

**GLOBAL FEMINISMS
COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES OF
WOMEN'S AND GENDER ACTIVISM
AND SCHOLARSHIP**

SITE: New Zealand

**Transcript of Aleisha Amohia
Interviewer: Nicky Newton**

**Location: Wellington, New Zealand
Date: February 3, 2023**

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Aleisha Amohia graduated from Victoria University of Wellington (VUW) in 2019 with a Bachelor of Science (majoring in Computer Science and specializing in Artificial Intelligence) and a Bachelor of Commerce (majoring in Management and minoring in Information Systems). While at VUW, she was President of VUW Women in Tech for two years. She is now the Koha Technical Lead at Catalyst IT, an open source software company, where she started as an intern in 2014. Aleisha is a passionate young advocate for diversity and equity in all spaces, particularly in the technology industry. She is currently Co-President of the Wellington Branch of the National Council of Women in New Zealand (NZ) and has previously served on the Boards of the YWCA Greater Wellington, the Wellington Alliance Against Sexual Violence, and the Māori Design Group at InternetNZ. In 2022, Aleisha was a finalist for the NZ Impact Awards for contributing a young, Māori, Asian and female lens to NZ's gender equity movement, and other diversity and inclusion initiatives.

Nicky Newton is an Associate Professor of Psychology, who was born and raised in Christchurch, Aotearoa/New Zealand. Nicky trained and performed as a classical flute player in New Zealand, Australia, and Austria. She played with the New Zealand Symphony Orchestra in the 1990s, before a hand injury curtailed her career. After moving to the United States, Nicky gained a PhD in psychology from the University of Michigan (2011). She has held research and teaching positions at Youngstown State University, Northwestern University, University of Michigan, and Wilfrid Laurier University (Canada). Most recently, she moved back to Wellington, Aotearoa/New Zealand, and is currently a Research Fellow with the Health, Work, and Retirement Study based at Massey University. Nicky uses quantitative and qualitative approaches to research relationships between personality, social roles, gender, life transitions, and well-being across the latter half of adulthood. Recent projects include a multi-faceted study of older Canadian women's lives, an examination of stressful events and well-being among mid-to-later life women in Aotearoa/New Zealand, and a case study of the life of an Ann Arbor-based community activist. She recently co-edited, with Jamila Bookwala, *Reflections from Pioneering Women in Psychology* (2022), a volume of 26 essays from trailblazing women in the field.

Keywords: Activism During the Covid-19 Pandemic, Indigenous Issues, Intersectionality

Nicky Newton: So, I'm here with Aleisha today and, um... but first off, before we begin the interview, can you please confirm with a verbal "yes" that you give your permission, uh, for this interview?

Aleisha Amohia: Uh, yes. I give permission.

NN: Great. Thanks, Aleisha. Ok. So, um, the first section of questions is background about your life. So, as you think about where you are today, how would you depict the journey that brought you to this place? So, what are your central commitments? Um, what does your career look like? And what do you consider the most significant lifetime achievement (in the short lifetime that you've had so far)—What would that be, professionally?

AA: Um... Ok, so I guess I'll start with what I'm doing currently. Um, I... In my day job I work in software. So, I'm a technical lead at a software company. Um, I've been in software development for about 8 years now. Um, and then my... my main involvement in, I guess, the context of this interview, is I am also the Wellington¹ branch co-president for the National Council of Women², uh, in New Zealand. I've been, uh, on the Organizing Committee of the Wellington branch³ for a few years now. I also am involved in a number of other organizations around Wellington, including, um, the YWCA⁴ Wellington, the Wellington Alliance Against Sexual Violence...⁵ uh, and I've been involved in the past with other groups such as the Victoria University of Wellington Women in Tech,⁶ and other clubs on campus while I was studying.

¹ Wellington is the second-largest city in New Zealand, the country's political center, and the administrative center of the Wellington Region. ("Wellington." Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wellington>. Accessed 1 June 2023.)

² The National Council of Women (NCWNZ) is the leading organization in the fight for gender equality in New Zealand. NCWNZ believes that achieving gender equality will have a positive impact on the country's society and economy. ("Kaupapa." National Council of Women of New Zealand. <https://www.ncwnz.org.nz/about>. Accessed 1 June 2023.)

³ Aleisha Amohia is the listed contact for the Wellington branch of NCWNZ. Up-to-date meeting information for local branches can be found at https://www.ncwnz.org.nz/local_branches. ("Local NCW Branches Meet Monthly." National Council of Women of New Zealand. https://www.ncwnz.org.nz/local_branches. Accessed 1 June 2023.)

⁴ The Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA) is a global nonprofit movement that seeks to empower and support women through various initiatives. ("What Does YWCA Stand For?" YWCA Monterey County. <https://www.ywcamc.org/blog/news/what-does-ywca-stand-for>. Accessed 2 June 2023.)

⁵ The Wellington Alliance Against Sexual Violence (WAASV) is a group of organizations that work together to advocate against sexual violence and establish safe communities. It was formed after an anonymous survey revealed that 95% of women had experienced or witnessed sexual assault, inspiring the creation of the #LetUsLive: Rally for a City Free From Sexual Violence. ("Wellington Alliance Against Sexual Violence Logo Design." Ashlee Metcalfe. <https://ashleemetcalfe.com/wellington-alliance-against-sexual-violence>. Accessed 2 June 2023.)

⁶ Women in Tech (VUWWIT) is a student club at the Victoria University of Wellington, focused on supporting women and other underrepresented minorities throughout their academic careers and interests in computer

Um. There were probably a number of things that led me to where I am now, one of them being, uh, I was always really interested in technologies, digital technologies, from a young age. And, um, I had a lot of really strong role models around me that, uh, let me know that, women were lacking in that department especially, and in software. And so, it was quite interesting, when I decided to study computer science at Victoria University of Wellington. I walked into a lecture theater and was, uh, pretty shocked at the lack of gender diversity, especially having come from an all-girls school. I really wasn't expecting what my teachers were saying to be that true and that obvious. Um, you know, in this century. And so, um, it was that—that shock and then, following that, the isolation that I felt in that, in those studies, and... Um. That's kind of what led me to seek out groups that supported women. So, together with a bunch of other engineering students, we started the Women in Tech. Uh. And after a year or so we'd already pulled together about 200 members. Um. And we had so many people telling us that that club is the reason they feel like they belong in their—in their studies. Uh. I really quickly realized how much overlap our purpose had with other women's groups: Women in Business, Women in Law, uh, the general kind of feminist groups at Vic.⁷ We were often collaborating and, um, asking each other to attend events and—and support and share things. So, I think when I was thinking of—well, when I was coming close to the end of my studies, I realized I wanted to keep doing things like that.

Um, so, I was approached by the National Council of Women, um, to join their exec.⁸ And... I guess the rest is history. I've stayed and, um, made some amazing friends, and together we've done some incredible work. Uh, and what I'm hoping is kind of modernizing and bringing different perspectives into the gender equity movement (at least in Wellington). Um. So that's... that's kind of my path. Oh yeah! I guess I should mention as well: so, I find a lot of overlap in—'cause all of this work that I'm doing is voluntary, so the National Council of Women is an entirely volunteer-led organization—um, I find a lot of overlap in that work and, at least in those interest groups with—even with my day job as a software developer—um, the tech industry is still very male-dominated. And so, perspectives like mine can either get a lot of interest—well, can get a lot of interest. Sometimes it's—most of the time it's positive. Uh, there are still a few people out there who question the need for women in tech groups and, um, women in tech panels, and that kind of thing, where we hear from people we don't normally hear from in this industry. So, I've been really lucky to be able to kind of hit all of my passions, whether it's software and tech and development or

science, engineering, and other STEM subjects. (“Women in Tech (VUWWIT).” Victoria University of Wellington, University Recreation Wellington. <https://www.wgtn.ac.nz/recreation/clubs-and-societies/directory/vuw-women-in-tech-vuwwit>. Accessed 2 June 2023.)

⁷ In reference to the Victoria University of Wellington.

⁸ Executive board.

um, working with people and for people, in all of my kind of different roles. Um, yeah. I think... does that answer your question? [laughs]

NN: No, no it certainly does! So, um. So, a follow-up question would be: so, in the company that you work for currently, uh, what—what’s the gender breakdown (approximately)?

AA: Yeah, so I work at a company called Catalyst IT.⁹ And, um, of the tech companies I’ve seen... I mean, we’re a 25-year-old organization, so we’ve been around quite a long time, and I think there’s over 200 of us just in New Zealand. Um, in the office... I mean, it’s one of those funny things, where my team is really diverse. There’s, uh, 6 of us, and half of us—or maybe 7 now, but—half of us are women, um, half of us are Māori.¹⁰ Um, and so we’re all... when I look around at my team, it is very diverse. Most of our... we have a good split, I’d say. It’s kind of hard to put numbers on it because we’ve got people ranging from development, design, legal, all of that. Um, so I don’t think I can accurately give numbers on our—on our company. When I look around it feels, um, it feels much better than it did in my computer science lectures, that’s for sure. [laughs]

NN: And that’s only like in, with—well, it’s not the same company I guess, but it’s the change in, say 5 or 6 or 7 years, give or take, would that be correct (from when you did your computer science to—to now)?

AA: Yeah, I think that is... that would be accurate. It’s, um... I mean, our company is one of those that has a real interest in, um, improving diversity in the tech sector. Uh, but, it’s still very much a work in progress in the wider tech sector, anyway. And, um, I probably could say that, even when I was first starting out in this job, it was less balanced than it is now. So, they’ve done a—they’ve done a really good job.

NN: Yeah. Excellent, excellent. So, what would be, do you think, um, your most significant lifetime achievement, so far?

AA: Um... [laughs] That’s such a hard question. [laughs] I just turned 25 actually, earlier this week. [laughs] And so, I’ve been doing a lot of—

⁹ Catalyst is a Wellington-based software company that provides a variety of free and open-source technology solutions. (“Catalyst: About.” LinkedIn. <https://www.linkedin.com/company/catalyst-it-limited/?originalSubdomain=nz>. Accessed 2 June 2023.)

¹⁰ Māori are the indigenous Polynesian people of New Zealand, believed to have settled in the country over a thousand years ago. The Māori people have full legal rights, and the Māori language is also one of the country’s official languages. (“Maori.” New World Encyclopedia. <https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Maori>. Accessed 2 June 2023.)

NN: [laughs] Happy birthday!

AA: [laughs] Thanks! So, I've been doing a lot of that kind of reflection/resolution-type stuff. Um, and there's a few things that I'm... I think there's a really interesting question of: what do you consider an achievement, and then what are you really proud of? I feel like they're 2 different questions.

NN: Yeah, totally.

AA: I've achieved—um, I'm really proud of finishing my studies. I ended up with a Bachelor of Science and a Bachelor of Commerce. Um, I remember, 'cause I actually started this job at Catalyst before I went to university. Um, I was really lucky to have—I did a high school kind of program with them called The Academy,¹¹ which is how I knew about them when I was 15-16. And then I, um, managed to get an internship in my—before my final year of high school. Uh, so I remember thinking, when my studies were getting really hard and really challenging, and I wasn't enjoying it so much, that I could just stop, because I had the job. Um, but I'm really glad I stuck it out and finished both degrees, because—that in itself is a huge achievement. I was—my family was really proud. But also, being a student is what, uh, gave me the opportunity to be part of those student clubs and, um, participate in something like the Women in Tech and all the other feminist groups I ended up being part of, which is—yeah. I wouldn't have had that opportunity had I not finished my studies.

NN: Yes.

AA: So, that was pretty cool. Um, something else that I would say: I mean, this is something that someone might have said about me. [laughs] But, I remember being, um,—when I was a little bit younger and I was doing a lot of public speaking about being a woman in tech, and I was going back to high schools and that kind of thing, um—I had girls coming up to me and saying, “I have never seen someone talk about software that looks like you, that looks like me.” Um. And I had these young brown girls telling me all about how much they love science and, you know, um “what other jobs are there out there?” And I made tech “look cool.” And, like, this isn't the kind of thing you can put on a CV,¹² right? But I remember, in that moment, like, this is exactly why I put myself out there and do what I do. Because, um, we need more people who are different creating the products we use every day. And so, if we can show these young people, from really early on, before they're

¹¹ Launched in 2011, The Academy is a Catalyst program focused on introducing open source development to senior secondary school students through classes and real-world projects, instigating their interest in the subject. (“Open Source Academy.” Catalyst. <https://www.catalyst.net.nz/academy>. Accessed 7 June 2023.)

¹² Curriculum Vitae is a comprehensive summary of a person's education, career, and qualifications.

influenced by the media, or society, or anything else about what they “should be doing,” then I think that’s, that’s an achievement. [laughs]

NN: Yes! That’s wonderful. It’s made—made me a little teary to hear that, ‘cause it’s wonderful to be such a great role model for, as you say, younger brown women. Um. Excellent. Oh. Thanks. Ok, I’ll pull myself together here. Ok. So, then let’s move on to the background about your work. So, it’s almost like you’ve... you’ve already answered this question, but if there’s anything else you think of, what drew you to the work that you’ve done? Um, the question that I’m kind of more interested in in this block of questions is: how has your work changed, and has your work changed from influences in or experiences in your life? And, has your life changed through experiences in your work? So, kind of like a 2-way sort of process. Um. So, drew you to your work, changes in your work, 2-way process. And then, what kinds of sites (and that is sites of action or intervention) have you primarily focused on, and why? And you’ve covered a lot of it, but if you could just reiterate what’s really important to you.

AA: M-hm. Um, I think... yeah, so I did kind of talk about my journey into feminist action, I suppose. But, um, specifically what drew me into the National Council of Women was actually the women who approached me. So, they had maybe seen my work, or been part of groups that I was also part of and asked me specifically to come and join them. And I think what I liked about the National Council of Women is that they’ve been around a really long time, uh, 126 years now, I think.¹³ And they were doing things like, um, helping to organize campaigns and rallies and marches, which is the stuff that people can really see and engage with on even a daily basis here in Wellington. But I also liked that they were writing submissions and trying to effect change at a policy level. I think that, especially now, with social media, and this kind of digital age of information, it’s really easy to get caught up in emotion and people being really loud online. But it’s that nitty-gritty kind of admin/policy stuff that will have those long-lasting changes. Uh. Like, the culture stuff that happens online is so important, but it’s the people who go out and write submissions and help to actually effect the policy. That work is so invisible, but it’s so important. And so, that insight into it through the National Council of Women was really valuable for me. So, that was what kind of drew me in and why I’ve stayed, because I just think the National Council of Women has this really unique relationship with government, and with other groups locally given

¹³ The National Council of Women was established in 1896. As of 2023, it has been around for 127 years. (“Where We Came From.” National Council of Women of New Zealand. https://www.ncwnz.org.nz/where_we_came_from. Accessed 7 June 2023.)

how old we are and being founded by Kate Sheppard¹⁴ and that kind of thing. So, um, a very cool group to be part of.

In terms of how our work has changed: it's changed a lot, actually, in the last few years. COVID¹⁵ was one of those really good pushes into, "we should try and figure out how to do our work online." We in the Wellington branch were already k of moving toward that, because our membership is generally younger than some of the other branches. So, we have moved all of our correspondence to email, and we were doing—we'd had a Google Drive and all of these other kind of electronic tools for minutes, and that kind of thing. We had also started doing meetings on Zoom, and now other branches are doing meetings on Zoom. We're—our meetings are hybrid (in-person and online), which means that people can join us from wherever, and it's just a little bit more accessible, a bit more inclusive, which is great. Uh. And, in the last couple of years, we've also done a sustainability review so, making sure that not only the work we do but also the way we operate is going to be sustainable and be relevant for how feminist action takes place today. There were a lot of changes to kind of our membership model and constitution and that kind of thing so that groups (or people) will see us and recognize that we are standing for the same things as them, 'cause it would—it was easy to get muddled in that with all of the really old-fashioned language and processes, and that kind of thing.

I think a lot of the work that I personally am doing now is very layered. So, it's not as simple as kind of gender equity anymore. It's, um, are we considering the perspectives of people with disabilities, like, how does this affect our indigenous people, have we made sure that we've pulled in all of these different perspectives? Um, because there is no point in feminism if it's not intersectional,¹⁶ because even if we make these advances for women, there are still going to be groups of women who don't receive that benefit, or don't receive, equal or equitable benefit. So that's something I've been working on quite a lot and trying to feed into the work that we do at the National Council of Women. And I think that what you're saying about how does—how has that impacted my own life, I've, I think in the last few years, I've been on kind of a journey to learn about my own cultural background. I'm Māori and Cambodian, and Indian; and growing up I always knew that I was Māori and

¹⁴ Kate Sheppard was a prominent member of the new Women's Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), well known for having led the campaign for women's suffrage in the country. When NCWNZ was founded in 1896, she was elected inaugural president. ("Kate Sheppard. Biography." New Zealand History. <https://nzhistory.govt.nz/people/kate-sheppard>. Accessed 7 June 2023.)

¹⁵ Refers to the COVID-19 global pandemic, which officially lasted from 2020 to 2023.

¹⁶ Intersectional refers to intersectionality, or the theory that overlapping systems of privilege and discrimination marginalize different individuals in unique ways, as a function of their different social locations (e.g. race, class, gender, sexuality, ability, etc.). The term was first introduced by Professor Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. (Taylor, Bridie. "Intersectionality 101: what is it and why is it important?" Womankind Worldwide. <https://www.womankind.org.uk/intersectionality-101-what-is-it-and-why-is-it-important/>. Accessed 7 June 2023.)

Asian, but I didn't really know what that meant, until the last few years where I've met more people who are also on journeys to figure out their identity. And so, as I've learned more about what it means to be Māori and where I come from and all of these other things, that's definitely fed into the things I—the projects I take on, and the conversations I have, and the people I surround myself with, and the things that we all work on together. So, yeah.

NN: Yeah, thanks! So, I—I wanted—the National Council of Women; two questions, I guess. So, would you be comfortable sort of naming the people who initially approached you? Who did approach you initially?

AA: Yeah. So, I was first approached by Sonia Randhawa.¹⁷ She was, at the time, the Wellington branch president. And we had met because she was studying at a Master's, I think, in... at Victoria University, and it was about chatbots,¹⁸ which is really cool. So, we bonded over being women in tech. And she said, you know, "I'm part of this organization, and we need someone to look after our admin stuff." So, that's how I got my foot in the door. I think at the time I might have also known Vanisa Dhiru,¹⁹ who was our national president for the National Council of Women. She's since stepped down from that role, but she's still very much involved. Um, but she's all over the place. She's one of the most active and busy people I know. I think she's a UNESCO²⁰ Commissioner or something. She's, um, she was on one of those New Year Honours²¹ lists, she's incredible. And so, those are just two of the women that I first met that were part of the organization. We've got so many women in the organization who have received New Year Honours or other honors and hold roles in all of these incredible organizations. Um, even in our branch we've got... one of our

¹⁷ Sonia Randhawa served as president of the NCWNZ Wellington branch from 2019 to 2021. ("Sonia Randhawa." LinkedIn. <https://www.linkedin.com/in/sonjarandhawa/?originalSubdomain=nz>. Accessed 7 June 2023.)

¹⁸ Chatbots are computer programs that can simulate conversation with human users through artificial intelligence. They are often used in customer service applications, where they can answer questions and resolve issues without the need for a human agent. ("What is a chatbot?" IBM. <https://www.ibm.com/topics/chatbots>. Accessed 7 June 2023.)

¹⁹ Nonprofit executive and activist Vanisa Dhiru served as president of the NCWNZ Wellington branch from 2017 to 2019. ("Her name is Vanisa Dhiru." Vanisa.nz. <https://www.vanisa.nz/>. Accessed 7 June 2023.)

²⁰ UNESCO stands for United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. It was founded in 1945 with a mission to promote world peace and security through international cooperation in education, science, culture, and communication. ("UNESCO in brief." UNESCO. <https://www.unesco.org/en/brief>. Accessed 7 June 2023.)

²¹ The New Year Honours are a series of awards presented by the New Zealand government to recognize outstanding achievement in a variety of fields, including public service, the arts, and sport. The awards are announced annually on New Year's Day. ("New Zealand Royal Honours." Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet. <https://www.dPMC.govt.nz/our-programmes/new-zealand-royal-honours>. Accessed 7 June 2023.)

members is Sue Kedgley, and she was the Green's—Green Party MP²² and I think actually you mentioned, or she mentioned, that she was doing an interview with you as well.

NN: Yes.

AA: Just very cool people. We've since managed to bring in, um, more people who are kind of around my age. So, we've lowered our general age, which is cool. We've got, it means that we've got people who have lots of energy, and kind of a different way of seeing the world, and different way of approaching problems, balanced with people who've been part of the organization for 10, 20, 30 years and have all of this really valuable historical knowledge, all of these connections across Wellington, but also government and internationally, all working towards the same kind of end goal. I think it's a pretty powerful group.

NN: Yeah, so you do have some heavy hitters there. So I wondered, and this is a sort of a difficult question, I guess. But, as a follow-up question, you know, you told me about the changes; has that—within the organization—has that been an easy change or has that been—I mean I, you know the sort of stereotypes, both ends of younger and older, or more established feminism, or less inclusive or more inclusive. Have you had conversations around that with the group, or has that, um, has that been an easy transition, I guess is what I'm trying to say?

AA: Um... prob—no, honestly it hasn't been. Um, I think that's one of the things... I think it can be both positive and negative, in having a group called the National Council of Women, is that women are so different and, um, come from different places, and have different experiences. So, we have to be really careful that we can represent all women, which means catering to a lot of different needs. And the sustainability review in particular took about two years. Uh, so it was a really long, drawn-out process. And arguably it could have even been longer, because just of the timing of when things were coming out and the consultation happened, and that sort of thing. As we shifted onto technology platforms, there was a lot of resistance. There've been members who've been around a long time, and learning to use new devices, new platforms, especially those who live remotely and don't have a young membership to help them, and to teach them things, it was really hard and scary, I think, for them. And I can totally understand that because just, in general, the older population is not given the support they need to stay connected. It's basically impossible now to not be online and live, you know, a fulfilling life. So, I really did feel for them,

²² Sue Kedgley is a Wellington-based writer, media trainer, consumer advocate, and independent director. She was an important figure in the fight for women's liberation in the early 1970s, as well as Green Party member of the parliament (MP) from 1999 to 2011. ("About." Sue Kedgley. <https://suekedgley.com/about>. Accessed 7 June 2023.) See also her interview in the Global Feminisms Project archive.

especially with lockdown, I feel like there were a lot of older members, or older people in general, feeling quite isolated, and you know, disconnected from everyone else.

So, it was definitely a challenge. I think that our board did a really good job of trying to make sure we heard everyone out. Myself and some of the other young members were involved in kind of running Zoom tutorials and showing them how to use Google Drive and the kind of tools that we wanted to use. So, it was just trying to set up time to make people feel like they were part of that shift. Because it had to happen. It was an inevitable thing. So just giving them access to people, resources, to help ease the transition. But it was definitely a challenge, and there were definitely people who pushed back or felt like they weren't part of that decision.

NN: Yeah. You know, it's good that you, you know, from a—from a layperson's view, even younger people keeping up with the changes in technology—the changes are fast. And all the software change, incredible. So, um, I like that you did that. And I also wanted to just comment on the ease with which it's—it's easy to be loud about feminism, or any activism, but the policy change is like, always envisage, you know, that's the scut work, that's the difficult work, that's the less—less sexy kind of out-there work that, that really does provide the foundation, I think. So, you know, I—I understand your comments about, “yes, both approaches are important, but you can't have one without the other perhaps. Yeah.

AA: Yeah. Totally.

NN: Ok. So, um, moving on to section 3, which is reflections on your work. So, um, how do you understand the term “feminism,” and what has it meant to your work?

AA: Um, I think of feminism as a movement for gender equity. I think it's important to use feminism because it's recognizing that there are, you know, genders who are starting from a lower place, that don't have the same access, opportunities, support, um, even laws applying to them, who will not receive the same health outcomes and, um, educational outcomes, occupational outcomes, simply because of their gender. I think that's a really important distinction to make. It's something we come up against quite a lot, is like, “of course, I believe in gender equality, we're there,” you know, “the women can work and vote.” And so, ok, cool, but only a couple of years ago we were allowed to get access to abortions.²³ And even now, you know, there's still a lot of uncertainty around that, there's

²³ In March of 2020, the Abortion Legislation Act was enacted in New Zealand, reducing barriers to access to abortion services in the country. The reform fully and officially decriminalized abortion and included abortion regulation under general health laws. Prior to the act, abortion was only legal under limited circumstances, as regulated by the Contraception, Sterilisation, and Abortion Act of 1977. (“Information on

still all these stigmas that exist. And so, that is why we need groups like ours working to correct, well not correct, but improve attitudes towards women and other genders, and change how society views our role. I think that's what feminism has become, at least. I also think that feminism (or at least my feminism) is, like I said before, intersectional. So, I'm really aware of how the work we do and what laws and other things, how they affect women of different ethnicities and different abilities, different socio-economic statuses. If that's not the current wave of feminism, I hope it's the next one, [laughs] so that we, um, yeah, so that we can be truly inclusive because, you know, like I said before, thinking about women and men and how women are considered, um, lesser than men isn't—even if it's not as black and white as that. There's a lot more to it than that. What was the second part of your question? Sorry.

NN: Um, what has it meant to your work, or to your work?

AA: Right. It has meant that—I mean, even from a really surface-level view, pictures of our group now and the activities we do, are very different to what they looked like 5-10 years ago. Our membership is really diverse, and we're organizing events like quiz nights, and we organized a fundraiser ball a few years ago and raised \$2,000 for Women's Refuge.²⁴ Yeah, it was really cool. I think it's changed the work that we do in that it's not all about policy and campaigning, we also put—we also really highly value social events and just having that opportunity for our members and our community to come together and actually meet each other. There's a lot of different groups that exist in this space, even if they're more niche, like Women in Tech, or like smaller, more targeted ethnic groups. In the end, we're all, you know, writing submissions for the same things. We're all showing up to the same rallies and saying the same chants. So, it's so important that we know who each other are, know how to reach each other, and can support each other's work. So, that social connection is really important, and I think our—the way we prioritize that is, uh, in a really big way impacted by how we see feminism now: being intersectional and being this movement of bringing women and other genders up. And, oh there was one thing I wanted to say. Oh yeah! And even the shift to technology and being able to conduct our work online, so we do a lot of organizing events and advertisement through Facebook and Twitter, Instagram. We stream as many of our events as we possibly can, so that people can watch live from home, but also people can watch later if they've got other clashes at the time, because everyone is so beyond busy these days. Um. And we try really hard to caption things, like the access to technology just means that we can be more accessible in the work

abortion." New Zealand Ministry of Health. <https://www.health.govt.nz/your-health/healthy-living/sexual-health/information-abortion>. Accessed 8 June 2023.)

²⁴ Women's Refuge works to liberate women and children from domestic and familial violence, providing victims with safe spaces and other support. ("Values." Women's Refuge. <https://womensrefuge.org.nz/>. Accessed 8 June 2023.)

that we do. If you, you know, if you can't go to a rally for whatever reason, there are other ways to get involved, there are other ways to donate to causes. I think recognizing that feminism must be intersectional is creating those channels for people to engage in your cause that isn't necessarily showing up on the day. I think that's a really important distinction to make.

NN: Yeah! Excellent, excellent, excellent. Ok. So, section 4: the relationship between feminist scholarship and activism. So, do you perceive, or, and, if you do, how do you perceive the relationship between scholarship and activism?

AA: I mean, it's kind of like what we said before about, we need those rallies and the marches and campaigning. We also need the submission writing, we also need the research, and the scholars, and the essays, and the writing to back it up. Something that's really clear in both my work with the National Council of Women, but also in the tech industry, is people love data. They often won't believe anything until there is data, until there are quotes and stories to back up the—the argument you're pushing. So, I think feminist scholarship has a really important place in particular for that reason. I think it's important to have the people that can be loud, but also the people who can contribute numbers and, um, anecdotes and also form conclusions from everything that we're kind of dealing with. There's an overabundance of information. And the ways that scholars can sift through that and, uh, make inferences, and summarize everything into writing, I think is very—really valuable and will help future waves of feminism and future activists, when they can look back and understand what feminists and activists before them dealt with and went through and achieved.

NN: Yeah. So, it—it seems that you mention intersectionality a lot, and it seems that it's way more complicated, both at a theoretical or, um, academic scholarship point of view, and then also practical and being accessible for all people. The added complexity with a lot of information makes it difficult for a layperson to then come in and actually—we're all used to sound bites these days. You know, get a sound bite that summarizes all of that. Good, good response there. So, um, [laughs] this is a silly question, really. Because I don't think you'd be here, and from what you've said, it's pretty much said and done. Do you identify as a feminist?

AA: Yes. [laughs]

NN: Ok. [laughs] So, why? Can you give me a, um, a pithy response that you've not covered previously?

AA: Um... I identify as a feminist because—because I believe in gender equity, and I recognize that there are some genders who have it better than others.

NN: Nice. That'll do, yeah. That's—that's a lovely response, thank you. Anything more you want to, to comment about feminism or being a feminist, or...?

AA: I think the only thing I haven't said explicitly is that all of this work can only be achieved by everyone working together. So, you know, I've talked about intersectionality in terms of, like, ethnicity and that kind of thing. But also, it needs to be intergenerational. So the feminist movement's been around for a very long time. And I gave the example of abortion before. That was something that—abortion health care is something that in New Zealand we've been working on for... what, 70-80 years? Women have lived and died through that time and not been able to receive healthcare in the form of an abortion legally. So, we really need the wisdom and passion and support of older women who have hopefully not given up on the whole notion, to back up the energy and the voices of young people. We have, a concept in te reo²⁵ Māori which is, “tuakana-teina,”²⁶ which is this concept of basically mentorship, a relationship between a mentor and a mentee. It typically describes someone older and younger, or more senior and more junior. Um. But I think what I love about it is that it describes a relationship that flows both ways. So, we as young people have so much to learn from older people, and vice versa. We can learn and teach constantly with this “tuakana-teina” concept. Um, and I think the same goes for activism and, and feminism.

NN: Yeah. I was thinking the same thing myself, and I'm recently returned to New Zealand, and I'm just catching up after years away, decades. Just catching up with, um, Māori and I have read about—and I'm not gonna try and say it, because I would butcher the word, but—that relationship, mentor-mentee. And it's—it's a wonderful way of describing it, yes. So, thanks for bringing it up. Ok. So, let's think about now, locally and globally. So, this is—the intersection of your work with the women's movement in this country and any other international forms of activism and scholarship. So, it's a difficult question, this one. Um, sort of puts you on the spot. What is your analysis, evaluation, and expectation of the development of feminism in New Zealand? I think you've—you've covered your expectation, but maybe you want to speak a little more to your expectations? That might be a place to start.

²⁵ The Māori language is also referred to as 'te reo Māori', or simple 'te reo'.

²⁶ The tuakana-teina is a model of mentorship based on the presence of an older mentor who guides a younger, less experience mentee through a process. (“The concept of a tuakana-teina relationship.” Te Kete Ipurangi, Ministry of Education. <https://tereomaori.tki.org.nz/Curriculum-guidelines/Teaching-and-learning-te-reo-Maori/Aspects-of-planning/The-concept-of-a-tuakana-teina-relationship>. Accessed 8 June 2023.)

AA: Well, the National Council of Women does a gender attitude survey²⁷ every 2 years, just to kind of get a baseline of how people in New Zealand view gender and gender roles. Um, our most recent one was 2021 and it was really interesting because the numbers were basically unchanged from 2019. Which, in our minds, is not good. [laughs] Because, it feels like we've reached this point of: people know about the word "feminism," all we can say is like, "we have to highlight women," and all of this kind of thing. And yet, the way that we view women and other genders in society has largely not changed in that time. It felt like all of the work we've been doing is reaching a point of our networks, and then it stops, and it drops off. So I think what I—my expectations are, I would really love for people to go out and do their own learning; to not be afraid of the word "feminism," or "feminist," and to figure out what it means to them. Because my definition of feminism is gonna be different to another feminists', or another person's. Um, and my reasons for aligning with feminism will be different as well. And so, I think that it's—it's really important that people go out and figure out for themselves where they sit, and what they care about. And also figure out how things like feminist issues actually affect them. Because, again, it's different on a person-to-person basis. And it's not something that someone can tell you. Like, I can't go to a group of men and say, "this is how I think these issues affect you." Like, I, you know, there's plenty of studies and papers written about why men should be feminists, and how feminist issues affect men. But if they don't conceptualize and contextualize that for themselves, they'll never be able to understand that. And that's, you know, just something they then have to learn themselves. I think that's my expectation, is just for people to go out and learn, and not be afraid of the whole concept just because there's a label for it.

NN: Right. And so, you've spoken a little bit about this but, um, could you speak a little more to what your relationship with other women's organizations in the country is, and perhaps what your relationship is with other activists as well?

AA: I think originally, the National Council of Women was actually an umbrella organization. So, rather than having individual members, women would be part of other organizations, and then those organizations would join and become members of the National Council of Women. And I think it was only in the last 20 years or so that they introduced individual members. And now, in the Wellington branch at least, most of our members are individual. We still have a few organizational ones, but most of them are individual people who are trying to be part of this movement when they've got the time. So we have long-standing relationships with other organizations locally and nationally, such

²⁷ Conducted by NCWNZ, the biannual Gender Attitudes Survey provides an up-to-date snapshot of the attitudes around gender and gender roles in New Zealand. ("Gender Attitudes Survey." Gender Equal NZ. <https://genderequal.nz/ga-survey/>. Accessed 8 June 2023.)

as Zonta,²⁸ the YWCA, Graduate Women Wellington,²⁹ the Business Professional Women,³⁰ quite a few of—kind of, yeah—women’s groups like that. So, we’ve—we’re aware of each other’s existence, we work together when we can. In Wellington last year we organized a debate with—alongside Zonta and Graduate Women Wellington, where we got women candidates for mayor, from Wellington and Porirua,³¹ to sit on a panel and talk about issues, which was really interesting. And it meant that they could talk about things they hadn’t mentioned in their other mayoral debates, uh, because, yeah. Those questions just weren’t coming up. So, it was really cool. And it was great to reach people we might not have reached, because we decided to work with other groups. So that’s just one example of it. And another time we often work with other groups is through, um, things like—yeah, so we’re part of the Wellington Alliance Against Sexual Violence. We helped organize a rally in Courtenay Place,³² which was—I remember it was like raining, and the weather was really terrible, but we ended up having 500 or 600 people show up. Um, and that was really, really special, and it was great for us to be part of that. And so, through that, um, I was able to work with a bunch of other activists, most of them students. And we just had access to all of these different activists through the groups that they might be part of. There are a few people who are kind of “unattached,” I suppose, and they’re just known, and so we work with them when we can, but yeah. Typically, we work—we will work with organizations, just so that there isn’t one person doing the work all the time. If we go through an organization then they can share it and it’s a little bit safer for them that way as well.

NN: Excellent. And now we have, in Wellington, a female Māori mayor, which is fantastic, yes?

AA: Yes.

NN: So, do you think your work has helped get her elected, or...?

²⁸ Zonta is a volunteer organization that advocates for women’s rights as human rights, as well as long-term gender equality and women empowerment. (“About Zonta.” Zonta International District 16. <https://zonta.org.nz/about-zonta/>. Accessed 7 June 2023.)

²⁹ Graduate Women New Zealand seeks to support women’s education through scholarships, networking, and advocacy events. Its Wellington branch hosts monthly meetings and other social and professional member events. (“About Us.” Graduate Women New Zealand. <https://gwnz.org.nz/about-us>. Accessed 8 June 2023.)

³⁰ A network of businesses and professional women, including influential women entrepreneurs, executives, leaders, and business owners. (“What is BPW?” Business Professional Women International. <https://www.bpw-international.org/about-bpw/>. Accessed 8 June 2023.)

³¹ A city in the Wellington region of New Zealand, part of the Wellington metropolitan area. (“Porirua.” Wikipedia. <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Porirua>. Accessed 1 June 2023.)

³² Courtenay Place is a popular street in Wellington, home to multiple restaurants, cocktail bars, nightclubs, and the renowned Embassy Theatre. (“Courtenay Place.” WellingtonNZ. <https://www.wellingtonnz.com/visit/courtenay-place/>. Accessed 8 June 2023.)

AA: [laughs] Maybe, maybe we contributed to a culture where people could be accepting of a woman Māori mayor. I think that would be a very cool thing to say, but I definitely—she couldn't take credit for that completely. She ran an awesome campaign for a long time, much longer than the other candidates. So, yeah we're pretty proud of Tory.³³ And actually, Tory Whanau is one of our branch patrons, so we're really stoked to have her support in our work.

NN: Well done, ok. So, last section of questions, um, talking about international, um, forms of activism. And so, you—you might have touched on this, and I might have missed it. What—do you have, or what are the connections to other activist and scholar organizations in other countries?

AA: I personally don't have much relationship, because my work is mostly local. But because I'm a very—I'm the type of person to get myself involved in things, I do often, find myself working with, uh, our national president, Suzanne Manning,³⁴ and that gives us access to more international spaces. So the National Council of Women in New Zealand is affiliated with the International Council of Women,³⁵ so we do have connections there. Recently a bunch of us did an event with the Japanese Women's Innovative Network,³⁶ I think is what they're called. And we ran two nights of seminars for them and talked about what the gender movement looks like in New Zealand and just answered some questions for them. And that was really cool. So, we're definitely trying to improve our relationships with some of our international connections. But it's a little bit higher than me. But, um, I can't help myself but get involved. [laughs]

NN: [laughs] Yes. I've—I've got that impression about you. You're a very busy person and doing lots, which is wonderful. So, I'll ask a question, but it may... you referred to it as being higher than you, so this may not apply. So, how do you make sense of the differences and similarities in the kinds of issues that are raised, or the approaches taken by these other activists? So, say, by the Japanese activists or scholars, or the

³³ After being elected in 2022, Tory Whanau became New Zealand's first wahine (woman) Māori mayor. She mainly campaigns for affordable housing, better public transportation, and climate action. ("Mayor Tory Whanau." Absolutely Positively Wellington City Council. <https://wellington.govt.nz/your-council/about-the-council/mayor-and-councillors/office-of-the-mayor/mayor-tory-whanau>. Accessed 8 June 2023.)

³⁴ As of June 2023, Suzanne Manning serves as the national president of the NCWNZ. ("Our Board." National Council of Women of New Zealand. <https://www.ncwnz.org.nz/ourboard>. Accessed 8 June 2023.)

³⁵ A global organization that advocates for women's rights and their empowerment, active since 1888. ("About the International Council of Women." International Council of Women. <https://www.icw-cif.com/about/>. Accessed 8 June 2023.)

³⁶ Established in 2007, the Japanese Women's Innovative Network (NPO J-Win) is a corporate organization focused on promoting diversity and inclusion in the workspace and advocating for more women in positions of leadership. ("About J-Win." J-Win. <https://j-win5.jp/en/>. Accessed 8 June 2023.)

organizations that you're working with, um, how do you make sense of any differences and similarities?

AA: I think what is helpful for me is that I already have that acknowledgment of—again, it comes back to that intersectionality thing. I think I have that cultural awareness of, there are some cultures that are just not as progressive as ours. And so, it was really interesting talking to the people in Japan who, you know, my presentation was specifically about, kind of, indigenous perspectives on gender equality in New Zealand. So, I was saying, you know, it's a little bit different for Māori women, and there are parts of the feminist movement that aren't so pretty when you think about the Māori perspective of it. They were saying that, like, already New Zealand is further ahead than Japan in terms of gender roles, and gender attitudes. But they were relieved to hear that we're not perfect, [laughs] and that we still have work to do. It made them feel like they were supported on their journey, that they're not going it alone. So I think that's quite refreshing. And it's helpful for us to know that the work we're doing can inspire and guide other people, but knowing that we're still on our journey further inspires them to keep at it. And they know that they're—that they have, you know, a big sister in it, through us. And I think it is just—just recognizing that where other countries are and where other cultures are in terms of their kind of feminist journey, it's not as simple as like “that is how it is in Japan,” or “that's how it is in the United States.” There are plenty of people on the ground doing heaps of really awesome work that, again, is invisible and harder to kind of see. But the things that we see all the time, and that we—the things that we see all the time are just... are not a representation of—of where things are at. So, yeah. It's just like not assigning—assigning blame, and not, um, making conclusions that are actually harmful to their journey.

NN: Right, or having assumptions going in, yeah. Understand.

AA: Exactly.

NN: Excellent. So, you know, those are my questions. Did you have anything else that perhaps we haven't touched on, that you would like to talk about?

AA: No. I've—I think I'm good. I feel like I've been talking a long time. [laughs]

NN: [laughs] You've been great. So, thank you so much, Aleisha, you've been, articulate and great. Um, and I will turn everything off right now.