations, from local, embodied identity

practices through to global discursive formations (Wetherell 1998). The analysis that follows includes the identification of imagined positions, ‘characters’ that populate interpretive repertoires; their local deployment provides information about the broader ideological context in which they arise (Edley, 2001).

Comfort and ease in deep friendships

In the first of this three-part analysis, we investigate a set of everyday ideologies that are characterised by constructions of close-friendships as: 1) permanent features of relationship-scapes; 2) made up of women being their ‘authentic’ selves; and 3) devoid of relationship work found with other (less intimate) friendships and other domains of life. In the first extract below, Naomi (44, interview) is responding to a question about the role of friendship in her life and conveys a sense of surety in her friendships. Like the majority of participants, Naomi made clear distinctions between her closest friends, and other friends.

It’s dependent on the stage in your life, what your needs are at the time and what you can give and yeah, so Gina’s sort of come in and maybe she’s meant to be here right now in this time you know, sitting next to me, and then yeah, it’s probably Jacqui and Helen, my old friends from school, I think they’ll just always be there, yeah, they’re like comfy slippers, they’re just always there.

Despite Gina’s place in Naomi’s friendships as potentially short-term, Naomi places a high value on the friendship, evident in the ‘meant to be’, fate narrative. Note also that self-reflexive relationship work is referred to, through mention of needing to work out “what your needs are at the time and what you can give” at any given point in your life. But what we want to draw attention to is Naomi’s invocation of familiar comfort in constructing her best-friendships — like comfy slippers, friendships are always reliable, reassuring and warm. A similar affective sense-making is apparent in Kristen’s (39, group discussion) words below, where the meanings of intimacy are crafted as an understated and everyday variety. Kristen is answering a question about what women get from their friendships.

They see you at your best and worst and still love you and still want to come back for more and yeah I think they, you just- I speak for myself. I am my true self with them and I know that they are their true selves as well and they just fit. And it’s one thing fitting with me in a friendship but fitting with my children and my family is another thing altogether. I mean mostly, well some of them have been you know in the woodwork so long that they just are part of the furniture.

We see again how notions of ‘just fitting’ mobilise a sentiment of durable fusing. The habituation of her friends’ presence in her life is constructed as complete; their intertwining comes through being “part of the furniture” and “in the woodwork” for a long time. This is then paired with the notion of being authentic, “true selves”, with one another. Kristen’s claim that friends see you at “your best and worst” is an example of a ‘warts and all’ sentiment that make up ideologies of intimacy between the closest of friends. Another discursive affective repertoire reinforcing the complete and easy nature of women’s friendship intimacies centres on meanings about fate bringing and keeping friends together, which was referenced in Naomi’s quote, above. Cathy (44, group discussion) also draws on this sense-making resource:

It’s that essence of what you bonded, what drew you together and that stays the same. So even though you have different experiences, that will always be that- your soul or your personality or whatever, that always remains the same and there is that judgement on- that recognising your clan kind of thing, if you want to get kind of spiritual about it, that you are likeminded that you think the same way about things or feel the same way about things and those sort of really deep friendships that just maintains.

Cathy’s proclamations are evocative through capitalising on notions of the meeting of ‘souls’ who were ‘meant to be’. The fate repertoire promulgates a belief in an essential, non-changing friend-self, where the imperatives of rational choice are swapped for faith that the relationship “always remains the same”. As an interesting contrast, in her analysis of advice columns about establishing and maintaining heterosexual relationships, Rosalind Gill (2009) finds fate narratives are treated as a folly for dreamers, not the female ‘intimate entrepreneurs’ who are obligated to upskill and transform their sexual-selves. The fate narrative in friendship positions friends as having a winning combination of personalities or beliefs, and as such, intimacy is presented as already achieved. As Cathy puts it, they are “really deep friendships that *just maintains*”. The discursive affective practices of comfort, ease and intimacy-as-achieved in women’s close friendships we have been outlining signal a reprieve from neoliberal cultures of intimacy work. While echoes of comfort and ease are apparent in the next part of the analysis, the patterns identified hone in on participants’ constructions of friendships as escape enclaves.

Escaping from regimes of productivity through happy domesticities

In this section, we focus on routinised friendship escapes, orchestrated around activities at home, including engagement with social media, films and television. It is perhaps unsurprising that women’s friendships constitute escapes, given that friendship is generally understood as taking place in the realm of leisure. However, when the current hegemony of postfeminist therapy cultures is considered, the contrasting ease of these quotidian activities becomes more pronounced. They

remain a form of genial sociality, but additionally, are a relief from imperatives of improvement in relationship management, careers, and beauty regimes. Although we are not suggesting that these domestic escapes are the most prominent or formative set of activities of participants' friendships, there is a consistency to the patterning, and the low-thrum affective formations belie a richness that deserves further investigation.

The first example sees Max (28, interview) construct pleasurable escapes with her flatmate and close friend.

We never make time to hang out just the two of us and yet whenever there's an opportunity to do so we always take it. Often if I have a sick day or if she has a sick day, the other person will pull a sickie. So we can sit at home and eat pies and Facebook stalk all day, which is just quite fun I guess because it reminds me of the friendship I used to have. But it's much more impromptu and when it can happen, which I guess scares me a little bit in terms of, well when I'm not living with them, will I still have those? And I hope that time will be made to have that because it won't just happen spontaneously anymore. And I really like pie days.

Max's talk is demonstrable of how these lazy, domestic escapes enact a distinct form of intimacy, activated through breaking the social conventions of going to work, eating healthily or using social media in principled ways. As such, the predicaments of needing to be productive are less obvious here than in other 'girlfriending' contexts, and meanings of mutual managing/surviving are omitted (Kanai, 2017b). Common to other examples in the corpus, 'pie days' are muted, languid, and rebelliously apathetic in nature. Across the data set, such sentiments were mobilised in order to describe *the closest* of friends. The reminiscing about "the friendship [she] used to have", which Max described as resembling a long-term partnership relationship, is suggestive of the non-transmutable quality of these affective formations. They may invoke ephemeral, low-intensity affective responses, but they are specific, recognisable and intelligible. Despite their depth, the subdued tenor of escapes can make them difficult to articulate.

The difficulty in elevating friendships which have this muted quality in current neoliberal and postfeminist times is perhaps why Maya (28, interview), uses a range of methods to convey the integral part her friends have played in her life.

Like, at times with both Kendrick and Kelly, even when things were really busy, we would always have one night a week that was bestie night. [...] Kendrick would come over every Friday and we would always go the bakery and get the same food and play the same [computer] game and hang out [...] I've always seen Kelly on Wednesdays and so it was really hard when she left. I felt like my Wednesdays were like- and so I would still watch all the same shows and just Facebook her about them. It was like an institution and we had like

a list of things that we would do and she would cook me dinner. So that has always been something that they have wanted as well, they would be as unlikely to cancel that as I would.

In addition to explicitly giving her friendships an institutional status, and allocating a dedicated “bestie night”, the importance of these friendships is constructed in more subtle ways. Maya claims no-one cancels these events, to counter a potential reading of the bestie night activities as insignificant. Maya also demonstrates how they run through different time periods and living situations, and the wording used results in there being ambiguity over whether bestie nights are still happening (they are not). Finally, Maya’s sorrow about the Wednesday night institutions ending also conveys the significance of the friendship. This rhetorical work begs a question — why would such a degree of discursive work be needed to persuade about the depth of Maya’s best-friendships?

One possibility is that, while depth of feeling is typically associated with intense affective responses, the intimacy of friendship in unproductive escapes becomes sutured instead into routines in very ordinary and everyday sorts of ways. Maya’s efforts then, push against hegemonic ideologies of intimacy, where deep investments are defined by depth, intensity and drama (Walker, 1994). Paradoxically, part of the pleasure of friendship here seems to come from rejecting those hegemonic intimacies where *saying* how one *really feels* is linked with a more ‘authentic’ form of intimacy. The following example, from Aurora (28, interview), similarly bears the marks of ongoing battles over meanings of intimacies.

When I think of other friends I am like, because it is so- like I said I am part of the furniture at [my best] friend’s house it is like we lay around and don’t talk and watch a movie, watch tv and you know it is like hanging out with your sister or something you don’t have to try you don’t have to sit through and think of what to say next it is just, with other friends I have got to ‘what can I say next, what can we talk about, do I have to listen to them talk about things I don’t really care about?’ or- I know it’s really weird, in a good way, it is easy.

Aurora’s use of the ‘part of the furniture’ idiom aids in constructing ease through not feeling impelled to do relationship work through talk. The picture painted is that she can simply ‘be’ without having to perform more intensive forms of relating. This is accentuated through contrast — she very effectively sums up the unease and effort she experiences when with other friends. Aurora also includes a second comparison; in likening her best-friendship to a sisterly one, she uses the higher relational capital normatively attributed to blood relations, but also implies a deep knowledge born from spending a great deal of time together. Perhaps Aurora’s use of “it’s really weird” is reference to an awareness of enjoying doing nothing being counter to hegemonic understandings of how intimacy is done, through explorations of self through talking with friends. With the mention of watching films/TV and lying around, these escapes are unproductive in two

ways, through nonconforming to both psy intimacies, and the transformation activities of postfeminist subjectivities.

Relief from being ‘nice’

In the last set of discursive affective repertoires we investigate, in addition to an escape from productivity, the field of women’s friendships is crafted as a relief from doing ‘niceness’. We ask how the boundaries of niceness and ‘being bad’ are played with, asking what it might tell us about contemporary gendering of intimacies.

The first example features a response that is part of a longer story about what Teresa (38, interview) did on the weekend.

Tilly’s birthday was fun. We drank a lot. We looked at boys. They were all married. At the after party we actually missed Alana because usually the after party ends with Alana having a breakdown about her relationship, drunkenly, tears. And we have to listen to it and we got sick of it. But we kind of miss it. Tilly’s like ‘what’s missing?’ I’m like ‘we’re missing our dramatics. We are missing, you know, tears’. And you have to understand, this sounds terrible, but Tilly is just like this sort of big person. She’s like ‘We need to cull people. They were boring’. I’m like ‘you cannot cull people because they are boring. They are just really nice people and they are not extraverts, they are introverts who are part of the group, lovely people, just don’t share a lot or entertain hugely but they are lovely people’. So that was quite funny. We were talking about friendships. It’s terrible. It sounds terrible. And so I stayed the night [...] She got rid of her husband and kids and we stayed in Tilly’s beautiful house [...] We lay in bed and kind of messaged each other. ‘I’m not getting up. Are you getting up?’ ‘No’. I do sleep overs at Tilly’s probably every three months and it’s kind of where we really vent.

There is a familiarity to the scene that Teresa sets. Her descriptions give life to the changing dynamics of heterosexual women’s friendships that Deborah Chambers (2006) identifies, where groups of women become visible through their public sociality, confidently congregating in pubs and cafes, which, somewhat predictably, has led to a moral panic about women ‘out of control’. Beverly Skeggs (1997) has also analysed how working-class British women have been reclaiming public spaces, in ways that resemble masculine sociality. Teresa’s descriptions are illustrative of patterning in this Aotearoa New Zealand corpus that indicate a form of sociality that is accessible to middle class women, which subverts discourses of nurture and respectability that has long been both a powerful signifier of female bonding, and fundamentally regulates women’s identities. A clear example of this from the above excerpt occurs in the ‘culling exchange’. A subject position is created, and derided, for those (non-close friends) who are not just dull, but are too nice. Fun is

made by subverting assumptions of women's pleasing, good-nature, and is a refusal to be pre-eminently relatable.

A second subject position of interest concerns Alana, another friend who Teresa and Tilly used to spend more time with, who is attributed with 'over-sharing' and over-emotionality. As has been shown via other data in the corpus (Martinussen & Wetherell, 2018b; see Chapter Six), although women are expected to demonstrate their capacities for emotional relating, careful rhetorical work is required to distance oneself from an 'overwrought' woman position. An oppositional pairing is apparent here, between the 'dramatic friend', and the low-key type of best-friendship. Yet, in the final line, Teresa comments on how her sleep-overs at Tilly's are a space for "really venting", for getting emotions 'out'. This hints at the routine nature of the blending of contradictory modes of therapy and escape in everyday friendship-relating, where it will be expected that strong emotions are expressed, without indulging in melodramatics.

There is also plurality of registers in the next excerpt. Dianne (29, interview) discusses how an ex-colleague, Sasha, supported her during a stressful year, where she both had a mentally unwell relative of her husband come to stay at her house, and a miscarriage.

She's quite cynical and I enjoy her sense of humour. She still regales me with ridiculous stories of [place of work]. Stupid team-building exercises or attempts to get staff to forget about the fact that they're underpaid and underworked but I mean that's just our friendship dynamic about everything. She was one of the people- when my [husband's relative] was living with us [...] I was an ideal target who she could let it out on so I copped it. Sasha was the person I'd speak to more than anyone else because we'd just be really cynical and laugh about it and be really quite cruel at times and I didn't have to worry about her going 'you're a terrible person for saying that'. I think even when I had the miscarriage I had this- the first time I had to go back to the doctor and explain what had happened [...] And the poor guy, I just cried for like 20 minutes, and he just had to sit there and couldn't do anything and I was seeing Sasha that afternoon, and we just laughed about it. Just- the guy not knowing *what* to do. And the look on his face just so awkward. And there wasn't anyone else in my life where we could just laugh, you know? Be sad and laugh.

From team building exercises with overworked staff, being mistreated by a mentally unwell relative, through to a devastating miscarriage, Dianne constructs her cynical laughter with Sasha as a form of therapy. Although there is an uptake of a victim position, it is expressed via a confident disdain, which is part of the friendship intimacies celebrated here. They enjoy poking fun at injustices, evident in the derision of the neoliberal disciplining methods dressed up as 'team-building'. There is a clear subversion of the norms of women as nurturing and acquiescent (Chambers, 2006). Laughing over the interaction with the doctor is similarly gender-subversive, where, firstly, Dianne

likens herself to a 'stereotypical' hysterical woman who cannot control her emotions. The doctor's discomfort at her (feminine) over-emotionality, and his (masculine) inability to provide comfort, however, are the real butts of the joke.

The rejections of feminine niceness are more overt in this, final, stretch of talk. Elaine (44, group discussion) is answering a question about if there is anything unique about friendships with other women.

Elaine: From my point of view you get an acceptance of, you don't have to be in your little 'this is what we are in our box'. You get all this advice 'if you are in a meeting and you talk this way...', 'if you want people to...' you know, there is a societal kind of perception of how a woman ought to be and I from my point of- I can talk about lots of different things and not have to filter myself through a male gaze, you know? I can talk about 'my underwear has gone wrong' that sort of thing without having to think 'oh' you know 'they will be disgusted' [...] Most men would run a mile because you know we are supposed to shave our legs and be pretty all the time and be nice and ladylike and I get from my female friends the ability to actually be bad I suppose, in what people would- do you see what I mean?

Maree: You can be kinda raw?

Elaine: Yeah I can be raw. And I can make crude comments and you know snigger at fart jokes and that kind of stuff. It was interesting because I saw Ghostbusters [remake] recently and it was- what I really liked about that movie was the four lead characters were in no way performing for a male gaze they were just hanging out, you know being ladies, you know being themselves. And it was nothing to do with kind of trying to get a man and sad because they don't have a boyfriend or anything there was no discussion it was just, it was about their friendships and I thought that was really interesting and I hope that we are moving into a period where it is not women in a man's framework it is actually just woman in their own framework you know.

Elaine constructs friendship as a reprieve from unacceptable expectations and self-monitoring. No "filter" is required here. She goes on to posit that the crudeness of fart jokes and underwear mishaps are her 'real' self, so that the expectations of ladylike decorum are positioned as a distorting force. It is fascinating to see how Elaine moves through rejecting normative femininities through both, mobilising political discourse, as well as sense-making that is challenging to the status quo in more indirect ways. Take for example her statement that the (all female) Ghostbusters characters were: "in no way performing for a male gaze they were just hanging out, you know being ladies". The first clause taps into politicised feminist discourse. Secondly, the reference to hanging out does not counter problematic expectations explicitly, but by casting the characters as authentic in this

way, not having to adjust themselves for a “man’s framework”, there is a powerful but indirect movement towards redefining ‘normal’. It is suggestive of a type of belonging with women that is free from having to actively attend to the preoccupations that currently come with doing womanhood in a man’s framework.

Discussion

We have attempted to elucidate a set of affective practices that have been overlooked in research on women’s friendship in neoliberal, postfeminist times. Characterised by accounts of ‘always being there’ and ‘just fitting’, these produce a version of friendship as easy and an escape. The melding of close-friendship intimacies into lives happens in very ordinary ways but they became clearer by focusing on what was reported about the activities friends undertook together. This ordinariness was often embedded through the consumption of media products, which for some, were key organisers for experiences of friendship. Assumptions of deep familiarity and embodied routines formed the basis of the intimacies mobilised with, what one participant referred to as, institutionalised friendship. One important aspect of ‘authentic’ selves-as-friends was the pre-eminence given to subversion of the norms of feminine relating. Embedded in practices of close friendship are possibilities of having time-off from the demands of always being nice, relatable, optimistic and caring.

What is the cultural and critical psychological significance of these emergent forms of togetherness? Firstly, the meanings of authenticity reproduced strike quite a different chord from those of confessing psy subjects. While psy discourses are thought to promulgate ideals of intimacy as something to be continually worked on (Illouz, 2007), we showed how best-friendships can run instead through narratives of intimacy as achieved. This was captured in the construction of best-friendship as the meeting of ‘souls’. Perhaps this is why these types of intimacies seem ephemeral, and to run in the background; they are undemanding by comparison to psy-defined intimacies and are not produced as topic. It should be noted that, when engaged in other modes, we agree that friendship *does* act as a mechanism for intensifying introspection and regulation (Kanai, 2017a, 2017c; Martinussen & Wetherell, 2018b; Winch, 2013; see also Chapter Six). But the intimacies under the spotlight in this paper are based around activities that reduce techniques of self-realisation, including ‘Facebook stalking’, watching movies and playing computer games.

Secondly, in the context of the current postfeminist climate, it is significant that ideals in women’s friendship intimacies are achievable, rather than being understood as out-of-reach aspirations. This paper has explored facets of friendship identities that engender a sense of simply being, or being enough. The postfeminist impulses towards make-overs (Gill, 2007) were suspended in the unproductive escapes. The repertoires of cynicism and subversions of being ‘nice’ offer a vivid

counter to other facets of the postfeminist sensibility, notably, girlish vulnerability (McRobbie, 2015; Winch, 2012), optimistic, empowered woman (Gill, 2009) and performing pleasing femininities (Kanai, 2017b). Rather, there seems to be an easy form of confidence, which is less taxing in its performance. It is not a 'taking charge' or 'leaning in' position, where one's own resources are drawn on to redress inequalities, found throughout postfeminist texts (Gill & Kanai, 2018). The affective practices of best-friendship therefore, are more than simply a leisurely activity and a relief from the daily grind of work or management of households, but from the mode of failing perfectionist who struggles along with a smile. These breaks from self-management may be a minor note overall in neoliberal life, but allow women a space to be present-oriented, rather than engaged in future-oriented productivities and anxieties.

Thirdly, we saw how notions of authenticity were produced through practices of resistance that mock supremely relatable feminine selves. Potentially, this links to a broader battle over the meanings of authenticity in the postmodern. David Grazian (2010) suggests that the aesthetic practices of hybridity, irony and transgression are a push back against configurations of authenticity that are read as tradition-bound, pretentious and essentialist. Thus, in 'easy friendship' mode, women's togetherness may function as a stabiliser in the face of much precarity, but takes on a rather ironic or perverse form of community that others have suggested will be sought out in the postmodern (Bauman, 2001). The humour and high value placed on subverting normative femininities resonates with celebrations of 'rowdy women' or a 'ladette' culture that have been emerging since the 1990s (Chambers, 2006; O'Neill, 1993; Rowe, 1995; Skeggs, 1997), which can now be detected in digitally mediated spaces (Dobson, 2014). Popular television shows in recent years where female friendships are a central theme, also reflect a shift. The glossy, aspirational spirit of *Sex And The City* has dropped away in programming such as *Broad City*, *Insecure*, or *Fleabag*. The protagonists of these shows struggle, but often, they do not – they simply 'hang out', or nonchalantly slide from one immoral situation to the next. Likewise, while the figure of the good-friend has resonances with Lena Dunham's *Girls*, in that the version of postfeminism on offer is less optimistic than earlier representations (Negra & Tasker, 2014), the confidence seems more robust. In this respect, there is alignment with Judith Taylor's (2016) analysis of women's friendships in recent literature, who carry out a self-reliant, 'obligatory camaraderie' associated with men's friendships.

We are not suggesting that women's friendships in this mode should be celebrated without caution or critique. For example, these practices of intimacy, which seem to operate as a low-pressure stasis, may require a suppression of feelings, as we saw in the condemnation of 'dramatics'. This links to a fourth key area for discussion, the connections between the low affect aspect of these patterns and heterorelationality. One of the key logics at play in these narratives is that friendships are

precious because one must ‘steal’ time from other parts of ‘productive’ life, such as employed work, motherhood or long-term sexual partnerships. In line with research elsewhere (Plummer, 1995; Roseneil, 2006), Max’s experience of a particular friendship as integral to the organisation of her life is suggestive of possibilities of greater intertwining. However, other (childrearing and partnership) relationships are anchored to meanings of ‘progress’ in ‘real life’ in ways friendships are not (Martinussen, 2018a; see also Chapter Five). Friendship escapes are sweeter, more illicit, *because* they are fitted in around work, family, and other productive endeavours, not just in spite of them. These low affect formations leave in place the sanctity of family, for which coupledness is the starting point, and “retains an almost unparalleled ability to move people, both emotionally and politically” (Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004, p.135).

Finally, we want to think about how these patterns relate to questions of agency. As has been mentioned, the modes of being that are mobilised through ‘easy friendships’ do not displace the self-regulation work of postfeminism or psy. Indeed, living out these understandings of self, as a competent, laid-back do-er of best-friendship are given greater meaning because intensifying neoliberal self-management technologies characterise many of the fields of practices we move through in day-to-day life. Kanai’s (2017b) research also illustrates strikingly how the affective magnetism of women’s friendships can be a vehicle for neoliberal, individualising and resilient femininities. To supplement this important work about neoliberalising forms of intimacy, our paper has used the concept of affective practice to explore how participants construct identity as ‘good woman-friend’, in ways that allow space for ‘creative becomings’ in other directions (Pedwell, 2017). Anita Harris and Amy Dobson’s (2015) proposals are apt here. They advocate analyses which avoid equating suffering with passivity, suggesting that ‘forms of unheroic struggle and creativity, and/or non-resistant actions, relations and practices... can also be understood as “agentic”’ (Harris & Dobson, 2015, p.153). In this way, we can attend to resistances in circulation, diffuse and transitory as they may be. The instances of relief in women’s friendship are not purposeful political indictments of the status quo, yet, they ‘jar against the regulative rhythm of normative discourses’ (Ringrose, 2008, p.54). As such, the pleasures of good-friendship represent an ambivalent, reparative strategy (Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, 2003), where women, *temporarily*, do ‘not have to push so hard in order to have “a life”’ (Berlant, 2013, p.285).

Part IV: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Chapter Eight: Concluding discussions

In this final chapter, firstly, I summarise the theoretical and methodological contributions this thesis makes to studies of friendship, personal life, therapy cultures and critical studies of postfeminism. In the second part, I move on to discussing the implications of the research. I provide suggestions for future research directions on neoliberal sensibilities and practices of intimacy between women friends. I do this by extending some of the arguments I made in the previous chapter (Chapter Seven). I support continued efforts to name and critique emergent forms of power disciplining subjects. However, I advance an agenda for supplementing those efforts with critical feminist research that seeks out resistances that may be diffuse, transitory, subtle, small and not intentionally political. In the process, I return to face a concern that I outlined in Chapter Three, asking how my analyses represent interpretations in which both analysts and participants have been treated as creative and empowered actors. Thus, although I acknowledge the constraints, work and inflexibilities involved in doing ‘good’ friendship today, I end by suggesting that a fruitful reading of women’s friendships can be gained by placing emphasis on what women, and feminism, are enabled to do through them.

An overview: neoliberal heterorelationality and ‘good’ friendship

The quote below is from a personal essay entitled ‘Relying on Friendship in a World Made for Couples’ (Hopper, 2016) that featured in the New York Times lifestyle magazine as part of a series about single women. Many of the articles in the series discussed topics core to this thesis, including the management of friendships and anxieties about how personal lives change post-twenties. Some of the articles reiterated the pervasive trope of ‘keep everything together’, and the role of friends in that task.

At times I’ve felt overwhelmed by the demands of balancing many close friendships. Once I failed to respond to a faraway friend’s email about her sick partner when I was consumed by caring for a single friend with cancer, and afterward I felt too guilty about it to pick up the thread. Another time I had to defend myself to a partnered friend who told me that caring for people with life-threatening illnesses was beyond the appropriate bounds of friendship because “that’s what lovers are supposed to do for each other”. (He failed to explain what those of us without lovers were supposed to do.) At its best, having many close friendships can feel like having an army of guardian angels ready to mobilize within minutes. At its worst, it can feel like the world’s most invisible form of emotional labour.

This extract draws attention to some of the main themes of this research. Firstly, there is the routine culture-making work of drawing limits around the “appropriate bounds of friendship” in social life. In a heterorelational world, the arrangements of those who privilege and heavily depend on

friendship are perceived as odd. Although stories of friendship like the one above are less common, which explicitly deal with the negative impacts of heterorelational nudges, even when not acknowledged these socio-cultural formations remain a salient part of the organisation of friendships and the ordering of intimacies in women's lives. Secondly, and a more pervasive trope in this extract, is the matter of the "invisible emotional labour" of carrying out friendship. Again, naming friendship in these terms, is a story less told than those which pronounce the depth of friends' goodness. While acknowledging the rightness, grace and generosity of women's friendships, in the current era, it is also important for feminist scholars to ask how friendships become implicated in neoliberal projects of self. According to this extract, for example, friendship today is about having both "guardian angels", and, the skills to manage them, so as not to become "overwhelmed by the demands of balancing many close friendships". As well as referencing thoughtful and gallant friend-identities, such sentiments also speak to what Negra (2009, pp.47-85) refers to as postfeminist modes of temporality, and the unrelenting time panic that underpins them.

When I began this research, not all of these themes were identifiable to me as centrally related to studies of friendship. Rather, the kernel from which this thesis has grown was rooted in forms of heterorelational prejudice, and the hierarchal arrangement of intimacies, that receive relatively little critical feminist attention. As I set out, the idealisation of couplehood, which is rarely presented as anything other than universally desirable in popular culture, occupied my sight. The drives towards organising life around coupledom seemed to me to be presented as either responsibilities to be shouldered by women, or something else more desirable than friendship, but no less uncontrollable. As the narrator notes above, assumptions about "what lovers are supposed to do for each other" frequently go unquestioned, and are posited as insuppressible. Sentiments about sexual relationships and motherhood seemed to be the most available threads from which women could weave their relational selves, and only when there was space, their friend-selves.

There remains a strong impulse in me towards detailing how the privileging of sexual-romantic relationships occurs. In my everyday discussions with near strangers about this research I fight an urge to say 'You see, it's right there in front of us! We say our friendships are *essential*, but we're happy for our hold on them to be so light that we let them go all the time!' Yet, as the previous chapters suggest, attempting to tell such a tidy story about the shapes of friendships between women today, or their meanings and effects, would not just be inaccurate, but would miss the tension and complexity that makes the weave of women's friendships so rich. As the research has progressed I have become more attuned to how, as in the above extract, friendships become something to be managed, and how one carries out this juggling act centrally constitutes the quality of the friendship. I have become more interested also in how friendships become tools for managing anxieties, part of women's repertoire for needing to be resilient (Gill & Orgad, 2018).

Some of these strategies of resilience are more aligned with feminist goals than others. In a recent example from mainstream media, an article in the New York Times asks “Are your friendships giving you a boost or bringing you down?” (Parker-Pope, 2018). This line of questioning suggests women must manage friendships with themselves squarely in mind, to ensure that the company they keep is helping them maintain their wellbeing. Given that women have a long history of overlooking their needs for others (Gullestad, 1984), this form of self-care may be necessary. However, it necessitates and instils a culture of carrying out self-reflective stocktakes, which has been linked to women’s never-ending searches for a ‘healthy normality’ (Walkerdine et al., 2001).

My investigations then, have had to go beyond demonstrating the operations of everyday sense-making that ensures women’s friendships are organised within heterorelational logics. Much of my efforts have been drawn towards showing the discursive strategies for sustaining oneself that come from doing woman-friend identities with neoliberal sensibilities. As I worked my way through my analyses it seemed necessary to detail my heightened sense of the efforts for reconciling the contradictions of postfeminism. It also seemed necessary to outline how, time and time again, psychologised knowledges were drawn on to describe friendship intimacies as a desirable but necessary form of work, which everyone must take responsibility for.

Moving between a molar and molecular view has allowed me to extend sociological research which politicises friendship through emphasising plurality, fluidity and fragmentation within personal relating, conceived as taking place within a queering social landscape (Budgeon & Roseneil, 2004; Roseneil, 2006c; Roseneil & Budgeon, 2004). As critical scholars of postfeminism have shown, crafting an identity and life(style) around vocabularies of choice does not guarantee freedoms from earlier constraints associated with labour in the household, and in the present context, may result in more complicated and contradiction-ridden formations (McRobbie, 2013). Critical social psychological methodologies, with emphasis on living out contradiction, the ongoing work involved in bridging identities and changing cultural persuasions, has been instrumental in allowing me to open up a view to women-friends’ enmeshments in neoliberal sensibilities that often goes unseen. I hope to have shown also, as per my suggestions in Chapter Two, that it is possible to study flows and arrangements of personal life that are alive with possibilities, while at the same time, contributing to knowledge about the weight and unthinking influence of the heterorelational or neoliberal ordering of everyday practices.

Another area in which I bridged academic divides was in Chapter Three. With a demonstration of Wetherell’s discursive affective practice theory, I began to link broader discursive formations to local sense-making resources and women’s histories of friendship identities. My participants’ skilful shaping and tailoring of intelligible cultural formations for specific interactional contexts

illuminated how emotions are not just feelings, but practical, sense-making knowledges that get personal life done. Whilst manifestations of, for example, sadness, a sense of control, rage or contentment were contingent upon embodiment, cultural, personal or interactional contexts, they were nonetheless patterned. To rely on interpretations of emotion as mysterious and emanating from the subconscious (Sedgwick, 1996), is to overlook the power of affect in the fleeting moments of collaborative accomplishment of social life. I emphasised how creative analyses can be carried out by centralising participants' own activities and concerns, where the limits and boundaries of said activities and concerns are being played with, tested out or acceded to. I showed for example how Leeann's report of swearing and getting "really angry" at her friend was presented as the rational choice for her. Leeann used the research group setting, to frame her angry outburst as the right course to take, and to present herself as a competent do-er of intimacy in her friendships.

With a commitment to sticking close to my data, these theoretical and methodological underpinnings have fundamentally shaped the research problems explored in the empirical chapters, which in some cases shifted considerably over the course of the research. In Chapter Five, I showed how everyday ideologies of friendship were drawn on to reconcile contradictions between maintaining intimacy in friendships and fulfilling the demands of 'developing' selves relating to long-term sexual partnership. I concluded that although friendships maintain their status as important intimate relationships, within the hierarchically organised sphere of care and intimate relating, it is friendships rather than sexual partnerships that must bend and stretch, sometimes becoming thinner in the process. Vocabularies of rational management were used to justify these heterorelational logics. My participants' postfeminist styled confidence seemed to shape the affective landscape of women's friendships in a similar way, by carrying out intimacy audits and adjustments in an affective register that centrally included notions of control and empowerment. Thus, I concluded by conceding that despite the *potential* of women's friendship's to challenge normative 'life-stages', neoliberal and heterorelational sense-making instead became imbricated through everyday ideologies of friendship. These analyses have implications for scholarship of intimate life. Friendship scholars need to take care when promoting friendship as becoming important because of a preference for light and flexible connections with others in 'post-traditional intimacies' (Giddens, 1992; Pahl, 2000). My participants positioned deep investments between friends as an unhealthy form of dependence, which is a different form of social action than choosing relationships with light commitments.

In Chapter Six, I examined sense-making about intimacy in participants' friendship practices, showing how psy cultures became embodied in sometimes surprising ways. I showed that while emotional, self-disclosing intimacies, and friendship as co-counselling were crafted as ideals, it was possible for women to draw on other sense-making devices to justify non-disclosures, although it

required some rhetorical work. Even those participants seemingly most fully invested in hegemonic psy-inflected meanings of intimacy-making also customised psy injunctions and re-worked them to fit the local context. Whilst accounts of women as gentle carers who are ‘good listeners’ largely make up the terrain, the availability of a therapist-friend position of ‘no-nonsense’, ‘straight-talkers’ suggested that other, contradictory, cultural imperatives were being attended to. Literature about Aotearoa New Zealand’s colonial history helped to make sense of these dilemmas. I concluded that, overall, women’s friendships represent the kinds of ethical projects Rose (1996, 1999) suggests will reign under the rubric of psy, where capacities for self-transformation and autonomy become worked on between friends. I further argued that a postfeminist entanglement was also detectable here. While there was valorisation of an empowered feminine subject, the feminine ideals of care were also naturalised. Simultaneously, conforming to these feminine ideals was interpreted as misguided and weak, with notions of untrustworthiness sticking to this too-gentle friend-figure. My participants blended caring and empowerment, but needed to work at reconciling contradictions in the process. Thus, while most of the research investigating the effects of postfeminism has centred on texts from the public domain, and largely on issues of work-life, body image and sexual relationships, Chapter Six expands on this suite of work, by investigating how non-sexual personal relationships are also informed by postfeminist dispositions.

In Chapter Seven, I illuminated everyday ideologies that constructed the closest of friendships between women as solid, not requiring relationship work, and as a site for doing authentic selves. Friendships were likened to comfy slippers, which may be endearing in their imperfections, and whose presence can be guaranteed. These practices of very close friendships cultivated small and temporary worlds of unproductivity. I suggested these were fertile grounds for contravening the demanding expectations of normatively sanctioned femininities, and sometimes even for naming them. I proposed that while other practices of friendship represent the tightening hold of postfeminism, including those discussed in Chapters Five and Six, as well as literature elsewhere (Kanai, 2016, 2017b, 2017c; Winch, 2013), the sense of reprieve and relief in these easy friendship practices indicates something different. I offered an interpretation of these short respites with friends as representing more than just leisure time. I claimed that to simply ‘be’ with friends in these lazy, cynical, nonchalant or playful frames allow women to drop the potentially heavy mask of optimism and performances of confidence. I showed how the versions of authenticity valorised here are different to those engendered via psy-styled forms of intimacy and care, and linked participants’ gleeful transgressions of ‘niceness’ to emergent forms of ‘unruly’ (Rowe, 1995) or ‘ladette’ (Chambers, 2006; O’Neill, 1993; Skeggs, 1997) femininities. Yet, despite a questioning of gender norms, and potentials for queering, these low-affect practices did not nudge significantly against heterorelational orders, and, potentially re-inscribed their captivating power. For the

moment, this ‘unproductive’, low affect area of intimate life is fitted around the mainstays of coupledness, motherhood and employment.

There are touchpoints and contradictions between the three analytic chapters. Although in Chapter Seven I propose that an important constitutive part of women’s friendship relating rests on unproductivity, in Chapter Five I showed how friendships are also an area of life where techniques of intimacy entrepreneurship are expected to be well-honed. Women must compartmentalise and weigh up the various types of intimacy and care in their lives, making investments accordingly, as autonomous friends. Friendships remain fluid and contingent, as women make re-categorisations to ‘reason’, ‘season’ or ‘life’ friends, as needed, to facilitate the organisation of other parts of intimate life, organised along the lines of normative ‘life-stages’. The types of relational competencies outlined in Chapter Five, including the labours of ongoing intimacy tracking and adjustment of friendships, are put on hold to do the lazy but ‘authentic’ intimacies constructed in Chapter Seven. What is similar between the positions on offer outlined in Chapters Five and Seven, is their construction within low-affect formations. Both hanging out in ‘easy’ friendships, and avoiding feelings of sadness when friendships change or end, require a low-key register. The two abject positions in these two chapters (those who get upset about friendships, or over-share with friends) wrong-foot themselves by engaging in high intensity affective practices. Entrepreneurial life-managers are too independent, it seems, to grieve for friendships. And while divulging vulnerabilities and feeling upset are required sometimes, careful management is needed to avoid being ‘too dramatic’. The current bricolage of women’s friendship ideologies often works to confine expressions of intensity in everyday friendship relating, whether these expressions are positive or negative.

An exception to this however, was shown in Chapter Six, where we saw participants’ demonstration of their competencies as therapists/patients, willing to do the emotional development work required. Friendships without self-disclosing talk were posited as ‘activities based’, or carried out by immature friends, with shallow, instrumental friendships. Although the demographic information concerning class was not straightforward (see Chapter Four), it seemed that descriptions of care and intimacy were heavily influenced by psy vocabularies across both interview and group discussion data, regardless of class and age, particularly in equating care with self-development. Yet, at the same time, therapised understandings of friendship included doing support that was not too sentimental. It is not clear how people deal with these inconsistencies in their everyday life, and variously privilege the contradictory repertoires of low and high intensity emotional relating as needed. Perhaps, given the propensity towards treating friends’ shortcomings as endearing (see Chapter Seven), friends are forgiven if they do not get it right. As Rebecca said

about the aversion to emotional self-disclosing one of her closest friends displays “I... choose to respect that”.

Another commonality between the positions I described in Chapters Six and Seven, was the derision of women who are ‘too nice’ and not gritty or subversive enough. I linked the construction of these subject positions to unfinished debates about meanings of authenticity (Grazian, 2010). Perhaps also, there is a link between these raw versions of femininity and the emergent popular culture representations which Melanie Waters’ (2017) refers to as forms of ‘imperfect feminisms’. Waters (2017) proposes that the frank discussions in women-centred programming about the characters’ own failings and vulnerabilities, or simply the deconstruction of unpleasant or awkward moments of everyday life, ‘foreground the kinds of conflicts and contradictions by which women and girls are perpetually confronted’ (Waters, 2017, p.86). Waters proposes that we prioritise the messiness and negotiation of women’s lives over discussions on what exactly are the right types of feminisms, forwarding the message that imperfect feminisms are better than no feminisms. I agree with this, and similarly, rather than attempting to predict if the patterns of femininities I have identified have good or bad effects, I too have opted to orient my attentions towards the gendered experience of female friendship and the negotiations involved. Gill (2017a, p.231) makes an important cautionary point on this matter however, suggesting that an openness about ‘imperfections’ should not automatically be accepted as progress, because we are yet to see whether ‘postfeminism is flexible enough to absorb and re-signify imperfection’ (Gill, 2017a, p.231). Perhaps an expanding repertoire of subversive femininities should be treated similarly. I hope this research contributes to a growing body of literature tracing the outlines of emerging patterns of femininities, that may in time, provide some perspective with which to draw some provisional conclusions on whether imperfect feminisms and gritty femininities are challenges to, or part of, postfeminist logics.

The contradictions between Chapters Six and Seven rest upon self-monitoring and self-development. The forms of authenticity espoused in Chapter Seven were of an unquestioning variety that required no self-reflection, whilst in Chapter Six, I demonstrated how friends were expected to act as aids to self-monitoring. As Nancy, one of the participants, said of her own approach to offering support: “I’m not the kind of person that would be like ‘oh there, there, that sounds terrible’, I am more like [[bangs table]] ‘how are we going to fix this problem?’”. This type of questioning is a route to get to a different, psychologised kind of authenticity. Cathy claimed that those who demand from you to know “what’s *really* going on?”, “have become family at that deeper level”. Again, I cannot comment more on when or how these differing modes of friendship become more prominent, and if there are other, in-between positions in play. Increasingly, however, I have come to understand in-between positions and places as important. It is towards

grey areas, and the spaces between agency and constraint, that I turn to now, in linking the implications of this thesis to the future agenda of critical feminist research.

Reading empowerment(s) in women's friendships

Taken together, this thesis contributes to a politics of friendship that raises the profile of a problem that is often left unnamed, which affects people differently, but touches many of us profoundly. My identification of the patterns of heterorelationality in women's friendships illustrates both the subtlety and entrenchment of its logics. These knowledges of heterorelational logics re-inscribe the subordinate position friendship has within the hierarchically-organised field of care and intimacy. Although the effects of heterorelationality may pass many of us by without recognition of the fundamental ways they shape our lives, for those whose identity positions are anything other than those idealised within heterorelational orders, there may be rather more direct and painful repercussions. As such, this thesis develops a political agenda with parallels to research on single identities (Lahad, 2017; Reynolds, 2008; A. Taylor, 2012), asexual identities (Dawson, Scott, & McDonnell, 2018; Gressgård, 2013), poly(amorous) identities (Barker, 2005; Haritaworn et al., 2006; Ritchie, 2010), or 'Living Apart Together' identities (Levin, 2004; Roseneil, 2006b). Similarly, this research complements studies which detail how living outside heterorelational norms is interpreted as unfeminine. In one stark illustration, Negra (2009) demonstrates how media representations of women who are geographically unsettled, that is, carrying out lifestyles that do not match well with the 'ideals' of long-term sexual partnership, are either portrayed as unfeminine, or dead. Mainstream media uses geographical mobility as an accounting strategy for women's untimely death, in fictional stories, but also in news reporting.

Yet, as Winch (2013) points out, women's friendships sustain a position in popular imaginaries as inherently good. The sanctity of women's friendships prevails despite, or facilitated by, an increasing reliance on neoliberal sensibilities which shape emergent forms of institutionalised sexism in women's everyday lives, such as renewed emphases on body projects and image management (Winch, 2011, 2012). The idealisation of women's friendships therefore represents a challenge for studying the intersections of neoliberal sensibility and patriarchal norms in women's friendships. In this respect, Lauren Berlant's (2008) theorisation of an 'intimate public' and of the role of 'women's culture' skilfully demonstrates what is at stake here, which is not just the entrenchment of heterorelational orders, but women's complicity in maintaining them, and the role neoliberal orders have in the process. Like critical scholars of postfeminism (e.g. Gill, 2007), Berlant highlights the ongoing and everyday nature, the taken for granted sensibilities, of self-monitoring forms of self-making. However, Berlant's interest lies in how neoliberalism and heteronormative logics are driven through women's affective attachments of belonging to a historically specific

‘women’s culture’ (Berlant, 2008, 2013). I introduce Berlant’s insights here not only because her analyses wonderfully capture the interconnectedness of many of the social phenomena I have brought together, but because her adroit scrutiny additionally highlights a theorisation of women’s agency that allows me to discuss some of the methodological and theoretical contributions this thesis makes.

In Berlant’s (2008) framework, ‘women’s culture’ is an example of an ‘intimate public’, where ideas that purport to express a group of people’s interests and desires are put into circulation, driven by the economic interests of mass-media. Berlant posits that ‘generalised intimacies’ of women’s culture circulate via therapy talk and discourses of victimisation. One central element of women’s culture that supposedly unites women, is caring for others, particularly with regards to being reactive to men and children via various forms of emotional labour (Berlant, 2008, p.17). Women, Berlant writes, ‘live for love, and love is the gift that keeps on taking’ (Berlant, 2008, p.1). Why do women give themselves over to a love that only takes? One reason Berlant puts forward is that when women come together to complain and give sympathy about their labours, it provides a sense of belonging. Secondly, rather than challenge inequalities, women use up their capacities, their agency and energies to simply survive, carrying out ongoing adjustments to make life liveable. Berlant (2008, p.2) proposes that the relationships upholding women’s culture are ‘juxtapolitical’, they occur beside but outside political registers — the very burden of exclusion from politics results in women seeking sustenance away from politics. In turn, these optimistic adjustments, oriented to ‘fantasies of a better good life’ (2008, p.1), bring women closer, the managing occurs *between* women. To reiterate, these enduring, affective pulls are enabled by engagement with neoliberal, mass-marketised media and popular therapy discourses.

Thus, it could be conceived that Berlant explains how the current state of gender politics can be so enduringly contradictory, where feminisms are more visible and potentially less stigmatising to inhabit, but where patriarchy’s re-territorialisation through women’s self-governance continues (McRobbie, 2009). With Berlant’s conceptualising in mind, we can imagine how women’s disadvantages are made sense of in the everyday through apolitical, individualising logics, because the thrust of the machine of women’s culture relies on *negotiating* belonging within and to a world, *not changing it* (Berlant, 2008, p.3). So, how does this account stack up against my analyses of intimacies in women’s friendships, and what might it mean for future research on the gendering of intimacy?

Firstly, as per my discussions in Chapter Two, I agree with Berlant that there remains a need to ask how contemporary meanings of non-sexual intimacies have wide reaching impacts on the gender order in the West. Effectively, Berlant identifies the gendered logics of intimacy where women’s

care and love become a marketised product, the status of which is sold to women themselves, who maintain an unequal system with further emotional labour. In the process, the potential for fostering greater intertwining between women is stifled by ideologies about the productive capacities of women's love and caring in a heterorelational order. To put it in slightly more hopeful terms, Berlant asks women to consider what it would mean to care for and love others, in a world when giving care and love is not conflated with the very definition of women's sense of being.

Secondly, akin to calls for investigations into the psychic life of neoliberalism (Gill & Kanai, 2018; Scharff, 2016), this thesis supports Berlant's prioritisation of examining the affective draw of practices that represent complicity in neoliberal values. Her explicit focus on understanding the *pleasure* in neoliberal forms of belonging is unique. What I illustrate through my analyses however, is that Berlant's explanation of the irresistible pull of the affective force of the intimate public is limited as a result of not taking sufficient account of the messiness of living out affective discursive formations, which are multiple and often contradictory. Rather, and in closer alignment with Gill's (2017) suggestions for drawing attention to specificities of postfeminism, we need to be more precise in our treatment of different manifestations of the affective draws of belonging. If we conceive an intimate public as made up of 'smaller' everyday ideologies, attention is drawn towards asking questions about *what women do* with these hegemonic meanings and ways of being. What everyday forms of meaning-making do women achieve when they put to use the assumption of women as commonly good at caring? In what specific ways do women actively use these meanings to shape understandings of themselves and others and in what situations? (Should one be a nice therapist or a demanding therapist in this context?) This provides a better starting point for exploring negotiations of the status quo and intersecting moral orders.

Thirdly, and supporting my suggestion that more detailed, context-specific analysis is needed, I suspect the affective draws of belonging, and concomitant aversions to collective feminist politics, are more practical in nature than Berlant's interpretations suggest. For instance, as I suggested in Chapter Five, the sense of rationality and control engendered through the use of tropes around flexibly organising one's friendships by auditing one's individual needs are examples of the pleasures of neoliberalism propelling heterorelational orders. Such sense-making may still be considered an 'affective magnetism', but conceiving them as something actively done, with a 'common sense' to them, and intertwined with identity as a relational being, acknowledges the social accomplishment involved. As I have suggested throughout, seeking out smaller units of discursive affective practice also opens up analyses to the possibilities of multiple cultural resources being put into use, and social actors' operation in different affective registers simultaneously, when attending to multiple moral orders. Thus, it would be more productive to treat the 'generalised

intimacy' of an 'intimate public' as discursive affective practices, identifiable in everyday practice, which women can move in and out of, and use creatively.

Finally, I want to respond to Berlant's theorisation of 'women's culture' as juxta-political, as operating beside but outside politics. From a discursive affective practice perspective, where social life is propelled by everyday ideologies, the politics of practical knowledges, it is difficult to distinguish between what might be political and what is not. We cannot discern the effects, consequences, mobilisations and uses of women's culture in advance. Moreover, Berlant imagines that legitimate social progress will only occur outside intimate publics, in more structured, or explicitly queer or feminist ways. But, as I suggested in Chapter Seven, there are benefits to seeking out more ambivalent and everyday varieties of resistance, which may be quiet and unacknowledged by those carrying them out (see also Mcconville, Wetherell, & McCreanor, 2018). Orienting towards small movements that grate or jar against the hegemonic is to acknowledge agency at the middle ranges, 'the sense that power is a form of relationality that deals in... negotiations (including win-win negotiations), the exchange of affect, and other small differentials' (Sedgwick, 2007, p.632). For Sedgwick (2007, pp.631-632), having and/or readings are preferable to 'all or nothing' readings; she also advocates working around internalised oppressions, rather than facing them head-on. Why? We risk instantiating them, giving form and power to things we wish did not exist. We risk over-determining them (Sedgwick & Frank, 1995). This represents a challenge for feminist politics today, particularly in relation to postfeminism. How do we study postfeminism, and its viscerally real effects in women's lives, without giving it more power? Also, at a time when the landscape of sexual politics is bewildering (Gill, 2016), where women must engage in 'schizoid' subjectivity-making as they live out multiple pushes and pulls of doing gender (Renold & Ringrose, 2011), the underlying question I orient to is, not simply 'where do we go from here?', but 'how can we get there in ways that are sustaining?' It is a push towards wanting to seek out opportunities for nourishment and surprise that I turn to next, when thinking about what this thesis indicates about future directions for critical feminist studies.

I have shown how the potentially subversive power of women's friendships seems to be offset by more insidious and slippery forms of governance. This feature of cultural life, the capacity of neoliberalism to absorb resistant and liberatory resources, has been elucidated most thoroughly in studies of postfeminism. These critical analyses are largely oriented to showing how endless shifting, morphing and re-shaping of cultural practices deepens investments in postfeminist sensibilities. This work, and the concept of postfeminism itself, is of course an indispensable tool for understanding newly visible feminisms and intensified sexism (Gill, 2016). Equally, as earlier chapters attest, I do not doubt that the current context has seen the re-territorialisation of misogyny into innumerable sites of (women's) practice, or that individuals are interpellated into

entrepreneurial or responsibilised positions. However, I wonder if we might append an additional focus, enabled through attention to the richness in localised practices, that helps us ‘get around’ neoliberalism. Given the difficulties of changing the rapacious, gendered effects of neoliberalism, perhaps we can instead change the context in other ways? The picture we have is currently rather bleak. Therefore, in addition to seeking out subversions that may be brave and face neoliberalism squarely, perhaps we can add more hopeful dashes of colour by locating those practices which are rather ambivalent in nature, and therefore produce a side-on nudge?

I demonstrated throughout my analyses that hegemonic discursive formations of heterorelationality, psy intimacies and those which inform postfeminist sensibilities, are incomplete, vulnerable to misperformances, and always operate alongside and against contradictory forms of sense-making. Developing some of the points I made in Chapters Three and Seven, I reanimate a critical discursive psychological concept that lies implicit in much of this thesis, but also in studies of postfeminism — the dialogical organisation of the social world. I will ask if and how dialogism can help us generate more reparative readings at a rather confusing, if not dire, moment of gender politics. In seeking middle range readings of friendships in postfeminist times, I follow in the footsteps of those who have been carving out a space for studies of postfeminism that centralise female desire and agency without eliding the operations of gendered neoliberal cultural forces (e.g. Dobson, 2014; Dobson & Harris, 2015; Harris & Dobson, 2015; Renold & Ringrose, 2011; Ringrose, 2008; Ringrose, Harvey, Gill, & Livingstone, 2013). At the moment, this movement is primarily being applied in settings relating to the lives of girls and young women. I bring a similar focus on possibility and agency to a critical reading of the lives of adult women under postfeminism.

A third reading strategy: women’s friendships, postfeminism and a dialogic imagination

Given that part of the power of postfeminist texts operates through discourses of empowerment, there is an urgency for critical studies of postfeminism to develop further analytic tools to interpret agency in gendered, neoliberal, intimate life. As Negra (2009) points out, popular culture fetishises women’s power and desire; choices are dwindling in the name of choice. How, then, can we tell when tropes of agency are being used for re-territorialisation, or when they indicate refusals or new directions?

I have argued that an emphasis on context-contingent discursive affective practices is productive in teasing out overlapping but contradictory forms of agency. In addition to treating postfeminism as a sensibility, with identifiable, psychological dimensions (Gill, 2007, 2017b; Riley et al., 2017), I

have shown the usefulness of breaking up broader patterns by means of conceptual tools provided by discursive affective practice theory. This has allowed me to remain attentive to the relational and negotiated aspects of living out neoliberal discursive formations, whose intersubjective flows often run on unnoticed, but may also jar, judder or collide as alternative discursive practices are brought into being. By adhering to practice theory, with its focus on everyday activity, I have shown that while the forms of belonging in friendships are about managing and improving the self, friendship is an area of life, and a form of identity, that mobilises meanings of confidence and authenticity outside neoliberalism, and the public intimacy of 'women's culture'. Even though my participants did sometimes rely on fetishised varieties of women's choice and empowerment, including women's emotional capacities for carrying out friendships, attending to micro and meso forms of social action has allowed me to reveal how these same actions may be, simultaneously, sustaining forms of power and desire.

In Chapter Six I pointed out how women used therapy knowledges flexibly. Naomi says "I'll choose the way I'll reach out to people", as she accounts for a refusal to do emotional self-disclosing. It is not a complete disavowal of gendered forms of self-governance that psy induces, but a more temporary, or lighter form of defiance. In Chapter Seven, I highlighted instances where women know what normative femininity looks and feels like, but may be ambivalent in their responses to them. When Teresa tells a story about her friend, Tilly, who insists that they need to "cull" people from their friend group because they are boring, albeit lovely, she is not indicting Tilly for a lack of generosity or respectability. Rather, Teresa is celebrating her friend's wit. Neither does Teresa's implicit encouragement of these unkind transgressions prevent her (nor Tilly) from accessing the identities of being nice and caring. In Chapter Five, I demonstrate how the labour involved in maintaining shifting friendship intimacies through modes of rational management is bound up in the confidence women accrue from this work. In contrast to Berlant's claims, I am unconvinced that this should be read as automatically disempowering in the long-term. These manifestations of gendered inequalities of emotional labour do not dictate what women might do with the confidence gained from them. We need to be vigilant, and continue exploring the ways women's disempowerment and constraint might be conveyed through tropes of empowerment, but it is helpful to produce 'and/or' readings. I am not suggesting that small or temporary forms of agency such as these will automatically shift into other areas of women's lives. But, effectively, I treat them as changing the social context in which gendered neoliberalism operates, at either the individual or broad-social level. In addition to the examples I provided in Chapter Three, these examples occupy a grey area. They represent the middle ranges of agency, and relative empowerment.

Another, similarly reparative, way of theorising the contradiction of the postfeminist saturated context is presented in Emma Renold and Jessica Ringrose's (2011) Deleuzian-inspired exploration

of teen girls' sexual cultures. Pointing to simultaneous 'double-pull' movements and 'schizoid subjectivities', they propose a reformulation of girls' agency, highlighting young women's reclaiming, navigating and bending the performative trajectories of femininities. There are similarities between the theoretical underpinnings in this thesis and Renold and Ringrose's (2011). For example, they use a similarly multi-levelled analysis which explicitly incorporates local and global foci, along with an orientation to openness and becoming. Moreover, my research, like theirs, takes a discursive psychosocial approach. Renold and Ringrose (2011) demonstrate how investments in personal histories and habits are inseparable from longer discursive histories and power. However, in my treatment of contradiction, I am inclined to ground the fluidity gained by Deleuzian assemblages with critical discursive psychology theory, particularly the insights of Michael Billig's (1991, 1996, 2001) Bakhtinian-inspired understandings of the rhetorical and dialogic nature of social life. I will now draw on a dialogic lens to discuss two opportunities for future research. Firstly, I briefly discuss how a stronger focus on dialogism can provide a reimagined view of women's friendships, which takes into account the need to track constraints, but also shine light on 'creative becomings' (Pedwell, 2017). Secondly, I move on to providing other suggestions about how thinking dialogically could more centrally inform the current feminist research agenda.

Reframing the topic of this thesis in explicitly dialogic terms would position the ebb and flow of friendship ideologies within the field of personal life as the unfolding of a perpetual argument, where all such arguments represent sense-making activities, and have counters to which they operate against implicitly. Crucial to my discussion is Billig's (1996) conception of competing ideologies taking two distinct forms. Firstly, some are hegemonic. Although the hegemony of such forces is incomplete, these discourses 'push towards unity, agreement and monologue' (Shotter & Billig, 1998, p.16). Describing neoliberalism and postfeminism in these terms is congruent with their characterisation as capable of engulfing discourses that push against and contradict them. Secondly however, in operation at the same time, are 'living' ideologies, akin to the sense-making affective practices about intimate life that I identify in my analyses. These smaller fragments of meaning-making are part of local culture, and although they still constitute agreement in the form of common sense, they seek 'multiplicity, disagreement and heteroglossia' (Shotter & Billig, 1998, p.16). Because the power of canonical discourses, or discursive regimes, is distributed, it is always in constant tension with living ideologies (Maybin, 2001). Although postfeminism maintains its hegemonic status, the complex flux and jostling of localised feminisms and postfeminisms are emblematic of these flows. Gill (2016) details some of the splitting and fracturing of postfeminism as she persuasively argues for the concept's continued relevance, elucidating how different forms of feminism sprout up and around sexism and neoliberalism, resisting them, whilst also being

intertwined with them. Dialogism is useful for reminding ourselves how feminism ‘is co-opted, *selectively taken up*, derided, and entangled in complex ways’, but not necessarily in retreat (Gill 2016, p.621, my emphasis).

Significantly then, for this reparative-leaning reformulation of women’s relationality in a postfeminist era, everyday ideologies are open and provisional. They are liable to swaying, through our internal dialogues (using shared discourse), or when reading autobiographical accounts across popular media, or in interaction with others, such as with friends. Perhaps also, because friendship holds a marginal place in the ideological field of care and intimacy, there are more opportunities for dominant discourses to become refracted, split and diversified, more than in other fields of practice. For instance, Renold and Ringrose (2011, p.404) propose that friendship interactions are key sites of “‘feeling’ [a] way through, and sometimes disrupting through new molecular becomings in... everyday lives” for their young participants. Also speaking to the example of friendship as a key point of tension between the hegemonic and margins, Rawlins (1989) conceives friendship as occupying a ‘double agent position’ where the uninstitutionalised quality of friendship allows members to *either* emphasise *or* downplay their involvement in institutional forces. Similarly, over the course of this research, I have come to think of friendship as flexible in the sense that sometimes it acts as an insulating barrier sitting between discursive formations, where dominant discourses become stifled. At other times, friendships operate as a conductive fabric, emulating, and co-aligning with hegemonic forces. Like in a television soap opera, friendship relations garner much screen time, but their role is predominantly to aid the development of the main plots. Although attention remains on the main characters of the plots, friend characters often make the plots possible, in whichever direction they flow.

What relevance does dialogism have for re-thinking agency more broadly, particularly in the postfeminist context? Firstly, as I have mentioned, analytic tools that can aid in the identification of ‘local’ instantiations of postfeminism (or otherwise), such as discursive affective practices and psycho-discursive practices, may be generative opportunities for tracking reclamations, resistances and revised re-citations. The current intensity of the dilemmas and contradictions women are forced to attempt to reconcile creates difficulties and emotional labour for sure. But at the same time, contradictions represent movement. In Billig’s (1996 p.53) words, ‘the sound of argument is the sound of thinking’. Although current research on proliferating and morphing forms of postfeminism largely points to trajectories of intensifying neoliberal tendencies, future research which seeks out the middle ranges of agency, which produces context-specific analyses, may offer glimpses of alternative modes of being. At the beginning of this research I did not expect to be claiming women’s communal television or film watching as resisting postfeminism, but

constructions of the marginal spaces of women's low-key hang out, do-nothing zones were fertile grounds for manifestations of relative empowerment.

Another useful heuristic device for thinking about how discordant ideas may inform practice at any one time is Raymond Williams' 'structures of feelings' (1961). Williams posits that the common sense of a particular time is solid to a degree (i.e. there is coherence to it), but is never total, with newer formations always emerging. Although postfeminism characterises the current period, Williams reminds us that flux is constant. Perhaps the high prevalence of contradicting cultural pushes suggests that we have entered a period of time in which there is more overlapping of the structures of feeling than in previous eras? If this is the case, it may be even more important to begin the process of untangling discordant ideas at the local level. We can use specificity of context as a tool for helping us understand how ideas are being used and to what ends, by questioning which discursive formations they might be linked to.

Secondly, to borrow again from Sedgwick, and to pick up on points I made in Chapter Three, it is important to treat both our analytic objects and ourselves as analysts as potential agents for change. While the polyphony of often contradictory voices that make up postfeminism make for a distinctly difficult setting in which women must maintain a sense of coherence, critical feminists may be consoled simply in the knowledge that contradiction is constant, through immersion in a living tradition of argumentation (Billig, 1996). The motifs of coping, struggling along, managing used by research participants caught in the webs of postfeminism are pervasive across this research, and are noted elsewhere (Gill & Kanai, 2018; Kanai, 2017c; McRobbie, 2002). But our participants, on the whole, *do* cope and manage, even as they struggle along to the next appointment/job/date/school pick-up. While we, as analysts, remain alert to injustices, how can we ensure we study them in ways that are sustaining, ignite creativity, and remain open to possibilities? For me, writing this thesis has meant, increasingly, making commitments to finding ways that avoid over-determining postfeminism, and pre-empting its political effects.

Thirdly, I wonder what further opportunities for exploring everyday practices of postfeminism there might be orienting towards spaces that are marginal to postfeminism, in everyday fields of practice that do not obviously speak to issues of sexism, misogyny or (post)feminist concerns. To explain this point, it is useful to retrace some of my steps regarding the practice-approach basis of this thesis, and David Morgan's (1996, 2011) 'family practices' concept, which I covered in Chapter Two. Morgan argues that when taking a practice approach, what is being studied is the relationships between the main object of study and other areas of practice. To study gender, for example, may mean starting out from another social phenomenon, such as social class, employment, ethnicity, or religion etc. Although in this study, I did start out with my main object of study at the centre,

women's friendships, the research was soon re-oriented to asking how friendship became implicated in the social processes of a hierarchically organised sphere of relational life, psy knowledges and a postfeminist sensibility. The advantage of this strategy is that attention is drawn to the merging, mingling, or assembling of everyday knowledges from different social domains, and the possibilities of new combinations of meanings that come with it. I think this is why a study of friendship has been fruitful for investigating the neoliberal subjectivities; as Todd May (2012) points out, in common sense terms, friendship and neoliberalism are posited as opposites. This is also congruent with a reparative strategy of exploring side-on, rather than head-on. What areas might there be to explore where postfeminist sensibilities are put to use in unexpected ways, and if a postfeminist sensibility runs deep, what concomitant feminisms might be dialogically opposing them?

Conclusions

I will close by suggesting that there is an ethical dimension to exploring the margins of our objects of study, whether they be friendship, postfeminism, heterorelationality, psy-complex, or any other social justice topic.

Only if we are prepared to change our hierarchically ordered... ways, and to dialogically balance them with ones of a more... relational kind, can we ever hope to arrive at a psychology properly respectful of the 'little details' of people's 'inner lives'. (Shotter & Billig, 1998, p.36)

A dialogic view of social life and social psychology reminds us why it is important to not lose sight of the openness of ideologies as they move between the margins and centre. Dialogism engenders relational analyses, between the centre and the margins. When carried out at the level of the everyday, dialogism captures the modes in which we spend most of our lives — routine negotiations where we are relatively empowered. In this thesis I have sought to, not just investigate the 'little details' of the 'inner lives' of women-friends, but to acknowledge the felt experience of them. It was my aim to bring into view the affective meaning-making carried out by women friends at the level of everyday life, through systematic study of situated practice. I have emphasised the value of investigating personalised affective practices, but have shown how they are particularly useful for examining the patterning of local instantiations of shared, global discourses. This research has been oriented to asking how friendship is defined collaboratively, but through focusing on my participants' own meaning-making.

My empirical analyses have been guided by asking how friendship could be used to study the contemporary patterns of subjectivity and power, at a time of demographic change and a rapidly shifting scene of gender politics. Through the three empirical chapters of this thesis, I have brought

into view some of the smaller fragments of meanings about women's friendships. This has allowed me to delineate some of the overarching thrusts of this rather contradictory social field. Despite a commitment to plurality and an openness to the possibilities created in small disruptions, this thesis speaks to the great amount of emotional labour involved in doing feminine relationality today, and the unacknowledged status of that labour. In addition however, I have illuminated some of the pleasures, along with the pitfalls, of instrumentalising the self. The role friends play in each other's ongoing self-transformations is highly valued, but sometimes friends accept that to just 'be' is enough, and a simple pleasure to be delighted in. As well as sketching out the hegemonic and marginal, I have also pointed to missing discourses, notably, those which would give women freedoms to express passion and intensity in their friendships.

Finally, with a focus on the everyday accomplishment of social life, this thesis illuminates the special status women construct for their female friends. Although carried through ideologies of intimacy that are subordinated to hegemonic, psy-complex versions, women construct their 'deep' friendships as a site of relief, a rarity when neoliberal modes seem so entrenched. In this vein, my reflections upon the empirical analyses have prompted me to suggest, not a re-thinking of our conceptualising of agency, but a re-orientation of our tendencies. Gender politics in the current period, in all its complexity, looks set to offer ample and/or readings. I am hopeful that others take up the opportunity to make studies of women's friendships part of them.

Appendices

Appendix A - Vignettes and questions (distributed via Qualtrics software)

Instructions

To follow are five short fictional scenarios depicting a situation or issue in which friends may find themselves. After each scenario, there are some prompts where you provide your responses about what is happening in the scenario. Most people spend about 5-10 minutes reading each scenario and responding, but please feel free to spend more time writing a longer response if you prefer. We would expect a minimum of three to five sentences for each response you give.

It is important to note that there are no right or wrong responses – we are looking for your opinions, feelings and views. You don't need to think too much or worry about whether it's the best response, just write what comes to mind. Feel free to be creative in providing your responses where you think it's appropriate. Please write in full sentences.

Scenario 1

Chun and Laila met at university and have been friends for five years. Since then, they've always spent a good proportion of their evenings and weekends together. But these days, Laila keeps inviting a new friend from work, Aroha, to join them. Chun wishes it wasn't the three of them all the time and is thinking of saying something to Laila about it.

Please think about and respond to the following:

- What are some reasons why Chun wishes it wasn't the three of them all the time?
- What might Chun say to Laila?
- Should Laila be doing anything differently?

Scenario 2 (Two versions allocated randomly)

Version A – from point of view of friend in 'serious' relationship

Chun, Laila and Aroha ended up all being friends. In fact, Chun and Aroha also became close friends too. They bonded over similar experiences they had when they came out of long-term relationships at the same time, and supporting each other through it. And since then, they've been able to share their experiences of being single and dating.

Over the past few months Chun's relationship with someone she has been dating has been getting serious. Although neither Chun nor Aroha have mentioned it, they're both feeling that Chun's serious romantic relationship might change their friendship. Chun has noticed one change already – she has been avoiding talking to Aroha about her new relationship.

Questions to respond to:

- Are Chun and Aroha right to be worried about their friendship changing? Please explain your response.
- Why might Chun avoid talking to Aroha about her new relationship?
- What might be the impacts be of Chun not talking to Aroha about her new relationship?

Version B – from point of view of single friend

Chun, Laila and Aroha ended up all being very close friends. In fact, Chun and Aroha also became close friends too. They bonded over similar experiences they had when they came out of long-term relationships at the same time, and supporting each other through it. And since then, they've been able to share their experiences of being single and dating.

Over the past few months Chun's relationship with someone she has been dating has been getting serious. Although neither Chun nor Aroha have mentioned it, they're both feeling that Chun's serious romantic relationship might change their friendship. Also, Aroha has noticed that she doesn't feel comfortable talking to Chun about her dating experiences anymore.

Questions to respond to:

- Are Chun and Aroha right to be worried about their friendship changing? Please explain your response.
- Why might Aroha feel uncomfortable sharing details about her dating relationships with Chun now?
- What might the impacts be of Aroha not talking to Chun about her dating relationships?

Scenario 3 (Two versions allocated randomly)

Version A - from the new mother's point of view

Chun and her partner now have a baby. Laila and Aroha came to visit Chun fairly regularly immediately after the baby was born, but six months on, Chun is finding it difficult to arrange meet ups with her best friends. Chun imagined that some things would change with her friendships after becoming a mum, but she didn't expect things to change quite so much.

Questions to respond to:

- In what ways might Chun's having a baby have impacted on her friendships?
- If Chun were to talk to her friends about the recent changes, what would she say?
- What expectations should friends that have recently become parents have (or not have) of their friends?

Version B - from the friends' points of view

Chun and her partner now have a baby. Laila and Aroha went to visit Chun fairly regularly immediately after the baby was born, but they don't go around so often now. The conversations always seem to lead back to the baby. Laila and Aroha don't feel that they can have frank discussions about what is going on in their lives with Chun anymore.

Questions to respond to:

- Are Laila's and Aroha's perspectives understandable? Please explain your response.
- What should Laila and Aroha do?
- What expectations should friends have (or not have) of friends that have recently become parents?

Scenario 4

Chun's child is now four years old, and the three friends continue to spend a fair amount of time together. However, over the last year or two Chun has found herself increasingly frustrated with Laila, who continues to be the life and soul of any party and never takes anything too seriously. Before, Chun admired Laila for her abilities to make jokes about everything, but now she now feels frustrated about not being able to have a serious, adult conversation with her. Also, Chun is finding it difficult to watch Laila make decisions without thinking through the consequences. Chun is getting to the point where she can't really be around Laila.

- How should Chun deal with this situation?
- In what ways might difficulties between Chun and Laila impact Aroha?
- Would it be possible for Aroha to help? Please explain your response.

Scenario 5

Aroha and Laila have now been close friends for nine years. They still socialise together regularly and they share a house with two other flatmates. Aroha has just started seeing someone romantically but she's much closer to Laila, and they often talk about how great it is living under the same roof.

When Laila came home today she told Aroha that she had been offered a job overseas, and asked Aroha if she wanted to move overseas as well.

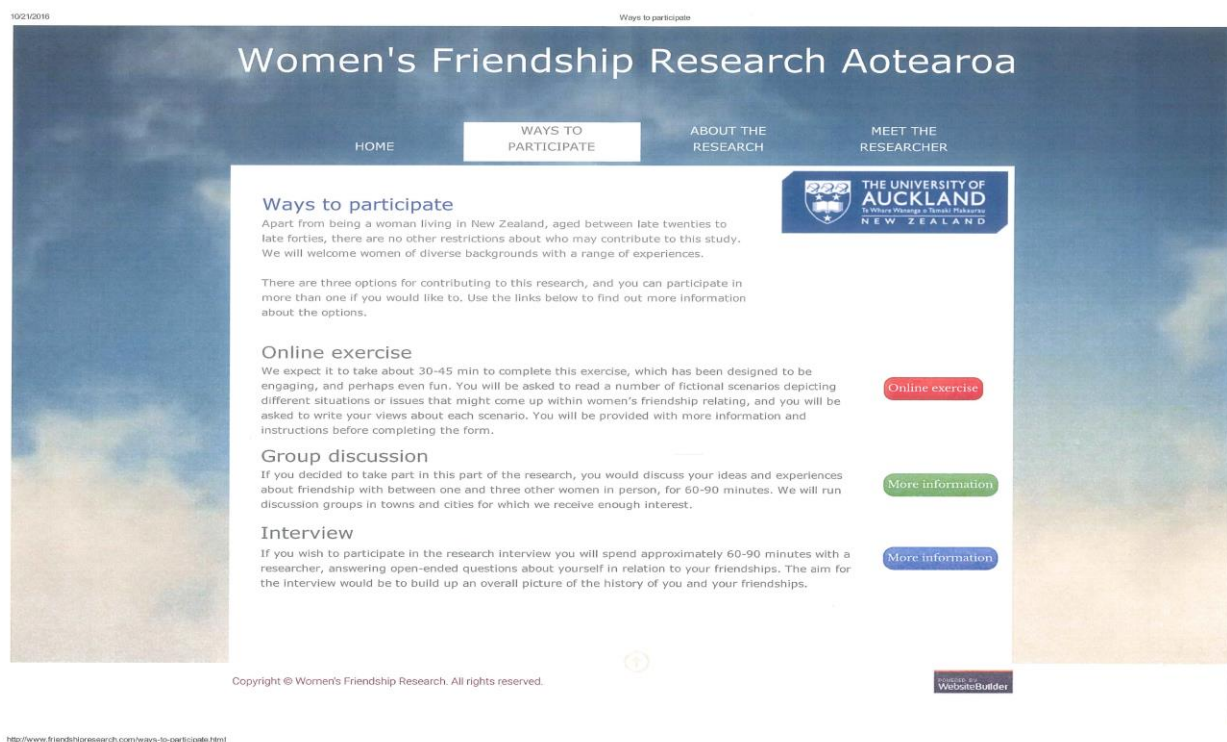
- Why would Laila ask Aroha about moving overseas?
- How do you think Aroha would respond?
- What do you think happens over the next couple of years for the friends?

Appendix B - Screenshots of website used for recruitment

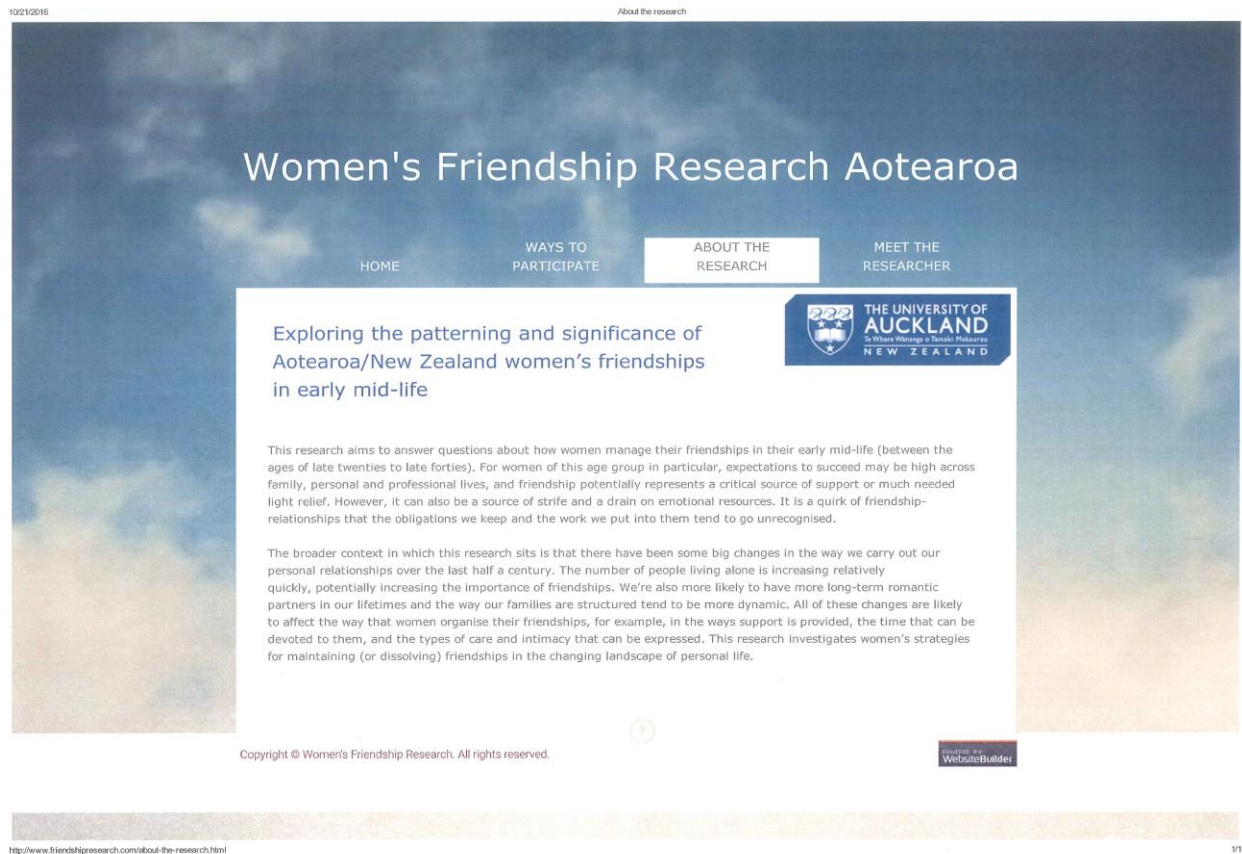
The home page of the website (1 of 4):



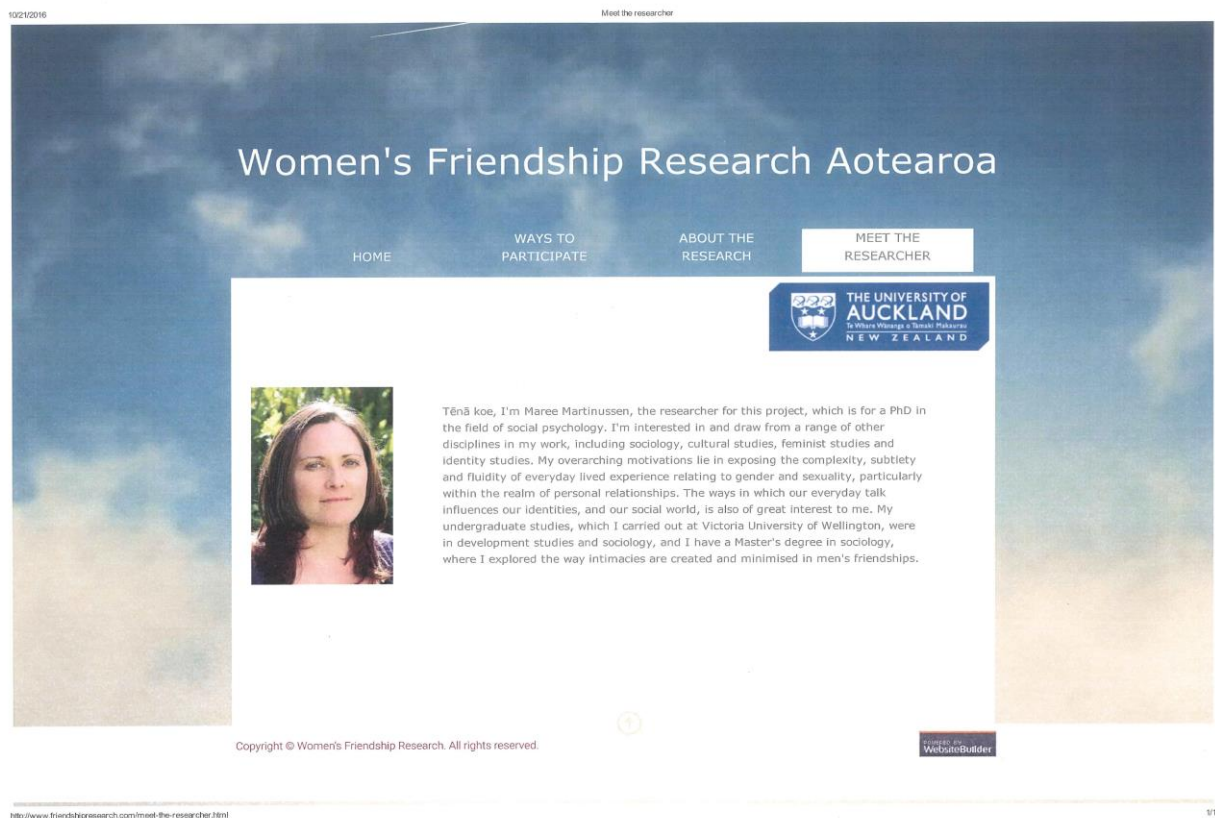
The 'ways to participate' section of the website (2 of 4):



The 'about the research' section of the website (3 of 4):



The 'meet the researcher' section of the website (4 of 4):



Appendix C – Request for demographic data for vignette participants

Demographic information

It would be useful if you could provide some information about your background. This allows us to say something about the diversity of people that participated in the research.

How old are you?

How long have you lived in Aotearoa/NZ?

How would you describe your race/cultural background/ethnicity? (Please feel free to identify your iwi, hapū, or any other ties you consider important to your identity, if you wish).

How would you describe your social class (e.g. working class, middle class)?

Have you always described your gender identity as you do now?

Invitation to take part in further research

If you would like us to send you information about other ways of participating in this research, please enter your email address below.

As part of this research project, we hope to speak to women in person about their friendship experiences through interviews, or small group discussions. These will take place in main urban centres of Aotearoa/New Zealand only, and confirmation of research locations will depend on interest received. However interviews could be carried out using Skype if meeting in person is not possible. Your email address will not be linked to the other responses you have provided.

Thanks for participating in this research, your responses are valuable to us.

Appendix D – Participant information for vignette participants



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University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand

Welcome to the online research exercise for the project 'Exploring the patterning and significance of Aotearoa/New Zealand women's friendships in early mid-life'

This exercise should take you about 30 - 45 minutes to complete. Women aged late twenties through to late forties are invited to take part in this research. Your responses are anonymous and the exercise is designed to be engaging.

Researcher introduction

I'm Maree Martinussen, and I'm carrying out this research for the fulfilment of a doctoral degree in Psychology. I am the primary contact for general information about this research (m.martinussen@auckland.ac.nz or tel: 09 373 7599 ext. 82866). My supervisors are Margaret Wetherell and Virginia Braun, whose contact information you can find at the bottom of the page.

Purpose

Friendships form an important part of all of our lives, but compared to romantic and familial relations, friendships are explored relatively little within the social sciences. This research seeks to address this gap. We will be exploring the everyday understandings and practices of friendship for women in Aotearoa/New Zealand, within the age range of late twenties through to late forties. If you take part in this research, you will be asked for your ideas about the best ways to deal with situations that women friends may encounter.

What's required of you if you decide to take part

If you participate in the research you will be asked to read a number of fictional scenarios depicting different situations and issues that might come up within women's friendship relating. There will be 2-4 questions for you to answer following each scenario. There is also a different sort of exercise where we provide the beginning of a story, and then you are asked to complete the story.

Anonymity and participation

Your response will be completely anonymous - the software (Qualtrics) delivers the data without revealing who submitted it. At the end of the questionnaire you will be asked to provide some demographic information (age, ethnicity, sexuality etc.). Although having this information is helpful to us, you are not obligated to respond to these questions.

You are not obliged to participate, and there are no consequences for non-participation. However, you may appreciate having the space to think about how you view friendships and to contribute to a study that highlights the importance of women's friendships in contemporary society. You may skip a question or withdraw from the survey at any time. However, submission of your responses will be taken as consent to participate.

What will happen to the information you provide

Results from this research may be published in a doctoral thesis or academic journals, or presented at academic conferences.

Data Retention

Your response will be kept for six years, and then it will be destroyed. Electronic versions will be stored on a password protected University of Auckland computer or hard drive. Paper versions will be kept in a locked cabinet in a secure room within a University of Auckland office.

I agree and I wish to

[Continue to the survey](#)

Contact numbers:

Researcher	Supervisor	Supervisor	Head of School
Maree Martinussen School of Psychology University of Auckland m.martinussen@auckland.ac.nz 09 373 7599 ext. 82866	Professor Margaret Wetherell School of Psychology University of Auckland m.wetherell@auckland.ac.nz 09 923 2933	Dr Virginia Braun School of Psychology University of Auckland v.braun@auckland.ac.nz 09 923 7561	Professor Will Hayward School of Psychology University of Auckland w.hayward@auckland.ac.nz 09 923 8516

For any concerns regarding ethical issues you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 0909 373-7599 extn. 83711. Email: ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on xx 2015 for three years, Reference Number 016328

Appendix E – Form requesting demographic data for group discussion and interview participants

Participant Demographics Form



Research: Friendship practices of Aotearoa/New Zealand women in early mid-life

How old are you?		
How long have you lived in New Zealand?		
What is your highest educational qualification?		
Are you currently employed?	Yes	No
If so, what is/are your current occupation(s)?		
How would you describe your social class (e.g. working class, middle class)?		
How would you describe your race/cultural background/ethnicity?		
Please feel free to identify your iwi, hapū, or any other ties you consider important to your identity, if you wish.		
Do you consider yourself to be differently-abled/disabled?	Yes	No
If so, how would you describe your disability?		
Do you consider yourself to be religious?	Yes	No
If so, how would you describe your religion?		
How would you describe your gender identity?		
Have you previously defined your gender in other ways? If so, how?		
How would you describe your sexuality?		
Have you previously defined your sexuality in other ways? If so, how?		
How would you describe your relationship status? (please circle)		
Single		
Partnered/Married/Civil Union		
Separated/Divorced/Civil Union Dissolved		
Other: _____		
Are you a parent/caregiver?	Yes	No

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 4 December 2015,
for three years: Reference Number 016328

Appendix F – Participant information for group discussions



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University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand

Participant information sheet for discussion-based exercise

Title of Project: Exploring friendship for women of Aotearoa/New Zealand in early mid-life

Researchers:

I'm Maree Martinussen, and I'm carrying out this research for the fulfilment of a doctoral degree in Psychology. I am the primary contact for general information about this research, and I will be facilitating the discussion-based exercise sessions. These are my contact details: m.martinussen@auckland.ac.nz or tel: 09 373 7599 ext. 82866. My supervisors are Margaret Wetherell and Virginia Braun, whose contact information you can find at the bottom of the page.

To the Participant

Friendships form an important part of social life, but compared to romantic and familial relations, friendships are explored relatively little within the field of Psychology. This research seeks to address this gap.

Women aged late twenties through to late forties who live in New Zealand are invited to participate in this study. The aim of this research is to explore everyday understandings of friendship for women in their early mid-life and to build up a picture of what the culture of women's friendship is for this group. For example, I will be interested in your thoughts about what makes a good (or bad) friend, and what some of the differences are between the categories of 'friends' versus 'very close friends'. You will be asked for your ideas about the best ways to deal with situations that women friends may encounter, particularly those relating to changes in other parts of personal lives, such as romantic relationships and family life.

If you wish to participate in the research you will discuss your ideas and experiences of friendship with one, two or three other participants. The materials used to prompt discussions may be in the form of discussion-based activities, and I aim for the topics to be engaging and relevant for participants. The research will take approximately 60-90 minutes of your time, and will take place at a time that is convenient to you. If you are Auckland based it may take place at the City Campus of the University of Auckland. If you are not Auckland based, it is likely that a room will be booked in a university campus, or in a community centre.

Your discussions will be recorded, with a video and audio device. Some or all of the recorded discussions may be transcribed (converted into text). If the recordings are transcribed, you will be allocated a pseudonym (you may choose this if you wish). The data will remain confidential, with only the investigators of this study having access to them (except that the data may be transcribed by someone other than a researcher, but your confidentiality will be guaranteed). The recordings will be stored securely on password protected devices, and any printed transcriptions will be stored in a locked cabinet in a locked room on the University of Auckland campus. The recordings and transcriptions will be kept for six years, and will then be

destroyed. Results from this research may be published in a doctoral thesis or academic journals or presented at academic conferences. However, your identity will never be revealed or associated with the data. You will be asked if you would like to receive a summary of aims and results from the research when the research is complete.

It will be important for participants of group discussions to be sensitive to the information provided by other participants, and for all participants to agree that discussions will not relayed outside the research environment. As such, although we cannot guarantee confidentiality, it is our intent that discussions remain confidential. Withdrawing information you have provided after the group discussion may not be possible, as it may risk compromising the integrity of the data from other participants who do not wish to withdraw from the research. Although you may not be able to withdraw all of your data, if you have particular concerns, you are encouraged to let the researcher know, and efforts will be made to ensure certain material is not used in the analysis. Further, if you believe that some of the data may risk your identity becoming known, we can work with you to avoid this by changing some of the details of your account.

We don't anticipate any particular risks to you with participating in this research. However, there is always the potential for research participation to raise uncomfortable and distressing issues. If this is the case, we will work with you and discuss options for seeking professional help. If you decide during the research collection that you do not want to discuss a particular topic, you are free to decline. Or, if you no longer wish to take part in the data collection, you may leave the room.

Contact numbers:

Researcher	Supervisor	Supervisor	Head of School
Maree Martinussen School of Psychology University of Auckland m.martinussen@auckland.ac.nz 09 373 7599 ext. 82866	Professor Margaret Wetherall School of Psychology University of Auckland m.wetherall@auckland.ac.nz 09 923 2933	Dr Virginia Braun School of Psychology University of Auckland v.braun@auckland.ac.nz 09 923 7561	Professor Will Hayward School of Psychology University of Auckland w.hayward@auckland.ac.nz 09 923 8516

For any concerns regarding ethical issues you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 0909 373-7599 extn. 83711. Email: ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 4 December 2015 for three years,
Reference Number 016328

Appendix G – Consent form for group discussion participants

SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY
Faculty of Science



Human Sciences Building
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Auckland, New Zealand
Email: m.wetherell@auckland.ac.nz
www.psych.auckland.ac.nz

Consent form for discussion-based exercise

This form will be held for a period of six years

University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand

Title of Project: Exploring friendship practices for Aotearoa/New Zealand women in early mid-life

Researchers:

- Maree Martinussen (Doctoral Candidate), School of Psychology, University of Auckland (phone: 09 373 7599 ext. 82866, E-mail: m.martinussen@auckland.ac.nz.)
- Professor Margaret Wetherell, School of Psychology, University of Auckland (phone: 09 923 2933. E-mail: m.wetherell@auckland.ac.nz)
- Associate Professor Virginia Braun, School of Psychology, University of Auckland (phone: 09 923 7561. E-mail: v.braun@auckland.ac.nz)

I have read the participant information sheet and understand the nature of the research project. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research and have them answered adequately. I understand that my participation in the project is entirely voluntary.

- I agree to participate in this research project.
- I agree for my discussions with other research participants to be audio and video recorded.
- I understand that I have the right to stop my participation at any point during data collection
- I understand that due to the conversational nature of the research, I cannot withdraw my data completely, but that I may request for particular parts of it to be changed or not used in publications, which the researcher will endeavour to comply with.
- I agree to not disclose conversations that occur within the group discussion elsewhere.
- I understand that anonymised extracts of what I say may be used in research outputs, including published work.
- I understand that if I submit my demographic details they will be collated and reported in research outputs.
- I understand that my data will be stored securely and will be destroyed after six years.

I **would / would not** like to be notified at about the availability of a summary report of the preliminary outcomes of the research (please circle).

Email address for notification: _____

If the transcribed recordings are published a pseudonym will be used to protect your anonymity. Please indicate here if you have a preferred name you would like to be used. A pseudonym will be allocated for you if you leave this space blank.

Name _____

Signature _____ Date _____

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 4 DECEMBER 2013 FOR THREE YEARS, REFERENCE NUMBER 000000

Appendix H – Participant information sheet for interviews



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www.psych.auckland.ac.nz

University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand

Participant information sheet for interview

Title of Project: Exploring friendship practices for Aotearoa/New Zealand women in early mid-life

Researcher introduction

I'm Maree Martinussen, and I'm carrying out this research for the fulfilment of a doctoral degree in Psychology. I am the primary contact for general information about this research, and I will be organising and carrying out the interviews. These are my contact details: m.martinussen@auckland.ac.nz or tel: 09 373 7599 ext. 82866. My supervisors are Margaret Wetherell and Virginia Braun, whose contact information you can find at the bottom of the page.

To the Participant

Friendships form an important part of all of our lives, but compared to romantic and familial relations, friendships are explored relatively little within the field of Psychology. This research seeks to address this gap.

The aim of this research is to explore understandings of friendship for women in their early mid-life. I'm interested in hearing about your experiences within your current friendships, but those in the past also. I would also like to have your thoughts of what kind of friend you are, and how previous experiences of friendship, or understandings of yourself might inform your views about friendship.

If you wish to participate in the research interview you will spend approximately 60-90 minutes with me, answering open-ended questions about yourself in relation to your friendships. In a way, the questions are there to enable you to tell a story about how you have become the friend you are today, or perhaps a history of you as a friend. The research will take place at a time and location convenient to you and refreshments will be provided. If you are Auckland based it may take place at the City Campus of the University of Auckland. If you are not Auckland based, it is likely that a room will be booked in a university campus, or in a community centre. However, if meeting is not possible, the interview may be conducted using Skype.

The interview will be recorded, with a video and an audio device. Some or all of the recorded discussions may be transcribed (converted into text). If the recordings are transcribed, you will be allocated a pseudonym (you may choose this if you wish). The data will remain confidential, with only the investigators of this study having access to them (except that the data may be transcribed by someone other than a researcher, but your confidentiality will be guaranteed). The recordings and transcriptions will be kept for six years, and will then be destroyed. The recordings will be stored securely on password protected devices, and any printed transcriptions will be stored in a locked cabinet in a locked room on the University of Auckland campus. Results from this research may be published in a doctoral thesis or academic journals or presented at academic conferences. However, your identity will never be revealed or associated with the data. You will be asked if you would like a copy of the transcription, and if there are any factual inaccuracies, or, if you think some information risks your identity becoming apparent, you can request that the transcript be edited. You will be required to confirm if amendments are required within one month from receiving the transcript.

You will be asked if you would like to receive a summary of aims and results from the research when the research is complete.

I don't anticipate any particular risks to you with participating in this research. However, there is always the potential for research participation to raise uncomfortable and distressing issues. If you decide during the research collection that you do not want to discuss a particular topic, you are free to decline. You can ask for the recording devices to be turned off at any time without giving a reason, and/or you can withdraw from the interview. You can withdraw from the research up to one month after the interview. If the interview raised distressing issues we will work with you and discuss options for seeking professional help if necessary.

Contact numbers:

Researcher	Supervisor	Supervisor	Head of School
Maree Martinussen School of Psychology University of Auckland m.martinussen@auckland.ac.nz 09 373 7599 ext. 82866	Professor Margaret Wetherell School of Psychology University of Auckland m.wetherell@auckland.ac.nz 09 923 2933	Dr Virginia Braun School of Psychology University of Auckland v.braun@auckland.ac.nz 09 923 7561	Professor Will Hayward School of Psychology University of Auckland w.hayward@auckland.ac.nz 09 923 8516

For any concerns regarding ethical issues you may contact the Chair, The University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee, The University of Auckland, Research Office, Private Bag 92019, Auckland 1142. Telephone 0909 373-7599 extn. 83711. Email: ro-ethics@auckland.ac.nz

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 4 December 2015 for three years,
Reference Number 016328

Appendix I – Consent form for interviews

SCHOOL OF PSYCHOLOGY
Faculty of Science



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Email: m.wetherell@auckland.ac.nz
www.psych.auckland.ac.nz

Consent form for interview

This form will be held for a period of six years

University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand

Title of Project: Exploring friendship practices of Aotearoa/New Zealand women in early mid-life

Researchers:

- Maree Martinussen (Doctoral Candidate), School of Psychology, University of Auckland (phone: 09 373 7599 ext. 82866, E-mail: m.martinussen@auckland.ac.nz.)
- Professor Margaret Wetherell, School of Psychology, University of Auckland (phone: 09 923 2933. E-mail: m.wetherell@auckland.ac.nz)
- Associate Professor Virginia Braun, School of Psychology, University of Auckland (phone: 09 923 7561. E-mail: v.braun@auckland.ac.nz)

To the participant

I have read the participant information sheet and understand the nature of the research project. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions about the research and have them answered adequately. I understand that my participation in the project is entirely voluntary.

- I agree to participate in this research project.
- I agree for my discussions with a researcher to be audio and video recorded.
- I understand that I have the right to stop my participation at any point during data collection (the interview), and withdraw part or all of the information I have provided up to one month after the research activity.
- I understand that anonymised extracts of what I say may be used in research outputs, including published work.
- I understand that if I submit my demographic details they will be collated and reported in research outputs.
- I understand that my data will be stored securely and will be destroyed after six years.
- If I request a copy of the transcript, I confirm that I will make any suggested amendments within one month of receiving it.

I would / would not like to be notified at about the availability of a summary report of the preliminary outcomes of the research. (Please circle.)

I would / would not like a copy of the interview transcript. (Please circle.)

Email address: _____

If the transcribed recordings are published a pseudonym will be used to protect your anonymity. Please indicate here if you have a preferred name you would like to be used. A pseudonym will be allocated for you if you leave this space blank. _____

Name _____ Signature _____

Date _____

APPROVED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF AUCKLAND HUMAN SUBJECTS ETHICS COMMITTEE ON 4 DECEMBER 2015 FOR THREE YEARS: REFERENCE NUMBER 016328

Appendix J – Transcriber confidentiality form



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University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand

TRANSCRIBER CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Exploring Aotearoa/New Zealand Women's Friendships in Early Midlife

Researcher: Maree Martinussen

Supervisor: Margaret Wetherell, Virginia Braun

I agree to transcribe the audio-recordings recordings for the above research project. I understand that the information contained within them is confidential and must not be disclosed to, or discussed with, anyone other than the researcher and his/her supervisor(s).

Name:

Organisation (if applicable):

Signature:

Date:

Approved by the University of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 4 December 2015 for three years, reference Number 061328

Appendix K – Participant information on counselling and support services



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University of Auckland
Private Bag 92019
Auckland, New Zealand

Information on counselling services, for participants of the research on women's friendship in early mid-life

As was noted in other information for participants, we are not expecting that your participation in this research will be distressing for you, or to bring up issues that are upsetting to you. However, because it is likely that you will talk about your personal relationships, and your past experiences within them, there is always a risk that we touch on a topic that is distressing. In the unlikely event that this happens, we will try to work with you to ensure that you find a professional support person to help you.

We have put together a list of organisations that may be contacted for support in case participating in this research triggers feelings that you want to talk to someone about.

Organisation	Description	Contact details
Lifeline	Lifeline provide 24/7 telephone counselling support, and may be able to assist in face to face counselling	Website: http://www.lifeline.org.nz Helpline: 0800 543 354
Home and Family Counselling	Home and Family Counselling are a community-based service providing professional counselling to individuals, couples and families in Auckland.	Website: http://homeandfamily.org.nz
The Samaritans	Samaritans offer non-judgemental confidential support to anyone in emotional distress and are available 24/7	Website: www.samaritans.org.nz Helpline: 0800 726 666
The Mental Health Foundation	The Mental Health Foundation doesn't provide services directly, but it is a great resource for finding some help. They have an extensive list for helplines for organisations for particular groups/specialist areas.	Website: http://www.mentalhealth.org.nz Telephone: 09 623 4812

This research has been approved by the University Of Auckland Human Participants Ethics Committee on 4 December 2015, for three years, Reference Number 016328

Appendix L – Question guide for group discussions

Friendships with women

- How are women's friendships with each other unique, compared to other types of personal relationships?
 - What do women get out of friendships with other women?
 - Are women's friendships with each other different to their friendships with men? How?
- On thinking about what makes a good friend, are some people 'good' at being friends, and that it's more related to personality or 'skill', or, is it more about particular connections?
- I think there's a general understanding that you don't have to like all of your friends' qualities, and that we're often happy to overlook some of their negative aspects.
 - What are some of the things we're happy to overlook?
 - What are things that you can't overlook? When is it that you would realise that it's been taken a step too far?

Change in friendship

- There might be periods of our lives when we feel closer to particular friends, and then we go through a period of being less close to them. How does that happen?
 - What does being close to friends feel like?
 - How do you deal with it if you're not getting much out of a friendship, and you haven't felt very close for ages?
- Are friendships more important at certain points in life?
 - When are women likely to feel closest to friends?
 - At what points do friendships seem less important?
- Are there particular times in people's lives, perhaps types of events, which have the effect of changing someone's friendships in drastic ways?

Doing of friendship – everyday stuff

- When you're getting to know someone, what are some of the things that signal that you're moving into being friends, rather than acquaintances?
- Some friends might see each other daily, others weekly or monthly, or even less frequently. How does that tend to get worked out?
 - Does seeing/communicating with someone frequently indicate closeness?
 - What are the risks and benefits of spending lots of time or not much time together?
- Friends that don't get to see each other very often might still really value those friendships. What do women in those friendships get out of them?
- What are some considerations when thinking about what a 'good' number of friends is?
 - Can people have too many friends?

Doing of friendship in context – other relationships

- How might friendships be different for women who are in a sexual/partnered relationship versus single/unpartnered women
 - Are the friendships of single women different?
- What about motherhood... Do you think friendships those that are mothers versus non-mothers are different?
- Some women might describe themselves as good friends with their partner? How are those friendships different from other friends?
 - What about friendships with a family member. How are they different?

Closing

- Is there anything else you'd like to add?
- Any questions about the research?

Appendix M – Question guide for interviews

What part friendship plays/played in life

- Are you able to tell me a bit about what friendship means to you at this point in your life? Important?
- Able to carve up friendship into phases, into different parts? Are there obvious shifts (geographic, 'type' of friends, partner you had)?
- Do you think the 'type' of friend you are, or have been able to be, has changed throughout your life? Can think of a particular friendship if that makes it easier.

Friendships as easy/good

- Recent good experiences? Specific times if possible.
- Times in the past when had very good experiences?
- Times when friends have been very important?
- Can you think of times or situations where a friend has made a really big impact on your life? Perhaps even changed your life?
- Do you have a sense with some friends that you'll be friends for a very long time?
- Can you think of a time when you hadn't known someone for long but you were able to tell that the friendship was going to be a really close one? What happened?

Friendships as difficult/bad

- Recent experiences you've had when a friendship has been difficult?
- Difficult experiences in the past to do with friends?
- Do you think it would still be just as stressful/upsetting if you encountered the same problems now, or would you handle the situation differently?
- Can you tell me about some times when other people being around or involved have made your friendships difficult in any way?
- Can you tell me about some times when you've really missed particular friends in your life?
- Are you able to tell me about some times when you stopped being friends with someone?
- Lots of people would say that friends simply come and go. If you stop being friends with someone in the future, what might some of the likely causes be and how will you deal with it?
- Have you had experiences when there's been an imbalance, and either you or a friend has felt or cared more about the friendship than the other?

Intimacy

- Tell me about some times or experiences you've had when you've felt very close to a friend or friends.
- Time when needed a friend? (whether they were 'there' for you or not)
- Can you think of some times when you have felt close to friends even when they haven't been present? What do you get out of that friendship?

Closing

- Is there anything else you'd like to add?
- Any questions about the research?

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