A Long Journey of Going Gender: Women's Self-initiated Expatriate Experiences and Career Decision Making

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ABSTRACT

This doctoral thesis investigates the career decision-making processes of mid-adulthood professional self-initiated expatriate (SIE) women living and working in New Zealand, with the 'going gender' framework (Stenbacka & Forsberg, 2020) serving as the primary theoretical lens for understanding the dynamic interplay between gender, careers, and self-initiated expatriation (SIE). This research aims to contribute to the existing literature by exploring the gendered experiences of mid-adulthood professional SIE women, particularly within the New Zealand context. It seeks to move beyond traditional career-centric perspectives by exploring mid-adulthood SIE women's broader personal and professional experiences. The study seeks to understand how 'going gender' operates as a dynamic process within the context of SIE, recognising the influence of early life experiences and the multifaceted nature of international career and life trajectories.

Employing a narrative inquiry and life story approach, this study gathered and analysed the lived experiences of 15 SIE women through semi-structured interviews. A multi-layered thematic analysis of these narratives revealed that 'going gender' is not merely a reactive adaptation occurring during and following SIE but a proactive, anticipatory process beginning before relocation. The research highlights the enduring influence of early life experiences, such as childhood exposure to diverse cultures and experiences, on women's propensity for and navigation of SIE. The study also demonstrates that SIE catalyses or facilitates accelerated personal and professional growth, leading to significant shifts in career aspirations and life priorities during SIE.

This research concludes that 'going gender' within the SIE context involves a more anticipatory and iterative process than previously understood, thereby challenging traditional models of gender performativity prevalent in SIE literature. The study

advances an understanding of SIE by emphasising the significant influence of early life experiences and the transformative potential of women's international mobility. From a theoretical perspective, this research reconfigures Stenbacka and Frosberg's 'going gender' framework by demonstrating its applicability to the SIE context and highlighting the proactive nature of gender role negotiation. Practically, the findings underscore the need for holistic support systems for mid-adulthood professional SIE women, addressing both their professional and personal well-being. Policy implications include addressing gender related issues in SIE, such as pay gaps and underemployment, and developing immigration policies that facilitate smooth integration. This research contributes to a greater understanding of SIE as a comprehensive life journey, revealing how gender intersects with career decision-making and the international mobility of women in New Zealand.

Table of Contents

LIST OF FIGURES

LIST OF TABLES

ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor used artificial intelligence tools or generative artificial intelligence tools (unless it is clearly stated, and referenced, along with the purpose of use), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.”

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Courtenay Basnayake Date: 17/07/2025

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ETHICS APPROVAL

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1 INTRODUCTION

Self-initiated expatriate (SIE) women engage in three processes: ‘doing gender’ to establish legitimacy in new contexts (West & Zimmerman, 1987), 'undoing gender’ to challenge limiting expectations (Seregina, 2020), and ‘going gender’ to strategically adapt their gender performances across different contexts (Stenbacka & Forsberg, 2020). This thesis examines how gender performativity shapes the experiences of mid-adulthood professional SIE women in New Zealand. Gender performativity, as conceptualised by Butler (1988, 1990), represents a fundamental shift away from understanding gender as a fixed identity toward recognising it as something actively accomplished through repeated actions and behaviours. Butler argues that "gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed" (Butler, 1990, p. 33), suggesting that gender identity emerges through performance rather than preceding it. Drawing on gender theory (Butler, 1988; Rubin, 1975; West & Zimmerman, 1987) and using narrative inquiry and the life stories of 15 tertiary-qualified women, this research examines and then reconfigures how 'going gender' (Stenbacka & Forsberg, 2020) as a dynamic process of gender performance across contexts influences women's career decision-making throughout their SIE journeys.

The concept of ‘going gender’, introduced by Susanne Stenbacka and Gunnel Forsberg (2020), provides a valuable theoretical lens for understanding how individuals actively navigate and strategically negotiate gender norms and practices as they move across different cultural and spatial contexts during international mobility. The concept of ‘going gender’ builds upon the foundational idea of ‘doing gender’, articulated by West and Zimmerman (1987), which posits that gender is not a fixed attribute, but a performative accomplishment enacted through social interactions. It also incorporates the concept of ‘undoing gender’, which refers to actively dismantling or challenging traditional gender

norms and expectations. Stenbacka and Forsberg (2020) extend this by emphasising the dynamic and adaptive aspects of gender performance in mobile contexts, where individuals must read and respond to new and often conflicting gender expectations. While their original work applied the 'going gender' framework to explain how migrants negotiate gender norms across geographical spaces, this study adopts it as a key theoretical lens to explore how these dynamic gender performances intersect with, and subsequently shape, women's career decision-making processes within the specific context of SIE. This approach enables an examination of gender as not merely a static backdrop but an active and evolving element influencing and being influenced by the career trajectories of SIE women.

The aim of this research is to explore how women's career decision-making is shaped within the context of SIE in New Zealand. As such, the study is guided by the overarching research question: *"How does 'going gender' contextualise women's career decision-making as an SIE in New Zealand?*

1.1 BACKGROUND

In 2020, women accounted for 134.9 million of the world's 281 million globally mobile, or 48%, bringing them close to equal representation with men. The World Migration Report (2024) highlights that women constitute nearly half the global migrant population. This significant presence indicates that their experiences and actions are integral to shaping migration pattern and outcomes, alongside those of men (De Haas et al., 2019; Owen-Jones, 2024; *World Migration Report 2024*, 2024). However, despite this increasing participation and consequently the growing interest of the scholarly community (Aghayeva, 2022; Baluku et al., 2018; Deutschmann & Recchi, 2024; Mello et al., 2025; Milani, 2023; Owen-Jones, 2024), a significant gap remains in our understanding

of how gender performativity (Butler, 1988), the ongoing enactment of gender through social behaviours and norms (Butler, 1990), directly influences the SIE experience for mid-adulthood women (Andresen et al., 2020; Arifa et al., 2021; Li et al., 2023; Myers & Thorn, 2023).

This chapter presents the background, rationale, and aim that frame this thesis, particularly in understanding the dynamic relationship between gender, careers, and SIE. Following this, the motivations for pursuing the research are outlined, followed by the research aims and questions. The research's scope, approach, and structure are discussed before concluding the chapter.

1.1.1 SIE in the Context of International Mobility

This chapter employs the term 'international mobility' to encompass both migration and expatriation (IOM, 2019; Migration, 2020; *World Migration Report 2024*, 2024), recognising that a blend of these experiences often marks this phenomenon (Alshahrani, 2024; Andresen et al., 2014a; Douglas et al., 2019). This is particularly salient as individuals may experience shifts in their motivations, from temporary assignments to long-term settlement, such as citizenship, or their legal and social status over time, blurring the traditional distinctions between these categories. Adopting this encompassing understanding of international mobility enables interpretation by researchers and participants of hybrid identities, where individuals integrate elements from their home and host cultures (Aghayeva, 2022), and complex contextual influences (Mello et al., 2025).

As a broader research area, international mobility is experiencing significant attention, driven primarily by recent global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic (Deutschmann & Recchi, 2024) and ongoing geopolitical (Mello et al., 2025) instability,

which have disrupted traditional migration patterns and highlighted the interconnectedness of global labour markets.

The movement of qualified, highly skilled individuals has economic, developmental, and social implications for both their home and host countries (Habti & Elo, 2018; Saba et al., 2018). The geographical distribution of highly skilled individuals engaged in international mobility is also evolving, with a growing number of people from various countries of origin, moving to a concentrated group of destination countries, such as the USA, Canada, the EU, Australia, New Zealand, and the Gulf States (Owen-Jones, 2024; *World Migration Report 2020*, 2020; *World Migration Report 2024*, 2024). This growing trend of concentrated mobility, while building upon established patterns, creates increasingly complex and dynamic environmental contexts within these destination countries (Wihtol de Wenden, 2023).

An examination of the literature reveals a need to move beyond general analyses of the globally mobile to explore the experiences of specific types of international mobility, such as SIE (Andresen et al., 2023; Ott & Presbitero, 2025; Suarez-Bilbao et al., 2023) and organisational-assigned expatriation (OAE) (McNulty & Brewster, 2017; Scullion et al., 2010; Stahl et al., 2012). Understanding the differences within these distinct forms of mobility is crucial, as motivations, support structures, and career implications can vary significantly.

While the study of SIE has developed considerably over the past three decades (Haak-Saheem et al., 2022; Li et al., 2023; Ott & Presbitero, 2025; Richardson et al., 2022), this PhD study contributes by exploring the contextual elements of this experience, focusing on the unique life trajectories encompassing career and broader lives' of professional SIE women. This focus allows for an in-depth exploration of how gender

intersects with SIE, providing insights into women's unique challenges and opportunities as they navigate their self-initiated career journeys.

SIEs are individuals who independently relocate to a foreign country, demonstrating considerable personal initiative (Alshahrani, 2024; Gleissner & Stoermer, 2025; Stoermer et al., 2020). This distinguishes them from traditional expatriates, who are often referred to in the literature as organisational-assigned expatriates (OAEs), assigned expatriates (AEs), or organisational expatriates (OEs) (Douglas et al., 2019; Mutter & Kallane, 2023; Stoermer et al., 2020). For the purposes of this thesis, the overarching term 'traditional expatriate' will be used to denote these employer-led assignments, highlighting the self-directed nature of SIEs by contrast. This autonomy in decision-making is characterised by self-funding and self-arranged employment upon arrival in the host country, rather than relocation to a prearranged position (Andresen et al., 2013; Andresen et al., 2020). For this study, SIEs are defined as individuals who have left their home country through autonomous financial means with an open-ended timeframe regarding their return, even though a future return to their home country often remains a consideration (Alshahrani, 2024; Stoermer et al., 2020). While often associated with notions of choice and opportunity in transnational employment, the SIE experience is not homogeneous, with significant variations across dimensions of gender, nationality, and life circumstances (Andresen et al., 2020; Haak-Saheem et al., 2022). These differences substantially influence pre-departure decision-making, adjustment processes, and career trajectories, creating dynamic experiences for women that necessitate further research.

1.1.2 The SIE as a Gendered Career Strategy

The study of international mobility increasingly acknowledges the significant influence of gender, with women constituting a substantial and growing proportion of the

globally mobile (Bergh & Du Plessis, 2016; Haak-Saheem et al., 2022; Vance & McNulty, 2014). Scholarship on gender and SIE has evolved, initially often focused on the experiences of accompanying partners (Andresen & Margenfeld, 2015; Suter & Cangià, 2020; Wachter & Holz-Rau, 2021). However, more recent studies have explored women's motivations for independent international mobility (Arifa et al., 2021; Despotovic et al., 2022; Linder, 2019; Stoermer et al., 2020), their unique challenges and opportunities in host countries (Zakaria & Yusuf, 2023), and the impact of gender on their careers and integration processes (Haak-Saheem et al., 2022; Mendonça Fraga et al., 2020).

The rise of SIEs as highly autonomous and agentic individuals (Jannesari et al., 2024; Myers & Thorn, 2023; Stoermer et al., 2020; Suarez-Bilbao et al., 2023) represents a more recent phenomenon in international mobility. This increased autonomy is fuelled by the rising numbers of women pursuing higher education and vocational training, driving and supporting them to seek SIE as a strategic avenue for career advancement (Hartman & Barber, 2020; Kraimer et al., 2009) and broader life opportunities (Garrett, 2019; Jannesari et al., 2024; Suarez-Bilbao et al., 2023) in new countries.

Unlike traditional expatriation, where organisations determine and largely drive relocations (Vance & McNulty, 2014), SIE positions individuals as primary decision-makers in their international mobility journeys (Alshahrani, 2024). As Jannesari et al. (2024) and Suarez-Bilbao et al. (2023) highlight, women engaging in SIE must negotiate their professional advancement without the institutional support structures typically available to OAEs, further emphasising their role as autonomous architects of their careers. The very nature of SIE thus reconstructs women's relationship with geographic mobility and career development, challenging traditional gender expectations by placing women's professional aspirations and decision-making at the centre of their international mobility.

Women are no longer solely internationally mobile within the context of family units. While this has been a feature of global mobility for centuries, women are increasingly shaping their career paths independently, with SIE playing a vital role in this process (Alshahrani, 2024; Jannesari et al., 2024; Suarez-Bilbao et al., 2023). SIE, specifically, can potentially enhance women's autonomy, self-esteem, and overall status within their home communities if they return (Haak-Saheem et al., 2022). However, this is not universally applicable, women from countries with extreme gender inequality often experience significantly lower rates of expatriation and repatriation (Wechtler, 2025). For those who can leave their home country, the host country may offer substantial benefits, such as access to education and employment opportunities that are scarce or nonexistent in their home countries. However, these women can face the harsh reality that returning to their countries of origin may be challenging due to their gender roles (O'Donnell & Kenny, 2016); substantial benefits achieved as SIEs, such as access to education and employment opportunities, can remain scarce or nonexistent in their home countries.

1.2 NEW ZEALAND AS THE RESEARCH CONTEXT

New Zealand has emerged as a particularly compelling context for studying SIEs (Ellis et al., 2020; Tahir, 2021), given its unique socio-cultural landscape (*Census results reflect Aotearoa New Zealand's diversity*, 2024) and changing immigration patterns (Stats NZ, 2025a, 2025b). The country actively encourages immigration, supported by policies (*Net migration remains near record level*, 2024) . Its distinct blend of cultures, coupled with increasing diversification through Pacific and Asian immigration, creates a rich environment for understanding the experiences of individuals who independently choose to relocate for professional and personal reasons. Furthermore, research specifically focusing on SIEs in the New Zealand context highlights the relevance of this location for understanding the nuances of this form of international mobility (Ellis et al., 2020).

Following the COVID-19 pandemic, New Zealand has seen varied degrees of interest as a destination for international relocation (*Changes to the Accredited Employer Work Visa (AEWV) and median wage*, 2025). For example, in the year ending June 2024, New Zealand experienced a net migration gain of 125,500 non-NZ citizens, in comparison to a net migration loss of 55,300 NZ citizens for the same period (*Net migration falls in 2024*, 2025). This fluctuation, primarily driven by a reduction in non-New Zealand passport-holder arrivals, reflects the variable nature of global migration trends and the impact of policy changes on international movement.

The number of non-New Zealand citizen women residing in New Zealand had reached 696,861 by December 2022 (Stats NZ, 2025). This significant population highlights the crucial need to understand these women's distinct experiences and address the challenges they face in their professional and personal lives. The active attraction of skilled professionals through skilled migrant visa categories over the past three decades has created a valuable context for studying the integrated personal and career trajectories of SIEs within New Zealand. The ongoing relocation of non-citizen women to New Zealand, combined with the country's unique socio-cultural and economic landscape, highlights the significance of this location for understanding the experiences of SIE women.

1.3 Research Aims and Questions

This research aims to contribute not only to the academic discourse on gender and mobility but also to inform policy and practice within a nation that actively seeks to attract and integrate professional women from other countries. The insights gained from this study have the potential to enhance our understanding of how to create more

equitable and supportive environments for SIE women within New Zealand, across organisations, and within society more broadly.

This thesis argues that 'going gender' (Stenbacka & Forsberg, 2020) can be reconfigured as a framework for exploring career decision-making. A reconfiguration initially emerged as a framework from examining the experiences of tertiary-qualified SIE women living and working in New Zealand. Hence, it will be argued that ‘going gender’ is not just about physical mobility, but also about social and professional mobility in careers – how SIE women adapt, resist, or negotiate gender norms while making career decisions.

The overarching research question, *"How does 'going gender' contextualise a woman's career decision-making as an SIE in New Zealand?*" directly addresses the abovementioned theoretical issue. Three sub-questions also guide the investigation:

1. What are the motivations driving the SIE experiences?
2. How do women navigate and interpret gendered experiences in establishing a career in a new country?
3. How does this move shape their future career aspirations?

1.4 Research Focus and Theoretical Underpinnings

Existing research on SIE often examines career development (Jannesari & Sullivan Sherry, 2019; Myers & Pringle, 2005; Myers & Thorn, 2023; Suarez-Bilbao et al., 2023; van den Bergh & Du Plessis, 2012; Vance & McNulty, 2014), contextual factors (Jannesari et al., 2024; Muir et al., 2014; Wihtol de Wenden, 2023), or gendered experiences (Shortland, 2020). However, the intricate interplay of these elements, particularly for women, remains underexplored. This study contributes to the literature by examining

the dynamic interaction of careers, gender, and international mobility within the specific context of women SIEs.

This study adopts and recognfigures Stenbacka and Forsberg’s (2020) 'going gender' framework, which builds upon West and Zimmerman's (1987) 'doing gender' concept and resonates with Butler's (1990) understanding of gender as a performative act continuously enacted through social interactions, institutional practices, cultural norms, and embodied behaviours. The 'going gender' framework is extended here to examine how these performances are influenced by and impact the SIE context's spatial, cultural, and professional dynamics. It acknowledges that women's gendered experiences are not static but constantly evolve as they navigate new environments and negotiate their professional identities across national borders and the intersections between professional and personal domains, requiring simultaneous management of career development and shifting gender norms in both workplace and domestic contexts (Andresen et al., 2023; Suarez-Bilbao et al., 2023). This research anticipates that gender performance during SIE is more complex than previously understood, particularly across different stages of life.

This study explores how early life experiences may significantly influence women's capacity for and approach to SIE in adulthood. Furthermore, it investigates the extent to which gender role negotiation commences before physical relocation, suggesting that 'going gender' may operate as both a reactive and proactive process, aspects underexplored in existing SIE literature that largely focuses on post-arrival adaptation. By investigating these dimensions, this study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamic nature of gender performance throughout the entire SIE journey, thereby enhancing our understanding of the gendered dimensions of SIE and laying a foundation for future research.

This study advances our understanding of the impact of SIE on gender performance across different spaces by applying the 'going gender' framework to career decision-making, extending its application beyond international mobility contexts. Unlike traditional 'doing gender' perspectives, the 'going gender' framework addresses how individuals adapt to new gender contracts in diverse environments, highlighting the reflexive and strategic attitudes required during SIE. This research also reconfigures the framework by examining whether gender role negotiation might begin before physical relocation, proposing that the autonomous nature of SIE may create unique pressures for women to engage in anticipatory gender role construction and deconstruction during their decision-making and preparation phases, potentially influenced by earlier life experiences with travel and mobility. This extension contributes to a greater understanding of gender performativity throughout the SIE journey, from pre-departure preparation to adaptation and beyond.

1.5 Research Scope and Design

A relativist ontology (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, 2018; Grønmo, 2020) and subjectivist (Krauss, 2005) epistemology are adopted for this study. Both support the rejection of universal and fixed conceptions of career success or professional advancement in expatriate contexts. Such philosophical positioning acknowledges that experiences of professional development are socially constructed and vary across cultural and organisational settings. The interpretivist paradigm guiding this study enables an in-depth exploration of how women make sense of their SIE experiences, recognising that their realities are multiple, constructed, and holistic (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Narrative inquiry was the primary methodological approach utilised in this study, allowing for the exploration of women's individual stories that are vital for understanding their subjective experiences of self-initiated expatriation. This approach captures the temporal, social, and situational dimensions (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) of women's SIE journeys. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with 15 women SIEs from diverse professional backgrounds. Thematic narrative analysis (Riessman, 2008) was employed to identify recurring patterns while preserving participants' unique narrative structures, focusing particularly on how women negotiate professional challenges and develop strategies for career advancement in international contexts. Throughout the study, a strong focus was placed on the role of gender and its impact on the experiences of these women between and within a range of contexts.

The selection criteria for the participants were as follows: 1) identified as a woman, 2) bachelor's degree qualified, 3) internationally mobile for employment, and 4) international mobility for employment included New Zealand. The complex and evolving nature of sex and gender was recognised, and for this study, 'women' refers to individuals identifying as women. While acknowledging the distinction between biological sex and socially constructed gender, this study enabled participants' self-identification. This decision was based on the understanding that gender is a personal and subjective experience.

1.6 RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

My research journey emerged from a critical intersection of personal observation and academic curiosity. During my Honours research project that examined mobility trends between China and New Zealand, I discovered a gap in understanding women's international mobility experiences. Hearing of my Mother-in-Law's complex career

transition as a young SIE moving from the global south to the global north in the early 2000s revealed the deeply intertwined nature of gender, careers, and life responsibility that SIE women navigate.

This previous personal encounter and research experience exposed the limitations of current mobility research: women's experiences as SIEs have often been reduced to statistical data, lumped crudely in with the global term ‘migrant’, or presented as a simple narrative, overlooking the intricate ways gender performance shapes and is shaped by women’s unique decisions and experiences as an SIE. Hence, this PhD study seeks to illuminate these dynamic experiences, transforming personal observations into research understandings and theoretical contributions.

By positioning myself reflexively within this research, I acknowledge that my insights are not merely anecdotal but represent a critical entry point for developing more complex, dynamic understandings of gender and SIE in contemporary professional contexts.

1.7 THESIS STRUCTURE

Chapter 2 explores the landscape of international mobility, with particular attention to gender in internationally mobile spaces, culminating in an analysis of how ‘going gender’ facilitates an understanding of gendered careers and SIE. This chapter provides a comprehensive and critical literature review that canvasses the broader academic fields of international mobility, SIE, and internationally mobile, gendered careers to build a thorough foundation for the study's contributions.

Chapter 3 presents a triangular approach for understanding gendered career mobility, beginning with the broadest conceptual level of power and performativity within

gender, then narrowing to examine mobile careers, and finally focusing on women's mobile careers. This chapter establishes the prevalence of SIE as a means of career progression and change, serving as a foundational aspect of this study while addressing identified limitations in understanding the interplay of gender and performance.

Chapter 4 outlines the methodological approach, moving from philosophical positioning to specific research methods and data collection. Grounded in subjectivism and aligned with an interpretivist and relativist worldview, the methodology recognises the importance of participant perspectives. Narrative inquiry, particularly within the life story paradigm, is identified as a suitable methodological framework to delve into the motivations and experiences of participants. As Atkinson (2007) asserts, the life story methodology provides a platform for articulating unexplored spaces, lending credibility to narratives and reflections that have yet to be documented or understood. This chapter also addresses researcher positionality and reflexivity before discussing the analytical strategy employed.

Chapter 5 presents participants' life stories, focusing on how each woman has challenged gender and social norms while navigating career continuation through an SIE lens. It offers rich, qualitative data derived from the participants' life stories, providing detailed accounts of their personal and professional journeys. Stories are used to illuminate the complexities of their experiences, including how New Zealand marked the first international move for some participants, while being one of several international mobility experiences for others.

Chapter 6 begins the analysis by examining the identified themes within each participant’s condensed story. It delves into the critical organising themes derived from

the analysis of the narratives, identifying and discussing the key themes that emerged from the participants' stories and providing a structured data analysis.

Chapter 7 connects the theoretical framework to participants' lived experiences and identified themes, examining how the reconfigured ‘going gender’ framework helps our understanding of women's SIE experiences. This chapter discusses the pertinent findings that emerged from the thematic analysis, highlighting insights gained from the participants' narratives while drawing on extant literature to determine the significant contributions of this study.

Chapter 8 concludes the study by outlining its contributions to theory, policy, and practice while suggesting future research directions. It emphasises how the research has built upon existing life story research, while distinguishing itself by advancing the significance of childhood and adolescent experiences when examining the interplay between gender, careers, and SIE for mid-adulthood professional women using a life course approach.

This introductory chapter contextualised the research, beginning with a broad overview of international mobility and narrowing it down to a specific focus on SIE professional women in New Zealand. It presented the core research focus: applying the 'going gender' framework to understand women's experiences of SIE.

2 INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY AND GENDERED CAREERS

This chapter explores the foundations of literature informing women's SIE and careers. Building on the research rationale outlined in Chapter 1, it synthesises three interconnected domains: international mobility, contemporary career theories, and the distinctive dynamics of women's geographically mobile careers. By integrating this knowledge, the chapter develops the scholarly foundations for analysing how women SIEs strategically navigate gender and make career decisions.

2.1 INTERNATIONAL MOBILITY AND SIE

To understand the experiences and aspirations of internationally mobile women, we must first understand mobility and how international mobility has developed as a career option.

The study of international mobility has evolved considerably since the initial and subsequent research focus on the movement of senior executives from developed countries on assigned expatriation for large multinational corporations, typically for two to four years (Brewster et al., 2014). Organisations sent these individuals to a host country to oversee a particular subsidiary area, and included their families for the entire period (Scullion & Collings, 2006).Significant changes in the progression of globalisation have further accelerated international mobility, as evidenced by the increasing flow of skilled labour and the rise of remote work opportunities globally (Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers, 2018; Newman et al., 2020; World Migration Report 2024, 2024). John Dunning (2009) describes four critical shifts in globalisation that facilitated the development of international mobility. First, the fall of the Berlin Wall shifted many Soviet Bloc countries into a market economy (Dunning, 2009) . Second, cross-border markets, such as the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), the ASEAN Free

Trade Area (AFTA), the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), and the European Union (EU), were designed to facilitate regional economic integration and support economic growth within specific geographic regions (Dunning, 2009)). The third shift was the start of the digital age, in which information technology and computing systems made it easier to expand many businesses, allowing entry into markets that may have previously been untapped due to a lack of access. Finally, increasing direct investment and the internationalisation of organisations has been acknowledged as the final critical globalisation shift. Understanding these fundamental shifts in globalisation helps to conceptualise how international mobility has accelerated over the last 50 years.

Each of Dunning's shifts (2009) has had an impact on the international mobility of women. For example, the digital age has opened new opportunities for women to work remotely and pursue international careers, regardless of their physical location. At the same time, the development of cross-border markets has created new avenues for women to pursue professional opportunities in previously inaccessible regions. However, these shifts have also presented new challenges, such as navigating cultural differences and overcoming gender-based barriers in new contexts.

International mobility varies, characterised by factors such as a person’s degree of self-initiation and independence, security and position upon arrival in the host country, assumed skill level, work, social, and cultural influences, and external factors resulting in departure from the home country (Kunz, 2020). The factors differentiating traditional expatriates (as discussed in detail earlier), SIEs, migrants, and refugees are tabulated in the appendices for ease of use (see Appendix A).

This research acknowledges that all four types of international mobility help us to understand the concept of mobility. However, there is also value in appreciating the

differences between the types, especially for reaching a deeper understanding of the aspirations and experiences of this study's international mobile sample group that has relocated to New Zealand.

Andresen et al. (2014) identify four key criteria differentiating a migrant from a non-migrant or expatriate. The first is the change of geographic location across national borders, the second is a change in the dominant place of residence, the third is whether the individual is carrying out work abroad, and last, whether that individual has legal employment within the host country (Andresen et al., 2012; Andresen et al., 2014a).

Existing literature distinguishes between the experiences of those who initiate international mobility and those dependent on a partner who initiates it (Aure, 2013). For many, this dependency is tied to a relationship or familial duty, requiring the accompanying individual to seek employment upon arrival in the host country (Douglas et al., 2019; Kinasih et al., 2020). A common reason for dependent international mobility driven by necessity is, for many, the fact that leaving children or a partner at home is not an option, and therefore, there must be adjustments and sacrifices made for the entire family unit (Aure, 2013; Kinasih et al., 2020). The classification of these dependent internationally mobile individuals (IMIs) as either expatriates or migrants often depends on the nature of their employment search: whether they initially arrive in the host country without intended employment and later seek it out of necessity, or if their high qualifications secure them a role typically associated with expatriate assignments (Andresen et al., 2014a; Aure, 2013).

The gendered nature of dependent mobility is often overlooked. Research has shown that women's careers are often regarded as secondary to their male partners' when it comes to international moves, which leads to many women sacrificing their

career aspirations to support their partners' opportunities (Boyle et al., 2002; Boyle et al., 2009; Smith et al., 2008). This phenomenon, sometimes called the ‘tied mover’ issue, highlights the persistent influence of traditional gender roles in shaping mobility decisions within couples (Duncan & Perrucci, 1976; Mincer, 1978). This can lead to frustration and a loss of women’s professional identity, highlighting the need for more support for women in dependent mobility situations.

2.1.1 SIE Mobility

An SIE is an individual who enters a foreign country independently (Alshahrani, 2024; Doherty, 2013; Stoermer et al., 2020). It is a self-initiated choice, a decision driven by motivations other than a prearranged job position, requiring individuals to self-arrange employment opportunities (Andresen et al., 2013; Andresen et al., 2020). This contrasts with an OAE, when typically a multi-national enterprise assigns the expatriate a position in a host country. (Brewster et al., 2014).

SIEs are not simply travellers or immigrants in the broadest sense, but living a self-directed ‘expatria’ lifestyle (Doherty, 2013; Vance & McNulty, 2014). Furthermore, SIEs are distinguished from 'migrants', a term often associated with vulnerability, uncertainty, escape from instability, and perceived lack of citizenship (Douglas et al., 2019). In contrast, SIEs are often associated with notions of choice and opportunity in transnational employment, with benefits often focusing on the economic aspects for both host countries and organisations (Douglas et al., 2019).

Three critical criteria differentiate OAEs from SIEs. The first is whether the employment opportunities are organisationally or individually initiated (Thorn, 2009; Thorn et al., 2013). The second is whether the individual’s employment decision was made with certainty before leaving their home country or whether employment was organised

largely upon arriving at their destination, recognising that some SIEs may have preliminary arrangements or intentions that are finalised after their arrival (Andresen et al., 2012; Andresen et al., 2014a). Generally, employment is organised on arrival by the SIE, but there are some instances of pre-arranged positions being negotiated. Thirdly, and similarly to the second criterion, is whether the individual is undertaking internal (inter-organisational) or external (outer-organisational) mobility, suggesting that the move is initiated within or apart from an organisation (Andresen et al., 2013; Andresen et al., 2020; Farcas & Gonçalves, 2017).

The definition of an SIE has been broadly debated (Alshahrani, 2024; Andrikopoulos & Duyvendak, 2020; Newman et al., 2020; Stoermer et al., 2020). Most scholars agree that SIEs are differentiated from other types of expatriates due to their autonomy in decision-making, self-funding, and broadly, more risk-taking or adventurous motivations, although there is no one set definition of an SIE at present (Gleissner & Stoermer, 2025). A key aspect of the autonomous decision-making process for SIEs is the belief that better opportunities, both in employment and lifestyle, are available outside the home country, driving a desire to explore and take advantage of them (Suutari & Brewster, 2000).

For this PhD study, an SIE is defined as an individual who has left their home country for employment through autonomous financial means without definite plans to return home at a specific time (Jannesari & Sullivan, 2021; McNulty & Brewster, 2017). The financial independence and relative insecurity of being an SIE requires these individuals to pursue job opportunities as soon as they arrive in the host country, leading to an intrinsic fear of failure and the need to adapt to the cultural environment of the host country with significant urgency (Andresen et al., 2014b; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009)(Maike Andresen et al., 2014; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009). Suutari et al. (2018)

argue that research on SIEs has often discussed them as a homogenous entity, frequently neglecting gender differences and the impact of host countries on outcomes, which has led to broad generalisations (Andresen et al., 2014; Suutari et al., 2018a). Of the comparatively smaller number of studies on women SIEs, the focus has predominantly been on capturing the experiences and outcomes of Western women, looking at the barriers and the multi-faceted issues, adjustments, and compromises that arise as part of the SIE process (Haak Saheem et al., 2022; Hutchings & Michailova, 2014; Salamin & Hanappi, 2014).

Women may choose to become SIEs for reasons beyond career advancement, such as broadening their worldview, providing opportunities for family, or enjoying the lifestyle benefits of the host country (Doherty et al., 2013; Fitzgerald & Howe-Walsh, 2009; Harrison & Michailova, 2013). As such, the literature often focuses on decision-making, choices, experiences, and a desire to explore as the reasons for relocation (McNulty & Brewster, 2017). Despite this, there remains a need for further research on the broader career journeys of SIE women, especially given that women now constitute a considerable and growing proportion of SIEs, with this form of mobility increasingly featuring as part of their long-term career trajectories (e.g., Andresen et al., 2023; Ott & Presbitero, 2025). This ongoing call for further research includes investigating whether SIE women of diverse nationalities and marital statuses exhibit differing career trajectories compared to existing understandings within the literature.

The career aspect of women's SIE journey has often concentrated on host country employment opportunities, frequently motivated by contrasts with potentially more restrictive or fewer opportunities in their home country (Tlaiss & Al-Waqfi, 2020; Tlaiss & Kauser, 2011). Furthermore, for many women, the autonomy inherent in being an SIE is

liberating, enabling them to pursue entrepreneurship, advance their careers, or explore new ventures (e.g., Andresen et al., 2023; Inkson et al., 2020; Suarez-Bilbao et al., 2023).

While the career trajectories of partnered women are influenced by career decisions and the location of their partners or family commitments more broadly (Linehan & Scullion, 2008; Selmer & Lauring, 2011), younger women SIEs, mainly from Western countries (Baluku et al., 2018; Gleissner & Stoermer, 2025; Rudiano-Matulevich & Beegle, 2018) ascribe more value to the adventure and challenges of an international career (Ellis et al., 2020). The experiences of living and working in a foreign country offer independence and exposure to a new challenge (Cheryan & Markus, 2020; Tahir, 2023; Zakaria & Yusuf, 2023).

Rodriguez and Scurry (2019) found that young, single, Western expatriate women enjoy more freedom and flexibility than local women in Qatar (and foreignness is an advantage as expatriate women in Qatar do not need to behave according to the conservative cultural values of the host country). However, the literature suggests that such opportunities may not be as readily available to MENA (Middle East and North African) women across their life stages (Tlaiss, 2015).

SIE women proactively manage their skills and networks to remain attractive in the labour market, which resonates with the experiences of many SIEs in general, as they often take jobs to maintain their marketability (Gleissner & Stoermer, 2025). For many women, these jobs are part of careers that include family breaks, are related to family relocations, or are in preparation for another career move (McNulty & Vance, 2017). Such experiences align with research on women's careers generally and the effect of contextual factors and family considerations (Andresen et al., 2023; Mayrhofer,

Pernkopf, et al., 2020; Mello et al., 2021; Ott & Presbitero, 2025; Ryan & Morgenroth, 2024)

There is limited evidence that the boundaryless career concept is fully suited to the SIE experience (Andresen et al., 2020). This raises questions about how other traditional career concepts apply. In a related vein, the literature often indicates that for women SIEs, career anchors (Schein, 1990), such as family-related values and needs, frequently take precedence over purely external career drivers (e.g., status, financial gain) when making career decisions. While SIE women are engaged with work, and some express interest in career success (Traavik & Richardsen, 2010), fewer studies specifically reference building career capital in this context (Myers & Pringle, 2005); hence there is a need within the literature for a greater focus on these women's future career aspirations. For many SIE women, career decisions appear to be based on more immediate circumstances rather than a rigidly planned career path, a phenomenon often linked to serendipity within the SIE experience (Arifa et al., 2021)

The existing literature on women SIEs highlights the influence of time, past experiences, and future expectations as potential factors shaping their career choices and trajectories. This suggests that career research could benefit from further exploring these temporal influences to help explain the career trajectories of women expatriates. This aligns with current understanding that careers often develop through distinct life stages rather than as a purely linear progression (Gleissner & Stoermer, 2025). This further indicates that women SIEs often view their careers in the context of time and space, exhibiting a kaleidoscopic career approach, seeing their career trajectories as temporally situated in concert with their personal and professional work environment (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005)

2.2 MOBILE CAREERS

Understanding individual mobile careers is essential in this research, given the diverse experiences of individuals pursuing them. Many are looking for mobility to further their careers, a movement supported by over 30 years of workforce globalisation and the ease of employment access globally. Understanding how a career takes on an aspect of mobility offers further insight into how this is viewed from a gendered perspective related to aspirations and experiences.

In a key definition from contemporary career theory, Sullivan and Baruch (2009) conceptualise career as “an individual’s work-related and other relevant experiences, both inside and outside of organisations, that form a unique pattern over the individual’s life span” (p. 1543). This comprehensive definition is crucial for the present thesis, as it encompasses not only physical movements between jobs, industries, and employers, but also an individual’s perception of career events and outcomes, and the impact of broad contextual factors, including personal circumstances such as relationships with family and friends. This expansive understanding allows this research to delve into the interwoven professional and personal dimensions of SIE, providing a necessary broader lens even while the central research question focuses specifically on career decision-making. Consequently, an individual’s career, understood in this holistic sense, can significantly shape their identity (Deblaere, 2020).

For women, becoming internationally mobile can be a step towards a new career trajectory, potentially accelerating their overall career development (Cao et al., 2014; McNulty & Vance, 2017). This career advancement is often underpinned by personal growth and self-development, key aspects of internal career capital that empower internationally mobile women to embrace risks and opportunities (Suutari & Taka, 2004).

Complementing this, external career capital, such as networks that enhance employability, becomes particularly crucial when navigating a foreign labour market (Lamb & Sutherland, 2010; Sutherland et al., 2015). Drawing on Arthur's (2005) pioneering 'intelligent career' framework, Parker et al. (2009) suggest that the development of these attributes is supported by understanding the 'why', 'how', and 'with whom' of SIEs' work, aligning with internal, external, and social capital, respectively. This framework continues to be a key concept in contemporary career literature (Andresen et al., 2023; Mayrhofer, Smale, et al., 2020; Ott & Presbitero, 2025; Richardson et al., 2022).

The way individuals perceive their careers is often reflective, constructed retrospectively through stories and narratives (Cohen, 2014), allowing for an examination of subjective perspectives. Cohen (2014) also notes that individuals within a job may find it challenging to identify pivotal career aspects outside of specific experiences and events. This highlights the need for a flexible approach to understanding the career of internationally mobile women in a new host country. Consequently, a career is often conceptualised as a trajectory, a 'journey', 'road', or 'path', rather than a fixed destination, emphasising the significance of an individual's experiences, both work-related and otherwise relevant (Mendonça Fraga et al., 2020). Existing literature has explored numerous career metaphors that provide a foundation for understanding this trajectory (Fournier & Bujold, 2005; Inkson, 2007), including careers as an inheritance, cycle, action, journey, role, relationship, resource, and story (Inkson, 2007). Furthermore, scholars have described career trajectories as ascending, descending, stable, or kaleidoscopic (Fournier & Bujold, 2005; Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). They generally call for an understanding of how an individual's career (internal) and lifestyle (external) experiences interrelate by looking at their career as the result of a trajectory. The word "trajectory" means the curved path that an object follows, an analogy that accepts that a career is a

journey without a destination and is affected by many forces outside the individual's direct control (Hugh & Peter, 2005). This necessitates an intrinsic understanding of the individual's relationships, movements, and decision-making processes (Mendonça Fraga et al., 2020). It is well known that careers can have an international component and involve a sense of fluidity, adaptability, and and uncertainty, which is often the case with women's careers.

2.3 Constructing and Conceptualising Women's Careers

2.3.1 Women's Careers and the Social Role

A significant parameter of the gendered career is traditional gender roles. Household divisions are evident in many cultures, especially within developing or underdeveloped countries (Metcalfe, 2006; Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007; Tharenou, 2010). The persistence of traditional gender roles within the home can create unique challenges for women's career progression. The scenario of a male partner supporting the family at home while the woman is the primary breadwinner is a challenge to traditional roles, and it can be difficult to shift deeply ingrained societal expectations around gender and work. In cultures with entrenched patriarchal structures, motherhood and its responsibilities are often solely attributed to women (Bergh & Du Plessis, 2016; Cheryan & Markus, 2020; Langinier et al., 2022; Lekchiri et al., 2019; Stoltz‐Loike, 1992)

Motherhood or caregiving responsibilities can interrupt a woman's career for extended periods, and due to the hierarchical nature of many jobs, there is pressure to return to work after childbirth or risk sacrificing career progression (Bowles et al., 2019; Fernando & Cohen, 2014). These challenges relating to household divisions and motherhood contribute significantly to broader patterns of gender inequality in the workplace. Such patterns can include vertical segregation – i.e., the unequal distribution of men and

women across different occupations and levels within organisations (Humpert, 2015) – reflecting gender inequality in terms of pay, prestige, skill, social stratification, and access to better opportunities (Watts, 2005).

2.3.1.1 Family as a Shaper of Experience and Provider of Motivation

An area of focus in occupational research has been contrasting expectations and aspirations for those of different genders (Aisenbrey & Brückner, 2014; Hartman & Barber, 2020). Early studies suggested that women, generally, were not focused on monetary incentives but instead chose skill advancement and intellectual challenges as two fundamental career aspirations (Pinto et al., 2020). This preference aligns with foundational work (Eccles, 2009), which underscored the importance of self-perceptions of skills and values in shaping women's career aspirations. Crucially, more recent scholarship (Biese & Choroszewicz, 2019; Cohen, 2014; Kruger & Nel, 2020; Myers & Thorn, 2023; Shortland & Perkins, 2020; Shortland & Porter, 2020; Tlaiss & Al-Waqfi, 2020) continues to affirm these critical internal factors as central to understanding women's pursuit of both advancement and intellectual challenge in their professional lives.

Despite the increasing career aspirations of women, the responsibilities of home, family, and childcare result in many women working part-time or leaving their field temporarily, therefore becoming a crucial part of their career experience (Aisenbrey & Brückner, 2014; Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Lippert & Damaske, 2020; Mendonça Fraga et al., 2020; Núria Vergés & Ana, 2013; Shortland, 2020). This is an important feature within underdeveloped and developing countries where women’s future career aspirations and expectations are dependent on their ability to obtain a qualification, begin a career, and balance their role as women with caring responsibilities (Bowles et al., 2019; Hartman & Barber, 2020; Shortland & Porter, 2020).

2.3.1.2 Agency in Women's Mobile Career Decisions

While family and caregiving responsibilities remain influential, recent literature emphasises women's autonomy in shaping their career trajectories (Williams, 2021; Garcia, 2022) as they strategically navigate work-life balance, sometimes delaying family formation or redefining traditional career paths. This agency is evident in their pursuit of international mobility, where they seek personal and professional growth while adapting to diverse cultural contexts (Fernando & Cohen, 2014; Ramos & Martín-Palomino, 2015; Svenja & Arthur, 2010).

Nevertheless, caregiving responsibilities may still significantly influence women's motivations for international mobility, indicating that the 'dual development model' of career and family is complex. Consequently, some women prioritise career aspirations over family formation (Blau & Ferber, 1991; Lippert & Damaske, 2020; Prete & Buchmann, 2013; Shortland, 2020). Alternative career paths, for which they may choose to remain childless or strategically balance career and family with career breaks, highlight the importance of agency in a woman's career experiences (Biese & Choroszewicz, 2019; Fernando & Cohen, 2014; Ramos & Martín-Palomino, 2015). Whether internationally mobile women pursue organisationally driven career pathways, such as OAE within a multinational corporation, or self-driven career pathways, these career options are increasingly prevalent, indicating a shift in gendered career studies (Chang et al., 2024; Haak-Saheem et al., 2022; Langinier et al., 2022). While the recognition of women's agency in their careers is not a novel concept, the increasing visibility and exploration of diverse career paths among internationally mobile women underscore its continued and evolving importance in contemporary careers research. However, this agency often operates within defined organisational or socio-cultural boundaries, creating complexity in the

negotiation of these career options (Gleissner & Stoermer, 2025; Ryan & Morgenroth, 2024).

2.3.1.3 Motivations and Antecedents

To understand the experiences and aspirations of tertiary-qualified internationally mobile women, we must understand why they engage in mobility. Previous research focused on the push and pull factors associated with international mobility (Harris & Todaro, 1970; Lee, 1966; Shultz et al., 1998). However, scholars have expanded on this by discussing intrinsic and extrinsic factors of mobility, adding complexity to the analysis (Andresen & Margenfeld, 2015; Kim et al., 2018; Massey & Espinosa, 1997). Theoretically, antecedents, referring to the underlying personal or background factors that predispose individuals towards mobility, are often associated with intrinsic factors, while motivations are often associated with extrinsic factors (Waxin et al., 2019).

Extrinsic factors are external to the person and are not primarily for self-satisfaction (Andresen & Margenfeld, 2015; Kim et al., 2018). These factors can both push the individual from their existing environment and pull them towards the perceived opportunities or benefits of the new one (Massey & Espinosa, 1997; Doherty, Dickmann, & Mills, 2011). The following table (Table 1) details some critical intrinsic and extrinsic factors affecting IMIs. These vary depending on the individual and their unique circumstances, although existing research suggests that extrinsic factors are more evident within migrant and refugee communities and intrinsic factors among expatriates, such as SIEs and OAEs (Farcas & Gonçalves, 2017; Linder, 2019). This relates to push and pull factors (Van Hear et al., 2018), suggesting that due to factors like fear and coercion, individuals from underdeveloped or developing countries may be pushed from their home environments more frequently than those from developed countries. The rising education rates in underdeveloped and developing countries suggest that push factors may be becoming

less prominent, contributing to the recent literature's focus on intrinsic and extrinsic factors (Doherty et al., 2013; Kim et al., 2018; Linder, 2019).

Table 1 - Intrinsic and Extrinsic Factors for Self-Initiated Expatriation

Intrinsic Factors (Antecedents) (de Eccher & Duarte, 2018; Waxin et al., 2019)	**Extrinsic Factors (Motivations) (Farcas & Gonçalves, 2017; Pinto Luisa et al., 2020)**
Career Advancement and Monetary Incentives (Massey & Espinosa, 1997)	Recession and Economic Hardship (Massey & Espinosa, 1997)
Location and Host Country Reputation (Doherty, 2013)	Political Instability (Castles, 2003; Dirlik, 2007; Van Hear et al., 2018)
Enlargement of Cultural and Social Understanding (Lauring & Selmer, 2012)	Educational and Social Opportunities for Themselves and Family (Farcas & Gonçalves, 2017)
Personal Skills Development (Banai & Harry, 2006)	

2.3.2 The Non-linear and Diverse Nature of Women's Careers

2.3.2.1 The Kaleidoscope of the Gendered Career

The Kaleidoscopic Career Model emphasises the cyclical, multidimensional nature of women's lives and careers (Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007). It is built upon three parameters, challenge, balance, and authenticity, that may manifest at different points throughout a woman's life, influenced by cultural context. Crucially, the Kaleidoscopic Career Model posits that these parameters are flexible; they fluctuate as individuals adjust their priorities and are often relevant simultaneously across different career stages. The model assumes that the individual is the active agent, in control of prioritising these dimensions at any given moment. While Challenge is often the primary focus in an early career, and Balance typically becomes central around family formation and increased

caring responsibilities, Authenticity is not confined to late career, as the desire to align work with one's values can be a vital and powerful driver for younger women and those in early career stages (Blau & Ferber, 1991; Clark, 2016; Cohen, 2014; Hartman & Barber, 2020; Hewlett & Luce, 2005; Mendonça Fraga et al., 2020; Pringle & Dixon, 2003; Smith et al., 2008).

While the Kaleidoscopic Career Model effectively describes what changes occur (a rotation of priorities across major life stages), it is primarily descriptive and is theoretically bounded by its strong focus on the individual as a self-directing agent. This individualistic assumption, which is a key critique in the extant literature (Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007; Arnold & Cohen, 2008; Ryan & Morgenroth, 2024), creates a theoretical gap by largely overlooking the systemic and contextual factors that constrain a woman's control over when and how she can shift her priorities.

The linear career progression model overlooks the changes in life context, trajectory, and priorities that occur throughout women's careers (Fournier & Bujold, 2005; Haak-Saheem et al., 2022; Myers et al., 2016; Myers & Thorn, 2023; Weisshaar & Cabello-Hutt, 2020), hence this model is better suited to a more traditional masculine career pattern (Biese & Choroszewicz, 2019; Mendonça Fraga et al., 2020; Seehuus, 2021). Women may leave their jobs if they perceive advancement as unattainable or feel overworked (Biese & Choroszewicz, 2019; Tabassum & Nayak, 2021). Because of this, women are opting out of traditional career models and instead are forging new ways forward to suit the demands and desires of a jobholder capable of obtaining career development and progression (Biese & Choroszewicz, 2019). The expression “opting out” has been typically used to describe women who leave the workforce to pursue other avenues, such as marriage, motherhood, etc. (Ryan & Morgenroth, 2024; Zimmerman & Clark, 2016). However, women in the early stages of their careers have increasingly

questioned or challenged the outdated notion of opting out (Harman & Sealy, 2017; Ryan & Morgenroth, 2024; Sealy et al., 2024). Instead, they are using it to create career pathways that may have left them feeling overloaded or at a dead end (Biese & Choroszewicz, 2019). These feelings arise from factors such as limited work and motherhood options, limited career progression, and burdensome cultural expectations regarding women and work (Harman & Sealy, 2017; Ryan & Morgenroth, 2024; Sealy et al., 2024).

Research suggests that women with families are still not considered entirely suited for traditional expatriate assignments (Caligiuri & Bonache, 2016; de Eccher & Duarte, 2018; Gleissner & Stoermer, 2025; Salamin & Hanappi, 2014), with earlier studies indicating that women are often encouraged to pursue international mobility primarily during life stages when they are young, single, and childless (Blau & Ferber, 1991; Damaske, 2011; Deblaere, 2020; Guillaume & Pochic, 2007; Harman & Sealy, 2017). However, this perspective represents an earlier view that may not fully reflect current practices, and additional recent research is needed to properly assess how this landscape has evolved, especially for mid-career women, over the past decade and a half (Frkal & Criscione-Naylor, 2021; Gleissner & Stoermer, 2025; Harman & Sealy, 2017; Ryan & Morgenroth, 2024; Sealy et al., 2024).

Foundational work by Pringle and McCulloch-Dickson (2003) on women's flexible careers provided an essential framework for understanding the self-managed career journey and the systemic challenges women face in established career structures. Their work developed from a wider critique of early individual-centric theories, such as the Boundaryless Career Model (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996), which often failed to fully account for the influence of non-work domains and structural constraints on women's non-linear careers (Pringle & Mallon, 2003). This focus on flexibility and the

acknowledgement of contextual influences provided the necessary theoretical precursor for subsequent models, such as the Kaleidoscopic Career Model (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005).

The Kaleidoscopic Career Model (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005) provides a lens through which to understand the non-linear and context-dependent career experiences of internationally mobile individuals, often highlighting how gender shapes these unique journeys. It is important to note that the Kaleidoscopic Career Model itself was developed as a women's career theory and was not originally developed in an international context (Kirk, 2015). Notably, the Kaleidoscopic Career Model operates at a macro-level, focusing on how the rotation of its three principles of Authenticity, Balance and Challenge aligns with major life stages (Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007). Some scholars suggest that the Kaleidoscopic Career Model effectively articulates the experiences of internationally mobile women, emphasising consideration of the motivations behind their decision to become mobile (Fitzgerald & Howe-Walsh, 2009; Harrison & Michailova, 2013; Harrison & Michailova, 2012; McNulty & Brewster, 2017; McNulty & Vance, 2017; Muir et al., 2014; Kirk 2015), however, while such models attempt to capture women's career experiences, they do not always adequately account for the diversity within the internationally mobile population. Kotze (2021), in a study examining the perceptions of international mobile individuals in South Africa, critiques policymakers and academics for adopting a "one size fits all" mentality, which neglects the unique skill sets and cultural, social, and societal value of IMIs, focusing instead on political or economic contributions (Bacchi, 2009; Kotze et al., 2021).

Beyond traditional career models, there have been many attempts to draw on women's careers to conceptualise women's internationally mobile careers. Lloyd (2013) suggests that women’s international mobility is more cyclical, meaning their careers are

composed of repeated moves, often resulting in no permanent sense of “home.” Smith (2010) similarly presents a cyclical understanding of women's internationally mobile careers, characterised by frequent, non-linear movement. Conlon (2011) disagrees, suggesting international mobility is not cyclical but relational, focusing on the quality of social connections that transcend across space and time rather than the movement itself. Anthias (2012) encourages a comprehensive approach to international gendered career mobility, stressing the interconnectedness and positionality of an individual within contexts as the key to understanding what international mobility looks like from a gendered career point of view. This research builds on these perspectives by suggesting that women’s international mobility is not merely framed by interconnectedness and positionality, nor is it a simple transactional process marking gains and losses. SIE women are not a homogeneous group (Bergh & Du Plessis, 2016; Gleissner & Stoermer, 2025; Kemp & Rickett, 2018; Myers, 2016) and have diverse origins, occupations, and reasons to relocate; hence, differing career choices and trajectories suggest an ongoing and dynamic exchange between aspects of their past and present lived experiences.

2.3.2.2 Boundaryless Careers

Boundaryless careers, as conceptualised by Arthur and Rousseau (1996), are defined as career paths that transcend the traditional boundaries of a single organisation, emphasising individual agency, mobility across employers, and reliance on external networks rather than internal hierarchies for progression. This concept resonates with recent literature identifying career journeys that are non-linear and characterised by a robust autonomous component (Mendonça Fraga et al., 2020; Weisshaar & Cabello-Hutt, 2020). However, the term ‘boundaryless’ has faced significant scrutiny since the early 2000s, with some scholars highlighting organisational hurdles and other critical boundaries individuals face throughout their careers. These structural limitations, including

poverty, gender inequality, and lack of education, render a 'boundaryless' career more accessible to individuals from developed countries (Inkson et al., 2012; Lamb & Sutherland, 2010; Svenja & Arthur, 2010; Pringle & Mallon, 2003). Furthermore, the Boundaryless Career Model's emphasis on singular individual agency tends to overlook the crucial relational dynamics, such as partner and family support, that are often prerequisites for women's international mobility and career progression (Mutter & Thorn, 2018), limiting its utility for complex international journeys.

Given these inherent limitations, scholars advocating for the 'boundaryless' career concept propose frameworks that integrate both individual motivation and contextual constraints (Inkson et al., 2012; Smith et al., 2008). Despite the theoretical constraints of the Boundaryless Career Model in fully capturing diverse mobility experiences, globalisation has undeniably facilitated an increase in individuals who actively seek adventure and self-discovery through international mobility (Andresen et al., 2020; Andrews & Roberts, 2012).

2.4 SUMMARY

This chapter began by highlighting how globalisation has opened up international career opportunities through key shifts that include the digital age and expanded markets. SIEs were distinguished from other internationally mobile individuals based on their agency and to some extent, their willingness to embrace risk. Career development was discussed as dynamic, emphasising career capital and fluid career trajectories. The agency, mobility, and fragmentation in women's careers were also explored.

3 UNDERSTANDING THE ROLE OF GENDER IN THE SIE JOURNEY

The chapter begins by establishing the crucial distinction between biological sex and socially constructed gender, highlighting how gender's expression can vary significantly across cultures and time. This foundational discussion then transitions to gender performativity, examining how individuals enact and express gender in various contexts. From there, the chapter explores the critical concepts of 'doing' and 'undoing' gender, which are crucial for understanding how SIEs, particularly women, adapt their gender roles in new cultural environments. This often involves strategically adopting behaviours to navigate diverse expectations, a flexibility more common in Western societies than in culturally conservative contexts. This leads directly to a detailed exploration of the 'going gender' framework, which moves beyond merely performing or adapting gender roles by recognising gender as a fluid and dynamic process requiring continuous adaptation to diverse cultural spaces – a process often involving tension and resistance. Finally, the chapter presents the theoretical framework for this research, which synthesises elements of gender identity and association with the dynamic, internationally gendered nature of careers. It also outlines key research gaps and introduces the central research question, setting the stage for the subsequent research process.

3.1 GENDER IDENTITY

Gender identity refers to a person's internal, deeply felt sense of their own gender; it is about who you know yourself to be (Butler, 1988; Lorber, 2000). This personal, psychological experience of gender may or may not align with the sex assigned at birth. For over five decades, Western scholarly discourse has increasingly distinguished between sex and gender, with a clearer conceptual separation emerging around the 1970s (Stoller, 2020). The concept of essentialism vs constructionism initially underpinned the

distinction between biological and identified sex to create a clear contrast between the two categories (Gill, 2008). Scholars widely agree that sex refers to the biological nature of an individual, while gender is a behavioural, socially constructed phenomenon and, therefore, an identity (Becker et al., 2017; Oakley, 2015; Stoller, 2020; Unger & Crawford, 1993). Despite this, essential qualities are socially expected based on assigned sex that aligns with gender association, such as masculinity or femininity (Becker et al., 2017; Factor & Rothblum, 2008; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010).

Rubin (1975) argues that social interactions and cultural assumptions about gender-specific behaviours functionally influence gender differences (Mari, 2017; Nisén et al., 2022). Definitions of masculinity and femininity vary depending on culture, time, race, sexuality, education, and other factors, suggesting that gender has a significant cultural character, with behaviour traits learned and heavily reliant upon social constructs (Hess, 2000; Mari, 2017; Mikkola, 2008). It is widely accepted that femininity and masculinity are socially determined rather than biologically determined (Haflinger, 1995; Butler, 1988; West & Zimmerman, 1987; Lorber, 2000). Given that gender is a fluid construct and is influenced by race, class, and region, it cannot be viewed separately from culture (Butler, 1988). Moreover, subsequent authors, including Butler (1990, 2004, 2011), question who and what constructs gender – whether it is built by people or whether people are being made by context (Jagger, 2008; Sinangil & Ones, 2003; Tohidi & Butler, 2017).

Beyond gender identity, the concept of gender association offers a relevant lens for understanding gendered careers and areas of inequity and inequality. The United Nations (UN) Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), whose mandate is reinforced by instruments such as the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), as highlighted by UNESCO

(2020), emphasises that gender is a broader construct than simply "women". It encompasses women, men, and other gender groups, as well as the often-unequal power dynamics between them. While discussions on gender frequently focus on women due to their disproportionate experience of gender inequality, achieving full equality requires the active participation of all gender groups (UNESCO, 2020). Consequently, adopting a gender perspective extends beyond a singular focus on women (UNESCO, 2020). This nuanced understanding of gender is particularly relevant to this research on the self-expatriation experiences of mid-adulthood women. By acknowledging that gender influences all individuals and shapes social structures, this study can more effectively analyse the specific challenges and opportunities faced by women in an SIE context, while also recognising the broader gendered dynamics at play in international mobility and career development.

There has been a discernible move towards examining international mobility in ways that extend beyond a binary understanding of gender association (Quinan & Hunt, 2023; Sert & Turkmen, 2022). Part of this is the understanding that for some, the performance of gender is not correlated to assigned sex at birth.

3.2 Gender Performativity

Butler's (1990) proposition that "gender is always a doing, though not a doing by a subject who might be said to pre-exist the deed" (p. 33) reconceptualises gender as an active process rather than a static attribute. Reflecting a constructivist stance, this suggests that gender is not an inherent trait but rather an ongoing performance. This theoretical intervention was built upon earlier sociological work by West and Zimmerman (1987), who established gender as "a routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment" (p. 126) rather than a natural property of individuals. Together, these perspectives

have shifted scholarly attention from questions of what gender is toward questions of how gender is accomplished through social practice, in other words, performativity.

These performative aspects of gender operate within hegemonic power structures that shape and constrain how gender is enacted. Hegemony, the social construct of power foundational to forming cultural and social expectations and norms (Lears, 1985), provides crucial context for understanding gender performativity. According to Antonio Gramsci (Bates, 1975; Lears, 1985; Zandra, 2024), hegemony represents the balance between culture and power, endorsing the dominant group's ideals (Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Hopf, 2013). This concept is particularly relevant to understanding gender dynamics, where societal norms often reinforce male dominance through what Connell (2005) identifies as hegemonic masculinity, "a pattern of practice that allow[s] men's dominance over women to continue" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, p. 832).

The conceptualisation of gender as performative has fundamentally disrupted conventional understandings of the relationship between sex and gender (Butler, 1988; 1990). From this perspective, gender is not viewed as an inherent biological reality or an internal essence, but rather as a social construct produced through repeated and stylised actions, gestures, speech, and other bodily enactments. These "performances" are not necessarily conscious choices, but rather the continuous process through which individuals conform to, or at times challenge, prevailing societal norms and expectations regarding gender. Rather than positioning gender as the natural consequence of biological sex, Butler (1990) suggests that gender performances create the illusion of an internal gendered self through their consistent repetition. As she explains, "gender proves to be performative, that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be" (p. 34). Conversely, the disruption or conscious alteration of these repeated performances, the 'undoing' of gender, can challenge established gender identities and the very notion of a coherent

gendered self. By extension, it can potentially challenge hegemonic power structures that rely on stable gender categories and hierarchies.

Crucially, Butler (1988, 1990) distinguishes between performance and performativity, emphasising that the consistent doing of gender is not a set of freely chosen acts but rather a deeply ingrained and often unconscious process that operates within the constraints of hegemonic systems. This aligns with Connell's observation that emphasising femininity represents compliance with subordination thus limiting women's positions of power within social or cultural contexts (Connell, 1987). Gender performativity operates specifically through what Butler (1990) terms a "stylised repetition of acts" (p. 191), embodied practices, linguistic enunciations, and behavioural patterns that, through their consistent reiteration, create the appearance of gender coherence and continuity. It is through these repeated actions, influenced by societal expectations and hegemonic norms, that individuals actively construct and present their gender.

This distinction is vital for understanding that gender performances are not freely chosen but occur within structural constraints that define the scope of possible expressions of gender. For SIE women, these repeated acts encompass professional behaviours, modes of self-presentation, communication styles, and other workplace practices that collectively constitute how they ‘do gender’ within specific contexts (Kelan, 2010; Seregina, 2020; Sultana & Deumert, 2023). Therefore, performativity, in this context, is fundamentally about how we 'do gender' through these stylised repetitions within the boundaries established by hegemonic masculinity and emphasised femininity, concepts that were developed specifically to establish and validate the hierarchical positioning of genders (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). For mid-adulthood professional SIE women in New Zealand, the focus of this thesis is on gender performativity, which provides a crucial theoretical lens for understanding how they navigate gendered expectations

within international contexts. This includes exploring instances of 'misfires in performativity' (Butler, 1988; Butler, 1990) where attempts to enact gender in ways that contradict prevailing contextual norms or expectations may lead to unexpected outcomes or challenges, reflecting the dynamic interplay between agency and structure in women's international experiences.

3.3 THE DOING AND UNDOING OF GENDER

When West and Zimmerman (1987) initially coined the phrase 'doing gender', they discussed how gender constructs are portrayed in a very lived-in way. Women have had to shape and reshape their gender roles throughout history. Every society has a gender structure to socially justify the gender-specific roles associated with femininity and masculinity. By 'doing gender', an individual is following the established expectations and norms around their gender, whether as a woman or a man. This is much the same as every society's economic structure, where norms around work, consumption, and wealth distribution are established through socialisation, cultural traditions, and institutional frameworks. Similarly, societal norms around gender are constructed and maintained through various mechanisms, including family upbringing, educational systems, media representation, and everyday interactions, which collectively prescribe how individuals are expected to behave, present themselves, and even feel based on their perceived gender. Patriarchal gender hegemony has implications for shaping expectations that are at the heart of 'doing gender' (Liu & Li, 2020; Pinho & Gaunt, 2021; Risman, 2009; Seregina, 2020; West & Zimmerman, 1987).

If gender is constructed, it is also capable of being undone, a process implying its deconstruction and potential reconfiguration (Risman, 2009; Seregina, 2020; Sultana & Deumert, 2023). This 'undoing of gender' refers to the deconstruction of gender

constructs both within organisations and across broader societal contexts (Deutsch, 2007). For SIEs, this process becomes even more critical, as they must actively navigate the doing and undoing of gender roles to balance cultural adaptation with personal agency during international mobility (Bakewell, 2010; Biese & Choroszewicz, 2019; Fernando & Cohen, 2014; Newman et al., 2020; Svenja & Arthur, 2010). These dynamics are evident throughout the mobility journey, particularly in relation to gender roles associated with childcare, career agency, and the household division of labour (Hansen, 2020; Langinier et al., 2022; Rodó-de-Zárate & Baylina, 2018).

In patriarchal societies, Powell (2009) observes that women sometimes employ strategies perceived as embracing masculinity. This requires an undoing of a woman's traditional gender roles, made more difficult in culturally conservative contexts where gender roles are less fluid and entrenched in both cultural and religious norms, meaning that societal expectations and behaviours associated with being a man or a woman are more rigidly defined, less open to individual variation, and deeply embedded in long-standing cultural traditions and religious beliefs (Connell, 1987; Lorber, 2000). The freedom to simultaneously do and undo aspects of gender is a way to establish individualism, identity, and agency. This is particularly observable in cultures where gender roles are still well-defined, and a woman's role is the career of the family unit. This adaptive agency, the ability to strategically navigate and modify gendered expectations, allows women to not only perform gender well but continue to operate within a professional identity cognisant of traditionally masculine decision-making (Kelan, 2010; Lorber, 2000).

However, the ability to 'undo' gender roles is often more prevalent in Westernised countries, and is attributed to advancements in gender equality and decision-making (Himmel, 2015; Lorber, 2000; Morash et al., 2011). Women living in patriarchal cultures are typically less likely to 'undo' gender role associations. Enabling this undoing through

mobility opens more room for agency, allowing women to navigate the dynamic interplay between their desire to pursue a career and their socially established gender.

3.4 Doing and Undoing Gender in Careers

The degree to which women simultaneously do and undo aspects of gender throughout a career depends on what career or industry is being pursued and the broader societal contexts the women find themselves in (Deutsch, 2007; Pinho & Gaunt, 2021; Risman, 2009; Seregina, 2020; Sultana & Deumert, 2023). Some careers are built around masculine norms, such as within the technology industry, and for those whose identities or approaches do not align with these norms, additional hurdles exist for establishing themselves (Cheryan & Markus, 2020b; Cuddy et al., 2015). Women in careers shaped by masculine gender hegemony must constantly defy stereotypes to advance and persist in their workplaces while also conforming to gender expectations and norms to navigate the patriarchal system (Mendonça Fraga et al., 2020; Wachter & Holz-Rau, 2021). This perspective highlights that women's success in specific settings requires navigating multiple individual, organisational, and societal factors. At the highest level are the societal norms. In some cultural settings, such as those with strong traditional or religious structures (Donnelly & Gamsu, 2020; Tharenou, 2010), these cannot be challenged to the same degree as in others. At the organisational level, women can challenge gender hegemony and pursue their career interests (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Lears, 1985). At the personal or private level, women may be restricted to certain expectations and norms around the role of the female within their social and cultural context, which can create tension with their gender performance, including family responsibilities (Greenhaus et al., 2001; Greenhaus & Foley, 2007; Powell & Greenhaus, 2010). Women’s ability to challenge expectations and norms may be limited, particularly during life stages such as child-rearing and elder care, as women continue to bear primary

responsibility for household work and caregiving (Bearak et al., 2021; Niemistö et al., 2021; Stoltz‐Loike, 1992).

This would suggest that some women have ‘kaleidoscopic careers’ (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005), operating relationally to others in both work and non-work realms and shifting the pattern of their careers by rotating various aspects of their lives, much like the patterns in a kaleidoscope. These shifts are often driven by womens changing needs and priorities related to authenticity, balance, and challenges across different life stages and roles. However, the ability to do and undo aspects of gender within a career relies upon the societal, organisational, and individual context within which women operate, suggesting that it is more than a kaleidoscopic career.

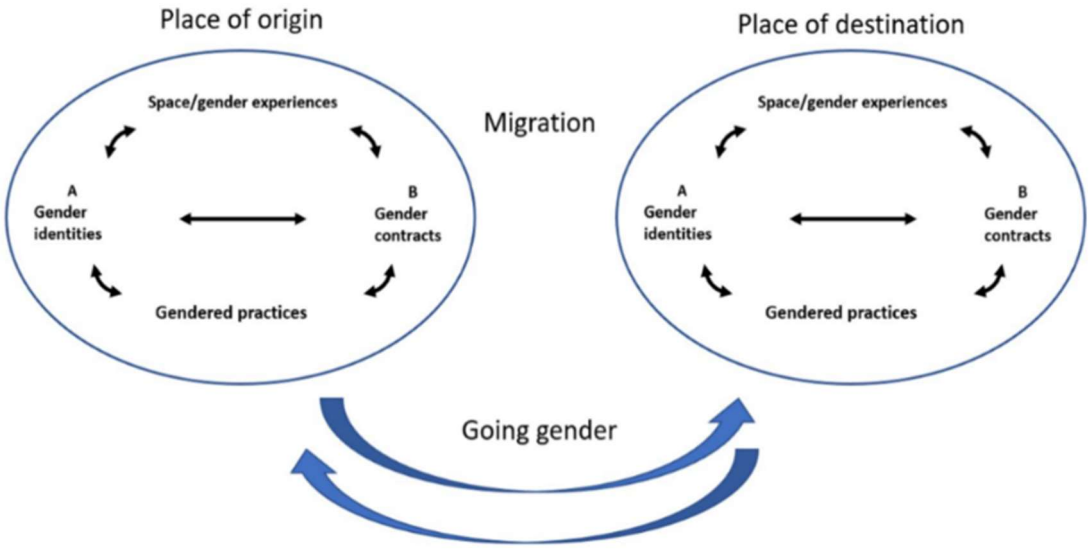
For SIEs, the need to 'do' and 'undo' gender becomes even more pronounced (Harry et al., 2019; Kubovcikova & van Bakel, 2022; Wechtler, 2018). Relocating to a new cultural context necessitates a constant negotiation of gender roles, both professionally and personally. For example, a woman from a culture with traditional gender roles might need to adopt more assertive behaviours in a Western workplace while simultaneously navigating expectations related to family and caregiving within her new community. This dynamic interplay between cultural adaptation and gender performance is a defining characteristic of the SIE experience, adding a layer of complexity to the career trajectories of SIEs.

3.5 From Doing Gender to Going Gender

A crucial aspect of doing gender is its place-specificity, whether in the immediate local context or any other particular context (Forsberg, 2001; Stenbacka & Forsberg, 2020). Examining local, space-specific gender contracts is vital to understanding the transition from doing gender within various locations to the transformational nature of

these gender practices. For internationally mobile women, this involves understanding how ingrained gender expectations in their home country interact with and are transformed by the new gender contracts encountered in the host countries' professional and social landscapes. While local gender practices can become ingrained between contexts, the transactional and transformative nature of gender comes into play. Gender practices, norms, and experiences will change between different social and professional contexts, requiring those moving between spaces to adopt a transactional approach to gender performance. In its most general sense, international mobility requires individuals to transform their understanding of their place within society by going gender – a continuous process of learning how to exist between different social, cultural, and professional spaces, often involving tension, persistence, and resistance.

Figure 1 - The Going Gender Framework (Stenbacka & Forsberg, 2020)



Drawing on developments in gender theory (Afiouni et al., 2020; Butler, 1988; Dupuis et al., 2008; Hoskin, 2017; Lorber, 2000), and especially pertinent to the study of

mobility and careers, is the idea of ‘going gender’ (Stenbacka & Forsberg, 2020). ‘Going gender’ examines how gendered experiences are actively and continually negotiated when people move between different geographical and social contexts (refer to Figure 1). It is not limited to one type of journey but varies depending on age, sexuality, and geographic context(s). It significantly challenges the individual’s values and beliefs if the local context differs from what they have experienced. Adapting can be challenging for those with firm values and beliefs who are reluctant to change, given their new context (Stenbacka & Forsberg, 2020). However, ‘going gender’ is an adaptive, fluid, and dynamic process that is significantly shaped within different social, cultural, and professional contexts (Butler, 1990; Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; West & Zimmerman, 1987). This is because the social norms, expectations, and performances associated with gender vary considerably across cultures and locations. Individuals navigating different geographic and social contexts encounter diverse interpretations and enactments of gender, which can lead to a deeper and evolving understanding of their own gender in relation to these varying social landscapes.

Forsberg and Stenbacka (2020) point out that the 'going gender' theoretical framework is a spatial concept of migration focused on the instability and transactional nature of gender performances across different contexts. International mobility demands simultaneous and cohesive physical, emotional, and mental adjustments, which can lead to conflicting gender contracts (Stenbacka & Forsberg, 2020). The 'going gender' framework explains how individuals adapt to new gender contracts in diverse environments, expanding upon aspects of traditional 'doing gender' literature and taking into consideration the gendered experiences of individuals undertaking international mobility (Stenbacka & Forsberg, 2020). One essential part of this approach is the challenging

and reshaping of local gender contracts, highlighting that women can go gender in different ways (Stenbacka & Forsberg, 2020)

Doing' or 'undoing' gender is only possible in social and professional situations with clear gender distinctions (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005; Jack et al., 2019). Gender hegemony affects men's and women's daily lives in several ways in different regions, suggesting that the nature of doing and undoing gender can look vastly different depending on the local context, which means that gender roles are locally constructed and contextualised. When international mobility implies a shift in the gendered nature of a gender role, women and men might transform their practices to the extent they perceive necessary. Stenbacka and Forsberg's (2013, 2017) studies on gender in the context of mobility suggest a continuous process of 'doing' and 'undoing' gender, involving tension, persistence, and resistance. The performative aspect of 'going gender' directly correlates with gender hegemony, highlighting the intersectional and contextual nature of gender roles and their performance, particularly for those changing societal contexts.

For example, a woman moving from a culture where traditional gender roles are strictly enforced to a culture with more egalitarian norms might find herself 'going gender' by adopting more assertive behaviours in the workplace and challenging traditional expectations in her personal life. This dynamic process is crucial, as any significant dissonance between expected and enacted gender can manifest as a 'misfire in performativity' (Butler, 1988, 2020). Conversely, a woman moving from a highly individualistic culture to a collectivist one might 'go gender' by emphasising community and collaboration over personal achievement. These examples illustrate how gender performance is deeply influenced by cultural context, requiring individuals to adapt and negotiate their gender identities in new and dynamic ways.

3.6 GOING GENDER – THE CONTEXTUAL VIEW ON GENDER ROLES BETWEEN SPACES

Despite knowing that women may use international mobility as a source of autonomy, there remains a gap in understanding how gender specifically impacts SIE women and their career trajectories. Further investigation is needed into the sensemaking of aspirations, expectations, and experiences of a diverse range of internationally mobile women, particularly those with tertiary qualifications (Biese & Choroszewicz, 2019).

Collectively, academics within the fields of international mobility and gendered careers have identified the value of looking at the multidimensional nature of the decision-making, career strategies, and experiences of internationally mobile individuals (IMIs) from a range of ethnic backgrounds, from immediately after becoming internationally mobile through to when they are deeply established in the host country, and during their repatriation process (if that eventuates) (Andresen et al., 2020; Baluku et al., 2018; Biese & Choroszewicz, 2019; Colakoglu et al., 2018). Khikji and Pumroy (2018) suggest using sensemaking to understand and interpret an individual's aspirations and experiences, outlining this framework as an understudied tool within gendered career studies. Therefore, addressing a gap in our understanding of the sensemaking of the aspirations, motivations, and experiences of tertiary-qualified mid-adulthood women undertaking cross-cultural international mobility became the motivation for this research study.

This study seeks to address a critical gap in the literature by advancing a reconfiguration of the 'going gender' framework to theorise the dynamic and adaptive experiences of women SIEs in New Zealand. It critically examines their motivations, career trajectories, and the complex negotiation of gender roles as SIEs, thereby contributing

to a deeper understanding of gendered career decision-making in the broader context of international mobility.

3.7 RESEARCH QUESTION

The aim of this research is to explore the role of 'going gender' in contextualising women's career decision-making as SIE women in New Zealand, guided by the over-arching research question of *"How does 'going gender' contextualise a woman's career decision-making as an SIE in New Zealand?"*

3.7.1 Sub-Questions

Within this framing the guiding sub-questions are:

1. What are the motivations driving the SIE experiences?
2. How do women navigate and interpret gendered experiences in establishing a career in a new country?
3. How does this move shape their future career aspirations?

3.8 RESEARCH FOCUS

This study explores the lived experiences and career trajectories of tertiary-educated women who have self-initiated their expatriation to New Zealand. Utilising a life story approach, the research investigates how these women, possessing at least a bachelor's degree, navigate their personal and professional lives within a new cultural context. The study examines the interplay of gender, careers, and international mobility, employing and reconfiguring the 'going gender' framework to understand the dynamic nature of decision-making processes and experiences to further SIE scholarship. This research also can provide valuable insights for policymakers concerned with mobility and international career experiences.

3.9 SUMMARY

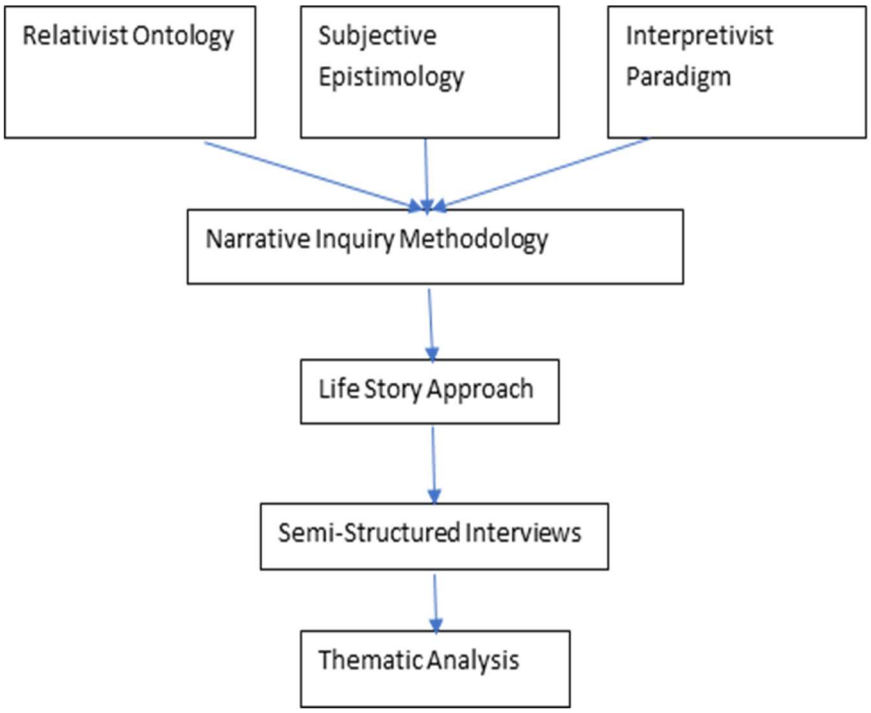
This chapter explored the complex interplay of gender, identity, and SIE experiences. It established the distinction between biological sex and socially constructed gender, highlighting that gender can vary across cultures and time. The concepts of 'doing' and 'undoing' gender are crucial for understanding how SIEs, particularly women, adapt their gender roles in new cultural environments, often strategically adopting behaviours to navigate different expectations. This flexibility is more common in Western societies than in contexts where traditional gender roles are deeply entrenched. 'Going gender' moves beyond doing or undoing gender in a performative sense, recognising gender as a fluid and dynamic process, requiring adaptation to diverse cultural spaces, which often involves tension and resistance. Research gaps and the central research question were presented, setting the stage for actioning the research process. The next chapter will discuss the methodology, methods, and analytical strategies that underpin and frame this research study.

4 RESEARCHING THE EXPERIENCES AND ASPIRATIONS OF INTERNATIONALLY MOBILE WOMEN

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter details the methodological approach of this study, which is grounded in a relativist ontology, subjectivist epistemology, and an interpretivist paradigm (Figure 2). First, the chapter establishes the study's philosophical foundation, demonstrating its alignment with a narrative inquiry methodology and a life story approach. Understanding my position as a researcher and giving space for the participant's voice (Major, 2017) is central to this process and is discussed next, alongside my commitment to reflexivity. The chapter then outlines the participant recruitment process, the methods for data collection (semi-structured interviews) and analysis (thematic analysis), and the ethical considerations.

Figure 2 - Method and Methodology Diagram



4.2 PHILOSOPHICAL POSITIONING

Research philosophy is fundamental to the research process, laying a foundation for developing knowledge and the overall research design (Saunders et al., 2000; Saunders et al., 2019). At its most basic level, ontology addresses beliefs about the nature of reality and what it means to be an active participant in the world (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). This leads to epistemology, which focuses on the concept of knowing and the fundamentals of this knowledge. It critically examines the relationship between the inquirer and the knowledge generated, alongside how participants construct and interpret their own knowledge and how the researcher subsequently interprets that understanding (Grant & Giddings, 2002). These philosophical aspects will be discussed in further detail throughout this chapter, leading into the methodology and methods.

A relativist ontology was adopted for this study, on the assumption that individuals perceive situations through multifaceted perspectives. This position is crucial for exploring the lived experiences of internationally mobile women now living in New Zealand, as it highlights the importance of their individual stories, sense-making, and unique realities (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, 2018; Krauss, 2005). Within a relativist ontology, reality is highly subjective and fundamentally shaped by personal experience (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, 2018; Guba & Lincoln, 2005; Leavy, 2014; Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Individual realities differ due to cultural, historical, and familial factors impacting how each person sees the world, rather than there being a singular overarching truth (Crotty, 1998). Consequently, the main premise of a relativist ontology is that there is no single fundamental reality. This leads to a focus on methods and methodologies that account for unique experiences, perspectives, and the researcher's subjective experiences and potential biases (Krauss, 2005). Therefore, factors such as emotion, cultural background, personal experiences,

social background, and norms are fundamental to the relativist ontology, empowering the individuality of participant narratives (Moon & Blackman, 2014).

A subjectivist epistemological stance was also adopted for this study, focused on cultivating a philosophical grounding for what kinds of knowledge are possible and how they can be ensured to be both adequate and legitimate (Maynard, 1994). The idea that reality is intrinsically a social construct, built around the interactions between varying realities, underpins this epistemological perspective. It is recognised that everyone has a sense of reality shaped by their experiences and expertise as part of the societies in which they participate (Cohen, 2014). Furthermore, it is acknowledged that each individual holds a different sense of reality due to their unique perspective of truth, the context, and their values and attitudes, which must be considered throughout the research process (Krauss, 2005). Under this idea is the concept that the subjective value of individuals' social locations is valuable to the overall outcome of the research. As Saunders et al. (2009, p. 111) suggest, a subjectivist epistemological view is when "social phenomena are created from the perceptions and consequent actions of social actors".

With a subjectivist epistemology, knowledge creation is a developmental and continually evolving process (Crotty, 1998), which integrates well within the interpretivist paradigm (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Using a subjectivist approach allows for a deep exploration of the female study participants' interpretations of their career decisions and how 'gendered' influences shape these interpretations. It allows for exploration of how they navigate their international careers by acknowledging that each participant's reality is unique and shaped by their subjective experiences, cultural background, and social context. This aligns directly with the research questions, which seek to understand SIE women's subjective motivations, experiences, and aspirations in New Zealand.

An interpretivist paradigm identifies that reality is socially constructed (Blaikie & Priest, 2017). A central feature of this paradigm is that it facilitates insight into how individuals perceive reality, including the interaction between society and the individuals' perspectives. It creates space for understanding the realities faced by diverse groups within society and the contrasting, dynamic way these different realities can be interpreted and made sense of (Blaikie & Priest, 2017; Morgan & Smircich, 1980). Because of the fluidity and understanding inherent within this paradigm, a subjective and descriptive methodology is required to appreciate complex personal situations, rather than an objective and statistical method (Remenyi, 2005). Understanding an individual's unique perspective on life requires an awareness of societal differences and how lived experiences may differ from those presupposed by society (Corbetta, 2003; Quinlan et al., 2015; Remenyi, 2005). Interpreting and understanding the subjective and constructive realities of the participants in this study was necessary to represent the varied career and lifestyle experiences of this unique group of internationally mobile women. The concept of reality relative to their own experiences and those of their fellow internationally mobile women respects the subjective nature of a narrative inquiry methodology.

4.3 NARRATIVE INQUIRY METHODOLOGY

Narrative inquiry was chosen as a suitable methodology for this study to explore, communicate, record, and unpack a participant's experience (Clandinin, 2016; Daiute, 2014). This methodology is underpinned by an interpretive ontology, which recognises that reality is co-constructed through human experience, and a subjective epistemology, which holds that knowledge is generated through understanding subjective meaning-making. Therefore, this methodology inherently focuses on how individuals construct meaning from their lived realities through storytelling, recognising that humans naturally 'story' their lives and that these individual narratives are fundamental to human existence.

Narrative inquiry provides a robust framework for studying an individual's life and experiences, creating space for nuance, dialogue, and reflection (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018). The methodology illuminates how people make sense of their world and the meanings implicit in the stories they share. It is grounded in the understanding that storytelling is central to human cognition and communication, from thinking and speaking to making sense or bringing meaning to life. By focusing on the meaning embedded in participants' narratives, the narrative inquiry framework facilitated an in-depth exploration of participants' experience, taking into consideration their personality, identity, and uniqueness, and recognising that it is through stories that individuals make sense of their lives.

Dewey (1938) created the philosophical basis for narrative inquiry in research. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) describe Dewey's philosophical basis as having two criteria for identifying an individual's experience. Firstly, the interpretivist paradigm guides how knowledge is understood within the narrative, emphasising subjective meanings over objective facts. Secondly, continuity focuses on identifying the sequence of events and experiences within the stories (Bruner, 1986; Butler-Kisber, 2010). Narrative is a class of discourse type, whereas a story is one form of narrative (Clandinin, 2016; Mertova & Webster, 2019b). Narrative inquiry acknowledges that the participants have human experiences that are dynamic and nuanced, many of which may be difficult to express (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Eichsteller, 2019; Mertova & Webster, 2019a). Therefore, this type of inquiry, using a life story approach, is used in this research to gain a subjective understanding of the participants within their specific social and lived contexts across a significant period of their lives so far.

4.4 LIFE STORY APPROACH

The life story approach, employed here as a qualitative research method, allows for the gathering of holistic, retrospective accounts of memories related to past events, situations, actions, and relationships, primarily via the in-depth interview process (Kemp & Rickett, 2018; Lind et al., 2021). Life stories are only one approach that narrative researchers use, simply due to the diverse, dynamic nature of people's lived experiences (Clandinin, 2020; Eichsteller, 2019; Goodall, 2019; Khwaja & Mahoney, 2019; Mertova & Webster, 2019b). Specific disciplines of research, including health sciences, education, and other social sciences, use the life story approach to look at the wide-ranging nature of lived experiences (Atkinson, 1998; Cohler, 1991; Habermas & Bluck, 2000; Josselson, 2013; Kemp & Rickett, 2018; Lind et al., 2021; McAdams, 1988). While less common, it has also been used previously in SIE literature (Myers, 2016). Other approaches commonly used by narrative researchers are life narrative, autobiography, autoethnography, biography, and ethnography (Creswell & Creswell, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018; Eichsteller, 2019; Grønmo, 2020; Liamputtong, 2019; Schindler, 2019). These approaches to narrative research are often used interchangeably, yet their alignment to a specific paradigm and methodology is crucial for clarity and coherence in the research process. Consequently, it is essential to articulate why a life story interview approach is best suited to this research study and its philosophical positioning (Atkinson, 2007; Clandinin, 2007; Gubrium, 2012; Kemp & Rickett, 2018). This section will examine how the life story approach functions as a distinct method within this research, detailing its specific fit and differentiating it from alternative narrative methods.

While distinctions exist between a life story approach and oral history, it is important to clarify their application within this study. Oral history, often a discipline focused on factual accounts of an individual's life, contrasts with the life story approach, which is

primarily interested in the participant's re-integrated narrative-telling and subjective meaning-making (Rosenthal, 2004; Spector-Mersel, 2006, 2010; Portelli, 1997). This distinction is vital for this research, as it seeks to interpret participants' perceptions and interpretations rather than establish an objective historical record. As Atkinson (2007) suggests, the open-ended interview questions inherent in a life story interview allow the storyteller to express their narrative in their own way, directly contrasting with oral history, where a researcher might more directly guide questions, edit, or search for information to produce a 'complete' story.

The life story approach was deemed highly appropriate for this research due to the need to understand each participant's past experiences and how these shifting and evolving experiences contributed to their decision to come to New Zealand and impacted their subsequent life and career decisions and experiences following expatriation. Hence, the interview process needed to allow participants to express and share their life narratives, focusing on what was important to them. This involved allowing participants the space to narrate their experiences as honestly and comprehensively as they felt comfortable with, with my guidance ensuring coverage of the essential aspects of their lives (Jackson & Mazzei, 2009). This approach honours the individual storyteller, acknowledging the subjective nature of their experience while inquiring into their unique journeys (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Kemp & Rickett, 2018).

Thematic analysis was undertaken once participant narratives were gathered through the life story inquiry process. While narrative research may draw on various analytical approaches, I chose thematic analysis as it allowed me to identify critical aspects within the participants' stories and group these themes accordingly. This inquiry approach emphasises the participants' narratives and how they use language to communicate their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). It also encompasses participants'

broader social, cultural, and institutional narratives, recognising how their personal experiences are shaped by their surroundings and situations (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). Such narratives can encompass personal accounts or stories about others, typically including specific details such as key individuals and critical events (Daiute, 2014). As Patton (2015) suggests, I focus on the story itself as the data, with the narrative serving as the analysis, "which involves interpreting the story, placing it in context, and comparing it with other stories" (Patton, 2015, p. 128).

4.5 Data Collection – The Interview Method

In-depth semi-structured interviews were chosen as the method for gathering participants' individual life stories. A semi-structured approach was deemed the most appropriate due to its ability to lead with a critical, open-ended question that encourages conversational responses (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). This enabled several participants to take the interview in a direction much better suited to their unique journey rather than my presupposed ideas of where the interview, or their life journey, has and/or should go. Interviews as a method of data collection have evolved to the degree that the researcher can use alternative wording and embrace the free-flowing nature of the conversation while keeping the overall questions consistent, resulting in an openness of expression and sense-making (David & Sutton, 2004; Grønmo, 2020; Gubrium, 2012; Pustulka et al., 2019).

The interviews were conducted in each participant's chosen setting, ensuring an environment that was comfortable and conducive to open sharing. Most interviews took place via video conferencing, allowing for flexibility and accessibility for participants across New Zealand. Each interview lasted between 60 and 90 minutes, allowing ample time for participants to share and explore their life stories. The interview schedule

(Appendix B – Interview Schedule) developed through a review of the literature and refined through pilot interviews, consisted of open-ended questions designed to elicit rich narratives about the participants' motivations, experiences, and aspirations. The guide was used flexibly, allowing for follow-up questions and exploration of emerging themes.

As a core component of the life story approach, in-depth interviews are typically designed as either unstructured or semi-structured, serving as a standard tool for inquiry (Mack et al., 2005). Due to the conversational nature of semi-structured interviews (Rubin & Rubin, 2012), this approach can facilitate a fluid narrative with the participant and enable previously unheard stories or less comfortable dialogue to emerge. This was observed in the current study, as participants often opened up about life events and decisions that might otherwise have been difficult for them to share. Conversely, when more direct questions were initially posed during pilot interviews, participants tended to be more reserved, consequently withholding personal details about their life stories and experiences.

Following the selection of narrative inquiry as the methodology and the life story as the specific method, semi-structured interviews were chosen as the primary instrument for data collection. Semi-structured interviews, characterised by their open-ended questions, foster a reciprocal relationship between the researcher and the participant, thereby facilitating deep insight through the process of reflection (Galletta & Cross, 2013c). A reflexive appreciation of knowledge production influences this approach (Gubrium, 2012), which means recognising that the knowledge generated in research is not merely uncovered but is actively co-constructed through the dynamic interaction between the researcher and the participant, inherently shaped by the researcher's positionality and interpretations.

Semi-structured interviews were well-suited for exploring participants' perceptions, experiences, and opinions (Barriball & While, 1994), aligning with the study's interpretivist paradigm. Recognising that communication is fundamental to human connection, interviews provide a crucial foundation for understanding participants' life narratives within society (Gubrium & Holstein, 2002). This approach allows for the discovery of the unique individual experiences of each participant, acknowledging that the same word within a question may hold different meanings, and participants' vocabularies may vary. Such interviews, therefore, necessitate a degree of researcher flexibility to draw out expansive and meaningful participant responses (Barriball & While, 1994; David & Sutton, 2004).

4.5.1 Selection of Participants

A criterion-based, self-selection, and snowball sampling technique was used to recruit 15 participants for the study (see Appendix E) (Lavrakas, 2008). The snowballing technique is used in qualitative research where a potential participant may know others who meet the selection criteria and approach them on the researcher's behalf. This works in conjunction with self-selection as a recruitment technique, as it involves the participants identifying themselves as meeting the study's criteria and putting themselves forward as a potential participant (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Although participants for this study were found using a snowballing technique, the self-selection process was purposeful and based purely on the assumption that I wanted to gain further insight and understanding from a specific group (Patton, 2015). Hence, I used criterion-based selection as identified by LeCompte and Schensul (2010), focusing on the types of attributes that are critical for this research and going into depth as to why those criteria were necessary for the result of the study.

Merriam (2016) identifies the snowballing technique as one of the most common forms of purposeful sampling, starting with a small number of participants meeting the selected criteria and expanding as each individual refers the researcher to others (Patton, 2015). In qualitative research, a common approach to determining sample size is to continue data collection until a point of saturation is reached (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Saturation refers to the point where no new information, themes, or insights emerge from the data, and further interviews would yield diminishing returns (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994, 2018)

However, this research adopted the approach of Patton (2015), who suggests that rather than aiming for saturation, sample size should be determined by the need for 'decent coverage' – ensuring enough breadth and depth of information to adequately answer the research questions and fulfil the study's purpose. The distinction lies in the endpoint: saturation seeks redundancy in themes, while decent coverage prioritises sufficient detail to comprehensively address the specific inquiry. Given the unique focus of this narrative inquiry on the profound, individual lived experiences of professional SIE women and the open-ended nature of the semi-structured interviews, a fixed sample size providing 'decent coverage' was deemed more appropriate than pursuing thematic saturation. The richness of each individual story was paramount. While themes would emerge, the goal was not necessarily to exhaust all possible thematic variations across a large sample, but to provide an in-depth understanding from a well-represented group.

As the focus of a life story approach within a narrative inquiry methodology is to elicit an in-depth response from participants, 15 participants were selected for this research (Mills & Birks, 2014; Patton, 2015; Vasileiou et al., 2018). This allowed for enough diversity in the sample while the narrow focus on tertiary-educated internationally mobile women in New Zealand also provided the depth of thematic analysis desired (Lecompte,

2010). Four participants were known to me personally before the study. However, they reached out independently through the advertising process. These participants then assisted in recruiting others via the snowballing technique. The following criteria were used to choose the participants for this research.

4.5.1.1 *Women*

Participants were required to identify as women and were selected based on this identification. Evidence shows that women are now choosing to delay other life events, such as motherhood, until later in life so that they can explore their careers and other opportunities, such as international exposure (Baluku et al., 2018; Bearak et al., 2021; Niemistö et al., 2021). International mobility is a pathway for many women seeking to develop a more diverse and autonomous career (Wechtler, 2018). Looking into the aspirations and experiences of this group of tertiary-qualified women involved discussing their career aspirations and experiences in the context of their life path (Phyllis, 2010). In identifying a woman, no apparent difference between sex and gender was specified: it was sufficient that the participant identified as a woman. Therefore, no restrictions were placed on the biological sex or gender identity of the participant.

4.5.1.2 Bachelor's Degree Qualified

This criterion was chosen to ensure that participants had a foundation of professional experience and were actively pursuing career development. A bachelor's degree qualification also signifies a commitment to higher education and professional growth, which are often associated with individuals who seek international career opportunities. Tertiary qualifications are one way to identify an internationally mobile woman actively pursuing an international professional career in a self-initiated manner. In an SIE context, global mobility is a result of an individual's pursuit of a higher qualification alongside their desire for employment in another country (Maharjan et al., 2022; Pinto Luisa et al., 2020).

An increasing percentage of the female population globally is seeking a tertiary education, with an OECD Report in 2021 stating that in 2019, “51% of 25–34-year-old women held a tertiary degree compared to 39% of men on average across OECD countries” (OECD, 2021). This growing proportion of highly educated women worldwide directly contributes to the emergence of the professional SIE female cohort, making their career decisions and experiences a pertinent area of inquiry.

A completed tertiary education impacts flexibility, international opportunities, and pay equality. The OECD (2021) reported that for those within the 25–34-year-old age bracket, tertiary-educated women earn, on average, 52% more than those with an upper secondary education. Tertiary education for women also has a direct effect on the gender pay gap, with women with a respective tertiary degree earning, on average, 83% of the earnings of men with the same level of education, compared to 80% for those with an upper secondary education (OECD, 2021). Therefore, it was fitting to use tertiary education as a parameter for this study, provided the participants were pursuing professional careers in New Zealand.

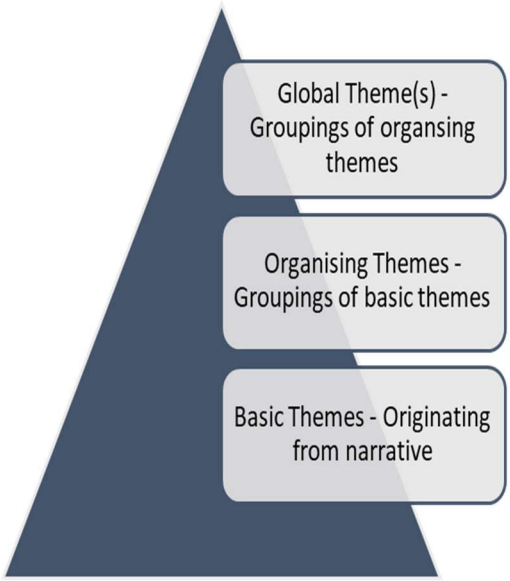
4.5.1.3 Internationally Mobile through Self-Initiated Expatriation

This criterion was used to ensure that all participants had experience with SIE as a form of international mobility and that their experiences with this mobility were current or recent, specifically within the last 10 years, to ensure relevance to their current career trajectories and decision-making. Participants in this study had resided in New Zealand for a period ranging from two to 10 years at the time of their interviews. This differing length of residence allowed for various participant experiences, from recent SIE arrivals to those in the process of gaining citizenship. The length of time a participant had been in New Zealand was likely to have impacted their aspirations and experiences as an internationally mobile woman (Andresen et al., 2020; Atkinson, 1998; Cameron et al.,

2019; Shortland, 2020; Suutari et al., 2018). Documenting an internationally mobile woman's career experiences and life path is essential to the life story approach in order to capture career experiences, interactions, transitions, and outcomes (Atkinson, 1998). The length of time participants will continue to stay in New Zealand may differ. At the time of the study, participants were visa holders, residents, or recent citizens with a current employment position in New Zealand. However, New Zealand may not be the first or last destination in their journey as an SIE; the critical element is their experiences and international mobility to date. This study acknowledges that New Zealand may represent a temporary phase within a broader trajectory of international mobility for some. Therefore, the research focuses on their career decision-making, gendered experiences in New Zealand, and the mobility patterns that led them to this current context, rather than predicting or tracking future movements.

4.6 Analytical Strategy

Figure 3 - Diagram of Thematic Hierarchy



This research utilised a thematic analytical strategy to systematically analyse the rich narratives gathered from participants' life stories (Figure 3). Thematic analysis is a method of identifying, analysing, organising, describing, and reporting themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Braun et al., 2019), providing a systematic yet flexible way to analyse the lived experiences of the participants (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Lorelli S. Nowell et al., 2017). This approach is particularly valuable for capturing text complexities, allowing for a deeper understanding of the data.

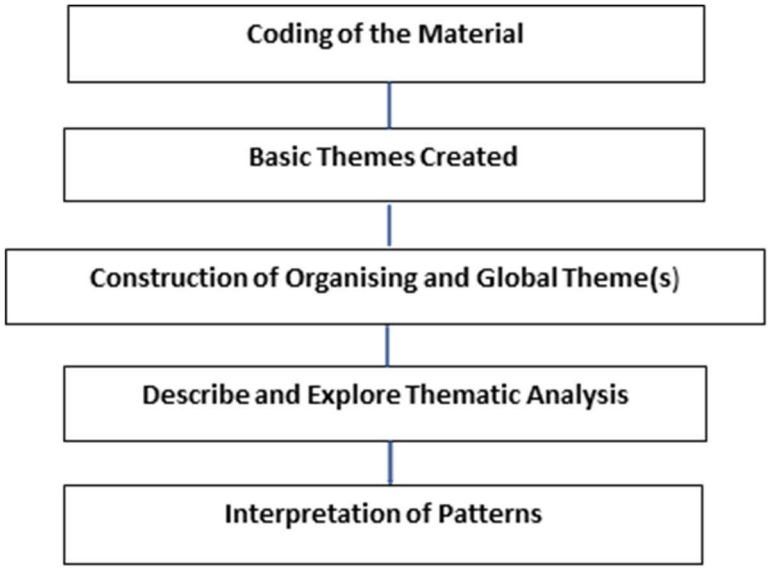
This research identified themes by observing recurring patterns and ideas within the data and interpreting their significance within each participant's life's broader narrative and social context (Guest et al., 2011; Guest et al., 2013). Thematic analysis is inherently reflexive, requiring a consistent focus on the expression of the participants when identifying themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun et al., 2019). It is a way to structure and visualise the connectivity between themes seen in the participants' stories, providing the depth necessary at this level of research (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

The three levels of themes used in this thematic analysis are as follows:

1. Basic Themes – As the lowest order theme, surface-level patterns are identified within each participant's narrative content. Basic themes do not divulge much about the overall story's deeper meaning; however, in relation to other basic themes identified within a single narrative, they highlight key characteristics. They primarily serve to describe what participants are saying without deep interpretation. The analysis then progresses to identify connections and broader patterns across these basic themes and individual stories, leading to the development of higher-order themes that offer richer insights and interpretations

2. Organising Themes – These act as mid-level categories that cluster basic themes into broader groups. They help structure the narrative and begin to reveal underlying meanings.
3. Global Themes – These are overarching, high-level themes that capture the core messages or dominant insights emerging from the participant stories. They provide a unifying narrative that explains the significance of the research findings.

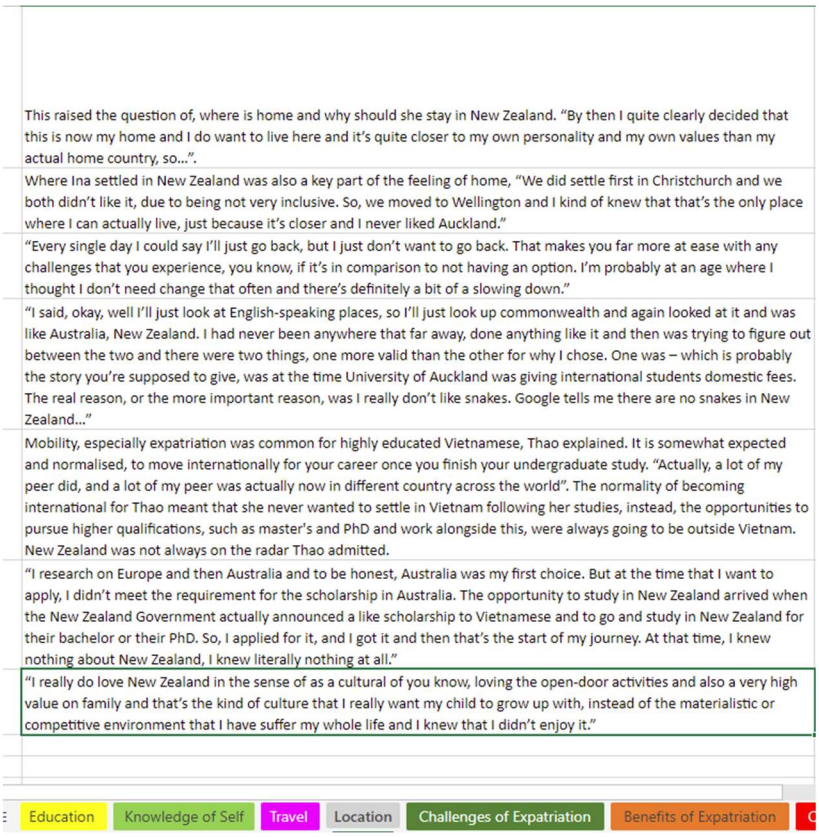
Figure 4 - Attride-Stirling's (2001) Analytical Approach for Thematic Analysis



Attride-Stirling's (2001) analytical approach (*Figure 4*) for thematic analysis was chosen due to its ability to create and view themes comparatively and hierarchically (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Mano, 2017). The first step was to *code the stories (Figure 5)*. Stories were generated from the raw transcripts and coding was conducted on the stories. This was done by open coding, dictated by the research questions and the rationale behind the research (Attride-Stirling, 2001). The narrative was broken down into palatable proportions through coding, making it easier to analyse (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Braun

& Clarke, 2006). Coding was conducted manually, using identified colour codes to identify basic themes.

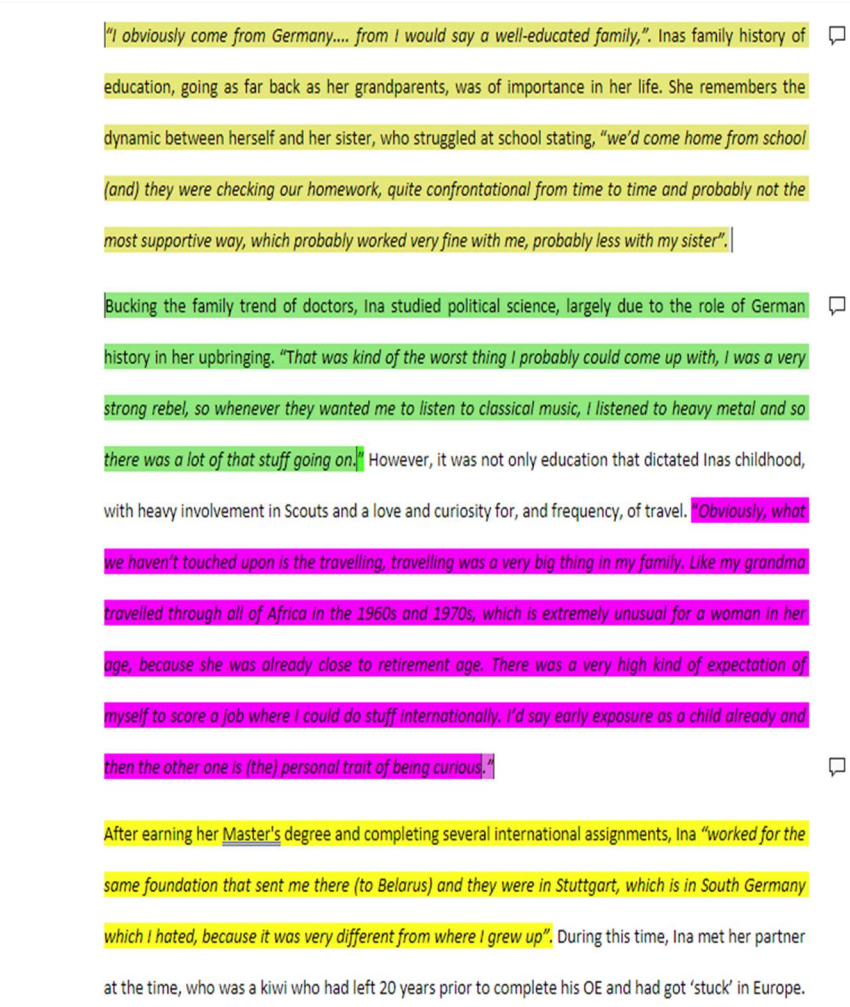
Figure 5 - Extract from Coding via Microsoft Excel



The second step was to *create initial themes from the codes (Figure 5).* It was important that the codes were cohesive, and some refining was required to create a viable theme for thematic analysis (Attride-Stirling, 2001). This meant grouping individual codes that shared a common underlying meaning or concept, and then iteratively reviewing and adjusting these groupings until they formed distinct, meaningful themes that accurately represented patterns within the data. Viability involved looking at the themes in relation to the research questions, focusing specifically on whether a theme answered a question and whether it worked in cohesion with other basic themes. Part of this viability

process was to look at how the theme represented the participants' subjective realities and interpretation of the world, aligned with a reflexive approach.

Figure 6 - Example of Basic Themes Identified from a Participant's Life Story



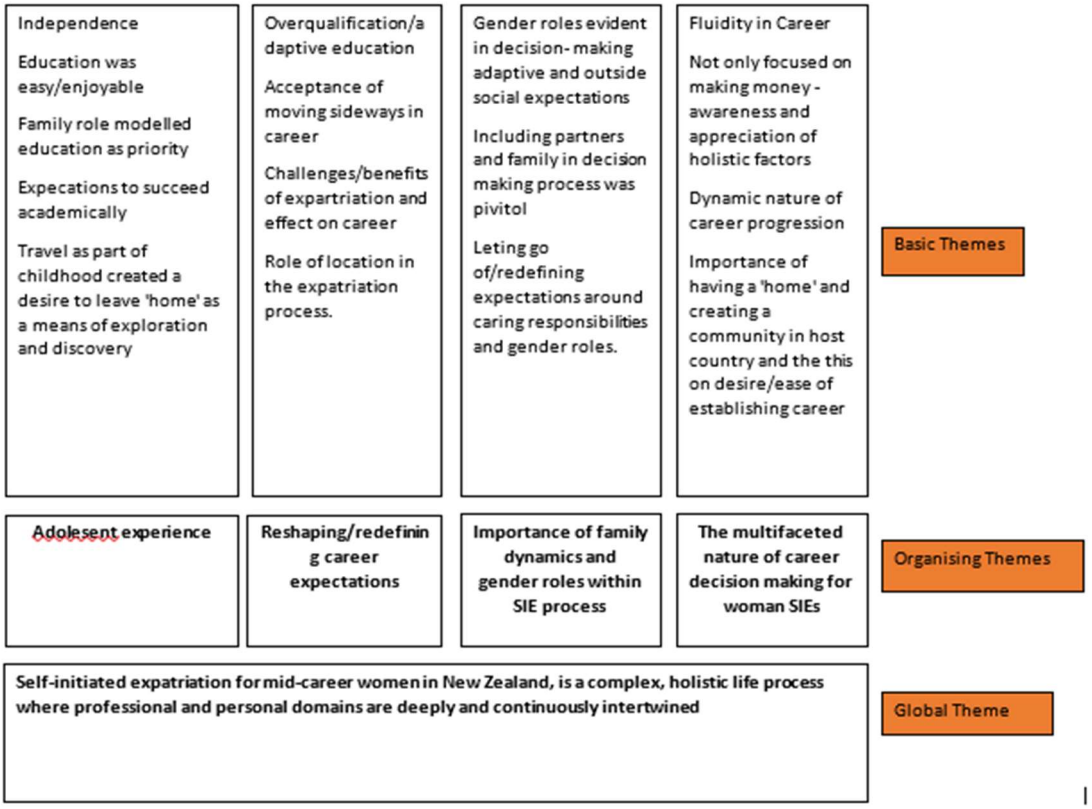
"I obviously come from Germany.... from I would say a well-educated family,". Inas family history of education, going as far back as her grandparents, was of importance in her life. She remembers the dynamic between herself and her sister, who struggled at school stating, *"we'd come home from school (and) they were checking our homework, quite confrontational from time to time and probably not the most supportive way, which probably worked very fine with me, probably less with my sister".*

Bucking the family trend of doctors, Ina studied political science, largely due to the role of German history in her upbringing. *"That was kind of the worst thing I probably could come up with, I was a very strong rebel, so whenever they wanted me to listen to classical music, I listened to heavy metal and so there was a lot of that stuff going on."* However, it was not only education that dictated Inas childhood, with heavy involvement in Scouts and a love and curiosity for, and frequency, of travel. *"Obviously, what we haven't touched upon is the travelling, travelling was a very big thing in my family. Like my grandma travelled through all of Africa in the 1960s and 1970s, which is extremely unusual for a woman in her age, because she was already close to retirement age. There was a very high kind of expectation of myself to score a job where I could do stuff internationally. I'd say early exposure as a child already and then the other one is (the) personal trait of being curious."*

After earning her Master's degree and completing several international assignments, Ina *"worked for the same foundation that sent me there (to Belarus) and they were in Stuttgart, which is in South Germany which I hated, because it was very different from where I grew up".* During this time, Ina met her partner at the time, who was a kiwi who had left 20 years prior to complete his OE and had got 'stuck' in Europe.

The third step involved *constructing links between the themes (Figure 7),* which was the process of clustering the initial basic themes under more comprehensive organ-ising themes (Attride-Stirling, 2001). Throughout this process, the research questions were used to guide the construction of themes, ensuring that the themes being created were within the scope of this research.

Figure 7 - Thematic Analysis



The fourth step is to *describe and explore the links between themes.* The critical aspect of this step is that the narrative is re-read through the perspective of the primary, organising, and global themes identified earlier. It is essential that time is spent time digesting the text and re-experiencing the participants' lived experiences and the relationships between the themes identified across all levels of analysis (Gubrium, 2012). By re-reading the text and re-evaluating the interview experience, I could refresh my understanding of the participants' lived experiences and how they told their stories. It was paramount to remember that there is a relational aspect to a life story interview. Therefore, I had to consider the whole transcript when identifying and linking themes. The fourth and fifth steps co-occurred, as it was necessary to describe and explore the themes in a manner that conveyed the findings while aligning with the overall purpose of the research, without presupposing the outcomes.

The last step, which is the fifth in Attride-Stirling's (2001) analytical approach, is the *interpretation of the patterns* within the themes. The patterns that emerge from the themes are interpreted and discussed, taking into account the research questions and rationale. This step was completed, as evidenced in Chapter 7 – the Discussion chapter, and focused on aligning the findings with the research questions and providing a conclusion. The step also shed light on the gaps identified by this research, providing a foundation for future work.

Initially, thematic analysis was used to identify basic themes, which were descriptive and involved numerous instances of duplication between participants. At the basic thematic level, it is typical for recurring themes to occur, which are then grouped into organising themes. This study looks at the lived experiences of SIE women in the New Zealand context, which is fundamental to the inquiry aspect of the study. An essential part of the analysis process was to open code, appreciating and adjusting to the data, creating space for ideas, experiences, meanings, and assumptions which may otherwise have been left undisclosed.

4.6.1 Reflection and Adjustment of Analytical Strategy

One aspect which arose from the coding process was the constant reassessment and iterative refinement of thematic choices to ensure they optimally represented the lived experiences of these women (Galletta & Cross, 2013a, 2013b; Kemp & Rickett, 2018; Myers, 2016). To maintain the reflexive and iterative nature essential to this life story approach, I chose to execute the primary coding and thematic clustering manually within Microsoft Excel, rather than employing specialised digital qualitative software. This methodological choice allowed me to maintain a close, organic relationship with the raw narratives, facilitating the necessary constant oscillation between individual stories and emerging higher-level patterns. For instance, initial coding might have grouped

seemingly similar statements, but upon deeper re-engagement with the individual narratives, it became clear that distinct nuances warranted separate basic themes. Conversely, some initial basic themes, while present, proved less central than first assumed, leading to their reclassification or integration into broader categories.

Because I was hierarchically structuring the themes, it was also essential that I identified the critical organising themes that arose from the data rather than presupposing what I deemed should be an organising theme (Mano, 2017). This involved a continuous oscillation between the granular details of individual stories and the emerging higher-level patterns, allowing the data to dictate the most salient analytical constructs. Finally, when culminating my coding themes into a global theme, I was not only required to be cognisant of all the organising themes but also the purpose of the research, going back to the primary research question.

Adherence to the inclusion criteria was prioritised during recruitment, with each participant asked to self-confirm their eligibility. However, minor variations in the participant cohort were accommodated to enrich the narrative inquiry process. For instance, while the primary criterion was 10+ years of professional experience, a single participant with 9.5 years was included due to the exceptional depth and relevance of her narrative to the research question. I viewed variation in their contexts provided a crucial humanistic quality to the process and ensured the final sample achieved the required coverage for rich thematic development. These deviations were accepted only after confirming that the core criteria were fully satisfied, thereby ensuring that the methodological concessions did not compromise the validity or depth of the resulting findings (Creswell and Poth 2013; 2016).

4.7 PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

4.7.1 Condensed Life Stories

These short stories (see Chapter 5) provide an overview of each participant's life journey. While constructing the narrative, every effort was made to capture the unique voice and spirit of each participant's story through carefully synthesising and interpreting the interview material. This involved faithfully integrating their specific language, idiomatic phrasing, and key insights to represent their experiences. These condensed versions of their extensive life stories involved a careful distillation of their journeys, always with an awareness of my positionality in shaping the presentation of their realities.

4.7.2 Thematic Analysis

Chapter 5 presents the condensed life stories of each participant. While distilled from extensive interview material, these narratives provide a holistic overview of each woman's unique life journey and experiences in their own words, capturing their individual voice and spirit.

Building upon these individual narratives, Chapter 6 progresses to thematic analysis, providing insight into the participants' collective perspectives. From this analytical process, specific excerpts are drawn upon. Unlike the comprehensive 'condensed life stories' in Chapter 5, which present an individual's entire journey, these are concise, illustrative excerpts or quotes taken directly from an interview. They serve a distinct purpose: highlighting key insights and powerfully illustrating the identified themes throughout the findings and discussion chapters. These excerpts provide rich, direct insight into the data in the participants' own words. They offer concrete examples underpinning the broader thematic understanding developed from all participants' lived experiences (Nowell et al., 2017).

4.8 ETHICAL PRACTICE

Ethical dilemmas in qualitative studies are most likely to originate from data collection and the publishing of the findings (Tolich, 2016). Historically, ethics in narrative inquiry have focused on damage control and limiting the harm caused by the inquiry (Clandinin et al., 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018; Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). This emphasis stems from the understanding that participants may undertake a profound re-evaluation throughout the inquiry process, making new sense and furthering their understanding of their lives, experiences, and decisions, which can sometimes be a sensitive or challenging process (Clandinin et al., 2018).

Patton (2015) describes ethics in qualitative research as reliant upon the researcher's ethics. One way to mitigate the risk of ethical dilemmas arising from the interaction with the participants of this study was by ensuring that within the interview setting, I as the researcher did not impose any interpretation on the participants' experiences (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Central to the interview process was the interaction between me as the researcher and the participant, which was not just a research relationship but a human relationship (Clandinin et al., 2018; Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The dependability of the qualitative data collected is directly connected to the trustworthiness, experience, emotional understanding, and interpretation of my interaction with the participant (Patton, 2015). Much trust is placed in me as the researcher to produce credible and trustworthy results, accurately representing my interaction with the participant. It is also essential that the data is not filtered and interpreted based on my theoretical position and bias; thus, a focus was placed on consistency throughout the analysis process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Ethical approval was granted by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) (21/216) on June 21, 2021, thereby acknowledging this research's integrity and its future participants' well-being. A copy of the ethical approval document can be found in Appendix C. The application process involved presenting the research questions, the research purpose, detailed data collection plans, and strategies to protect both the researcher and the participants. This included outlining adherence to Te Tiriti O Waitangi principles: partnership, participation, and protection. Furthermore, the submission required an interview guideline document detailing the leading questions, a comprehensive consent form, a transcriber agreement form, and a researcher safety protocol.

In practice, this research adhered strictly to AUTEC guidelines to ensure the protection and well-being of all participants. Informed consent was obtained from every participant before the interviews commenced, clearly outlining the study's purpose, the interview process, and participants' rights. Participants were assured full confidentiality, with all identifying information removed from transcripts and subsequent reports, they were also given pseudonyms to further protect their identity. Crucially, participants were also informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any time up until the findings were analysed, reinforcing their autonomy throughout the research process.

4.9 SUMMARY

This chapter detailed the methodology used to explore how ‘going gender’ shapes women's career decisions as SIEs in New Zealand. Employing an interpretivist paradigm with a relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology, the research utilises narrative inquiry and a life story approach.

Narrative content was collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews with 15 tertiary-qualified, professional women, selected via criterion-based, self-selection,

and snowball sampling. Analysis followed Attride-Stirling's thematic approach, which involved an iterative process: first, identifying basic themes within each participant's narrative, followed by identifying higher-order organising and global themes across all narratives.

Researcher reflexivity and ethical considerations, including AUTEC approval, were significant factors shaping the research process. The condensed life stories of each participant are presented in Chapter 5. Subsequently, the thematic findings, illustrated by specific short stories drawn from the narrative content, are presented in Chapter 6. These narrative presentations collectively incorporate the participants' voices, thus reflecting the power of narrative inquiry as a methodology to explore the lived experiences of women SIEs at a very deep level.

5 CONDENSED LIFE STORIES

This chapter presents the data in individual narrative form, directly relating to the main research question: *"How does 'going gender' contextualise a woman's career decision-making as an SIE in New Zealand?"* The 15 stories presented are drawn from the life story approach employed in this research, focusing on women who have undertaken SIE. These individuals are characterised by their self-driven nature and willingness to openly share their personal experiences for this research. The self-initiated expatriation process for them was often multifaceted; for some women, it appeared less complicated, but for all, it inherently involved compromise.

When constructing these narratives, the challenge lay in ensuring that each participant's experience and voice were genuinely captured as they unfolded in their unique and iterative contexts. This required a constant reflexive process to understand the participants' perspectives without imposing preconceived notions of their life journeys. While it might have been simpler to create standardised narratives, the integrity of the research demanded a focus on preserving the authentic unfolding of each participant's story. This approach is particularly pertinent because the growing and diverse literature on SIE and gender highlights a need for careful and individualised presentation of each participant's lived experiences.

5.1 THE INDIVIDUAL STORIES

5.1.1 Iris

Iris was born and raised in a German family where education was deeply ingrained across generations. Her grandparents, like her parents, emphasised the importance of academic achievement. However, Iris's childhood was marked by a noticeable contrast between her and her sister. While Iris thrived in school, her sister struggled.

Their parents' focus on academic performance often resulted in confrontation, not only between parents but also between the sisters. Iris recognised that this assertive approach worked well for her but negatively impacted her sister, creating tension between her and her parents. Contrary to the family tradition of becoming doctors, Iris chose to study political science. Her upbringing and a strong fascination with German history partly influenced this decision.

Iris had often demonstrated an independent spirit, preferring to forge her path rather than strictly adhering to all family expectations. She recalled, *"I was a rebel, so whenever they wanted me to listen to classical music, I listened to heavy metal, so there was much of that stuff going on."* Education was not the only defining aspect of Iris's childhood. She was actively involved in the Scouts, loved travel, and was curious about the world. Her grandmother had travelled extensively through Africa in the 1960s and 1970s, an uncommon feat for a German woman of her generation. This exposure to travel, coupled with the aspirations Iris developed by listening to her grandmother's stories and through her own childhood experiences, helped shape her interest in international travel and work. She explained, *"There was a high expectation of myself to score a job where I could do stuff internationally. I would say early exposure as a child already, and then the other one is (the) personal trait of being curious."*

After completing her master's degree and various international assignments, Iris worked for the same foundation that had sent her to Belarus, where she had previously worked. She was, however, moved to South Germany, a location she found uncongenial due to its significant cultural and social divergence from her childhood town in Eastern Germany. During this period, she met her partner, a New Zealander who had left his home country two decades earlier and had since been living in Europe. Although Iris initially intended to return to Eastern Europe, following her earlier experiences in

countries like Belarus, her partner's need for assistance with German language acquisition and her realisation that pursuing her career aspirations in that part of Europe would be challenging led her to re-evaluate her plans.

Upon relocating to New Zealand, Iris felt an immediate and strong sense of belonging, considering it her home. This sentiment persisted even after separating from her partner two years before our interview. She perceived that New Zealand resonated more strongly with her values and outlook than her home country, Germany, and she found a sense of connection with its lifestyle. She chose Wellington as her preferred 'place' as she felt it was the only location where she could truly thrive, embracing its diversity, culinary scene, and cultural offerings, which she found particularly appealing as an internationally mobile individual. Her impressions of other New Zealand cities were formed through visits and exploration; she found Christchurch less inclusive and more quietly paced, and she had never developed a fondness for Auckland.

Starting anew in New Zealand, Iris faced rebuilding her professional and social life. English was her second language, and she acknowledged the effort required to overcome the language barrier. She noted that while many people assume it is easier for English speakers from countries like England or South Africa to move to an English-speaking country like New Zealand, her reality was that she had to begin again, despite her extensive experience across Europe and a good understanding of the English language. She reflected on the difficulties she and her friends, many of whom were also SIEs, encountered upon arrival in New Zealand, encompassing social, professional, cultural, and financial aspects. She observed that the experiences of her fellow internationally mobile friends were often characterised by initial feelings of discomfort and confusion, despite the support they found within their community of other expatriates, leading to an extended period of exploration and uncertainty before they felt truly 'settled'.

Although the prospect of moving to New Zealand (from Europe) emerged through her partner's connection to the country, Iris ultimately viewed the relocation as a rebellious and liberating decision for herself. Financial considerations did not primarily drive her move, as she had no significant responsibilities or children. This lack of external pressure allowed her to pursue what felt right to her at that stage. Upon arrival in New Zealand, Iris initially took on a role in traffic management, a significant shift from her previous senior professional roles in international project development and education in Europe. She quickly found the working conditions and pay unsatisfactory. Iris revealed, *"I mean, I started on $39,000. When I left Germany, I nearly earned double the sum in Euros."* In discussing the financial implications of her move and its impact on her career, Iris acknowledged that, from her perspective, other global locations might offer more direct professional growth opportunities than New Zealand. However, for Iris, the lifestyle opportunities available in New Zealand were more important than immediate monetary gains or rapid career advancement.

Her early experience in New Zealand reflected a period of significant adjustment and compromise; it took her eight years to reach a professional position comparable to the one she held before leaving Germany. She perceived that her extensive foreign experience was not fully appreciated in the New Zealand job market. However, this did not bother her, as her decision to move was not solely driven by career progression. Her feeling that New Zealand had become 'home' was a personal and social evolution, separate from the professional hurdles she encountered in the job market. She had reached a point where she sought new challenges and personal fulfilment beyond traditional career ladders. While she recognised she could have returned to Germany and earned a higher salary, Iris prioritised her work-life balance in New Zealand. This shift in perspective allowed her to reassess her future aspirations. She no longer aspired to become a

CEO but prioritised a fulfilling lifestyle and expressed contentment with lower managerial positions. Iris had also become more cautious about exposing herself to the intense professional environments she had previously sought out, particularly after acclimatising to the different professional cultures between Europe and New Zealand.

5.1.2 Angela

Angela's childhood unfolded in Cornwall, a region she described as a *"country bumpkinsville",* but one that afforded her a *"really happy, lovely childhood".* Her parents, who were from what she described as a *"lower socio-economic sort of setting",* instilled in her a strong philosophy of valuing experiences over material possessions. They were *"very focused on we would have all the things they never had",* not branded clothes or PlayStations, but through activities that pushed Angela and her two older sisters out of their comfort zones. She grew up in a large extended family, surrounded by grandparents and cousins, until the age of nine, when her family moved up north. This transition was a significant shift; suddenly, she was *"the weird kid who had the funny accent and was from Cornwall",* moving from a close-knit community to a more urban environment.

Angela's secondary education in the UK occurred in large comprehensive schools, where she felt fortunate *"to get through and not be pregnant at 15, 16".* She observed that these schools often desperately tried to *"funnel kids into apprenticeships",* with little expectation that many would attend university. Angela consistently excelled academically despite this environment, recalling that *"literally up until I went to university, I had had my whole life where I was the smartest one in the room".* Her supportive family background, which prioritised activities, hobbies, and education, provided a significant, albeit not financial, privilege. When she was 15 or 16, career counsellors, seeing her top

grades, would ask, *"Are you going to do law or medicine?"* Angela, disliking blood, chose law, a decision she now views as a *"really weird"* pathway.

Feeling unchallenged by school, Angela was initially drawn to the military, specifically the Air Force, aspiring to join the military police and eventually the close protection squad. She was actively involved in martial arts, competing globally, and saw this as a direct path to becoming a bodyguard after military service. However, upon entering recruitment offices, her academic achievements quickly redirected her onto an officer track, with familiarisation visits and suggestions of becoming a pilot. Her father's pragmatic intervention, asking if she truly wanted to be a pilot or if she felt she was supposed to, allowed her to walk away from the military as a career option, as she felt they were again trying to force her into a *"predetermined avenue".*

A pivotal moment occurred during her final college summer when she became the first female to compete for Great Britain in the World Martial Arts Games, winning the World Championships. This significant achievement unexpectedly opened the door to a full scholarship to university. Feeling a lack of a clear alternative path and with no financial burden on her family, she *"just went and went along with the flow a bit"* and enrolled in law school. She quickly *"hated every minute of it",* finding herself among *"fancy kids"* from *"posh schools"* (often *"Oxford rejects"*) who discussed their nannies and Porsches, a world jarringly different from her own. Angela worked as a bouncer to support herself through law school and in her martial arts training, starting work at 9 PM and finishing at 4 AM, training in the mornings, attending law school all day, and then training again in the evenings. This starkly contrasted her life with the wealthy peers she was often *"throwing out because they were drunk".*

A defining experience occurred in her second year when she participated in an exchange programme at the University of Lapland in Finland. Her *"genuine first realisation was that I could go and have an education, not in England".* She had previously been unaware that studying abroad was an option, unlike her university peers, who had travelled extensively. Being among international students in Finland, she *"really, really enjoyed it"* and thrived in the different education model, even participating in an international mooting competition. This experience ignited her desire for international mobility.

After completing her law degree, Angela spent a year working in close protection and security. During this time, her parents were divorcing and feeling *"stuck"* at home and needing an escape, she spontaneously Googled *"criminology, but where it's still a law degree, master's, Europe".* She found that Maastricht Law School had an open day that very weekend. She packed a bag, took the Eurostar, and attended the open day. A senior member of the law school was impressed by her and offered her a spot to start halfway through the semester, an *"abnormal"* offer she accepted, moving to Holland a week later to pursue a master's in Forensics, Criminology, and Law. While pursuing her master's and working for Thomson Reuters in pseudo-legal roles, Angela realised she still didn't want to be a lawyer, perceiving the same exclusive *"world of people"* she didn't belong to.

A summer school spent in Macedonia, where she learnt about counter-terrorism and organised crime research, sparked a new interest. She became increasingly aware of the significant involvement of women in organised crime at senior levels and felt frustrated by the scepticism she encountered when discussing this. This led to a significant decision: *"Well, f-you, how will people believe me? Cool, I'll do a PhD".* She was further motivated by those who told her she wasn't smart enough or too young for a PhD, determined to prove them wrong.

Her decision to pursue her PhD led her to consider English-speaking countries: her husband, who spoke five languages but no Asian languages, needed to find employment quickly. Angela's choice of New Zealand was influenced by two factors: the University of Auckland offering domestic fees for international students at the time, and, more importantly, her strong dislike of snakes (*"Google tells me there are no snakes in New Zealand"*). This spontaneous, yet pragmatic, decision led her to email a potential PhD supervisor, and a few weeks later, she was on a plane to New Zealand. Her PhD journey involved living on Waiheke Island while her husband worked in hospitality. After completing her PhD, a chance encounter at a Christmas party led to an introduction to an ex-regulator who was starting an Anti-Money Laundering (AML) company. Angela, initially downplaying her expertise, began doing research work for him.

Within four years, she became the CEO of TICC, now one of the top AML outsourcing companies in New Zealand. This rapid ascent involved *"two years of really, really hard graft",* working 80-hour weeks, and carrying most of the intellectual property while male colleagues, often earning more, contributed disproportionately less. This perceived inequity made her confront the company's board, realising she had to *"back herself"* and assert her expertise. She even consciously invested in an expensive handbag to project an image of success, acknowledging that *"a PhD is not enough"* to gain immediate recognition in some corporate circles, especially as a young woman.

At the time of the interview, she was continuing to teach at the University of Auckland, balancing her academic passion with her CEO role. Angela reflected on her unique challenges as a young, female CEO in a male-dominated field, encountering dismissive comments and attitudes. She had asserted her AML expertise across the Asia-Pacific region, acknowledging that she had had to *"go further and above and beyond"* for recognition. She also observed that New Zealand's *"who you know"* culture can make it hard

to break into networks, but as an international, she bypassed the *"which school did you go to"* social hierarchy prevalent in New Zealand and the UK. However, she found the *"slow pace"* of work in New Zealand frustrating, often leading her to work longer hours while others prioritised work-life balance.

Despite these challenges, Angela viewed New Zealand as her *"roots"* and *"home".* She believed her experience in New Zealand, particularly at the forefront of AML regulation, gave her a unique advantage if she wanted to *"export herself back out to the world again".* She hankered for international engagement, regarding constant learning and challenge crucial for her fulfilment. She believed that if COVID-19 had not occurred, she would have already sought international opportunities. She planned to pursue international work as soon as possible, as she felt the pace and challenge in New Zealand were no longer sufficient. Her journey exemplifies resilience, adaptability, and a relentless drive for personal and professional growth, fuelled by internal ambition and a desire to prove detractors wrong.

5.1.3 Erika

Erika's childhood began in Melbourne, Australia. However, at age five, just before kindergarten, her family moved to a *"really rural area",* which she described as a *"locality"* of mostly farms with no shops. She attended a tiny primary school with about 25 children, housed in a building which felt was like *"going to school in the 1800s".* In her view, this small, flexible environment, with a *"really smart teacher",* was *"probably the best learning environment I can think of for primary school".* After this school closed due to size and cost issues making it unsustainable, she moved to a larger town of about 5,000 people for the rest of primary school and then spent six years at a co-ed Catholic high school.

Not being Catholic, she had to *"learn the culture"* of the school, which was a *"huge culture shock"* but ultimately led to many friendships. Growing up in a self-contained community where many families had attended the same schools for generations, Erika was one of the few who *"moved out of town or left",* a decision she was *"quite happy to do".* Her extracurricular activities were limited in primary school to Brownies, but in high school, she engaged in debating, drama, and choir, avoiding sports. She has one younger sister, about two and a half years her junior.

Upon leaving high school, Erika, interested in science and maths but with no desire to be a teacher, discovered the National Youth Science Forum, a Rotary-sponsored conference at the Australian National University. This experience broadened her understanding of career possibilities in science. She decided to apply for engineering courses at university. Despite some careers teachers suggesting polytechnic or even law/medicine, she pursued her chosen path, applying only for engineering programmes. She ultimately enrolled in civil engineering at Monash University. This four-year degree took five years due to glandular fever and the necessity of working to fund her studies. She gained extensive work experience during her degree, including 48 weeks of full-time summer work and part-time roles with engineering companies. This solidified her desire to work in the field despite struggling with some theoretical components, such as advanced maths. Erika's goal was to work in construction, a less common path for qualified civil engineers at the time. She found that in Australia, a four-year degree was required to be called an engineer, a stark contrast to New Zealand, where the term is not protected, leading to her surprise and feeling of being *"a little bit cheated"* by the lower qualification levels of some *"engineers"* in New Zealand's construction industry.

In 2006, a booming period for engineering jobs, she secured a graduate role at a major civil construction firm new to the Australian market. This was a *"wild time"* with

more jobs than engineers, and she had received multiple offers, including one that flew her to Brisbane for an interview. After about a year in Australia, her decision to move to New Zealand for a project with this major civil construction firm was driven by a desire for overseas experience and the project's interest. New Zealand was a compromise, as she initially wanted to go to the US but couldn't be that far from her mother, who had been diagnosed with cancer. Her mother encouraged her to go, but her father was *"not impressed".* Despite never having been to Auckland, Erika found the move relatively easy. However, she was *"a little bit surprised by some attitudes towards Australians",* experiencing consistent *"unkindness"* through jokes and comments, which felt like being *"singled out".* She likened it to New Zealand's *"tall poppy syndrome",* acknowledging that it wasn't racism but still *"really unkind".*

Erika stayed with this major civil construction firm for nearly 10 years, initially based in Orewa for four years before moving to Central Auckland. Her first role fulfilled her expectations, but the Global Financial Crisis shifted her into a maintenance and operations role, which was *"a little bit boring"* but provided learning opportunities. After nine years, while on maternity leave, her project finished, and upon her return, the firm failed to provide her with a suitable role, effectively sidelining her. Her husband also faced redundancy during her maternity leave, creating significant financial pressure. Despite having a legitimate case for constructive dismissal, Erika chose not to pursue legal action, as it would have made her *"close to unemployable".* Instead, she quickly secured a new role with another construction firm, which was later acquired by a larger construction conglomerate, putting her back into the corporate construction world. At the time of the interview, she had been with this larger construction conglomerate for nearly five years, working as a project manager responsible for programmes of work ranging from hundreds of thousands to $15 million and managing a small team of engineers.

Erika's career had been marked by frequent *"push back"* against industry norms, particularly as a woman in a male-dominated field. She often found herself underpaid and overlooked for promotions, having to *"demand"* rather than ask for advancement. She noted a theme of having had legitimate grounds for constructive dismissal three times in her 15-year career, which she found *"horrifying"* and indicative of a lack of management support. This had made her cynical, leading her to believe that she *"has no friends in industry"* and could not expect support from management.

Looking to the future, Erika was contemplating moving out of construction, finding it *"exhausting and unrewarding"* to constantly fight for basic recognition and progression. She had recently completed a master's degree, with her research paper focusing on why young women leave the construction industry, a problem she believed the industry is *"ignorant about"* despite its prevalence. She felt her research provided concrete evidence for issues she had experienced firsthand, and she was prepared to share her findings with her current employer upon her potential resignation. Her childhood experience of being moved from a woodwork class to home economics because she was the *"only girl"* in the class, despite her aptitude, resonated with her current struggles in the construction industry, highlighting that *"the attitude still hasn't changed".*

Erika still aspired to be the CEO of a large construction company, a *"very specific wish"* she had held since high school. While she acknowledged that external factors, particularly the lack of diversity at top levels and the *"old boys club"* mentality, might actively block her, she believed she could *"do it better than some people"* and bring a different perspective. Despite the industry's resistance to change, she was confident in her leadership ability. Erika appreciated the diversity of people she had worked with in New Zealand, pointing out that it was easier for international professionals to get visas than in Australia. She had built a life in New Zealand, buying a house, marrying, and

having a child and a dog, giving her *"two homes now."* She saw New Zealand as being *"far ahead"* of Australia in addressing inequities, particularly concerning Māori, due to the existence of Te Tiriti O Waitangi. She acknowledged her good fortune in easily obtaining residency and citizenship, recognising that this was not the case for everyone.

5.1.4 Molly

Molly's childhood began in Darjeeling, a hill station in India, which she often referred to as *"where I was born"* when describing her origins. She grew up with her parents, a younger sister (five years her junior), and her grandma, alongside a house helper and a couple of dogs, making for a bustling household of about eight. Molly described herself as a *"pretty nerdy kid"* who was *"super competitive, not liking it if I was placed second or third, so always coming first in class".* This drive was self-motivated, stemming from her position as the eldest sibling and cousin, fostering a *"need to role model".* She attended a private school in India, where the primary language of education was English, and she grew up learning three languages, eventually becoming proficient in five. Her extracurricular activities included classical singing and dancing.

While Molly did not have a clear vision for her career in her teenage years, she enjoyed the sciences, pursuing physics, maths, and chemistry in high school. In India, after completing school at 15, students attend two years of high school before college and university. Molly continued with physics and maths in college but found that the only career paths she could envision – being a scientist or a professor – did not appeal to her, leading to some disengagement. After her three-year bachelor's degree in physics and

maths, Molly took a year-long break to figure out her next steps. She engaged in career coaching and counselling, realising that a degree in business, a *"very different career choice altogether",* was what she truly wanted. She decided to pursue an MBA, which is highly competitive in India and requires numerous entrance exams to get into tiered colleges. Molly excelled in these exams, gaining entry into her college of choice, marking her first time to move out of her home to study in a different city in India. She specialised in human resources with marketing as a secondary subject, completing her MBA in two years by 2008. Her parents, both retired at the time of the interview (her mother previously a teacher and her father a banker), were *"pretty supportive",* leaving her and her sister to *"do what you want to do, we're happy to fund you".*

Upon completing her MBA, Molly was *"placed in an investment bank from uni",* a common practice in good business schools in India, where companies recruit directly from campus. She entered a year-long Management Trainee Programme, a graduate programme that involved rotating across different HR themes. She chose this role primarily for the high salary, as investment banks were booming in India in 2008. However, this first professional year was *"probably the worst one year of my professional life".* She lacked clear guidance and established boundaries, reported to two different people, and navigated internal politics, leading to a *"miserable one year".* Despite the difficulties, she *"stuck around for a year"* to avoid having a mid-programme departure on her CV. This experience led her to have *"major doubts about did I pick up the right career for myself?".*

After this challenging year, Molly secured an opportunity at Johnson & Johnson, which she considered *"probably the best decision I took in my professional career".* Despite joining during the 2009 recession when the company was downsizing, she found it an *"amazing place to be in"* with values that *"match quite closely with mine".* She faced a heavy workload, replacing an entire team, and her manager went on leave in her first

week, leaving her with *"two layers of gaps".* She learned that *"everything is figureoutable"* and gained valuable experience in customer service and quick response times.

After two and a half years, seeking progression, she moved to Britannia Industries, a large Indian equivalent of Fonterra, specialising in dairy and bakery. Here, she took on a people management role, leading the HR team for five Western Indian states. She was an *"experimental hire"* – the youngest and only woman on the leadership team, and a diversity candidate from a different community. Her mandate was to *"shake things up"* and shift the culture of a *"boy's club".* She stopped traditional HR activities like arranging food for training. Instead, she focused on becoming a *"business partner",* conducting market visits and spending time with field staff to understand the business, slowly earning their respect. After about three and a half to four years at Britannia, Molly married her university sweetheart. They initially lived in different cities due to their careers, but later moved to the same city.

Seeking further progression, Molly moved to HSBC Bank, returning to her banking roots. She found HSBC to be a *"very, very conservative organisation",* with *"layers and layers of approval"* required, due to its global and risk-averse nature. While she appreciated the alignment of values, she missed the autonomy she had had at Britannia. Molly and her husband then began to consider overseas experience. Her best friend in New Zealand had long encouraged her to explore the country. They considered Singapore and Dubai but found them *"too hot"* (Molly grew up in a cold region of India). Between Canada and New Zealand, New Zealand was an *"easy pick, because my friend lives here".* They decided to take the student route, with Molly pursuing a second master's, which she completed in 12 months, taking more than the required number of papers to finish quickly. Her husband joined her in August 2017, following her own arrival in February. He initially struggled to find a job, a common challenge for skilled Indian

migrants, as Molly's dissertation research on the topic revealed. She advised him to *"just take whatever right now, because it's… just a foot in the door".*

Molly landed a temporary HR analyst role at a major public transport organisation during her summer break, which quickly became a permanent position. At this organisation, Molly initially felt the analyst role was a *"step back"* from her business partnering role in India. However, she embraced it to *"get the context"* of the new country. She used her analytics background, a *"skill set that's quite limited in the New Zealand market, especially in the HR space",* to understand the organisation from the backend before moving to a front-facing role. After about a year and a half, she sought to return to a business partnering role. When external offers came, her organisation retained her by creating a new, desired role during a restructuring. She felt she had *"lost a couple of years"* in terms of progression but was *"totally open to it"* when moving countries. While she initially took a *"little bit of a cut"* in salary compared to India, she quickly regained her previous grade within two years. Her lifestyle also changed, as she no longer had house staff or a driver, but she valued the shift towards prioritising her own well-being.

During COVID-19, Molly was shoulder-tapped for a secondment in change management. Despite having *"no frigging idea of what change management was",* she was known for her structural change expertise. She took the role, learning on the go, and found it a *"different ballgame altogether".* This six-month secondment kept getting extended, and she helped build a new Change Management Centre of Excellence, creating a change framework and strategy. This role lifted her into a more strategic position, working on the organisation's 10-year plan. At the time of the interview, Molly no longer had five-year plans, as the world was changing too quickly. Her new outlook was one to one and a half years, focusing on working on *"bigger and more strategic projects"* in change management, a *"sought-after skill"* in the job market. She valued the flexibility and the

fallback option of returning to business partnering. Molly found the work culture in New Zealand *"a lot more relaxed"* compared to India, where she recalled colleagues working until 7 PM on New Year's Eve. In New Zealand, she could prioritise her well-being and work flexibly. However, she noted that India offered *"more options in terms of career… more variety"* and *"pay packages are soaring".* She believed she would be earning *"way more"* in India due to faster mobility and more multinational options, but she valued the work-life balance in New Zealand more. New Zealand had become *"home"* for Molly, a realisation that deepened after buying a house. While she initially planned to be nomadic, she and her husband were now appreciative of the *"chilled out"* atmosphere and friendly people. She acknowledged that if a family situation necessitated it, they might return to India, but otherwise, they planned to stay in New Zealand.

5.1.5 Sandra

Sandra grew up in Delhi, the capital city of India, in a *"pretty middle-class home"* with her parents and a younger brother. Her parents, who moved to Delhi from an agricultural background after getting married, prioritised their children's education. Her father, in particular, strongly emphasised being *"educated and well-versed in English",* believing it was crucial for opportunities, a sentiment Sandra attributed to *"the colonisation hang-over".* For this reason, she was sent to a well-known Loreto Convent School, a very strict girls' school run by Irish nuns, despite it being *"way out of the zone"* of their home. She was taught in English at school, and while she spoke Hindi with her parents, her *"thinking is all sort of in English".* Sandra's parents, though conservative, allowed her more freedom than other girls in her wider family. She was not expected to be *"domesticated from an early age"* and instead *"really enjoyed playing sport",* including badminton and cycling. She was *"quite independent",* biking to friends' houses from as young as seven, reflecting

a time when there was *"a lot of trust in community".* She was also very active in theatre, loving to organise events, act, and direct, with her father, whom she describes as a *"very funny guy"* who *"can be a stand-up comedian easily",* encouraging her acting. She was a *"very well-rounded"* student, attending the same convent school from age five to 18.

Upon finishing school, Sandra had *"some very extreme sort of ideas about what I wanted to do".* She loved science, especially space and physics, but found the Indian education system, which prioritised rote memory and was *"very competitive",* made it difficult to get into top colleges without scoring *"above 98 per cent".* She did not achieve these scores because she also had other interests like sports. At the other end of the spectrum, she liked writing and considered journalism or the arts. However, coming from a middle-class family, the focus was on securing a job. *"There was nothing like, do what you're passionate about, blah blah blah. It's not like that. It was like cool, what job will you get after that course?"* This pragmatic mindset led her to consider hotel management, influenced by a cousin who had a good career as a chef in a five-star hotel chain. Sandra took various entrance exams, including for architecture and engineering, but ultimately got into a good hotel management school. She also subconsciously desired to move away from home, choosing colleges in Mumbai and Bangalore over Delhi simply because *"they were far".*

At 18, she moved to Bangalore for her three-year graduate course in hotel management. Her first experience living away from home was *"hard".* Bangalore, in the south, was culturally and linguistically very different from Delhi in the north. *"No one speaks Hindi there. They speak in Kannada or they speak English".* She felt like she did not belong, missed her North Indian food, and was severely homesick, travelling back to Delhi several times in the first three months. Her father even suggested she could stay in Delhi if it wasn't working out, but this made her *"stick it out".* She slowly adjusted, made

friends, and got busy with college. After graduating, Sandra did well in college placements and secured a management trainee role at a prestigious five-to-seven-star hotel chain in Mumbai. She chose Mumbai because her boyfriend was there, and it was a *"nice place to be when you're young".* The training was *"hard work",* with long hours and low pay, and she felt they *"just really like sort of use you".* She stayed for about two to three years but *"didn't enjoy it".* She found it lacked creativity and felt too formal, *"it didn't motivate me".*

Seeking something more creative and a place where she could *"be more myself, rather than this uniformed person",* Sandra moved into advertising. She initially faced scepticism from agencies like Saatchi & Saatchi, who questioned her background. However, a client from her hotel job, who was a vice-president at Ogilvy, called her and offered her a job on the spot. *"She's like oh, you're 21, you shouldn't give a shit about money, just do what you love, money will come".* Sandra started at Ogilvy the next week.

She found Ogilvy to be *"brilliant",* with a *"great team, really good leadership, amazing bosses".* She learned a lot about processes and improvement. After a couple of years, working on a single tech client for Australia and New Zealand, she found the advertising *"shouty"* and *"was over it".* She moved to another agency, JWT, gaining various clients, including hospitality and media. She also moved cities, to Chennai, after a quick marriage (that she later divorced from). She felt pressure to marry at 25, as *"all my friends were getting married".* Her parents' attitude had also shifted, suddenly asking, *"Do you have a boy, or shall we find you one?"* She felt she had to compromise on her career by moving to Chennai, where she struggled to find the same level of work. Chennai was a *"micro environment"* where she, as a North Indian who didn't speak Tamil, *"stand[s] out".* She felt *"quite alone"* and *"very homesick"* for three and a half years, despite picking up some basic Tamil and enjoying the local food. Her soon-to-be ex-

husband eventually got a job transfer to Bangalore. It was in Bangalore that Sandra realised the relationship was *"quite abusive and very controlling".* A friend's comment, *"No, this is not normal",* gave her the courage to tell her family, who were *"very supportive".* Her father told her, *"You can do whatever you want. Do you want me to come there and get you out, or can you get out?"* That same day, she moved out and began divorce proceedings.

After the separation, Sandra decided she wanted to leave India and get a fresh start. She looked at Australia and the US, but the US was too expensive, and Australia offered limited post-study stay options. New Zealand appealed to her for its nature and cooler climate, a contrast to the extreme temperatures of Delhi and the heat of Mumbai. She saw New Zealand not as a transient place, but somewhere to *"settle and make it a type of home".* In New Zealand, Sandra was *"quite lucky".* She secured a part-time job at a large media organisation while studying an MBA and networked extensively. Despite her initial overconfidence before finding that her extensive Indian experience was *"hardly acknowledged or counted"* and *"just glossed over",* she eventually secured an account manager role at a major advertising agency, a year after finishing her course. This felt like a *"step down"* given her eight years of experience, but she was grateful to have a job in her field, especially seeing other skilled migrants struggle to find relevant work. However, her role was made redundant after 10-11 months due to client budget cuts, a common occurrence in the lean New Zealand agency market. Nevertheless, this opened doors to contracting work, which gave her *"more flexibility"* and allowed her to *"demand whatever I wanted".* Sandra shared that, *"[I] gave myself a promotion"* and started earning more, finding that *"once you have that, other people suddenly trust you more".* She worked in various agencies, adapting to the *"Kiwi way of life"* and *"toning myself down a bit and unlearning whatever I knew".*

In 2015, Sandra reconnected with her future husband, whom she had known from college in Bangalore. They married in 2015, had their first daughter in 2016, and a second daughter in December of the following year. Her husband, also from hotel management, became a customer success manager at a chatbot company, a *"nerd"* who *"can teach himself things really fast".* In 2019, the Christchurch Mosque attack deeply affected Sandra, making her feel she should *"not tolerate things that aren't right, just like stand up for what I believe in".* Despite its good pay and team, she left her subsequent account director role at an agency because the culture did not appreciate her *"difference",* feeling she constantly had to *"fit in".* She sought a place with a strong culture and meaningful work, even taking pay cuts. This led her to a non-profit organisation, World Vision, where she found an *"amazing culture"* that was *"very sensitive towards different cultures"* and had many international staff. She felt *"very included and respected and appreciated".* This contract kept extending for a year, solidifying her desire to find *"more places like this and not take crap from other places just because it pays".* She is now working with another non-profit with an *"amazing culture"* that prioritises mental health and well-being.

At the time of the interview, Sandra places great emphasis on being *"more values-driven"* and was learning *"it's okay to say no".* She was selective about her work, even if it meant *"taking pay cuts after pay cuts",* because she felt *"happier".* She acknowledged the challenge of being a woman, SIE, and mother in New Zealand. She observed that many women were making career compromises due to the gender pay gap and societal expectations. She noted that she was asked about childcare at a job interview following the birth of her first child, while her husband was congratulated. She felt migrants were "*just seen as resources"* in New Zealand, where their worth is *"only what they can give, rather than economically".* She felt New Zealand had a *"lot of appreciation for work-life balance",* which is why she valued it over the intense, 20-hour workdays

common in India. While New Zealand may not have offered the same career advancement opportunities or high pay as India for some, it provided a *"beautiful place"* for work-life balance and family time.

5.1.6 Leonee

Leonee worked in a telecommunications company in her home country of Colombia following her tertiary studies in Business Administration. However, she yearned for a change that would breathe new life into her career, lifestyle, and marriage. Around this time, her husband, Jason, had just started his own business in Colombia. However, they quickly confronted the harsh realities of corruption that, from their perspective, significantly impacted the country's business environment. This experience convinced the couple to explore opportunities abroad, turning their gaze towards New Zealand. They planned to study English, viewing it as a crucial stepping stone towards better prospects and visa opportunities. Leonee articulated their decision, sharing, *"We wanted a change in our life, so we decided okay, let's go somewhere else, a different country, a different place, where nobody knows us because friendships back in Colombia were not that good, from my husband's side, because he used to drink a lot."* New Zealand was not their first consideration, with Leonee noting, *"You don't usually hear about New Zealand, only Australia, Canada, or the USA".* What particularly caught their attention was New Zealand's work-study option, a favourable contrast to the limitations they might have faced in the US or Canada. *"A major drawcard for me was that I could work in New Zealand, whereas in the USA or Canada, if I chose to study, this was illegal",* Leonee emphasised.

Their move to New Zealand initially resulted in mixed emotions as they grappled with their first impressions of the country. Leonee reminisced, *"Our first impression was*

this is so small, you know, no people around. We came on a long weekend, so everyone was away and didn't see many people." Even Jason, initially enthusiastic, echoed these sentiments, suggesting their stay might be *"short-lived".* Consequently, they primarily focused on English language studies, as everything felt foreign.

In their pursuit of suitable employment, Leonee and Jason, as internationally mobile individuals, encountered the harsh reality of securing professional roles. Leonee poignantly recounted her struggles, stating, *"It's hard to find a job, a good job, because as an immigrant, you always find these jobs cleaning, you know, to be a waitress, these kinds of jobs... We came from working in a company, earning good money, to come here and clean a toilet. It's not nice, you know."* This sentiment highlighted the significant professional downgrade many skilled internationally mobile individuals experience upon arrival.

Their initial life in New Zealand commenced with them working together at a popcorn company, often stretching into late hours. Leonee shared the intensity of their hardships, saying, *"We spent all the money we brought from Colombia, so 20 hours is not enough. It is hard. Someone from church helped us with a cleaning job, so sometimes we worked in the popcorn company, and sometimes we worked in cleaning, cleaning restaurants, which was so hard."* Yet, in the face of these challenges, they consciously decided to stay and embrace the peace and security New Zealand offered. Leonee mused, *"What made us decide to stay here is – I don't know. The place is so peaceful; it is so quiet. Back in Colombia, insecurity, even finding a job is hard."* Their move also profoundly impacted their relationship. Leonee observed, *"If we fight, we cannot just leave and you go your way, and I go to my way. Now we need to be together, even though sometimes we want to kill each other."* This forced proximity, while challenging at times, also strengthened their bond.

While carving out a new life in New Zealand, Leonee grappled with the heartache of being separated from her family. She acknowledged and looked to her mother's strength in the face of adversity as an example, remarking, *"I grew up [to be strong] because she had a hard time when my father passed away... it was hard for her."* The longing for her family, particularly her mother and grandmother, weighed heavily on her heart. Leonee shared, *"Even my grandma... I felt like I passed away",* conveying a profound sense of loss and distance from her roots.

Leonee's path was paved with challenges; however, her perseverance was strong and she faced them head-on. Reflecting on her experiences, she shared, *"Many times I struggle, but I felt these things like okay, you have work. You should be grateful as well... I can't live to be unhappy."* During these challenges, Leonee secured a job that aligned with her qualifications and gave her a renewed sense of purpose. She acknowledged the struggles of internationally mobile individuals, asserting, *"Being an immigrant is difficult because it's not only the language... it's also people... it's also these barriers... we put many barriers in front of us because we don't know what we can do until we do it."* Through the hardships, Leonee came to view New Zealand as her home and found it increasingly difficult to imagine starting anew in another country. With their newly acquired permanent residency, Leonee and Jason contemplated starting a family in New Zealand and extending the warmth of their new home to their loved ones. As Leonee found her footing in her professional life and cultivated a sense of belonging, freedom, and flexibility, her priorities evolved beyond the confines of her career. She began to embrace the unique opportunities New Zealand offered professionally and personally. This transition was challenging, and Leonee acknowledged the slow and often arduous process of adapting.

Leonee's unwavering commitment to her dream led her and Jason to form a supportive network and community that shared their values. This community became pivotal for Leonee, affording her the freedom to express her cultural identity and forging a genuine sense of belonging – two things she was unwilling to compromise. Leonee's journey as an SIE in New Zealand was very different from her initial expectations. It was marked by arduous challenges and an unpredictable timeline, but she remained grateful and persistent despite the obstacles until she had successfully created a professional and personal life of which she was immensely proud.

Leonee also highlighted the unique hurdles she faced as an internationally mobile professional in New Zealand, particularly the limited recognition and understanding of professionals from countries like Colombia and Asian nations. She noticed a perceived bias towards individuals from countries like Australia, the UK, and the US, which often overshadowed the skills and expertise of those from different regions. This lack of acknowledgement can be a discouraging reality for those seeking growth and advancement. Leonee shed further light on the challenges women face as internationally mobile professionals, observing that many women, constrained by factors such as the gender pay gap and societal expectations, often compromise their professional aspirations. This perceived incongruence between societal expectations and personal goals contributes to guilt and a sense of not giving their best. Despite these challenges, Leonee remained optimistic about her future in New Zealand. She aspired to cultivate an inclusive and supportive culture within her workplace and the broader professional community that values work-life balance and acknowledges the contributions of individuals from diverse backgrounds.

5.1.7 Natalie

Natalie's early life in Germany was shaped by her parents' separation, leading her to attend two different kindergartens depending on which parent she was with. This early exposure to varied environments, she recalled, was *"really cool".* When it came time for primary school, she chose to live with her father in southern Germany. Her primary school years were notable for their short days, finishing by 12:30 PM. This schedule meant that as a child of a single working parent, Natalie spent her afternoons in privately organised care with another family, who became *"like a second family"* to her for several years. This arrangement provided stability and care during her father's working hours, a common necessity for working parents in Germany at the time.

After four years of primary school, Natalie moved to the north of Germany to live with her mother. She entered a secondary school system that streamed students into three different educational levels after primary school. She initially attended a mixed-ability school, primarily for its full-day afternoon care. However, she found her academic progress dwindled there, perceiving that the teachers struggled to manage the diverse skill levels and as a result, she felt *"unchallenged".* This led her mother to insist on a change, and Natalie transitioned to the highest secondary education level. Here, she faced a significant challenge, finding herself *"so far behind"* and having to work *"really, really hard over quite a number of years to get myself basically up into a Year 10".* By her final three years, she had caught up, excelling in some subjects while finding others more challenging. Her curriculum was broad, encompassing core subjects like German, maths, and English, alongside a focus on politics, economics, and geography, and even mandatory religion for 13 years.

Beyond academic pursuits, Natalie was actively involved in horse riding, dancing, and, notably, the student newspaper, where she enjoyed interviewing people and

capturing stories, even if she *“didn't really overly enjoy writing everything up at the end”.* Her involvement with the newspaper also afforded her early European travel opportunities, including workshops in Berlin and a study tour to the European Parliament in Brussels.

Upon finishing high school at 19.5 years, Natalie felt strongly inclined towards university, a path none of her immediate family had taken. She considered international business or architecture. Following a common German tradition, she took a gap year, initially as an au pair in the UK, as *“a bit of a test”.* This successful experience later her to New Zealand as an au pair, where she met her partner. Her initial plan was to return to Germany to continue her architectural studies, but meeting Stewart led to her reconsidering this plan.

To understand her career trajectory that eventually led her to New Zealand, it is important to note that Natalie had previously become disillusioned with her architectural studies in Berlin. She realised the reality of the profession often involved mundane tasks like building extensions and paperwork, rather than grand designs. A turning point in her life came when a female architecture lecturer, a successful professional, candidly advised students who were aiming for an influential architectural career to *“reconsider if you want to have a family”*, as she herself had spent *“very little time”* with her six-year-old daughter. This stark reality led Natalie to conclude that architecture was not for her; she desired a life that did not demand such a stark either/or choice between career and family. She also reflected on the rigid nature of architecture degrees, noting that they are *“very focused on the country where, you know, you can't just move that”.*

It was at this juncture, with her architectural ambitions in Germany waning and her long-distance relationship with Stewart deepening, that the opportunity to return to

New Zealand arose, and Natalie readily took it. Without immediate residency, her career planning was initially limited. She secured a part-time job at an agency organising internships and farm stays. This job became her pathway to a work visa based on her relationship with Stewart, and eventually, residency, which meant she could study without needing to pay international fees. She then enrolled in business studies, choosing it over architecture due to its greater flexibility and portability, which was crucial given her uncertain long-term location. She initially considered tourism due to her love for travel and her job. However, she ultimately opted for a broader business degree, influenced by advice that tourism might not offer significant financial returns. Her decision to study in New Zealand also presented financial hurdles; unlike Germany, where *"studying is free",* she had to pay her fees upfront each semester. *"I basically just had to, at the start of each semester, rock up with my money I earned during the semester break, or the semester before and literally to pay in cash."*

Due to this financial pressure, Natalie's academic drive in New Zealand was intense. Despite knowing that studying in Germany was free, she felt compelled to excel in New Zealand and secure an academic excellence scholarship, as no other scholarships were available for her as a new resident. She described herself as hugely focused on group work, aiming for A and A+ grades to avoid tuition fees. This rigorous academic pursuit, she admitted, made her university life harder than it needed to be, but a clear financial imperative drove it. She recalled a colleague describing her as *"really full on... really good in class and really driven and would not take any shit",* a perception she attributed to her need to secure that scholarship.

Her entry into management consulting was serendipitous. While studying for her honours, someone invited her to a panel discussion on millennials' workplace preferences. This led to an interview with a global consulting firm, where she was offered a job

despite not actively applying for it. She accepted, viewing it as a secure, paid *"internship"* that she could leave if it wasn't a fit. She stayed for almost three years. She admitted being *"a little bit blind and naïve about it"* when she joined, focused primarily on finishing her dissertation. She also recalled having *"tears in my eyes"* during her orientation week upon learning about the internal auditing focus of her role, contemplating quitting immediately.

At the global consulting firm, Natalie found her role broad, with much of her time consumed by internal auditing, which she disliked. She coped by initiating sustainability initiatives and activities within the firm, hoping to find a *"gold nugget"* of interest. She spent most of her time *"hoping that I'd get to try the other things",* constantly extending her stay, feeling obliged after the company invested in her, such as funding a trip to London for a Sustainability Summit. The COVID-19 pandemic and her growing proficiency in tasks she disliked ultimately prompted her departure. She realised she was becoming an *"expert in things that I just, you know, I didn't want to be an expert at".* She deliberately sought a new role, finding one at a government agency focused on international trade, a job she had considered three years prior. She felt perfectly suited for it, confident that if they didn't hire her, *"it's literally their own fault, because I'm perfect for that job".* However, they did hire her and her role there aligned with her long-standing interest in international business and export, helping New Zealand companies expand overseas.

While the financial benefits of this role were not comparable to her previous corporate trajectory, Natalie prioritised work-life balance and flexibility. She acknowledged the challenge of comparing herself to former colleagues who had continued on a higher-earning path, stating, *"I'm always looking, kind of have my eye a little bit back and I compare myself with where I could be."* She recognised that at the global consulting firm,

there was *“the safety of getting essentially a $10,000 increase every year”,* a security she no longer had. However, she asserted her happiness in a role she enjoyed and was good at, even if it meant less financial growth.

Her future aspirations included working for a government agency in Europe, ideally in Berlin, to leverage her knowledge of New Zealand businesses from an international base. She preferred working for a New Zealand company abroad, anticipating a more casual and supportive work culture than she expected from German corporations. Natalie viewed New Zealand as home, but her desire to be close to family in Germany drove her aspiration for a blended lifestyle, potentially through remote work or a side-business, prioritising flexibility above all else. She believed *“life first and then trying to figure out how to finance that life”* is a crucial lesson. Her overarching goal was to achieve greater flexibility in her work to balance her family's dispersed locations.

5.1.8 Tina

Tina's life revolved around a strong emphasis on education that began in her early years. Growing up in Vietnam, she experienced the weight of her parents' expectations and their pressure on her academic achievements. However, Tina considered this focus on education a privilege rather than solely an obligation. She felt fortunate that her parents could afford to prioritise her education and support her future endeavours, understanding their motivation to prepare her for success in a competitive environment. Tina was surrounded by peers who shared her appreciation for education from an early age, attending a specialised high school for talented students. Many of her classmates and close friends aspired to attend the same university, fostering a sense of camaraderie

and a desire to study together. The prospect of separation from her peers motivated Tina to pursue higher education and maintain her connection.

During her final year of undergraduate teaching studies, Tina ventured into the tourism industry, working at a tourist agency where she organised trips for foreign visitors in Vietnam. Although this role may not have directly aligned with her future academic pursuits, it exposed her to international travellers and markets, leading to an unexpected opportunity. A Singaporean company specialising in importing Vietnamese products recognised her potential and offered her a position. Tina's boss, a tough and driven woman, served as a considerable influence, teaching her valuable lessons about resilience and assertiveness in a male-dominated professional landscape.

In Vietnam, it is common for highly educated individuals to seek international opportunities and move abroad following their undergraduate studies. Tina's ongoing aspirations for higher education and career advancement naturally directed her attention beyond her home country. She initially focused on Europe and Australia, with Australia being her first preference. However, Tina's plans took an unexpected turn when she did not meet the specific scholarship requirements for Australia, which typically included a certain number of years of work experience that she did not possess, or the need for additional entrance certificates like the GMAT. This meant that making herself eligible for her preferred Australian programmes would have significantly delayed her plans. Unexpectedly, the New Zealand Government announced a scholarship programme for Vietnamese teachers to study a bachelor's or PhD, which piqued Tina's interest. She applied and was granted the scholarship without knowing much about New Zealand, beginning her journey to an unfamiliar land primarily driven by this financial incentive.

After completing her initial master's degree in New Zealand, Tina returned to Vietnam, intending to work and eventually reunite with her now long-distance boyfriend, who resided in New Zealand. While working as a teaching assistant at her alma mater, she realised that to pursue her academic career aspirations in Vietnam and progress beyond an assistant role, she needed to acquire a PhD degree. Balancing work and studies, Tina focused on obtaining this necessary qualification. Her positive experience with New Zealand's education system, particularly the student support and knowledgeable faculty, drew her back for her PhD. She also returned to New Zealand for personal reasons: to reunite with her boyfriend (now husband), with whom she had maintained a long-distance relationship.

Over time, New Zealand became more than just a temporary stop in her academic journey: it became a place she called home. Nearing completion of her PhD studies at the time of the interview, Tina reflected on her journey and the significance of achieving her academic ambitions. Beyond personal fulfilment, her accomplishments profoundly affected her family's future, particularly as she prepared for motherhood. Tina cherished New Zealand's cultural values, such as a welcoming and open-door community and its emphasis on family. These values contrasted with the materialistic and competitive environment she experienced growing up in Vietnam, prompting her desire to raise her child in a nurturing and family-oriented culture, close to nature. She felt *"more comfortable"* with the lesser social pressure in New Zealand, particularly regarding expectations around marriage and having children. She also appreciated the more relaxed attitude towards appearance compared to Vietnam, where professional women often face constant pressure to be *"well dressed all the time".*

When contemplating their future in New Zealand, Tina and her husband considered both of their careers. They felt they functioned as a team, supporting each other's

professional endeavours and making decisions based on what was best for their family. Should Tina's career thrive in New Zealand, her husband would stay by her side and take on any job that contributed to the family's well-being, and vice versa. They prioritised their family's collective happiness and success, demonstrating their willingness to make sacrifices for one another.

Looking ahead, Tina aspired to an academic career, primarily in New Zealand. She acknowledged that research involved *"frustration and a lot of pressure"* but found it deeply fulfilling, especially the reading aspect. She also discovered a passion for teaching during her time as a teaching assistant, finding immense satisfaction when students understood her lessons. She believed her internationally recognised New Zealand degrees opened many opportunities globally, citing friends who had found success abroad. Being exposed to an international network had broadened her research ideas and connections, giving her a *"standpoint that I don't have when I stay in Vietnam",* allowing her to *"see the whole picture better than when I am in the picture".* She valued the opportunity to work with people from diverse backgrounds, which enriched her knowledge and research topics. Tina remained optimistic despite the challenges of the small New Zealand job market. Her journey as an SIE was a testament to her adaptability, resilience, and unwavering commitment to personal and professional growth, driven by a desire for a life that offers both intellectual challenge and a supportive environment for her family.

5.1.9 Sally

Sally's childhood began in the west of the US, within a *"generally happy family unit"*, though her parents divorced when she was eight. Her early years were spent attending a private Christian school until eighth grade, which she described as a formative

period that provided a structured environment. Transitioning to a public high school opened new doors for her, exposing her to a broader range of perspectives and experiences. After graduation, she decided to pursue higher education at a small Christian university in Kirkland, Washington State. Sally's music degree at university involved a range of general courses throughout her four years of study, such as English, science, psychology, and history, alongside her music classes. This broad curriculum, common in US bachelor's degrees, provided a well-rounded education. Although she had a passion for psychology and a love for helping people, Sally felt she lacked the necessary life experience and emotional readiness to make a meaningful impact in that field at the time. She chose to pursue music, a field she genuinely enjoyed and felt more prepared for. She emphasised her appreciation for her university education, as she and her sister were the first generation in her family to attend college. Sally acknowledged her parents' sacrifices as lower-to-middle-class individuals, and credits them for her success, noting that they instilled a strong emphasis on education as a pathway to securing stable employment and opportunities, rather than merely pursuing a passion from a young age.

Travel played a significant role in Sally's teenage years, profoundly broadening her perspective of the world and fostering her international outlook. Her first overseas trip, a church mission trip to El Salvador at the age of 14, was particularly influential. This experience exposed her to the stark contrast between her privileged life in the US and the hardships faced by others in a country recently ravaged by civil war. She vividly recalled encountering a teenage armed guard with an automatic assault rifle outside a restaurant, a sight that *"shook my world".* Witnessing the generosity and kindness of a local family, who invited her group into their humble home, deeply affected her. Tragically, her family later learned that the family's father had been killed in gang violence. This experience, at such a young age, clarified her understanding of global inequalities and

privilege, instilling in her a lasting memory and a desire to make a difference. She continued exploring different countries through similar church organised trips in her teens and early twenties, visiting Zambia, Paraguay, and various European destinations. These experiences, she acknowledged, were essential to her personal growth and understanding of diverse cultures, shaping her into a seasoned traveller who was *"racing to get to Asia so that way I can beat my sister to six continents".*

After leaving university, Sally's first career opportunity arose as a part-time choir director in a small community church. Despite the differences in age and experience between Sally and the predominantly older choir members, she embraced the challenge, finding it *"so much fun"* and appreciating the opportunity to bring *"new life and some fresh blood"* to the group. However, seeking a *"real job"* with more consistent income, she transitioned to working in the leasing office of an apartment management company in Seattle.

Although initially convenient due to its proximity to her apartment, Sally quickly discovered her boss engaged in unethical practises, such as renting out properties that were unsafe or near condemnation. She recalled instances where maintenance staff warned residents not to use balconies due to structural integrity issues. This ethical discomfort was coupled with the realisation that although she was *"making good money and I was good at it",* she still felt morally compromised. She convinced herself of the need to move on. This began a pattern of *"jumping from one bad job into another because it was a way out",* including an office manager role at *"shitty hotels"* with a boss who would *"go to his car and get high at lunchtime".* She felt that these highly stressful and ethically challenging environments were triggering a great deal of anxiety in her.

Amid these unsatisfying experiences, Sally embarked on a road trip to rural Western New York State with her mother, exploring unfamiliar places and learning valuable life lessons about self-reliance and what environments she truly desired. A year in a *"horrible little town"*, where she stayed with a distant relative, was tough, a period of *"buckling down and being like, okay, I need to decide what I want and who I want to be".* She found the small-town mentality stifling, where people *"don't understand why you travel"* and the *"drinking culture is really toxic"*. This experience reinforced her desire for personal growth and broader horizons. Inspired by the movie *"The Way",* she planned a trip to Spain to walk the Camino de Santiago pilgrimage, a journey she described as *"incredibly difficult, but it was one of the most incredible experiences of my life".* During the journey, she met two Kiwis, a father and a son, with whom she connected, leading to a romantic involvement with the son. When everyone parted ways, Sally, having nowhere else to live and intrigued by the connection, decided to move to New Zealand to be closer to him. Despite their subsequent breakup, Sally's move to New Zealand three years prior marked a watershed moment in her life, driven by a blend of spontaneity and a search for a new beginning.

Deciding to settle in New Zealand, Sally quickly fell in love with the country, realising this was *"where I want to spend my time. This is where I want to put down roots. This is where I want home base to be."* Although initially unfamiliar with New Zealand, beyond its association with the filming of *The Lord of the Rings,* Sally found opportunities in an urban winery business in Napier through her connection with her ex-partner's father, who was a barista for the winery owner. She started at the winery in a cellar door role, conducting tastings and preparing platters. However, a sudden tragedy, the death of the business owner, created a significant staffing gap. Sally quickly stepped into this void, taking on additional responsibilities, including running live music and ticketed events.

She *“built it from only having an acoustic guitar player maybe once a week to having live music on once a week with a game night, quiz night, functions and weddings”.* This role, which she loved for its creative freedom and impact, led to the original owners' children who took over the ownership of the company, sponsoring her Essential Skills visa, highlighting her adaptability and entrepreneurial spirit as an SIE navigating the New Zealand job market.

Returning to New Zealand after a visit home during COVID-19, Sally faced a difficult job search, applying for *“about 40 jobs within about three months”* with little success, despite her efforts to create *“cute, excitable, and relevant”* video cover letters. This period of discouragement led her to temporarily take an assistant manager role at a retail shop before moving to an administrative and accounting role at a car dealership owned by her New Zealand-based partner's family friends. These roles, while not her long-term aspirations, provided necessary income and further diversified her experience. Sallys longstanding interest in counselling resurfaced throughout her varied career and personal challenges.

While living in the US and prior to her SIE, her first marriage ended after her husband's deployment to Afghanistan and subsequent struggles with PTSD, a period that significantly shaped her. This experience, where she felt she *“wasn't old enough or okay enough to be what I needed and what he needed”,* led her to understanding of co-dependency and the importance of boundaries. This initiated a *“healing process”* that continued with therapy in New Zealand, which she had previously been unable to afford or commit to due to frequent moves. This personal journey and her inherent desire to help people consolidated her aspiration to become a counsellor. Lamenting the current stigmatisation and under-utilisation of therapy, she believed her generation could normalise it and increase its accessibility.

Sally perceived the overall pace of life in New Zealand, particularly in Napier, where she lived, as *"wonderful",* appreciating the slower rhythm and emphasis on family time. She saw that shops close earlier, reflecting a culture where people prioritise getting home to their families, starkly contrasting with the late-night consumerism she experienced in the United States. She also admired New Zealand's progress in its relationship with Māori, seeing it as a source of hope for her own country. As an American living in New Zealand and observing from afar her own government's relationship with indigenous people, she could not help but recognise how broken and failed it seemed. Comparatively, she found it intriguing that things were being renamed in New Zealand and Te Reo was being taught in schools.

Sally, having decided to upskill and enrol in counselling studies, was eager to take advantage of the opportunity to visit a Marae and learn about the culture. This experience and the general embrace of Te Tiriti filled her with excitement and optimism, giving her hope that her home country, the United States, could learn from these examples, work together, and acknowledge and address past wrongs, especially against their indigenous and migrant populations. This reflection underscored her evolving worldview as an internationally mobile individual, actively seeking positive social change. The impact of COVID-19 also weighed on Sally's mind. Being far from her family was challenging, but she understood it was a consequence of the pandemic rather than a reflection of New Zealand specifically.

In April 2020, she received the devastating news that her stepfather had been diagnosed with stage-four colon cancer. Despite the risks and uncertainties, Sally and her new husband planned a May trip back to the United States. Throughout the entire process, Sally remained well-aware that re-entering New Zealand might not be possible. They spent three months in the United States, one more than planned, supporting and

caring for her stepfather. Sally acknowledged that it was a highly challenging experience that she would not necessarily recommend due to the circumstances and risks involved. This period highlighted the unique vulnerabilities and sacrifices SIEs face when global crises impact their ability to connect with family, forcing difficult choices between career stability and familial obligations.

Looking to the future, Sally was optimistic about her career in counselling. She aimed to contribute to a more inclusive and supportive culture, particularly within the mental health space, valuing work-life balance and acknowledging contributions from diverse backgrounds. Her journey reflected a continuous search for a life that aligned with her values, emphasising connection, purpose, and the pursuit of a career that truly helped others, embodying many SIE women's adaptive and values-driven nature. She was excited about the prospect of normalising therapy and making it more accessible, believing it to be a life-changing tool that is currently underutilised and stigmatised.

5.1.10 Sophie

Sophie's life story begins in a small South African town, Pietermaritzburg, which she described as reminiscent of Hamilton in New Zealand, known for its close-knit farming community. She recalled a pleasant childhood with supportive parents, both teachers, who ensured the family always had their necessities, despite not being wealthy. Her mother was a stay-at-home parent until Sophie's younger brother started primary school. School was a happy place for Sophie, where she excelled academically and in her extracurricular activities. Due to her academic achievements, Sophie initially felt that a medical career was the expected path for her. However, she soon realised it was not her true passion and felt uneasy upon observing the intense competition among aspiring

medical students. This included an insight into individuals who desperately hoped for someone to drop out so they could take their place. Sophie felt *"out of place"* in such a system and began questioning her motivations for pursuing medicine. At that point, Sophie switched to actuarial science.

Her family immigrated to New Zealand during her second year of university, which was largely her parents' decision, but one Sophie ultimately felt compelled to make herself due to financial considerations. She recalled, *"It was my parents' decision and not what I wanted to do."* This relocation meant she was unable to continue actuarial studies in Auckland, as the programme was not offered in New Zealand. Sophie missed the independence she had enjoyed living in Cape Town and felt isolated without an established friend group in Auckland, a city she found challenging to navigate without her own transportation or social network. Once more, she changed direction during her studies, taking up a double degree in accounting and computer science. She often felt like an outsider in her computer science classes, being one of only a handful of European women, and realised she did not share the same deep passion for the technical aspects as her peers, preferring to socialise rather than *"rebuilding my server at home".*

After graduation, she navigated the social pressure to secure a job in the competitive market, eventually securing a coveted graduate position at a Big Four accounting firm. Her time working at the Big Four accounting firm provided valuable experience and was a good first job. However, Sophie could not shake the feeling of exclusion in what she perceived as a male-dominated field. She realised she did not fit in and longed for a career where she could feel a stronger sense of belonging.

Sophie's desire for independence and exploration led her to England, where she moved to London with her partner, whom she had met in New Zealand. She then secured

a role at a large insurance company in London. After two years, feeling she had learned all she could, she transitioned to a global conglomerate's insurance solutions division. This move, however, coincided with the division's acquisition by a major European reinsurer, leading to a significant "*culture clash".* Sophie observed a *"hugely Swiss-Germanic kind of culture"* that she found particularly challenging due to its perceived sexism. She even recounted an anecdote about a part-time working mother in the Zurich office who was ostracised simply for having a job, reflecting a *"deeply conservative view of women's roles*". Despite the perks of business class travel and luxurious hotels, Sophie realised this corporate culture was not for her long term. This realisation, coupled with their shared desire for more meaningful travel, led Sophie and her husband to take a year off, during which they travelled extensively through Europe, Southeast Asia, New Zealand, and South America.

This career break provided a crucial opportunity for reflection. She identified a desire for a workplace with a better culture and a role that allowed her to be *"part of making things better",* rather than just identifying problems as an auditor. She also realised her enjoyment of *"the process and the people side of things".* She and her partner returned to the UK just before the Global Financial Crisis, securing new jobs. Sophie took a contracting role at a major syndicate in the Lloyd's insurance market, which she found fascinating due to its involvement in insuring *"weird and wacky things"* and major global events. She quickly moved into a permanent role, eventually being promoted to manager of her team, a move she acknowledged was *"quite awkward"* as the youngest and newest member but supported by a strong CFO. During this time, she also completed her chartered accounting qualification, pushed by her manager to ensure she had the *"right paperwork".*

After about eight years in the UK, with the prospect of starting a family, Sophie and her husband decided to return to New Zealand. They moved back six weeks before their first child was born, prioritising the extensive family support available on the North Shore. Initially, Sophie did not plan to return to work, but a friend convinced her to take on a job-share arrangement for a small start-up, offering significant flexibility. This experience, though brief due to a second pregnancy, was invaluable, providing *"the best way to work"* as a new mother. With two children under two, and one who *"never napped",* Sophie decided to swap roles with her husband, who became the stay-at-home parent, taking on the full-time care of their children and running the household. This decision reflected Sophie's agency and strategic career management as an SIE, adapting to family needs while maintaining her professional trajectory. Transformation work, particularly process improvement and culture change, had always fascinated Sophie; she considered her previous role on the Endeavour Programme at a major New Zealand bank a career highlight. Her new position at a central bank allowed her to expand her passion for transformation on a larger scale. However, one challenge she anticipated was implementing change in a non-face-to-face manner, as the Auckland office was a subsidiary of the Wellington Centre.

Sophie then secured a *"dream job"* at a major New Zealand bank, initially on a fixed-term contract covering parental leave, focusing on productivity and process improvement in the technology team. She coached general managers and their direct reports, impacting around 250 people, and achieved *"Silver Accreditation"* for her team, a significant accomplishment. She also became involved in the bank's agile transformation work. After three years at the major New Zealand bank, Sophie felt the culture had changed, and many colleagues she enjoyed working with had left. She sought a new challenge, making a *"weird sideways move"* into leading diversity, inclusion, and

belonging for the bank. This decision was driven by her passion for fairness, influenced by her South African upbringing and having two daughters, and her belief that D&I work aligns with agile transformation principles. This role, initially a maternity cover, allowed her to expand her influence beyond technology.

More recently, Sophie transitioned to a new role at the central bank, working on their transformation programme. This move was partly due to her feeling less happy at her previous workplace and her desire to return to transformation work, which she considered a career highlight. While the team was largely based in Wellington, she was part of the growing Auckland team. Sophie admitted she still did not know *"what I want to do when I grow up".* However, she prioritised stimulating work that paid well, without necessarily aiming for the highest executive positions. Inspired by her mother's career trajectory, which saw significant growth later in life, Sophie was content to *"make the most of the in betweenness of where I am now",* valuing time with her children over rapid career ascent. She acknowledged that her *"sideways move ladder career"* provided a unique skill set, allowing her to take on diverse transformation roles. However, it may have made finding conventional next steps less straightforward.

5.1.11 Tammy

Tammy's childhood in a small town in southern India was shaped by her parents' strong focus on education. As an only child, she was a *"bright student"* who participated in many activities, though extracurriculars diminished as she grew older. She chose to study engineering, majoring in computer science, a conscious decision despite her mother's preference for medicine. Her four-year degree culminated in campus recruitment, a common practice in India, leading to her first professional role. Her career began as a

programmer at a large multinational IT services company, a globally recognised firm. This was her first time to leave home, a significant step for someone whose mother had been very protective. The company's tailored three-month training programme, which encouraged group discussions, helped her personality *"kind of change"* and opened her up in a *"safe environment".* She was initially posted to Mumbai, a metropolitan city, for a year-and-a-half before transferring back to her hometown for another year-and-a-half, totalling three years of work in India.

After three years of working in India, Tammy married through an arranged marriage and immediately moved to New Zealand. Her husband was already working there. While she had no specific career aspirations for coming to New Zealand, she was *"really clear"* that she wanted to continue working in IT. Her initial impression of Hamilton, where she first landed in 2006, was one of shock: *"For one full week I couldn't see a single person on that street."* She found the city, particularly in 2006, to be *"very rural"* and a stark contrast to the bustling environment she was accustomed to in India. After just one month, she *"ran away from Hamilton",* securing a job in Auckland. She then gave her husband an ultimatum: *"I said, hey, listen, I'm going, I've got a job. I think you either come and follow me to Auckland, or we have to work out some arrangement here."* Her first break in the New Zealand IT industry came in a supply-chain-related role in Auckland. She was willing to take any opportunity to get her foot in the door. She stayed with this company for six years, initially living as a paying house guest/boarder while her husband remained in Hamilton. He then moved to Auckland after a year-and-a-half when Tammy was *"pretty settled".* Tammy's first New Zealand role provided a significant cultural shift regarding work-life balance. In India, she had been accustomed to *"slogging our arse off ",* working from 8 AM to midnight, with cabs dropping employees home after overtime.

In contrast, her New Zealand company encouraged employees to leave at 5 PM, a practice that initially bewildered her but which she *"slowly got used to"* and came to appreciate.

Professionally, Tammy perceived that if she had remained in India, she would have progressed faster, potentially reaching a team lead position sooner due to the rapid pace of career growth there. She remained a programmer in New Zealand for a long time observing that *"designation and role doesn't matter so much here. It's just there".* She found that professionals in the smaller New Zealand market often need to be a *"jack of all trades",* whereas in India, with its larger workforce, roles are more specialised. After six years, her first New Zealand company was liquidated, which, despite the circumstances, she now views as a *"good break"* that prompted her to move on. She found a new job at an IT company in Tamaki within two weeks.

Nine months later, she was unexpectedly contacted by a North Shore company that had previously sought to hire her. Despite her initial reluctance to commute over the Auckland Harbour Bridge, the *"really good package"* and a promotion from software developer to technical team lead convinced her. This new role was challenging, as she was solely responsible for the software, essentially the *"technical team",* without immediate backup. She experienced *"a few sleepless nights",* missing the moral support of a team. After a year-and-a-half, the North Shore company transitioned her to a new software based on a different programming language, offering to keep her as a technical team lead with a team reporting to her. She accepted, viewing it as an opportunity to gain *"a taste of people management".* She stayed with this company for eight-and-a-half years. Her primary reason for this long-tenure was not career advancement but her daughter, who was in primary school. She became a *"very paranoid helicopter mum",* prioritising proximity to her daughter's school and being available for her.

More recently, Tammy transitioned to a new role as a development manager, where her work became *"100 per cent management",* with no coding responsibilities. This shift brought *"mixed feelings"*; she missed the *"magical things"* of coding and being able to solve problems herself. However, she acknowledged the energy required to stay updated with rapidly evolving technologies and accepted that she could not remain a full-on programmer. At the time of the interview, she was focusing on Cloud-related certifications to stay involved in her team's technical discussions. She believed her technical background made her a better manager, as she understood her team's challenges. Nevertheless, Tammy found people management emotionally draining, likening herself to a *"part-time counsellor".*

Tammy learned to be more thoughtful and observant of her team's emotional states, contrasting with her previous programmer mindset of seeking *"straight answers".* She aspired to manage managers, allowing her to focus on metrics and strategic improvements. She found validation when her team expressed appreciation for her management style. Reflecting on her career in New Zealand compared to her peers in India, Tammy observed that her Indian friends had remained more technically up to date due to intense competition. She doubted she would cope well with the Indian market's pace now, having grown accustomed to New Zealand's work-life balance. While she might have pursued a more technical, architect-like path in India, she had no regrets about her career in New Zealand.

New Zealand had become *"home"* for Tammy, a realisation that took her *"a good five years to accept."* Initially, she found it hard to *"mingle with [my] colleagues"* due to cultural differences, jokes, and slang. This experience as an internationally mobile professional highlighted the subtle nuances of social integration in a new country. However, she gradually became more comfortable and connected more easily as she came to

understand local nuances. As a manager, she still found it challenging to fully open-up with colleagues, preferring to keep work and personal life separate, a common professional boundary. Tammy also completed a part-time master's in IT Project Management, a two-year course while working full time. This study, prompted by feeling *"too comfortable"* and lacking challenge in her previous role, opened up new options and provided a *"different type of education"* compared to India's textbook-based approach. She found it beneficial as a personal challenge and for networking, and it acted as a *"bonus"* for her subsequent job applications. Overall, Tammy highlighted the excellent work-life balance and supportive work culture as major positives in New Zealand. She had not personally experienced gender bias in her workplaces, feeling encouraged by her colleagues. Negatives included giving up her technical skills and missing aspects of Indian nightlife, shopping, and food culture. Despite the initial challenges of adapting and the unique dynamics of the New Zealand professional landscape, Tammy was proud of the life and career she had built.

5.1.12 Keesha

Keesha's childhood in a small town in southern India was shaped by her parents' strong focus on education. Growing up in a highly patriarchal society, where men's success was often prioritised, Keesha was fortunate to have a mother who significantly supported her interests, education, and career aspirations, a dynamic that was not the norm. This maternal support fostered her early development and independence. When Keesha completed high school, she had a burning passion for fashion design. Unfortunately, her mother insisted she follow a different path, influenced by relatives who recommended engineering based on their children's success in the field. Despite her disappointment, Keesha completed her four-year bachelor's degree in electronics and communications

engineering in India. Although she trained as an engineer and learned coding languages, Keesha's career took an unexpected turn during her early years. She landed a business analyst role in her first year following graduation, where she excelled and continued for the next 11 years. Her career as a business analyst took her across the globe, including a stint in Paris, where she gained valuable insights from a European professional perspective.

The idea of moving to New Zealand was not solely Keesha's; it was suggested by her husband, whom she had been with since college. Intrigued by the new career opportunities and the comparatively affordable cost of living, they decided to explore New Zealand as their next destination. While Australia and Canada were also considered, the extreme climates (Canada) and perceived inflated cost of living (Australia) dissuaded them. Additionally, having family in New Zealand gave them a sense of security and support, making the transition less daunting. Keesha's employment in Paris before moving to New Zealand, coupled with the complexities of the visa system, meant she did not qualify for a work visa immediately upon arrival. As a result, she had to remain unemployed for seven months in New Zealand, adding financial stress and uncertainty to their life. This period was particularly challenging as her husband was on a one-year contract, and it took him six months to obtain his residency, further contributing to their precarious situation. This initial phase highlighted the significant hurdles skilled SIEs' often face in establishing themselves in a new country.

Upon her arrival in New Zealand in December 2016, Keesha's husband was already in the country, having arrived in 2015 to study. Once her husband secured residency (around July 2017), Keesha became eligible for a dependent work visa. She began her job search, approaching it with the same diligence she would have had in India. Within a month of being eligible to work, she secured a position as a business analyst in

a company that employed a group of consultant business analysts, allowing them to work in various industries. Initially unsure of how her Indian degree and extensive experience would be valued in the New Zealand job market, she was relieved to find a suitable job that offered a foothold in her field, even securing *"decent pay"* that exceeded her initial expectations. Having recently started her third job in New Zealand after five years, Keesha reflected on her career journey and compared it to where she might have been in India. She observed that while Indian organisations often have a more rigid hierarchical structure, in New Zealand, the exposure and opportunities she had experienced were comparable to what she could have had in a smaller Indian company. She found that in the smaller New Zealand job market, individuals often need to be versatile and possess multiple skills, becoming a *"jack of all trades".* In contrast, in India, roles are more specialised due to the larger workforce.

As an internationally mobile worker, Keesha did not consider New Zealand her permanent home, but she appreciated the Indian community there, which provided a sense of connection and familiarity. In India, she had a robust support system. She did not have to worry much about finances, social interactions, or emotional well-being, as she was part of a larger, more established family and social network. However, in New Zealand, she had to learn to rely solely on her husband and the expatriate community, which was a steep learning curve for her. The couple had worked diligently to make their way in the country, with Keesha taking pride in the challenges they had overcome together. New Zealand's slower pace of life (which she initially appreciated for work-life balance reasons), and the now inflated cost of living, made it less suitable for her long-term goals. While the comparatively affordable cost of living initially attracted them, this perception changed when housing costs increased significantly.

Keesha viewed New Zealand as a *"pathway"* or *"stepping stone"* in her broader international career trajectory. Once they obtained citizenship, Keesha planned to move to Australia, where she believed better opportunities awaited her and which would benefit her daughter's education due to its proximity to India and perceived better educational prospects. Despite their intention to move on from New Zealand, Keesha acknowledged the significant personal and professional growth she had achieved during her time there. She had become more confident, willing to take risks, and had developed skills in household management, a stark contrast to her upbringing, where she had little knowledge of such responsibilities. She also noted a personal transformation, moving from being a *"non-risk taker"* in some areas (like personal safety) to a *"risk taker"* in others (like career moves), reflecting a newfound confidence in her capabilities. For Keesha, the decision to come to New Zealand propelled her career to a level comparable to what she could have achieved in India. It expanded her abilities as an individual, both socially and within her family. She took pride in her accomplishments as a wife, mother, and careerist, recognising that these achievements, including her ability to navigate complex professional landscapes and balance family responsibilities, would not have been possible had she remained in the comfort and predictability of what she knew in India.

5.1.13 Preeti

Born and raised in India until the age of seven, Preeti's life took an unexpected turn when she attended a Canadian school in the vibrant city of Hong Kong. Her father's job transfer shaped this unique trajectory. Enrolled in an International School focusing on Canadian history and geography, Preeti's education followed a different route than if she had stayed in India. While the curriculum was distinctly Canadian, as an international student, Preeti embraced this unfamiliar environment enthusiastically, adapting to a new

academic and social landscape that included friends from diverse nationalities. Recalling her schooling experience, Preeti shared, *“The school resembled the Cambridge system in New Zealand, allowing me to explore various sports and clubs while maintaining a solid academic standing. I made many friends along the way, and my upbringing was an exciting mix of Canadian education and varied social interactions.”*

However, Preeti’s family decided to return to India, and re-adjusting to the Indian education system presented its share of challenges. Having completed Grade 10 at a younger age than her Indian peers, Preeti had to bridge an age gap, finding herself among typically older students, while simultaneously adapting to a new curriculum. Though challenging, this academic and social adjustment period ultimately strengthened her adaptability and perseverance. Undeterred by these obstacles, she completed her bachelor's degree in physics. Raised in a family of academics and teachers, Preeti was instilled with a deep passion for learning. Guided by her family's academic legacy, she set her sights on a master's degree in nuclear physics at a university in southern India. However, the road to her academic pursuits was not smooth. Preeti recounted, *“During my master's programme, one professor even created an atmosphere of fear and doubt, highlighting the difficulty of the course and the low pass rate.”* This challenging experience, rather than deterring her, stimulated her interest and determination to become involved in education and teaching, shaping her future approach to pedagogy. Despite her ambition, Preeti’s pursuit of a PhD encountered more hurdles. Hindered by a perceived lack of clear guidance and mentorship within the Indian academic system, she temporarily diverted her focus from research and scholarships towards gaining practical experience in teaching and public speaking. Nevertheless, her thirst for intellectual growth remained undiminished.

Reflecting on a significant turning point in her academic journey, Preeti vividly recalled the choice between pursuing an engineering degree or specialising in astrophysics during her transition from higher secondary to university. Her childhood fascination with subjects like black holes, Einstein, and Stephen Hawking pushed her towards astrophysics. However, the gender biases prevalent in STEM fields presented a formidable barrier. Preeti acknowledged, *"The gender disparity and the glass ceiling became apparent. I realised that opportunities in these fields did not come as readily for women as they did for men."* Despite these observations and societal expectations that often channelled women into more traditional, less scientifically rigorous fields, she embraced her passion, pursuing a bachelor's degree in science with specialisations in physics, mathematics, and electronics. Preeti's academic progression was notably swift, culminating in graduating from her master's programme before age 21. Her early accomplishments opened various career paths, and she began teaching physics for a brief period at an engineering college. This marked her initial foray into education; however, the absence of a PhD posed challenges in securing a full-time teaching position.

A growing demand in the Indian job market for soft skills, communication, and people skills training led Preeti to the world of public speaking. Her proficiency in public speaking, honed since the age of 13 through various school and college activities, positioned her well in this burgeoning field, particularly with the rise of Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) firms and call centres. Seizing this opportunity, she embarked on a public speaking career, conducting sessions and seminars and engaging with varied groups of professionals and students. Her expertise earned her recognition, and she was often featured in local newspapers, becoming known for her ability to simplify complex topics and engage audiences effectively.

As Preeti's career progressed, she delved further into academia and administration. Joining an international school as an academic coordinator, she managed a team of 25 teachers who taught over 700 students. The challenges and rewards of this role further fuelled her passion for education and leadership, providing her with valuable experience in educational management. Preeti's career path took another turn as she transitioned into training teachers, a role that resonated deeply with her passion for adult learning. She conducted workshops, facilitated leadership development programmes, and collaborated closely with institutions to ensure effective training implementation. Through her tireless efforts, she helped shape the professional development and careers of over 6000 individuals. This comprehensive role included pre-training analysis, module design, delivery of intense, activity-based sessions (sometimes for 120 people over nine hours), and post-training evaluation.

However, Preeti's unfulfilled aspiration of pursuing a PhD persisted in her thoughts. In 2014, an advertisement in a newspaper opened the door to a new life chapter. The prospect of studying in New Zealand triggered her curiosity, and she explored opportunities at New Zealand universities. While her academic journey in New Zealand was an overall success, she initially encountered obstacles in pursuing a PhD. Complications surrounding her previous degree's validity, particularly due to the different educational systems, posed a significant setback. She was initially told her Indian master's degree was *"not valid"* for direct PhD entry, a moment that left her *"sobbing for two days"* as it threatened a lifelong pursuit. Determined not to relinquish her dream, Preeti sought alternative pathways.

A University in Auckland eventually created a pathway for her, requiring her to complete a specific qualitative research paper and a master's thesis, which her workplace generously co-funded. She submitted her 40,000-word master's thesis just 12 days

before giving birth to her child, a testament to her extraordinary resilience. Despite an initial rejection for PhD entry based on her master's grade (which she felt was unfairly penalised for its unconventional interdisciplinary approach), she persevered. Through the support of key mentors, she was finally accepted into a PhD programme at another New Zealand university in September 2021. Her path to completing a PhD demanded resilience and unwavering commitment. Despite personal sacrifices and challenges, Preeti's perseverance prevailed. Upon completing her PhD, she embarked on a short academic career, further consolidating her reputation as a tenacious learner and educator.

Preeti's dedication to teaching remained steadfast throughout her time as an SIE in New Zealand and through her PhD studies. She embraced opportunities to engage with students, nurturing their intellect and curiosity. Her approach to teaching was informed by her rich and varied experiences, both in India and internationally. She believed her classes were *"filled with information that is rarely obtained otherwise",* using numerical facts and real-world examples to engage students. She was recognised for her teaching and was invited as a guest speaker for master's programmes and to train teaching assistants and even featured as teaching faculty at her university. Despite the myriad responsibilities she shouldered, from juggling work to managing a growing family, Preeti's passion for education continued to burn brightly. As she balanced the complexities of academia and being a wife, mother, and student, Preeti remained profoundly grateful for the opportunities she had been afforded, continuing to seek roles that allowed her to combine her passion for education with her drive for continuous growth and making a difference in the academic world.

5.1.14 Harriet

Harriet was born in Germany, specifically eastern Germany, and grew up in a family of five, including her parents and two younger siblings. During Harriet's childhood, her father faced unemployment for many years, which instilled in her a strong desire for economic security and stability. Her mother, however, frequently changed jobs, starting as a dental technician who worked in a lab and eventually opening a cafe on the lower level of their family home when a tenant moved out. While Harriet and her siblings lived upstairs, her mother's presence at home provided a sense of convenience and supervision. They would often visit the cafe, sometimes disturbing her mother's work. Despite the interruptions, Harriet enjoyed the freedom of being at home and spending time watching TV. Her primary school was just across the town square from their home; however, she had to travel a long-distance by train for high school. Academically, Harriet excelled in school. Her maternal grandmother, a primary school teacher, had prepared her well, enabling her to read and do maths before starting school. Harriet attended an information day for a boarding school in Berlin and was captivated by the idea of attending, which was highly unusual in Germany. She was drawn to the prospect of spending considerable time with friends at the boarding school, as everyone lived there full-time. She chose to apply, leaving her current high school once she was accepted. Her experience was reminiscent of her enjoyable time at a summer camp she had attended previously, reflecting her early inclination towards independent social environments.

During her teenage years, the internet became more prominent, and Harriet discovered chat rooms, spending much time in a graffiti chat room despite not being directly involved in graffiti. She developed an admiration for the scene and was introduced to German rap music by a friend, finding it intriguing. Harriet's fascination with Berlin grew, and she contemplated leaving boarding school to transfer to a regular high school in

Berlin, drawn by the city's cultural relevance and the desire to experience an urban environment independently. This demonstrated a high degree of agency in her personal choices from a young age. While Harriet had yet to have a clear career path in mind, there was a general expectation that she would pursue higher education after high school. Initially considering law, she studied business administration at a tertiary-level business school rather than a traditional university. She believed that business administration was best learned in a more practical, application-focused environment outside of a conventional university setting, aligning with her preference for hands-on knowledge and a desire to fill a gap in her earlier, more humanistic education.

Towards the end of her business studies, Harriet became less motivated to write extensive papers and decided to work part-time instead. She found the work exciting and dedicated more time to it than to completing her remaining courses. As part of her work programme, she was required to do a mandatory internship, which led her to work at a major live entertainment company in Germany, where she gained exposure to the music industry. She then worked at a research institute as a student assistant, focusing on communications in the eGovernment department, further diversifying her practical experience. After graduation, Harriet was hired as a project assistant for a new electronic national ID card project at a government research institute. Due to her competency in administration tasks related to personnel hours and budget, she was eventually assigned the role of department administrator. While offering ultimate flexibility and remote work options, this role became a *"dead-end job"* for her. She found it increasingly boring and lacking in clear career progression, as salary progression was fixed and opportunities for advancement were limited within the German public service. She perceived it as a *"back-stage support"* role encompassing elements of accounting, HR, and project management without a defined job title or clear career trajectory, leaving her feeling professionally

adrift and stagnant. Seeking new work opportunities and driven by an enjoyment of working with data, she decided to pursue a master's degree in statistics to escape this stagnant position.

Harriet returned to university for two years to pursue her master's degree. However, she found the theoretical nature of the statistics programme, with its focus on abstract concepts rather than applied data analysis, did not fit with her practical learning style. She ultimately did not complete this master's degree. Transitioning to a new career path proved challenging in Germany, where the typical entry into consulting or auditing companies involved starting at entry level as a student assistant and participating in a summer programme. With her prior work experience, she did not want to start all over again. However, she felt that her previous role as department administrator did not provide a clear, transferable professional identity, making it difficult to position herself for specific roles in other organisations. Then, a suggestion from a boarding school friend sparked an idea. This friend, an Australian whom she had met in Germany and who subsequently returned to Sydney, invited Harriet to visit her. Captured by the notion of a significant change, Harriet decided to seize the opportunity. Gathering documents and making necessary arrangements, she applied for various permits to complete the process before her 30th birthday. As plans began to take shape, Harriet realised that if she were already going to Australia for a year, she could extend the journey and spend an additional year in New Zealand. Having previously visited New Zealand during an extensive tour, Harriet felt familiar with the country. She saw it as an opportunity for a fresh start, a continuation of her international exploration.

Upon arriving in New Zealand after her year in Australia, Harriet yearned for a sense of normalcy and connection. She sought meaningful work, colleagues, and a supportive social circle. Previously, during her time in Germany and Australia, Harriet had

been engaged in online bookkeeping for a friend's business in Germany, which, while providing income, lacked the camaraderie and professional fulfilment she desired. Fortunately, Harriet swiftly secured a temporary job through an agency recommended by a friend in Sydney and found herself working for a major public transport organisation in Auckland. The temporary position was extended, and then extended again, until others started encouraging Harriet to apply for a permanent role. Despite initial hesitations due to visa complications and a lingering longing to return home, Harriet recognised the potential for personal growth and professional exploration in New Zealand. She decided to apply for a permanent position, which, in turn, provided a stable work visa and a validation of her skills and adaptability within the New Zealand context.

During this time, Harriet's perception of Germany had started to shift. While it remained her homeland, Harriet had felt a growing discomfort since the refugee crisis in 2015 and the rise of far-right movements. She observed that Berlin, in particular, had undergone significant changes, evolving into a vibrant multicultural hub with shisha bars, kebab shops, and a diverse population. However, she also noted internal conflicts between various cultural groups and a shift in the city's liberal ethos towards a more egocentric and less tolerant environment, contributing to her evolving view of her home country.

In contrast, New Zealand represented a liberating change. Politically aligned with her beliefs and featuring a more substantial European influence, it felt more like home than Australia, a country Harriet believed she could not live long-term due to her perceptions of its cultural and political differences. The smaller size of New Zealand, she felt, fostered a greater sense of unity and co-operation among its people, a quality she greatly appreciated compared to the anonymity and social tensions she observed in densely populated German cities. Harriet also highlighted New Zealand's commitment to

accepting refugees. Despite its small size, the country has welcomed refugees for the past 50 years, a fact she noted is often overlooked in discussions on global refugee acceptance, and which she found admirable.

In New Zealand, Harriet discovered a sense of belonging that stemmed from the ease of connecting with people. While the connections may have been fairly loose compared to her close childhood friendships, Harriet relished engaging in conversations at farmers' and craft markets, which she attended not just for shopping but for genuine human interaction. She felt this starkly contrasted with Germany, where the dense population and sense of anonymity often hindered the formation of such spontaneous connections.

In an ideal world, Harriet envisioned a climate-neutral mode of long-distance travel, enabling her to divide her time equally between Europe and New Zealand. She fantasised about traversing the seas on a boat, spending quiet time on the water during a month-long voyage back to Europe. This notion of eco-friendly travel appealed to her environmentally conscious priorities and desire to maintain connections across vast distances. At the time of the interview, Harriet felt desperate to return home after a three-year absence. She was anxiously waiting for permanent residency in New Zealand, a process initiated in May 2021 and expected to take another year-and-a-half to complete. Meanwhile, Harriet’s career path had sparked a passion for working in non-profit and public-service-related roles. These positions offered her the freedom to be candid and unencumbered by workplace politics, allowing her to focus on her responsibilities and deliver results without compromising principles. She strove to balance her longing for her homeland and her appreciation for the opportunities and sense of belonging she had found in New Zealand, embodying the complex attachments of many SIEs.

5.1.15 Alma

Alma's life story began in Russia. Her parents were quite young when they had her, her father was 19 and her mother was 21. As the eldest child, Alma witnessed her parents' challenges as they navigated life as a young Russian family. When she was five years old, her parents decided to part ways, and during that same period, her sister was born. The Soviet Union collapsed when Alma was around five or six, and her mother, a researcher specialising in chemistry, found it increasingly challenging to support their family as a single parent. During this period of profound economic upheaval, professions like chemistry, which had once been stable, now offered little government support, leaving researchers in precarious positions. Alma remembered those days vividly, recalling times she would stay home alone, by herself, to look after her baby sister while their mother desperately searched for work, often taking on multiple jobs to make ends meet. Looking back, Alma felt that this early experience affected her strongly and was the beginning of a developing sense of resilience and self-reliance, leading to an independent spirit.

Alma's father was largely absent from their lives for the first fifteen years, during which time her mother and the two girls embarked on various adventures. They moved to countries like France, Italy, and the US so that her mother could pursue better employment opportunities in a determined effort to provide for her children. Alma recalled learning French upon moving to France when she was 11 or 12, then Italian when she joined her mother in Italy for Year 8. She started high school in North Carolina in the US, speaking English, which she had been taught from first grade, but still found challenging. In the US, she felt a stark contrast to her previous experiences in France and Italy, where her Russian background was seen as *"exciting".* In the US, she felt the attitude was, *"We*

have so many immigrants, we don't care – which is understandable, but for me it was a shock." She also felt less independent there, unable to move without a car and too young to drive, while also feeling that public transport was unsafe. She reflected that *"it was very tricky for me".* Eventually, Alma returned to Russia to complete her undergraduate law degree, living with her maternal grandparents. However, while studying, she felt a strong pull to explore beyond her home country, so when she graduated, she moved to France to pursue a master's degree in international law. This period of her life, marked by constant relocation and adaptation, was her *"normal",* and she now appreciated the diverse cultural exposure it provided.

After completing her studies, Alma returned to Russia to join her partner. They settled in Moscow, a city Alma described as *"as big as Auckland"* but still a *"small town"* compared to her hometown in Siberia. After a couple of years, they realised that the political and social changes happening in the country, particularly the government's actions, did not fit with their values and beliefs. Feeling the need for a fresh start, they began considering other countries. France was a possibility, but the language barrier for her husband, an accountant, and his limited job prospects made it less feasible. They also thought about the UK but found its immigration process complicated. Australia was quickly dismissed as *"too hot, too many species that want to kill you".* They then set their sights on Canada, specifically Quebec, as both English and French were spoken there (French was a language Alma spoke fluently due to her childhood in France). However, due to changing immigration rules, their plans to move there did not materialise. Moreover, while investigating the process of immigrating to Canada, Alma had already applied to study psychology, as she realised that law was not her true passion; she found the corporate legal world too rigid, unfulfilling, and not compatible with her desire to help people. However, the Canadian authorities were sceptical of her intentions, questioning

why a corporate lawyer from Moscow would suddenly want to study psychology. She believed this scepticism was a key reason the couple's plans of immigrating to Canada never came to fruition.

The political situation in Russia, particularly the annexation of Crimea, heightened their safety concerns and pushed them to seek other options, feeling that it was “really unsafe to stay in this country”. That is when New Zealand appeared on their radar. Alma had harboured a childhood fascination with New Zealand, viewing it as a “far away magical place” she always wanted to visit. Unfortunately, entering the country proved challenging. To gain entry, Alma had to commit to further university studies in New Zealand, despite already holding a master's degree in international law. This was necessary as her law degree from Russia had limited value outside the country in terms of direct professional recognition and transferability.

After arriving in New Zealand in 2015, Alma faced the harsh reality of a competitive job market, which was *“not like now”* with high demand for skilled workers. Despite her qualifications, finding employment proved to be a daunting task. She sent out countless résumés, faced rejections, and struggled with the feeling of de-motivation, wondering if her *“very Russian”* full name contributed to the rejections. She felt caught in a *“very interesting position… inexperienced and overqualified at the same time”.* She observed that New Zealand seemed to be *“after skilled migrants, but then when they arrive... your skills don't matter”.* When she applied for work at McDonald's, she was told *“you have a master's degree, no thank you”.* Eventually, a friend referred her to an IT company where she landed a support analyst role. It was completely different from her previous career paths, and the initial months were challenging. She often left her office and sat in the workplace stairwell, shedding tears of frustration. However, the experience taught her valuable lessons in adaptability, problem-solving new technical systems, and building a

new professional identity from the ground up, which strengthened her resilience in a foreign professional environment.

While working in the IT industry, Alma began volunteering at retirement homes, reading and talking to residents. She was increasingly drawn to psychology and fascinated with the workings of the mind, particularly the human connection aspect and the impact of feelings. It became clear to her that becoming a psychologist or psychotherapist was a career pathway she wished to pursue, connecting with her long-held desire to help people, a passion she had wanted to pursue even back in Moscow. After obtaining her residency in 2018, Alma enrolled in postgraduate studies in psychotherapy at a New Zealand university. During this time, she continued volunteering at a rest home, engaging with and reading to the residents, further crystalising her commitment to the field.

Despite her academic success, finding a job that used her qualifications in psychotherapy remained elusive in the immediate term, partly due to perceived discrimination in the mental health field, where psychologists often earned more than psychotherapists. However, Alma remained determined. She toyed with working in a mental health facility but found the pay inadequate for her financial needs. It was then that she considered the option of establishing a private practice, which she then went on to start. This path offered her flexibility and the opportunity to prioritise the well-being of individuals, potentially even in corporate settings. Her vision was to become a consultant, teaching companies how to nurture their employees' mental health and promote a positive work environment, leveraging her business background with her new psychological expertise. This would allow her to *“make quite a bit of money”* in one place, enabling her to *“reduce my fee in the other place”* for less privileged clients, reflecting her deep commitment to accessibility for mental health patients.

New Zealand quickly became Alma's beloved home. Despite the initial adjustment from the bustling city life of Moscow (15 million people) to New Zealand's more rural setting, she fell in love with the country's pace, the emphasis on work-life balance, and the people's desire to live fully. She appreciated how people worked to live rather than lived to work, a philosophy she observed less frequently in other countries like the United States and Russia, where people *"have to work, work, work."* She liked the general helpfulness and respect among people and the sense of community, even if she sometimes felt *"not quite part of it".* In hindsight, Alma could not help but laugh about leaving Moscow with the desire for a place with no traffic and affordable real estate, only to find herself wondering, *"Where am I now?"* as New Zealand's housing market became increasingly challenging. The high house prices and traffic were prominent drawbacks. She also missed speaking her mother tongue, and while her English was *"quite good",* the difficulty people had pronouncing her Russian full name was a minor but persistent issue. She also learned to be *"less direct",* adjusting her communication style from the straightforward Russian approach to the more indirect *"dance"* required in New Zealand, although her Russian directness still *"comes through sometimes".* However, through it all, she persevered, embraced change, and remained faithful to her passion for psychology, forging a new life and career path in New Zealand that resonated with her evolving sense of purpose.

6 ANALYSIS OF PARTICIPANTS' STORIES

6.1 INTRODUCTION

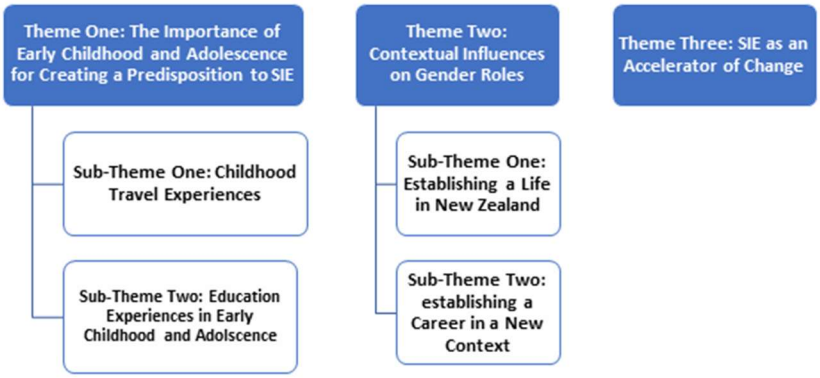
Chapter 5 presented 15 condensed life stories, each unique narrative illuminating the participants' experiences of SIE. The life story approach is particularly powerful as it centralises individual experiences and subjectivities, providing rich, discursive insights. This method facilitates sense-making for participants and enables readers to identify with the diverse beliefs and ideas expressed within these personal journeys (Lind et al., 2021; Myers & Thorn, 2023)

This chapter draws out the themes arising from the analysis and interpretation of participant transcripts. It shifts the focus from individual narratives to the factors and broader patterns influencing the career trajectories of the tertiary-qualified, internationally mobile women participants. The findings in this thesis involve two distinctive parts. The first part (Chapter 5) provided space for each participant's unique experiences. The second part (Chapter 6) is based on analysis across the stories to identify how similar threads underpin the SIE experience and create connections between the participants. The themes emphasise the importance of contextual influences on mobility (Thorn et al., 2013).

The analysis revealed three overarching themes (Figure 7). These were: 1. The importance of early childhood and adolescence in creating a predisposition for SIE; 2. contextual influences on gender roles; and 3. SIE as an accelerator of change. These themes emerged through an iterative process of thematic analysis (section 4.6). This involved familiarisation with the interview transcripts, initial coding, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes, and finally producing the report. The

detailed coding process, including illustrative codes and their aggregation into sub-themes and overarching themes, was described in Chapter Four. A summary table of the thematic development can be found in Appendix I. This methodical approach ensured that the identified themes accurately and comprehensively represented the participants' lived experiences and provided a robust foundation for the subsequent discussion.

Figure 8 - Overview of Themes



6.2 The Importance of Early Childhood and Adolescence in Creating a Predisposition for SIE

Participants spoke openly about the importance of early childhood and adolescence. In existing literature, childhood experiences have been acknowledged as a motivational characteristic of the SIE journey (Mayrhofer, Pernkopf, et al., 2020; Myers & Thorn, 2023); however, these studies have largely focused on general motivations for international mobility (Despotovic et al., 2022; Linder, 2019; Van Hear et al., 2018), broad influences of parental internationality, or the development of a global mindset as an outcome of early exposure. My research extends this by providing a more in-depth exploration of how specific formative experiences in childhood and adolescence, particularly

those challenging or shaping traditional role perceptions, contribute to a predisposition for SIE and influence later adaptability in new cultural contexts. In this study, participants expressed how their childhood and adolescent experiences before the age of 19 (Sawyer et al., 2018) influenced their desire to become internationally mobile, leading to a later decision to undertake SIE in adulthood.

This study's findings on the significance of travel and expatriation experiences in early childhood and adolescence and the increased curiosity towards SIE that this stimulates represent a distinct extension to the existing SIE discourse. Current scholarship on SIE often touches upon motivations for international mobility; however, the literature generally posits that motivations are primarily rooted in adult career aspirations (Arifa et al., 2021; Despotovic et al., 2022; Linder, 2019), the desire for personal growth and challenge (Eccles, 2009; Jannesari et al., 2024; Myers & Thorn, 2023), or specific life circumstances such as relationship changes or a search for novelty (Jannesari & Sullivan, 2021; Mayrhofer, Pernkopf, et al., 2020; Zakaria & Yusuf, 2023). Childhood experiences are typically not considered a primary or direct driver of adult SIE decisions (Van Hear et al., 2018). While some research might acknowledge a wide range of general life experiences as being influential (Caselius & Suutari, 2023; Mayrhofer, Pernkopf, et al., 2020), an exploration of early developmental periods as foundational for later SIE tendencies is less common.

In contrast, in this research, the analysis of the participants' narratives indicates that for these women, experiences during their early childhood and adolescence sparked a curiosity towards SIE in their later years. This finding is notable because it highlights a previously under-examined longitudinal dimension of SIE motivation, extending beyond immediate adult drivers. It suggests that a deeper, more enduring foundation for SIE may

be laid subconsciously, during formative developmental stages, a perspective that warrants further integration into SIE theory.

Participants who travelled, experienced international mobility, and had exposure to diverse cultural interactions early in life often expressed a strong desire to independently move outside their home country as adults. This appeared to stem from their early familiarity with and curiosity towards navigating different environments and contexts, which fostered a sense of comfort with novelty and a reduced apprehension about the unknown. Their initial experiences cultivated a curiosity about global opportunities and practical competencies in adapting to new situations and interacting across contexts, making them highly open and later intrinsically confident and capable of undertaking SIE. Various types of travel and mobility were identified: international moves due to parental employment, leisure travel, and participation in student exchanges or educational programmes. Some participants experienced a mix of these travel types, adding complexity to their understanding of international mobility. Travel through education or student exchange is included in this sub-theme, as it provided a distinct change of environment, culture, and mobility that was key to the participants' childhood and adolescent experience. The second sub-theme focuses on the autonomy and opportunities that education provides participants in early childhood and adolescence.

6.2.1 Childhood Travel Experiences

Two-thirds of the participants had experiences of significant domestic and/or international mobility during early childhood and adolescence due to parental employment. For the remaining participants, while they did not experience international mobility in childhood and adolescence, all had lived or travelled outside their country of birth before their SIE to New Zealand. This suggests that some form of prior international mobility,

even if not extensive or in early life, was a consistent and essential characteristic of their pre-SIE journey.

Participants detailed how, throughout their lives, these earlier experiences of exploring and interacting with diverse cultures and environments, including significant internal mobility within their home countries, provided a foundational understanding and cultivated a deep-seated curiosity towards international living. These experiences did not just underpin their move: they acted as a catalyst, shaping their curiosity towards, and comfort with, the challenges and opportunities of living abroad, ultimately preparing them for their eventual move to New Zealand as SIEs in adulthood.

> *I did some travelling, too (during adolescence), which was awesome. I think my parents are probably kicking themselves because they're like, now she lives in New Zealand. (Sandra)*

> *I remember being asked, aren't you angry at your mum for moving you around so much and making your life crazy? I'm like, no, because it was my usual. It was my life. I didn't know anything different. (Alma)*

For Alma, a history of international movement due to her mother's career fostered a sense of familiarity with travel, transforming moving to New Zealand into an illusion of novelty, a *"magical, faraway place"* brimming with adult life and employment opportunities. Leonee shared a similar desire for distance, seeking an adventure and a new lifestyle as far from her home country as possible. Her motivation was equally sparked by the novelty of New Zealand and a personal curiosity about her ability to *"survive"* in a foreign environment, far from the comforts of home in Colombia.

In stark contrast to those with early travel exposure, some participants' restrictive childhoods included no significant travel to shape their later desire for independence;

instead, they underwent a quiet rebellion towards mobility in adulthood. For instance, Tammy had not travelled before university, and this lack of childhood freedom made her feel that her personality *"changed"* dramatically once she moved away from her home city. This perceived absence of freedom during her formative years acted as a powerful driver, leading her to voice frustration towards her family for denying her these experiences and compelling her to seek opportunities to travel as far away from her home country as possible. Similarly, Tina's upbringing, marked by limited exposure beyond her immediate community, fostered a deep-seated curiosity about the world and a quiet determination to explore it independently once she reached adulthood.

> *I had never left home… being a single child, my mum was very protective of me. She wouldn't let me go anywhere, not even to school trips or uni trips or anything, so the first time I went out (going to university), I felt like my personality changed. (Tammy)*

Angela's upbringing was geographically limited: her family of five never ventured beyond their village in the south of England during her formative years. Initially, this lack of early exposure made her apprehensive about travel as a young adult. However, curiosity ultimately prevailed, leading her to live outside England ever since. In contrast, Harriet experienced considerable freedom during her adolescence, even choosing where she wanted to study during high school. Angela recounted how her university year abroad further strengthened her desire to travel, transforming her initial apprehension into a zest for international living.

> *I was in my second year of university. They had the opportunity to do a year abroad as part of my undergrad… and I got placed at the University of Lapland… it was my genuine first realisation that I could go and have an education and experience life outside of England…. In contrast, all the kids I'd gone to uni with had travelled the world, and it was just like an obvious thing, or they'd already*

done these years abroad in their early teens. I went to Finland and realised being around international people, loads of different people … I really enjoyed it; I did so well and enjoyed myself. It challenged my understanding of the world, provided exposure to different ways of doing life and opened my eyes to other opportunities for myself, both educationally and career-wise. (Angela)

This early exposure, whether due to forced circumstances or embraced through travel or educational exchanges, cultivated a unique understanding of international opportunities and the path to expatriation. Preeti, originally from India, illustrated this theme of early international immersion:

I did a few years of schooling in India before we moved to Hong Kong (for my dad's job), and then we stayed there for almost seven years, so I did most of my primary schooling and higher secondary in Hong Kong. Growing up in a city like Hong Kong… you've got friends from all over the world [it's very different to both India and New Zealand with its diversity and cosmopolitanis]. (Preeti)

Participants' experiences of living, or conversely, being prevented from living in diverse, cosmopolitan environments from a young age, instilled an inherent comfort with multiculturalism and global interaction, which became a foundational element of participants' later SIE journeys. Curiosity, developed while they were young, appears to have created a propensity for more international experience for many of the participants, whether that was due to positive or negative experiences regarding travel and expatriation during these formative years. The role of parents, or other familial figures such as grandparents, was prevalent in this theme of childhood travel experiences, as it was evident that a necessity to move, or not, in their earlier lives due to parental circumstances and decisions was foundational in some participants' future willingness to travel for employment.

My family immigrated from South Africa in my second year of uni, and that gave me a chance to rejig things a little bit, so I went to Auckland University, which was

a mistake for me. I'd been living away from home, having a great time living in Cape Town and then moving to Auckland. Living with my parents when you don't have any school friends in Auckland was really tough. It was not the funnest time of my life just because I didn't have that many friends and stuff around. (Sophie)

While many participants experienced early mobility as a given, shaping their global outlook, Sophie offered a nuanced perspective on the interplay between early parental mobility and individual agency. She was the only participant who immigrated to New Zealand with her parents when she was still somewhat dependent, despite being in her late teens. Her parents had permitted her to stay in South Africa to complete her qualification, allowing her to decide whether to move. However, her student loan was tied to their employment, meaning she could only financially support herself if her parents stayed. As such, her ability to stay in South Africa was somewhat constrained. This early experience of restricted autonomy within a parental relocation context is notable, as it potentially contrasts with the later unconstrained, self-initiated characteristic of her expatriate journey. Perhaps reflective of this early constraint, she and her partner left New Zealand shortly after she completed her qualification, only to repatriate independently later in adulthood after completing approximately 10 years of employment in the UK. Her eventual independent repatriation highlights another potential feature of autonomous mobility – delayed 'self-initiation' following an earlier, more constrained move.

A clear theme emerged across the narratives of most participants (approximately two-thirds) who experienced international mobility in childhood and adolescence: they understood and generally accepted that such movements were necessary for their parents' careers and livelihoods. These participants consistently appreciated the extensive cultural exposure, experiences, and opportunities afforded to them due to their parents' employment mobility. For example, several participants, such as Keesha, Alma, Sally, and Preeti, detailed how their parents' varied employment opportunities across

continents and extended family networks in various countries (e.g., Europe and North America) directly facilitated their frequent relocations during childhood. These family circumstances gave them invaluable travel opportunities and rich cultural and language experiences that fundamentally shaped their later desire for and confidence in independent international moves, including to New Zealand. This collective experience demonstrates how early exposure, even if not fully self-chosen, built a strong foundation for future SIE.

> *When I was 11 or 12, we moved to France for a year because my mum couldn't find a job [in Russia], so I went to school there and had to learn French. Then, I returned to Russia for a little while. My sister stayed with our grandmother back in Russia, and I stayed with them for a little while; then, I returned to France and joined my mum for another year. (Alma)*

For many participants, navigating the cultural and social changes accompanying their family's moves became a focal point for understanding the deeper, more complex reasons behind their parents' decision to leave their home country. These early experiences fostered an appreciation for global mobility that continued.

Beyond simply experiencing new environments, participants like Sophie and Preeti consistently emphasised how these early, often challenging, international transitions provided invaluable social and cultural learning. For this group of participants, such exposure broadened their perspectives, enhanced their adaptability, and instilled a sense of comfort with diverse environments, which collectively contributed to their later predisposition for SIE. While the immediate drivers were often parental careers, the consequences for the children involved significant cultural and social learning that shaped their future trajectories.

Some participants' parents were motivated to secure a stable future for their children rather than solely advancing their own careers. For example, witnessing the collapse of Zimbabwe, Sophie's parents were concerned about the reliability of local degrees. They believed obtaining an education in a developed country would provide better opportunities and security. This perspective underscores their intent to ensure their children had access to a high-quality education that would offer more options and choices in their futures.

> *To be fair to my parents, part of what they did want was for me to get a degree that wasn't a South African degree… because, growing up, they had seen the collapse of Zimbabwe. I think for my future and my brother's future, they wanted us to get educated in a proper First World country, which would always give us options and choices in the future. (Sophie)*

Other participants had families who viewed travel and freedom as formative experiences that should be nurtured, not out of necessity, but as a life skill to foster a sense of adventure. This perspective helped alleviate barriers around mobility in adulthood. Despite having more local educational options, Harriet's adolescence was shaped by the freedom to live separately from her family and attend a boarding school away from home. Her family understood that the adventure of living away from home was important for her development as an individual, so they allowed this travel and adventure to be nurtured at a young age.

> *It probably started when I was 12 or 13, when I would take the train to the next big town. That's half an hour away, and then we go shopping, and I already had an Eftpos card back then, so I would go shopping, do all my clothes and stationery and stuff shopping, and then come home with bags of shit, and my mum would reimburse me afterwards. But she had like – I had complete independence in that regard, always. (Harriet)*

For some, this sense of adventure and autonomy was intergenerational, with the importance and place of travel and mobility observed across generations. For Iris, her grandmother's courageous travels across Africa, as well as her grandmother's experience of walking the length of Germany shortly after the conclusion of World War II, provided the blueprint through which Iris also felt the need to explore beyond her comfort zone and expand her understanding of culture and experience.

> *My grandma travelled through Africa in the 1960s and 1970s, which is highly unusual for a woman her age because she was already close to retirement. I was highly expected to score a job where I could do stuff internationally. I'd say early exposure as a child, and then the other one is (the) personal trait of curiosity. (Iris)*

Travel and mobility in early childhood and adolescence took various forms for the participants. A transient childhood, one peppered with familial employment mobility across countries, instilled in some participants a desire to try new contexts in these formative years. For others, travel was an added extra in life that led them to develop a sense of freedom and adventure from an early age. Regardless of the type of travel and mobility experienced in early childhood and adolescence, the participants of this study collectively suggested that these formative years were fundamental in creating a desire to move autonomously as SIEs in adulthood.

6.2.2 Educational Experiences in Early Childhood and Adolescence

Building on the significance of early childhood mobility, this section delves into how participants' educational experiences during their formative years also seeded their international curiosity and eventual undertaking of SIE.

6.2.2.1 Early Education as Foundational to International Mobility

In reflecting on their mobility as SIEs, participants identified a strong connection between their desire to move internationally and the quality and outcomes of their earlier education.

> *Learning since then has impacted my mind because learning there [in Hong Kong] was quite different, and learning with so much diversity always makes you think from different perspectives. (Preeti)*

Preeti reflected on how her educational experiences in Hong Kong profoundly influenced her subsequent thinking about academic and experiential education. She highlighted that the learning environment in Hong Kong was markedly different from India, exposing her to a wider range of cultural and intellectual perspectives. This opportunity was primarily afforded her by her father's employment during her adolescent years. The diverse environment encouraged her to approach situations and problems from multiple perspectives, broadening her understanding and appreciation. This later led her to pursue higher-level studies in India and New Zealand. Participants linked early educational opportunities with the accessibility of higher education and career pathways in adulthood.

> *We were really lucky. My parents were lower middle class and then maybe even poor. So, they made many sacrifices so that we could have really great opportunities and stuff. A lot of it was Mum and Dad deciding that we were going to go to college because we were smart and capable. It was always the plan. Then, in classes, it was always about getting good grades. So, we could go to college and get a job wherever we wanted. That's something they did not have the luxury of. (Sandra)*

A valuable characteristic of this sub-theme was the direct relationship between participants' early childhood and adolescent education and their ability to adjust to new

environments and capitalise on opportunities as SIEs in adulthood. This extended beyond mere academic learning: it involved the subconscious development of a 'global mindset' and an ease when navigating diverse social and cultural settings. Early educational experiences, such as attending international schools or participating in student exchange programmes, served as a preparatory ground, equipping participants with the resilience and curiosity necessary for independent international moves.

> *I had finished schooling a year and a half earlier than my peers in India…. In the family, I had grandparents who were teachers and academicians, and there was no pressing issue regarding earnings and social security when we were growing up. And that propels you to think beyond your comfort zone. That allows you to think about self-actualisation at a young age … at 21, I had already finished my master's, so I had a whole life ahead of me. (Preeti)*

Many participants identified that the educational opportunities they were provided with when they were younger facilitated pathways to traditionally 'professional' tertiary education outcomes, such as careers in law, medicine, engineering, or academia. Further illustrating how diverse educational backgrounds shaped career trajectories, Molly's ability to speak multiple languages and being educated in English set her on a pathway where she could see two distinctive career outcomes.

> *In private school, your first language is always English, your second language is your native language, and then you learn a third language. I can speak and read five… at the age of 15 and a half, I finished … and that's when I started thinking of a career and the only career I could see, or instead, only two careers that I could see, was either being a scientist or being a professor. (Molly)*

Molly's language education and the capabilities she developed proved to be a direct *"gateway"* to SIE. She felt this education empowered her to make career decisions unconstrained by her home country's expectations and traditional pathways, expressing

much gratitude to her family for providing the linguistic foundation that opened up her current international opportunities. For Molly and Preeti, their academic aptitude in adolescence allowed them to pursue tertiary studies earlier than typical, leading them to begin their careers around the age of 20-21. While their career outcomes sometimes diverged from initial visions, both were firmly convinced that their well-developed academic capabilities and skill sets were key to their ability to adapt and navigate early career shifts.

The solid educational foundations provided a strong sense of agency in shaping participants' careers. For some, this foundation offered clear foresight into their potential career paths as early as adolescence. Tina's experience exemplifies this, as she considered her family's focus on education a privilege rather than solely an obligation, feeling fortunate that her parents prioritised her learning to prepare her for success in a competitive environment. From an early age, Tina attended a specialised high school for talented students and was thus surrounded by peers who shared her appreciation for education.

Beyond providing clear pathways, this strong educational backing also instilled profound confidence in participants to explore diverse career avenues. For some, such as Erika and Sophie, their qualifications and academic capabilities assured them that they would *"never really grow up" or* settle for a particular career pathway, confident that their skills would enable them to adapt their careers as needed. Sophie, for instance, felt immensely confident that her robust education and skill set positioned her to pursue her international career aspirations effectively.

> *I think again, and probably a theme that still hasn't resolved itself for me, is what I want to do when I grow up. Probably – you know, I'm lucky that I did well at*

school and uni, so I've got a perfect opportunity to go places like academically I've achieved. But probably still not clear on my dream job. (Sophie)

6.2.2.2 Family Obligations and Expectations

For some participants, the freedom and flexibility found in education were often offset by familial expectations accompanying such privilege. This dynamic created a dual experience: while education opened doors to liberation and personal choice for these participants, it also came with an implicit, or explicit, set of responsibilities and predetermined pathways created their families. This tension between expanded individual agency and the pressures of familial duty formed a significant sub-theme in their career trajectories.

I was the eldest of two siblings and among many younger cousins, so I wouldn't feel pressure, but I had much need to be a role model. So, it was all self-regulated, but there was a need to be a role model for many younger cousins and people around. Yeah, that's how I grew up the first 15 years of my life; that's pretty much the long and short of it. (Molly)

The ability to move internationally for their careers often signalled success for these participants. As such, there was a strong emphasis on making a career choice perceived as "correct" – providing international opportunities and simultaneously meeting family obligations. Sally articulated this pressure:

"Where I was from, and I think a lot of it had to do with the fact that my sister and I are the first generation of university-educated people in my family… a lot of it was Mum and Dad deciding that we were going to go to college because we were intelligent and capable. It was always the plan. Then, in classes, it was always about getting good grades. So, we could go to college and get a job. But I wonder if all of that pressure on teenagers is not helpful… I love that people are encouraged to get a technical degree, become an apprentice, or do a trade here. That

makes way more sense to me than spending $80,000 on a degree that you may or may not want later on. (Sally)

There was a significant internal conflict for some participants, where their initial career path reflected what they believed was the “correct” professional route, often at the expense of their true passions. The pervasive influence of their families’ beliefs and stereotypes, as well as those of others around them, linked to high-achievement careers (e.g., law, medicine, engineering) was evident, with participants frequently highlighting a strong social expectation to select careers commensurate with their academic potential, irrespective of personal desires. Despite navigating these pressures, some participants ultimately acknowledged the positive impact of these high expectations. Tina reflected on this duality:

I’m grateful, although sometimes I miss those bits and pieces of going out and having real fun. I feel like, especially in the context that I’m living [as an SIE in New Zealand], in Vietnam, people put much pressure on academic achievement, and people want their child to be successful. So, I understand my parents' motivation, and I think ‘til now, ‘til the moment where I am now, I think that helped me a lot with my achievement and where I am now. (Tina)

These narratives demonstrate that while the privileges of education and the path to an international career came with some tensions, the responsibility to be a role model and succeed academically, though sometimes self-imposed, was often driven by a deep desire to meet family expectations, ultimately contributing to participants' current achievements as SIEs.

6.2.2.3 Educational Institutions’ Obligations and Expectations

Interestingly, as previously mentioned in this chapter, a degree of expectation from other key influencers, such as participants' educational institutions, created a

distinct paradox in the freedom and expectations participants hoped to experience. Academic ability translated into pressure from schools to pursue traditionally “professional” or “masculine” career options, such as medicine, law, engineering, or business (Cardador et al., 2021; Seehuus, 2021).

> *When I spoke to a career counsellor in school, they were – the primary response was, well, you’re a top-grade student; are you going to do law or medicine? I was like, huh? And the sum of my thinking at that time was, well, I don’t like blood, so I'd better be a lawyer, and weirdly, certain things just set me on my pathway. (Angela)*

> *I had a great time at school, finished with solid results, and signed up for med school because that’s what you do if you get lots of A’s at the end of school. Then I got to medical school and realised I didn’t want to be a doctor. (Sophie)*

> *University itself wasn’t that common at my school, so I had one career teacher who said that engineering might be a bit hard and that maybe I should look at Polytech, which was okay. The other career teacher asked why I shouldn’t apply for law or medicine. (Erika)*

As a capable and well-rounded student, Angela felt pressure from her school to pursue a specific career opportunity. Her family still expected her to use her education and academic capabilities constructively. However, her father saw the risk in her pursuing something she felt was expected and that her school had suggested, but which she did not desire.

> *I remember my dad sitting me down one evening and being like, I’m proud of you, and this is great; I want to check, do you want to be a pilot? I was like, no, but I think I’m supposed to want to be. (Angela)*

This study aimed to determine the aspirations and experiences of SIEs working and living in New Zealand. Initially, it was assumed that motivations for expatriation

followed tertiary study, suggesting that tertiary qualifications primarily provided a pathway for SIEs. However, upon examining the lived early experiences of this group more closely, it became evident that foundational experiences in both travel and education, spanning from early childhood to adolescence, played a significant role in cultivating their curiosity toward, and propensity to become, SIEs in adulthood. These early influences, as explored through themes like "early international exposure" and "the power of early educational foundations" in this current chapter, ultimately set the stage for their later self-initiated expatriation.

6.3 THE CHALLENGES OF MANAGING MULTIPLE ROLES

For the SIE women in this study, establishing themselves in a new country and workplace contexts both influenced and reshaped how they perceived and performed gender roles. Two sub-themes emerged from their narratives: the influence of the national context and the impact of career trajectories.

6.3.1 Establishing a Life in New Zealand

For the SIE women in this study, balancing multiple roles, as mothers, partners, financial supporters of extended family back home, and as advancing professionals, was a persistent challenge. Upon arriving in New Zealand, it became increasingly evident that external support was severely lacking, compelling participants to navigate the delicate equilibrium between household caregiving responsibilities and their professional lives. This challenge was particularly pronounced for women accustomed to more traditional gender roles in their home countries (Janssens et al., 2006; Tharenou, 2008), where women typically hold primary responsibility for caregiving and domestic duties and men are expected to prioritise their careers. This clear division of labour and expectations

reflects established ways of ‘doing gender’ within those cultural contexts, contrasting with how women navigate professional and personal lives as SIEs.

The absence of adequate external support exacerbated these pre-existing gendered expectations, making it significantly harder for participants to achieve and maintain this balance – that is, to fully engage in their careers without compromising their caregiving responsibilities. This situation frequently reinforced traditional gender norms, where women are often expected to prioritise family over career advancement, potentially hindering their professional growth compared to their male counterparts.

It is important to acknowledge that the challenges of balancing career and family responsibilities are widely recognised as universal for women (de Jong et al., 2024; Ezzedeen & Ritchey, 2009; Seehuus, 2021). However, the experiences discussed in this section highlight how these universal challenges are uniquely amplified and complicated by the specific context of SIE (Mutter & Kallane, 2023; Tahir, 2023; Torres, 2024), where women are often detached from pre-existing family and community support networks in a new cultural environment. This emphasises the practical difficulties SIE women face and the profound contextual expectations shaping their professional pursuits and personal lives within the expatriate context. Tammy's experience starkly illustrates this shift in domestic responsibilities, as she recounted:

> *I do much more work (now) compared to my previous life, yeah, because I grew up in a family that had a maid for us while we were growing up, and my mum did everything pretty much, so I didn’t know anything. I came to New Zealand without knowledge of household management. (Tammy)*

Sandra discussed how she often felt compelled to balance or choose between her caregiving responsibilities and career aspirations due to being isolated from her

support systems while in New Zealand. She only realised the extent of this challenge after having children and facing the high cost of childcare and work-life restrictions in New Zealand.

> *If you wanted to also consider how, like being a woman, being a migrant, and being a mother, I think becoming a [migrant] mother is a whole different world regarding sharing the load at home. (Sandra)*

For Tammy, her desire to be close to her daughter's education facility and extra-curricular activities took precedence over her career for some time. She openly admitted that her priorities directed her to stay around in a job for longer than she would have preferred due to this decision.

> *The main reason I stuck around there was that it was at that point where your priority was slightly different. It wasn't my career that was the priority. I was focusing more on my daughter because she was in Kindy. (Tammy)*

Tammy experienced feelings of guilt as a migrant mother, particularly concerning the long days her child spent in daycare. She openly acknowledged her challenges as her child reached school age, significantly restricting her ability to work due to the constraints of school drop-offs and pickups. This dilemma was common among participants who were mothers (Bearak et al., 2021; Niemistö et al., 2021; Stoltz‐Loike, 1992). Such caregiving responsibilities would typically be shared within extended family networks in their home countries. The absence of this support structure posed a significant mental and financial barrier for these women in fully committing to their career aspirations.

> *It became more apparent once my son started attending school because you can work from nine to five when your child is in daycare. However, as soon as school starts, you have holidays, you have shorter hours, and suddenly I see more and more women making that compromise, and I think, why do we do this? One of*

the reasons that my friends mentioned was that it's the gender pay gap because when you see that, oh, we've got this household and my husband's making more money, then it makes sense for me to quit or reduce [hours]. (Sandra)

Several participants spoke about the pressures of settling in New Zealand and the absence of external support, which often led to complex decision-making. These circumstances necessitated adjustments to their planned timelines for significant life events, such as starting a family. For these individuals, prioritising career development and establishing themselves in New Zealand took precedence over conforming to traditional gender roles, particularly the role of motherhood, as exemplified by Leonee.

So, we will say, what's the point of being here and having children if they are not going to be New Zealanders? So, we have to put that dream aside for these years…. Probably we will think maybe more seriously now that we have the residency and see, okay, we want children or not. (Leonee)

This was different from Leonee's initial plan before coming to New Zealand, highlighting how she had to change this once she and her husband arrived in New Zealand, despite having a clear plan for their life in Colombia. This was also the case for other participants, who paused aspects of what can be deemed traditional responsibilities for women, such as marriage and children, due to financial constraints and the lack of family support. The realisation that being an SIE in New Zealand drastically reduced their support systems resulted in many of these women prioritising and nurturing their careers and associated changes as an alternative. In addition to the challenges associated with managing multiple roles, the financial pressure to begin their careers in New Zealand often resulted in participants accepting career compromises. These women did not make this decision autonomously – it was one which most felt forced upon them.

The only thing [job] I could find was through a friend, a position in an IT company as a support analyst. (Alma)

As Alma, a qualified lawyer, highlighted, there was a general feeling that she should take whatever opportunity was available. These women, as SIEs, did not have the security of a job upon arrival in New Zealand and could not afford to remain jobless. For this reason, this immediate need for employment often resulted in significant and unanticipated changes to their career paths, compelling them to enter industries, undertake new qualifications, or take jobs they were not passionate about. They also compounded their career difficulties by making tough life decisions about their roles as women while establishing themselves in New Zealand.

I came here, and for the first seven months, I was not eligible to even look for a job. I came as a visitor because of the whole visa system because my husband and I were not under the same roof for 12 months [due to working in different countries before migration]…. At that time, I didn't know much about the work environment, or what sort of jobs I would get, what I could qualify for, so I was a little confused. My first intention was just to set up a base in New Zealand, get that work experience, expose myself to the culture of New Zealand, and understand how things work here. But my husband was on a one-year contract role, so that was a precarious time. (Keesha)

Having to manage multiple roles brought about a notable shift in the lifestyles of most participants. This shift underscored the importance of participants finding a sense of equilibrium between their professional responsibilities and personal lives. While the experiences shared by the participants resonate with broader gendered career narratives (Mertova & Webster, 2019b; Prosek & Gibson, 2021; Wang & Geale, 2015), the evolving context within which they operated significantly shaped their career aspirations.

For example, Tammy only achieved a sense of balance after relocating to New Zealand and establishing a stable life for herself and her family. In this new environment, the intense focus on career competition and success that she associated with the Indian Software Engineering Industry gradually receded in importance. Similarly, Erika found herself reevaluating her career priorities after encountering the competitive landscape of the New Zealand Construction Industry and considering how her gender could impact her professional advancement. This shift prompted her to reconsider her definition of success, moving away from the conventional markers of achievement that she had envisioned during her formative years.

In essence, the experiences of these participants reflected the complex interplay between personal identity, professional aspirations, mobility, and external influences. By navigating these dynamics, they were reshaping their career trajectories and challenging conventional notions of success and fulfilment in their respective industries. This redefinition of success often included a shift in work-life balance, as articulated by Tammy.

> *If I have to go back, I don't see myself coping well with the Indian market because I have lost touch with that, and I'm used to this work/life balance, and if I go back, I'll say, there'll be like, what work/life balance? (Tammy)*

> *When I finished high school, I told my best friend I wanted to be the CEO of a large construction company, which is a particular wish, and actually, I'm not sure that I have changed that. I think now I'm recognising that may be beyond me for many reasons – and I think no small part of that reason is that I would be actively blocked from doing that because of the conversations I have had about my career. (Erika)*

6.3.2 Establishing a Career in a New Context

This study delves into participants' experiences of establishing their careers in New Zealand. Upon arriving with tertiary bachelor's degrees or higher, they sought to leverage their international qualifications within the local job market. However, many participants encountered challenges linked to a perceived undervaluation of their previous education and stringent visa requirements that sometimes required them to complete full-time study alongside full-time employment. These difficulties significantly hindered participants' career aspirations in New Zealand (Habti, 2018; Saba, 2018; Ravasi, 2015; Núria Vergés, 2013). As well as studying, they felt compelled to adapt to undesirable jobs and unfamiliar employment conditions, and being forced into roles that did not match their skill levels intensified their feelings of vulnerability and a lack of control.

It is important to note that these challenges are not unique to this study's participants but resonate with broader research on skilled migrants navigating new labour markets. Such studies consistently highlight how immigration policies and market dynamics can lead to underemployment and deskilling among highly qualified migrants (Aure, 2013; Habti & Elo, 2018; Kraimer et al., 2009; Shortland & Porter, 2020)

For many participants, this dual commitment to studying and working full time became the primary avenue for applying their internationally acquired skills and qualifications within New Zealand. While nearly all participants had attained at least a tertiary bachelor's degree before arriving, the perceived undervaluation of their education caused significant frustration and desperation, profoundly impacting their career advancement. Consequently, participants had to adapt to New Zealand's distinct employment landscape while adhering strictly to visa conditions. These challenges, often compounded by a lack of control inherent in their situation as Skilled Migrant Category visa

holders, occasionally moved them into roles that did not align with their professional backgrounds.

Alma was sexually harassed in her first employment opportunity in New Zealand; however, she felt obligated to continue in the role due to the lack of options available to her, given her qualifications and experience. As an SIE, the vulnerability she felt, given her gender and lack of financial stability, resulted in what she felt was a lack of control or choice. As an internationally masters-qualified lawyer, she was disheartened by the extent of responses suggesting she was either far too qualified for a role she applied for, or that she was a liability, due to her qualifications having no significance in New Zealand, and the subsequent need for her then to retrain.

> *I worked for an Indian guy, and he told me he hired me because I was Russian and he liked European women. At that point, I didn't care because I needed the money, but like he tried to be inappropriate a couple of times, I stopped it, and then we could work together. (Alma)*

For these women, navigating the New Zealand job market involved a complex intersection of their professional aspirations, educational credentials, and the practicalities of being SIEs. Many faced the challenge of securing roles that matched their qualifications while also contending with the additional complexity of speaking English as a second or, in some cases, a third language. This combination significantly shaped their experiences, directly influencing their career opportunities and professional trajectories within the new environment.

> *Yeah, immigrating is so hard because it's not only the language. It would be easier if you spoke the same language, but it's not the language; it's also the people. It's also the culture and these barriers. (Leonee)*

Career transition and adjusting career expectations were frequently discussed aspects of the SIE journey among the participants. For individuals like Leonee, it became clear that the opportunities available in New Zealand differed from her initial expectations. Despite this realisation, there were more feasible alternatives than returning to their home country or relocating elsewhere.

> *I see myself living here. I'm so happy here because, as I told you, to think about returning to our countries like now is impossible. No, not opportunities, no, nothing. Also, thinking of going to another country is like, I – you don't want to start this process again, or find a job, or it's hard, it's hard. It takes us a long time, and we'll struggle. (Leonee)*

For Leonee and others, the experience of navigating the New Zealand employment landscape led to many different responses, ranging from despair to being resilient. The career adjustment phase following their SIE was especially challenging, largely due to gendered discrimination in employment opportunities and the migrant pay gap, a dimension explicitly evident within New Zealand's labour market (Ministry for Women, 2023).

Appropriate organisational culture was another crucial characteristic of the transition phase. The SIEs' pursuit of employment where their skills, values, and beliefs were acknowledged and respected was significant, as this led to a smoother transition, or sometimes to change that was unanticipated. However, this acknowledgment often faltered during the critical moment of salary negotiation, where prior international experience was frequently undervalued. This friction is vividly captured by Iris, whose CEO questioned her level despite her extensive and relevant background.

> *My boss, who had known me for six or seven years since I worked for the company, the CEO, when we were discussing my salary, also questioned my level*

because it was within the framework of my previous job. He said I know you do a good job, and I was like, but I did the same role; we have less than 70 people (in this organisation). I did the same job for a company with 400 people in Germany, and that was my last job, so… I think he was reasonably sure I could perform. He did say that, but he was trying to get out of it, but it was the same thing again… they look through what you've done before; it doesn't count. But it doesn't bother me too much because I didn't come here for the career and enjoyed every day of my job at all levels. (Iris)

For many women, these values and beliefs were fundamental for navigating the transition, empowering them to manage multiple roles effectively in the workplace or at home. Acknowledging their unique contributions and challenges often enabled them to take the initiative in balancing their professional and personal responsibilities. Sandra's and Natalie's experiences illustrate this pursuit of balance and the desire for an inclusive environment.

I wanted to do something more meaningful [with my career]. I've taken pay cuts because I think the work/life balance in agencies is not there, and for women, especially if you have a family, it's just my husband, myself, and we've got two kids, but we don't have any grandparents and cousins and all that, it's just us. So, I wanted to work in a place that was more inclusive of our diversity, and I also found the ad agencies very predominantly Pakeha, like there's very little diversity. (Sandra)

Having joy is more important for me, being flexible, so I had some moments in my career where I was thinking, okay, in a way, placing the expectations, because if you're very good at uni, I felt like that doesn't do all of that justice. I need to do myself justice. (Natalie)

While financial considerations, such as achieving appropriate remuneration that adequately compensated their level of experience and qualifications, were undeniably necessary during the transition into life and career in New Zealand, it appears that for

many, these were less a primary driver and more a baseline requirement. Their ultimate focus was on the significance of following a passion, adhering to goals, values, and beliefs, and seeking happiness. Through a gendered lens, it is notable that female SIEs, in particular, often prioritise these intrinsic motivations, such as personal development and fulfilment, over purely financial incentives (Arifa et al., 2021; Despotovic et al., 2022; Shultz et al., 1998; Wechtler, 2018). This highlights a potential difference in how gender influences the valuation of professional and personal fulfilment in global mobility experiences.

> *Even if my salary was a bit ridiculous, I enjoyed that job from day one, and I love the low hierarchies you have in New Zealand, the way you can be yourself at work and say what you think. There's far less judgment…. I just loved that I could be myself, including what I say, how I talk to superiors, what I wear, and even how I do my job. (Iris)*

> *I love New Zealand…. Even though it initially seemed quite rural after Moscow, I love the pace here. I love the work and balance, how people want to live first and then work and work to live, unlike in the US…. I like the people who often respect each other. They're helpful; they are trying to help each other. I like the sense of community…. I'm probably at an age when there's a slowing down. Before, after one and a half years, I got itchy feet and wanted to do something else, another country, another, you know, so that's gone. I have a rhythm in my life where I do kind of serious proper work stuff, and then I do other things that also give me fulfilment. (Alma)*

It's not suggested that the participants' internal, individual qualities, such as their early-developed adaptability and curiosity, outweigh the importance of establishing a career in New Zealand. Instead, these qualities align with the concept that a career is a journey that can span multiple life stages and is deeply intertwined with personal fulfilment.

I want to grow, and I want to grow personally. But I also feel like I need that validation of the financial growth to see that I'm going somewhere, so I guess that's in my mind. So, I'm just trying to benchmark myself against my former trajectory, and I guess that's the best way I know how to see that I am progressing. (Natalie)

When I was 20, I thought I would have been a partner by now, or you know, like in a pretty senior job. But I'm not, and could I fight harder to get one? Probably, but it's not the right time. (Sophie)

While immediate financial needs sometimes pressured participants into less-than-ideal employment, a more complex picture of career priorities emerged once they had established themselves in New Zealand. For some, earnings became somewhat secondary to the overarching priority of establishing their career in the new context. This meant securing a job to gain local experience and validate their skills within the New Zealand professional landscape took precedence, even if it led to a temporary compromise on salary. They did not mind earning relatively far less than they had their home country, as their primary concern was securing employment.

However, the experience of being an SIE also offered a significant opportunity for participants to re-evaluate their professional priorities and life goals. This was not always about upward mobility or maximising financial gain. For instance, participants like Natalie and Sophie explicitly viewed their SIE as a chance to deliberately step back from pursuing greater seniority or higher financial rewards. This shift often allowed them to prioritise work-life balance, personal well-being, or roles more aligned with their individual values, even if it meant a temporary reduction in earning potential. This re-evaluation of career success, moving beyond purely financial terms, was a distinct outcome for a subset of the women in the study.

6.4 SIE AS AN ACCELERATOR OF CAREER CHANGE: EXPECTED AND UNEXPECTED

Participants found that acceleration in a career context traditionally refers to advancement within a professional journey at a faster pace than envisaged. This acceleration can manifest in various forms, such as being promoted quickly, taking on higher levels of responsibility, and/or acquiring new skills and expertise. In this study, it became evident that career change occurred due to SIE. In some instances, this was in the manner participants expected, through promotions, increased responsibility, and pay. However, in other respects, change occurred in ways largely unexpected, such as shifting career trajectories and fulfilling requirements to re-train or upskill. What was guaranteed, however, was that rapid change did occur, and as such, the careers participants ended up in were influenced by their experiences as SIEs.

SIE to New Zealand acted as a powerful accelerator of change for the women in this study, though not always the change they initially anticipated or desired. Participants consistently found international mobility facilitated career transformation, often leading them down unexpected paths that diverged significantly from their original plans. The nature of this change varied; for some, it manifested as upward career mobility, while for others, it resulted in a downward shift in their professional standing. Across the group, participants experienced diverse trajectories, with outcomes ranging from highly desired to less than ideal. However, a consistent theme was that the experience fundamentally altered their expectations regarding career progression.

Leonee, who relocated to New Zealand from Colombia with a degree and professional experience in business administration, found her job search severely hampered

by language barriers and visa restrictions. These initial obstacles prevented her from securing suitable work and immediately compelled her and her husband to rely on sponsorship from their church, which legally barred Leonee from accepting any paid employment. This legal constraint, however, unexpectedly led to a professional detour into voluntary work. Though unpaid, this non-traditional path provided her with valuable career experience, clearly illustrating how external constraints in the SIE context can paradoxically force unforeseen, yet ultimately beneficial, professional outcomes.

> *The church helped us get a religious visa…. But it was hard because I was at home doing nothing.... I couldn't work.... I stayed home for three years…doing nothing, so it was hard for my career and myself because being at home every day is not lovely…you start losing your security… you start losing your value…. Someone helped me to do a voluntary job in the Leprosy Mission... I didn't get paid, but at least I was doing something. (Leonee)*

As Leonee's experience vividly illustrates, external constraints in the SIE context can force unexpected professional detours and periods of reduced engagement. While not always providing direct career advancement, engaging in voluntary work (Gleissner & Stoermer, 2025), even when unpaid, offered Leonee, a crucial avenue for maintaining a sense of purpose and combating feelings of stagnation during restricted employment, leading to unforeseen but valuable personal and experiential gains.

The SIE women often found their experiences deviated significantly from their pre-mobility expectations. This unexpected reality frequently compelled them to cultivate a deeper understanding of their adaptive capabilities and inner resources, a critical attribute for success in SIE. In some instances, participants experienced considerable stress from relying on the financial support of partners or other family members in New Zealand, particularly while retraining to gain locally recognised qualifications. This unwelcome additional stress contributed to a sense of disassociation and dissatisfaction

for some regarding their move to New Zealand (Doherty et al., 2013a; Pinto et al., 2020; Suarez-Bilbao et al., 2023).

For example, Molly, who arrived with 15 years of experience in high-profile human resource management positions in large corporations in India, faced immense pressure. The need to rely on her husband's income to support her financially while she completed a master's degree in New Zealand added considerable strain to an already vulnerable period of professional transition.

> *I came here in February 2017 and started studying. My husband was wrapping up his stuff and his work. He joined me in August… there was a bit of a gap, and then he came here. He chilled out, we travelled a little bit, and then he started looking for a job. He finally landed something in October, so there was a little gap… at the point where he was starting to get a bit frustrated… I told my husband to take anything you could (because I was still studying for another six months) and not get too picky. The first job is always just a foot in the door, and … he started. I finished uni, I got into AT soon after uni, so I got into AT in my summer break of 2018. (Molly)*

For these participants, career opportunities and a sense of autonomy were some of the prevalent factors that brought them to New Zealand as SIEs. Hence, if the SIE journey did not result in the desired career outcome or change, there was a sense of disappointment or failure.

> *It's hard to find a good job because, as an immigrant, you always find these jobs cleaning, you know, to be a waitress, these kinds of jobs, and to be honest, you have pride in yourself. We came from working in a company, earning good money, to come here and clean a toilet. It's not nice, you know. (Leonee)*

The need for self-confidence and pride in their careers was evident among many participants, fuelling a strong desire to prevent regression in their professional

trajectories. However, some participants expressed dissatisfaction upon realising that they could not manage their careers or have control over them to the extent they had anticipated. Instead, they were reliant on the opportunities available to them.

For some participants, the journey of SIE led to careers fundamentally different from those they had initially imagined before leaving their home countries. Conversely, for others, this change created opportunities in their chosen field that would not have been available otherwise. This might have been due to the patriarchal nature of the industry in their home country, a highly competitive employment market, or a combination of both.

Regardless of their marital and familial status, establishing themselves professionally in a new country often took participants several years to reach a comparable career position. It became evident to these women that being an SIE was directly linked to their career position and, in some cases, necessitated a complete career re-establishment in New Zealand. For some, like Iris, it represented a profound career reset, underpinned by their unique position as SIEs. This reset was not merely a change in job title but a re-evaluation of professional purpose and a forging of new paths.

> *The interesting bit for you is that I had to start from scratch. Yeah, zero recognition for overseas and that's what they tell you when they, you know, the Chamber of Commerce is they do those courses. They tell you that the only thing that counts is Kiwi work experience, and I can feel that even 10 years or eight years later. (Iris)*

Adapting and reshaping careers, which sometimes meant letting go of former expectations, proved an onerous experience for this highly motivated and capable group. This challenge, while significant, was met with a strong sense of resilience. It fostered a

willingness in the participants to take the necessary steps to establish themselves, even as they sought to maintain a sense of their unique professional identities.

The understanding that the destination alone would not guarantee desired outcomes emerged during the participants' SIE journey. Their ability to leverage international lifelong mobility experiences to unlock, enable, and shape change became fundamental to their overall experience and outcomes in New Zealand. This realisation involved navigating unforeseen hurdles and actively redefining what success looked like in a new context. Participant Angela serves as an example of this dynamic adaptation.

> *Getting the company off the ground was two years of hard graft. And I look back at it, and again, it was me, and I would have been 29-ish, 30 and was doing all the work, all the Intellectual Property, all the brain. (Angela)*

Angela emphasised the opportunities she believed were afforded her due to the tenacity she developed as an SIE woman. Her ability to shape her career was significantly enhanced through her SIE experience. She found that initiating change and establishing a company was primarily a result of her assertive nature and proactive attitude. She directly attributed this to her experience as an internationally mobile woman who, throughout her career journey, had maintained a determined and autonomous approach to creating opportunities in what she perceived as a predominantly masculine industry. Another participant described how she adopted an assertive approach to establishing her career in New Zealand, stepping away from the sheltered lifestyle she experienced to before expatriation. Growing up in India and having an arranged marriage in a cultural environment that was highly patriarchal, Tammy took SIE as an opportunity to redefine what it meant for her to be a career-oriented woman.

I wanted a husband who would encourage that; otherwise, it would drive me crazy. So, it was clear that I would continue working in the same field and not switch fields. I want to continue in IT, so I landed in Hamilton. It was a tiny market, so running away from Hamilton took precisely one month. By God's grace, I was lucky; I found a job in Auckland…so I said, hey, listen, I'm going; I've got a job. You can either come and follow me to Auckland, or we must work out some arrangements here. (Tammy)

This personal assertion of professional priority highlights how SIE can empower women to deliberately challenge and redefine relational dynamics, especially in a different cultural and social context where the immediate pressures of extended family and ingrained societal norms might be lessened. Away from familiar expectations, Tammy was able to courageously take personal and professional risks and pursue individual career advancement in a way she might not have considered previously. This demonstrates a newfound freedom that several other participants experienced, allowing them to actively shape their career trajectories beyond prior constraints.

Another participant, Keesha, originally from India, found the SIE experience and the requirement to establish her career in New Zealand a far more emotionally challenging process than she had imagined. She expressed frustration at the lack of natural career progression and relied heavily on her husband for emotional support during this adjustment period.

This experience presented a notable contrast to that of Tammy. Tammy acted largely autonomously from her husband after arriving in New Zealand, relishing the profound sense of independence she felt in the context of the new country. It is important to acknowledge that Tammy's ability to pursue her career and independence in this manner was facilitated by her resolve and her husband's willingness and flexibility to support her choices, including living apart for a period. This highlights that while individual agency,

characterised by the initiative to independently identify and pursue international career goals, is a fundamental precondition for SIE women's mobility (Biese & Choroszewicz, 2019; Ellis et al., 2020; Ramos & Martín-Palomino, 2015), the realisation and successful outcome of this agency are crucially mediated by the specific dynamics within their relationships and their partners' adaptability. The varied experiences of Keesha and Tammy demonstrate the diverse ways SIE women navigate personal and professional challenges, often influenced by their relational contexts.

> *I'm very dependent on my husband in terms of emotional support, significantly. I could be very strong for 20 days, and on the 21st day, I could sort of break down and have my moments, typical human stuff, girl stuff, mum stuff, wife stuff. So, I've had those days and rely severely on my husband for that emotional support. (Keesha)*

Upon arrival in New Zealand, Leonee encountered substantial obstacles in her career pursuit. The reality of finding employment proved far more challenging than her initial expectations. Before her move, she had harboured perceptions of New Zealand as a 'promised land', with abundant job prospects and an appealing lifestyle. However, she faced an extended period of unemployment and encountered rejection primarily due to her limited English proficiency and SIE status. This experience was shared among other participants, highlighting a dissonance between the perceived ease of securing employment prior to relocation and the significant challenges experienced once in New Zealand. Leonee vividly recounted one such frustrating encounter with a potential employer:

> *Once, I went to an interview at a café, and you know, I was telling him, oh, I just finished my English studies, and blah blah blah, I just wanted to practise it. He replied, 'Sorry, but this is not a school where you can't come here to practice your*

English.' He was so mean to me, so when you face these kinds of things, your security, you go down. (Leonee)

For some participants, New Zealand ultimately served as an interim or stepping-stone destination, a means to obtain residency or citizenship to then enter other countries, such as the United Kingdom or Australia, where opportunities and remuneration were thought to be more attractive. This strategy illustrates how the change experienced as an SIE, including establishing oneself and a career in New Zealand, was often a strategic step to unlock further opportunities, whether professional or personal, in other countries.

Keesha's journey exemplifies this strategic approach. The emotional and mental toll of being away from her support systems in India and the difficulties she faced establishing her career in New Zealand led her to desire another international move. Her next desired destination was Australia, driven by its proximity to her family in India and the belief that it offered more significant opportunities.

Once I get citizenship, I will explore Australia. One thing is that it's closer to India, so in terms of an emergency, it makes sense. I guess there are much better opportunities. And it's also suitable for my daughter's education. (Keesha)

This demonstrates how participants strategically weighed diverse factors, including family proximity, perceived career opportunities, and their children's future, in planning subsequent international moves, even if it meant prioritising these over their immediate career progression or emotional well-being in the current location.

For others, however, it was a unique mix of personal and professional change experienced in New Zealand that became invaluable and fostered a deep sense of home. These participants actively sought to understand their new home better and integrate

personally and professionally into their new environment. Yet, for many, the longing to be with family created a desire to split their time between two countries.

> *My family is far away, in Germany, so if we want to structure our life around being with family and the people we care about, we can also be in New Zealand sometimes, because we love it here. (Natalie)*

Natalie did not see New Zealand as a means to gain residency or citizenship but instead as a destination through which to advance her career, achieve the work/life balance desired, and live life whilst still being able to regularly travel back to visit family in Germany. It afforded her the freedom, financially, to travel further and prioritise her happiness rather than her previous priorities.

6.5 SUMMARY

This chapter set out to explore three key overarching themes that emerged from participants' life stories: (1) the importance of early childhood and adolescence in creating a predisposition for SIE; (2) contextual influences on gender roles; and (3) SIE as an accelerator of change. In summary, these themes illuminated participants' interpretations of their experiences and the profound impact of their SIE journeys.

The first theme revealed how participants' motivations largely centred on advancing their careers and pursuing broader lifestyle opportunities. Crucially, a significant finding within this theme was how various childhood and adolescent experiences in international travel and education cultivated a global mindset and an intrinsic international curiosity. This early foundation created a powerful predisposition to later undertake SIE.

The second theme, contextual influences on gender roles and careers, highlighted the unique challenges and adaptations faced by women SIEs. It became evident that individuality, determination, and adeptly managing multiple roles were crucial during participants' settlement in New Zealand. While SIE was often considered a direct career advancement opportunity, the reality of moving to a new country without wider family support meant participants faced many personal and professional challenges, with gender constraints and expectations proving to be a major issue across all spheres of their lives. Participants navigated these obstacles by leveraging their existing experience and qualifications, often encountering unexpected employment and skill utilisation challenges. Consequently, participants' career outcomes in New Zealand varied significantly from their initial expectations and were profoundly shaped by their personal and professional experiences in New Zealand, as well as the credibility of their qualifications in the New Zealand context.

Crucially, the third theme underscored SIE's role as an accelerator of change, often in ways that participants may not have initially expected. This change extended beyond mere geographical relocation, profoundly impacting their professional identities, personal priorities, and perceptions of success. The SIE journey acted as a catalyst, forcing the participant’s to re-evaluate established norms, adapt to unforeseen circumstances, and redefine their sense of self and fulfilment. Therefore, the participants’ motivations and experiences proved to be dynamic and multifaceted, reflecting the inherent complexities and transformative power of becoming internationally mobile in an SIE context.

7 DISCUSSION

In Chapter 6, the individual stories of 15 participants were shared. Although I have written the condensed stories and thematic analysis as part of the process of analysis, I have been cognisant, especially in the condensed stories, to capture and reflect the voice of each participant. This chapter discusses these stories, themes, and insights in relation to the extant literature (see Chapter 3) and as a process of further analysis and contextualisation of the study. Here, the focus is on answering the primary research question: *How does 'going gender' contextualise a woman's career decision-making as an SIE in New Zealand?*. The chapter also responds to the associated sub-questions, which also guided my inquiry.

The thematic analysis of participants' life stories revealed three significant themes in this study: the importance of early childhood and adolescence in creating a predisposition to mobility in general, and specifically to SIE; a range of contextual influences on the construction of gender roles through the SIE experience; and the SIE experience as an accelerator of dynamic, and at times unexpected, career and personal change.

7.1 EXPLORING THE INFLUENCE OF EARLY CHILDHOOD AND ADOLESCENCE ON THE INTERNATIONAL CAREER EXPERIENCES AND ASPIRATIONS OF SIE WOMEN

This research significantly advances our understanding of SIE women's career trajectories by refocusing the analytical lens to a much earlier phase of life. It demonstrates that foundational experiences during childhood and adolescence play a more significant and often under-recognised role in shaping an individual's inherent curiosity and desire for international mobility and subsequent adaptability within diverse cultural

contexts. This contrasts sharply with the conventional focus of SIE literature on solely adult experiences and immediate pre-expatriation factors.

Building upon the insights of Caselius and Suutari (2023a, 2023b) regarding early life influences and integrating Andresen et al.'s (2023) emphasis on contextual understanding, this study suggests that the very seeds for effective international mobility are frequently sown during these formative years. Specifically, early international exposure, whether through extensive family travel, internal mobility, schooling in multicultural environments, or living abroad as a child, appears to cultivate a predisposition towards seeking international opportunities and intrinsically develop a unique blend of flexibility, resilience, and cross-cultural adaptability. These characteristics are akin to those traditionally associated with "third-culture children" (Nash, 2020; Selmer & Lauring, 2014), who develop a unique worldview by integrating elements of their birth culture with those of their host culture(s). Crucially, this early immersion fosters a deep-seated curiosity about the world and a genuine interest in diverse ways of life that become powerful motivators.

Furthermore, this study directly builds on Carr et al.'s (2005) seminal observations about the influence of family context and relational dynamics in shaping the career trajectory and adjustment of expatriates.. By forging a direct link between these early life experiences and successful adaptation in complex SIE contexts, my research indicates that these formative years are critical touchpoints that profoundly influence later life choices and mobility patterns among women. They particularly shape how women instinctively approach and proactively navigate the often-conflicting expectations across different cultural contexts. This contribution directly challenges the previously held notion of fixed, pre-SIE gender roles in adulthood (Cheryan & Markus, 2020; Svenja & Arthur, 2010), instead positing that early life experiences lay a crucial foundation for international mobility among women.

This expansion of the theoretical understanding posits that SIE aspirations and the development of necessary competencies are not isolated occurrences emerging solely in adulthood. Instead, they are integral components of a broader life narrative deeply interwoven with early experiences. This thesis reveals that exposure to diverse environments during formative years, including both international settings and significant internal mobility, does more than foster a global mindset, as suggested by Doherty, Richardson, and Thorn (2013). It actively cultivates a pervasive sense of curiosity and a proactive drive for engagement with SIE in adulthood.

This leads to the development of unconscious, yet specific, tangible competencies, such as heightened cultural awareness, problem-solving in ambiguous situations, and an eager willingness to adapt personal behaviours, which enable women to more readily navigate and thrive across disparate cultural settings. This finding is particularly significant because it suggests that the inherent capacity for flexibility and adaptability, previously attributed primarily to adult learning and post-expatriation adaptation processes (Chen et al., 2024; Kelly & Conroy, 2024; Yussuf, 2024), may be significantly shaped by experiences during early childhood and adolescence. This represents a substantial advancement in theoretical understanding, contributing to and extending the temporal boundaries of SIE research by emphasising early life influences, and further answering the call for a more holistic, life-course approach to understanding women's international career trajectories (Myers & Thorn, 2023).

For many participants in this study, the initial, often unconscious, immersion in cross-cultural environments during their formative years ignited a great and lasting sense of curiosity, fostering a strong desire for subsequent international experiences. This early exposure appears to have ingrained a fundamental openness and flexibility in their thinking and a natural comfort with navigating ambiguity, transforming nascent interest into a

strong, proactive drive that later fuelled their SIE ambitions. For instance, women who described extensive travel as children frequently articulated developing a heightened awareness of and a genuine fascination in global opportunities and diverse ways of living. This intrinsic curiosity significantly informed their later, deliberate decisions to pursue SIE. This suggests that the very idea of undertaking an SIE, and perhaps the foundational tenets of an unconscious 'going gender' approach, where women are predisposed to actively explore and negotiate their gender identity within new contexts, may be sown subconsciously in these formative years. This early development of intense curiosity influenced how the participants became equipped to navigate the complexities of international mobility and, crucially, why they were so strongly motivated to seek such experiences in the first place. These early experiences significantly shaped their aspirations, creating a deep-seated predisposition or propensity towards pushing boundaries. Participants appeared to develop a global mindset rooted in genuine curiosity, and later embarked on international careers, with the evolving patterns of doing and undoing gender becoming a more conscious and explicit performance as the SIE journey progressively unfolded.

7.2 Rapid Cycles of Gender Role Oscillation: Heightened Tensions and Challenges between Contexts

Employing a focused contextual approach, this study demonstrates that context significantly shapes the experiences of mid-career SIE women, particularly as they navigate transitions between their home and host countries. Foundational work by Butler (1988) and West and Zimmerman (1987) details that gender is a performative, socially constructed phenomenon, constantly shaped and reshaped through daily interactions and context-dependent practices. This concept of gender performativity has been extensively applied within mobility studies by scholars who demonstrate how individuals'

gendered performances are negotiated and reconfigured across different social contexts (Milani, 2023; Quinan & Hunt, 2023; Sert & Turkmen, 2022; Stine et al., 2018). For example, Connell (2005), along with Holmes (2007) and Kofman (2018), have extended this idea by introducing concepts such as hegemonic masculinity to mobility studies, which they use to explore how gendered practices are negotiated within professional settings, emphasising mobility's role in reshaping gender identities. Additionally, Liu et al. (2020) highlight the impact of globalisation on gender roles, demonstrating that transnational mobility explicitly leads to the reconfiguration of gender norms as individuals encounter diverse contexts. While scholars have increasingly examined how contextual shifts affect gender dynamics in international mobility (Ana et al., 2014; Dupuis et al., 2008; Sert & Turkmen, 2022; Stine et al., 2018), little has been done to comprehensively contextualise gender and its performative role specifically for SIE women (Andresen et al., 2020; Andresen et al., 2023), as is the focus of this SIE research.

This study uniquely contributes by examining the experiences of mid-career women, a group distinct from younger and older SIE cohorts, and capturing their experiences. At the same time, these women are still actively engaged in the SIE process. While recent scholarly engagement, including field-defining reviews (Andresen et al., 2023) and studies focusing on the wider expatriate experience (Suarez-Bilbao et al., 2023), acknowledges the evolution of the SIE landscape, this study demonstrates that while the SIE experience is inherently nonlinear, individuals actively and dynamically navigate gender expectations and self-presentation across different contexts as a highly adaptive process Each new location, whether internal or international, presents unique norms and power dynamics that interact with SIE women’s accumulated experiences and adaptations from previous contexts.

In international mobility, gendered expectations in the host country often differ considerably from those in an individual's past contexts (Begley et al., 2008; Ott & Presbitero, 2025; Suter & Cangià, 2020; Waxin et al., 2019). Research on SIE women has predominantly focused on female Western expatriates (Garrett, 2019; Haak-Saheem et al., 2022; Kumar & Chhokar, 2019), often concentrating on the barriers they face and challenges adjusting to new cultural environments. These adjustment challenges are frequently conceptualized and framed through the lens of foundational cross-cultural models such as those developed by Hofstede (1980) and Trompenaars (1996). However, an increasing and vital body of literature is emerging on the experiences of non-Western SIE women, particularly those expatriating from the Global South to the Global North (Pustovit, 2020; Suter & Cangià, 2020; Tami et al., 2019). This study contributes to this growing perspective by including participants from diverse origins, encompassing both the Global North and Global South, thereby offering novel insights into how contextual spatial transitions influence gender role performativity. In line with Andresen et al.'s (2023) call for a deeper contextualisation of gender within the SIE experience, this study also acknowledges the broader academic critiques of simplified cross-cultural frameworks, such as Hofstede's dimensions (Hofstede, 2011; Minkov & Kaasa, 2021; Signorini et al., 2009), which have been criticised for their limited ability to capture the complexities and fluidity of individual gender experiences across diverse cultural contexts (Hofstede, 1996; Smith et al., 1996; Trompenaars & Woolliams, 2002). As such, this study examines the experiences of mid-career SIE women, uniquely revealing the dynamic and often rapid ways that they must navigate gender performativity across multiple contexts, while simultaneously responding to the inherent tensions and challenges that arise during this process. For example, participants in this study often quickly adapted their professional assertiveness, shifting from direct leadership to more consensus approaches in different workplace cultures, or renegotiated work-life boundaries when external support

structures for childcare or domestic help differed significantly. These rapid and often unforeseen adjustments frequently created tensions for the participants, such as feelings of inauthenticity due to constant adaptation, or exhaustion from the continuous effort required to integrate themselves within evolving external expectations.

The concept of ‘going gender’ (Forsberg & Ståbacka, 2020) posits that individuals, particularly migrants, actively engage in the continuous processes of ‘doing’ and ‘undoing’ gender as they navigate new environments. This theoretical lens highlights how individuals move between the demands of their new cultural context and their established gendered identities, often adapting their behaviours and self-presentations in fluid ways.

My research study further found that the participant mid-career SIE women experienced gender role oscillation intensely, a challenge exacerbated by the simultaneous navigation of their professional aspirations and complex personal lives, often involving partners and children also adapting to new contexts. This aligns directly with Forsberg and Ståbacka's (2020) understanding, as participants in this research actively engaged in ‘doing’ and ‘undoing’ gender, navigating between the demands of their new environment and their established identities. Similarly, Sultana and Deumert (2023) observe that factors like race, class, and background further shape how women, in particular, experience gender dynamics abroad, necessitating an ongoing adjustment to both subtle and more overt gender norms. Consequently, these experiences and tensions profoundly challenge SIE women. Participants in this study faced unique pressures based on their relationship status and age; for instance, being a single, career-focused woman in her thirties might be celebrated in some contexts, while leading to social isolation or professional barriers in others. The challenges extended to daily workplace interactions, where participants deferred to male colleagues in meetings, adjusted their communication style from direct to indirect, and managed different expectations about working hours and

work-life boundaries. Even seemingly mundane decisions became complex, including whether to wear wedding rings if professional credibility was affected by marital status (Doherty et al., 2013), deciding how to respond to personal questions about family planning in contexts where this was an ordinary workplace conversation (Lekchiri et al., 2019), or navigating social settings (Lippert & Damaske, 2020; Martins et al., 2024).

While the tensions and challenges that SIE women face are not entirely new (Caligiuri & Bonache, 2016; Cardador et al., 2021; Hansen, 2020; Lekchiri et al., 2019; Lippert & Damaske, 2020), this research underscores the heightened nature, rapid emergence, and degree of gender role oscillation experienced by SIE women, which remains underrepresented in the literature. Within this research, as within a broader SIE context (Biese & Choroszewicz, 2019), the dynamic nature of gender role construction was intensified by the autonomy (Jannesari & Sullivan, 2021; Yussuf, 2024) and agency (Despotovic et al., 2022) experienced by participants. Specifically, their ability to make independent choices about when, where, and how they would work internationally meant they had to be prepared to actively adapt their gender presentation across contexts without the institutional support or predetermined roles often found in traditional expatriate assignments. On arrival in New Zealand, this independence, while empowering, required them to constantly evaluate and adjust their gender performance, especially as they independently navigated new professional and social environments, chose future destinations, and made strategic decisions about how to position themselves in different contexts (Biese & Choroszewicz, 2019; Newman et al., 2020). While research has found that women are underrepresented in traditional expatriate roles, often due to gendered expectations surrounding professional and personal responsibilities (Bowles et al., 2019; Langinier et al., 2022; Lekchiri et al., 2019; Tharenou, 2010), this is notably not the case for SIEs, where the representation of women is proportionally higher than other

expatriate subgroups (Stoermer et al., 2020). However, due to the inherent dynamics of autonomy and agency characteristic of SIE (Ramos & Martín-Palomino, 2015), participants in this study often felt pressured to balance family roles and societal expectations. This made it difficult to focus entirely on their new lives and subsequently manage all tensions and challenges, leading them to often prioritise professional or personal aspirations in their current context or focus more heavily on fulfilling responsibilities in their previous contexts. This feeling of sometimes neglecting their professional or personal lives throughout their SIE experience reflected the constant negotiation of their expected gender roles as a woman, an SIE, and a professional. Chiu and Ng (2018) point out that women in expatriate positions frequently face conflicting demands between their professional aspirations and familial obligations, leading to reluctance to pursue international assignments. Female SIEs, as highlighted in this thesis and the broader SIE literature, are willing to undertake these international opportunities and are cognisant that they will have to adapt their gender roles to facilitate their SIE journey, though perhaps not always to the full extent anticipated or in the unexpected ways that ultimately unfold. For some, this means ‘undoing’ (Liu & Li, 2020; Pinho & Gaunt, 2021; Risman, 2009; Sultana & Deumert, 2023) a number of their gender role expectations, for others constructing or ‘doing’ other roles, and for many, a combination of these processes is seen in the ‘going gender’ framework.

This study points to the iterative nature of contextual gender role change for SIE women, significantly contributing to the theoretical concept of ‘going gender’ to understand the impact of international mobility on SIE women. Participants' experiences revealed that gender constructs are not static but continuously performed and reshaped by the social and professional contexts women encounter. This study highlights the importance of viewing gender as dynamic and adaptable, influenced by both personal

agency and external factors. Whether it involves pausing personal aspirations or adjusting professional goals, the participants demonstrated remarkable flexibility and autonomy as they navigated SIE life's multifaceted challenges and opportunities. This ongoing process of gender role negotiation is essential for understanding how SIE women experience their careers at both a macro level, moving between different international contexts, and a micro level, moving between work and home in the current context, thereby offering new, critical insights into gender in the context of international mobility.

7.3 The SIE as the Catalyst of Accelerated, Intense, Daily Change

Building upon Suarez-Bilbao et al. (2023), this research highlights that mid-career SIE women experience daily accelerated, intense, and often unanticipated personal and professional change. This represents an under-explored phenomenon within existing SIE literature, which has focused on early career women (Li et al., 2023; Myers & Pringle, 2005) and those later in life (Myers et al., 2016; Myers & Thorn, 2023). This study, however, uniquely explores the co-dependent relationship between professional and personal change for mid-career women, analysed through a contextualised and gendered lens. Understanding this accelerated, intense, and often unanticipated change is fundamental to exploring how the study's female participants navigated and interpreted their experiences in establishing a career in a new country, and subsequently, how these dynamic shifts profoundly shaped their future career aspirations.

Personal development, a recognised hallmark of the SIE experience (Atay et al., 2024; Martins et al., 2024; Pinto et al., 2020), encompasses enhanced cross-cultural communication abilities (Jannesari et al., 2024; Jannesari & Sullivan, 2021; Zakaria & Yusuf, 2023), expanded international networks, acquired language skills, and a cultivated mindset embracing learning and flexibility across diverse organisational and

national contexts (Lauring & Selmer, 2012, 2014). Concurrently, professional development (Bastida et al., 2021; Bowles et al., 2019; Pylväs & Nokelainen, 2021) involves acquiring new skills, knowledge, and experiences crucial for career advancement (Chen et al., 2024; Kelly & Conroy, 2024; Yussuf, 2024). Suarez-Bilbao et al. (2023), in their examination of SIEs' career-crafting strategies, provided crucial insights into how SIEs manage their careers in dynamic and unpredictable contexts, emphasising the challenges of adapting to new cultural, organisational, and labour market conditions.

This thesis builds directly on the established understanding that SIE is a powerful catalyst for change. Early research, such as Inkson and Myers (2003) study on the "Big OE" (overseas experience), first suggested that SIE often leads to unanticipated personal growth and shifts in career direction, particularly for younger individuals. Subsequent work, like that of Myers and Pringle (2005) on Self-Initiated Foreign Experiences (SFE), further demonstrated an acceleration of professional and personal development, highlighting gender's influence. More recent studies, including those by Andresen et al. (2020) and Arifa et al. (2021), have adopted a more holistic approach, arguing that SIE is a broad lifestyle choice that enables multiple forms of change across various age groups, including older SIEs (Myers & Thorn, 2023). This study uniquely contributes by examining the experiences of mid-career women, a group distinct from both younger and older SIE cohorts, and capturing their unique and unexpected transformations while still undergoing the SIE process. Participants vividly described their international experiences as hugely impactful, leading to unexpected and non-linear shifts in their professional paths and broader life trajectories. For example, once in New Zealand, many participants found themselves re-evaluating their career goals, often leading to more flexible and unconventional career paths, some substantially different from those they had envisioned before SIE. This focus on mid-career women in their active SIE journey offers

fresh insights into how the ‘doing’ and ‘undoing’ of gender unfolds within this dynamic context.

The ability to adapt and leverage international experiences for future career advancement, as noted by Thorn (2009), is a hallmark of the SIE experience. However, the challenges faced by the SIE women in this current study underscore the complexity of navigating a career in a new country, where expectations and realities often diverge significantly. While participants consistently anticipated professional growth, the extent of personal transformation required throughout the journey was frequently unexpected. They expected to advance their careers and acquire new skills, but they often did not foresee the significant shifts in their personal values, priorities, and self-identity. Doherty et al. (2013) emphasise that career outcomes for SIEs are frequently unpredictable and heavily influenced by local employment conditions and cultural differences. The experiences of the mid-career SIE women of this study strongly aligned with this, demonstrating that while SIE can indeed lead to exciting, unexpected opportunities, it also presented participants with significant obstacles, such as the non-transferability of qualifications or the lack of relevant jobs or domestic experience that challenged their ability to fully utilise their existing skills and qualifications.

This thesis extends the existing notion that SIE is a multifaceted phenomenon (Zakaria & Yusuf, 2023), suggesting that due to its autonomous nature (Jannesari & Sullivan, 2021), the personal and professional facets of change mutually shape each other (de Jong et al., 2024; Suarez-Bilbao et al., 2023), creating a complex interplay. Here, personal and professional development are continuously constructed and influenced by a wide range of SIE experiences and contexts, with gender and culture emerging as significant, pervasive aspects throughout the entire SIE journey. Participants frequently identified frustration and a pronounced need for more employer support,

particularly in securing roles that genuinely matched their extensive skills and qualifications. While more recent research has highlighted challenges specifically faced by SIE women (Haak-Saheem et al., 2022; Suarez-Bilbao et al., 2023), this study builds on earlier research (Myers, 2016) that demonstrates that SIE appears to markedly accelerate both professional and personal change for mid-career women, often in unexpected and non-linear directions, which can yield both positive and negative outcomes. Participants consistently described this acceleration as faster and more dynamic than they had anticipated, and in some cases, it led to outcomes that felt unexpected and beyond their immediate control.

For the participants, significant personal and professional growth came through this intense acceleration, albeit manifesting in various ways and with diverse outcomes for different individuals. While much of the existing literature continues to focus predominantly on professional outcomes (Baluku et al., 2018; Jannesari & Sullivan Sherry, 2019; Pylväs & Nokelainen, 2021) following SIE, this research explicitly highlights the pervasive impact of SIE on all aspects of life. It adopts a comprehensive approach that considers how multiple facets within an SIE's life can shift, intertwine, and change, shaping each other in more extreme and varied ways than initially expected.

In exploring how the SIE move profoundly shapes women's future career aspirations, this study powerfully demonstrates that the accelerated personal and professional transformations inherent in the SIE experience are key. Building on the work of Suarez-Bilbao et al. (2023) on career crafting, my study shows that the dynamic and often intense interplay of personal growth, professional development, and gender role evolution creates a unique and compelling context for profound career reflection and re-evaluation. For example, participants vividly described how the simultaneous challenges of navigating a new job market, establishing community, supporting their immediate family, and

experiencing unexpected shifts in their understanding of gender roles, such as cooking, cleaning, and childcare, collectively prompted them to reassess their long-term career goals. The accelerated pace of change inherent in SIE meant that these critical reassessments often occurred far more rapidly and dramatically than they might have in a more stable, familiar environment (Bowles et al., 2019; Caligiuri & Bonache, 2016; Suutari et al., 2018a). As the participants of my study were mid-career and were interviewed while still immersed in their SIE, this accelerated change (both expected and unexpected) may have felt more extreme and immediate, i.e. in the moment, than perhaps if they were to reflect on this experience sometime later, perhaps post SIE. This intense adaptation process compelled some to proactively pursue entirely new career paths. In contrast, others prioritised different aspects of their work-life balance, while others adopted a broader, globally minded perspective in their career planning, actively seeking opportunities beyond a single national context. As these women acted with inherent agency and autonomy, two key characteristics of SIE (Bakewell, 2010; Fernando & Cohen, 2014; Ramos & Martín-Palomino, 2015), they were perhaps expecting a certain, often idealised, path for their careers that, in reality, did not exist. The SIE experience, therefore, transcended being merely a chapter in their professional lives; it emerged as a turning point that fundamentally redirected and reshaped their long-term professional aspirations and outcomes.

7.4 An Integrated Framework for Understanding SIE Experiences

This doctoral research reveals a critical need to advance the current conceptualisation and understanding of the SIE experience for mid-career women (Afiouni et al., 2020; Ott & Presbitero). Foundational work by Pringle and McCulloch-Dickson (2003) on women's flexible careers provided an essential framework for understanding the self-managed

career journey and the challenges women face in established career structures. This work, alongside other critiques of individual-centric career theories, provided the necessary theoretical precursor for models that acknowledge context, such as the Kaleidoscopic Career Model. The Kaleidoscopic Career Model (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005) provides a lens through which to understand the non-linear and context-dependent career experiences of internationally mobile individuals, often highlighting how gender shapes these unique journeys. Notably, the model focuses on how the rotation of its three principles aligns with major life stages (Sullivan & Mainiero, 2007). It is important to note that the Kaleidoscopic Career Model itself was developed as a women's career theory and was not originally developed in an international context (Kirk, 2015).

While some scholars suggest the Kaleidoscopic Career Model effectively articulates the experiences of internationally mobile women (Fitzgerald & Howe-Walsh, 2009; McNulty & Brewster, 2017; Muir et al., 2014), this study finds that it faces two limitations in the context of this research. First, it does not always adequately account for diversity in the lived experiences of women SIE. Second, although it offers a perspective, the findings of this study contradict this assumed sequencing, revealing that participants often operate within and across these principles almost simultaneously in a dynamic, 'messier,' and somewhat chaotic fashion. Kotze (2021), in a study examining the perceptions of IMIs in South Africa, critiques policymakers and academics for adopting a "one size fits all" mentality, which neglects the unique skill sets and cultural, social, and societal value of IMIs, focusing instead on political or economic contributions (Bacchi, 2022; Kotze et al., 2021). A similar sentiment can be applied to the career conceptualisation of SIE women.

Beyond career models such as the Kaleidoscopic and Boundaryless Career models, other attempts have been made to conceptualise women's internationally mobile careers. Lloyd (2013) suggests that women’s international mobility is more cyclical, meaning their

careers are composed of repeated moves, often resulting in no permanent sense of "home." Smith (2010) similarly presents a cyclical understanding of women's internationally mobile careers, characterised by frequent, non-linear movement. Conversely, Conlon (2011) suggests international mobility is relational, focusing on the quality of social connections that transcend across space and time rather than the movement itself. Anthias (2012) encourages a comprehensive approach to international gendered career mobility, stressing the interconnectedness and positionality of an individual within contexts as the key to understanding what international mobility looks like from a gendered career point of view.

More recently, there has been a shift towards considering the entire life story of SIEs, as seen in the work of Myers (2016) and Myers and Thorn (2023). This research builds on these perspectives by suggesting that women's SIE is not merely framed by interconnectedness and positionality, nor is it a simple transactional process. It is the study's focus on the 'doing' and 'undoing' of gender that enables a much deeper understanding of this integrated, contextual process. SIE women are not a homogeneous group (Bergh & Du Plessis, 2016; Gleissner & Stoermer, 2025; Kemp & Rickett, 2018; Myers, 2016) and have diverse origins, occupations, and reasons to relocate; hence, differing career choices and trajectories suggest an ongoing and dynamic exchange between aspects of their past and present lived experiences.

In this study, it became apparent that for the participants, the SIE experience represented a process that began in early childhood and adolescence, where traditional roles were often implicitly questioned and tentatively challenged. This early experience of subconsciously 'doing' and 'undoing' gender roles, which may have been restricted in their traditional social or cultural settings, evolved and developed throughout their adult lives, providing them with the necessary tools to navigate new contexts. This research further

builds on this by empirically demonstrating how these early, formative experiences cultivated a unique capacity for adaptability and resilience in the mid-career SIE women, directly influencing their ability to navigate complex professional and personal transitions in their host country, New Zealand. Importantly, this process of mobility and adaptation often began well before the actual expatriate experience.

Whilst earlier research (Inkson & Myers, 2003) has indeed highlighted that the curiosity needed for expatriation can be built from childhood, this study provides a detailed but nuanced perspective on the proximity and persistence of these formative childhood experiences in the subsequent self-initiated expatriation SIE journey, offering a deeper understanding of this pre-expatriation phase. This finding builds on previous work by reconfiguring our understanding of how these early influences shape later self-initiated mobility (Mayrhofer, Pernkopf, et al., 2020).

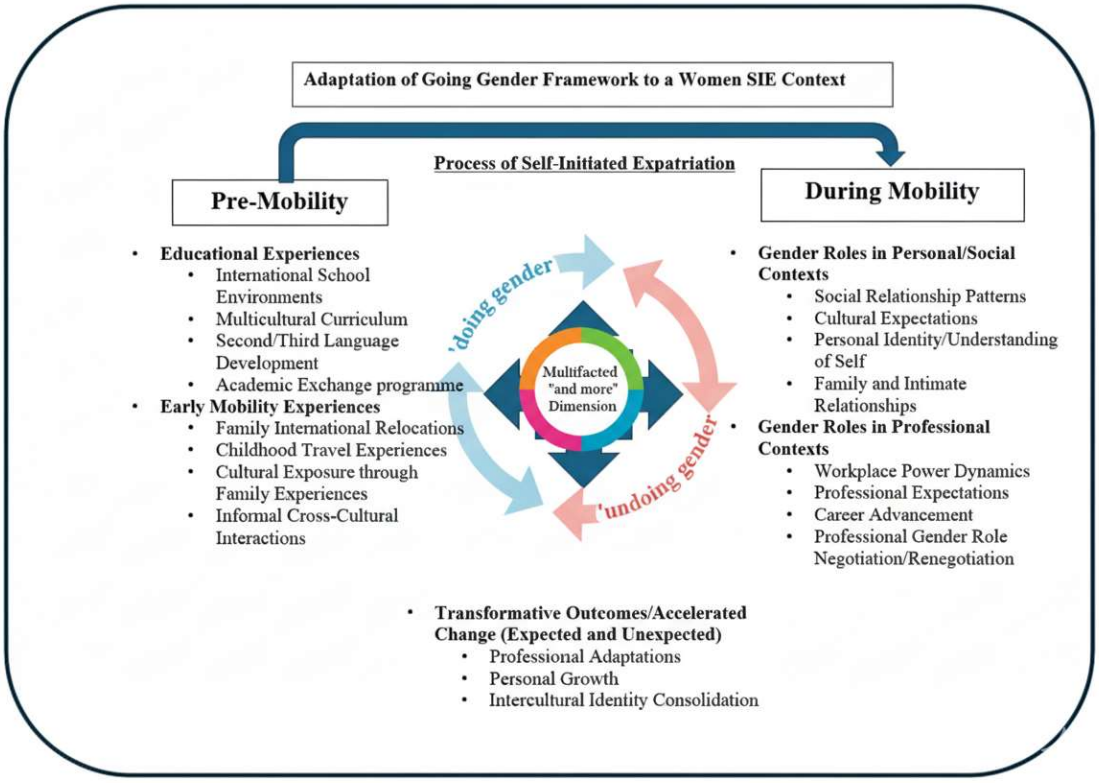
Research suggests that women with families are still not considered entirely suited for traditional expatriate assignments (Caligiuri & Bonache, 2016; de Eccher & Duarte, 2018; Gleissner & Stoermer, 2025; Salamin & Hanappi, 2014), with earlier studies indicating that women are often encouraged to pursue international mobility primarily during life stages when they are young, single, and childless (Blau & Ferber, 1991; Damaske, 2011; Deblaere, 2020; Guillaume & Pochic, 2007; Harman & Sealy, 2017). However, this perspective represents an earlier view; hence, additional recent research is needed to properly assess how this landscape has evolved, especially for mid-career women, over the past decade and a half (Frkal & Criscione-Naylor, 2021; Gleissner & Stoermer, 2025; Harman & Sealy, 2017; Ryan & Morgenroth, 2024; Sealy et al., 2024).

It is the study's focus on the 'doing' and 'undoing' of gender that enables a much deeper understanding of this integrated, contextual process. SIE women are not a homogeneous

group (Bergh & Du Plessis, 2016; Gleissner & Stoermer, 2025; Kemp & Rickett, 2018; Myers, 2016) and have diverse origins, occupations, and reasons to relocate; hence, differing career choices and trajectories suggest an ongoing and dynamic exchange between aspects of their past and present lived experiences. Additionally, as these women were acting with inherent agency and autonomy - two key characteristics of SIE - they were perhaps expecting a certain 'path' for their careers that, in reality, did not exist to the extent that they expected before SIE. This tension between high personal agency and unpredictable external reality intensified the need for constant negotiation. This research also highlights the need for ongoing gender role transformation and how, for many participants, the experience fell short of expectations, underscoring the constant negotiation and adaptation required. Reconfiguring the ‘Going Gender’ framework (Stenbacka & Forsberg, 2020) by integrating these findings, along with the use of the life story methodology, which is particularly suitable for exploring such complex SIE experiences, makes a substantial contribution to the existing literature. This integrated approach powerfully demonstrates that the SIE experience serves as an accelerated catalyst for holistic life change (Myers & Thorn, 2023). This outcome, driven by the continuous intersection of personal, professional and immediate contextual demands, highlights the multifaceted nature of the SIE experience for women and firmly establishes the necessity of moving beyond staged, macro-focused career models when looking at SIE women.

7.5 Reconfiguration of the Going Gender Framework for the SIE Field

Figure 9 - Reconfiguration of the Going Gender Framework for mid-career women



The reconfiguration of the 'going gender' framework (Figure 9), specifically in a female SIE context, represents a theoretical development. It extends the original model (see Chapter 3.6) into a dynamic, contextual process specifically tailored to women's SIE experiences.

The original framework established connections between gender identities, practices, and spaces across places of origin and destination (Stenbacka & Frosberg, 2020). The extended framework, however, delineates three distinct temporal phases: pre-mobility, during mobility, and key outcomes and experiences, creating a comprehensive developmental trajectory. This reconceptualisation advances traditional approaches within SIE research, which have predominantly positioned gender as a discrete variable (Bergh &

Du Plessis, 2016; Haak-Saheem et al., 2022; Muir et al., 2014; Vance & McNulty, 2014; Wechtler, 2018), by reconceiving it as an intrinsic and multidimensional construct which intricately shapes the interconnected SIE experience alongside other critical elements, reflecting the continuous process of 'doing and undoing' gender within SIE.

The theoretical significance of the reconfigured framework lies in its robust fit with the findings and its incorporation of new dimensions, dynamism, and relationships, which were not fully encompassed by the original ‘going gender’ framework (Stenbacka & Frosberg, 2020). This includes dimensions such as educational experiences, early mobility experiences, and the dynamic interplay between personal/social and professional gender roles that women navigate throughout their expatriation journey. Crucially, it explicitly incorporates the concepts of 'doing gender' (conforming to roles) and 'undoing gender' (challenging and re-negotiating roles) as central mechanisms in the SIE experience. This approach allows the analysis to move beyond simple categorisation, capturing the participants’ often daily work to actively conform to or resist traditional gender expectations within professional and personal spheres across different cultural contexts. Most notably, introducing multifaceted (and more) dimensions as a central influencing factor suggests a complex understanding of how gender intersects with expatriation beyond being a simple feature.

This reconfigured framework provides insight into how gender operates as a dynamic construct, encompassing multiple processes that simultaneously shape and are shaped by various contextual factors throughout the SIE journey. Furthermore, by explicitly detailing three distinct phases, pre-mobility, during mobility, and key outcomes, the framework effectively addresses the crucial **temporal** component of the SIE experience. This **temporal** element shifts the ‘going gender’ framework for the women SIE, from a comparative snapshot of a particular life stage to a developmental life trajectory, which is

essential for understanding how early life experiences influence later mobility choices and how gendered negotiation processes change over the duration of the SIE. These include cultural, professional, and personal considerations, with an awareness of how these elements interact and influence each other within specific contextual conditions. Both frameworks maintain conceptual continuity through their shared theoretical underpinnings in a gender-based analysis of international mobility.

While both frameworks acknowledge the impact of international mobility on gender constructs, the reconfigured framework highlights that this understanding has significant outcomes specific to the SIE experience. This facilitates the exploration of women's SIE experiences across contexts, recognising that gender's impact on expatriate experiences exists. The reconfigured SIE ‘going gender’ framework is critically distinct from the original in its recognition of SIE as a career and life choice significantly influenced and shaped by earlier life experiences in childhood and adolescence. These formative experiences, which are themselves shaped by gender role performativity and sociocultural contexts, create predispositions and competencies that later influence how individuals approach and experience their SIE. These early influences continue to evolve through ongoing personal, professional, and cultural interactions throughout the SIE process.

This dynamic perspective acknowledges that changes in one domain of the study participants' SIE experience inevitably impacted on other interconnected aspects of their professional and personal journeys. The reconfigured framework demonstrated how participants with early international exposure appeared to feel very comfortable with cultural differences and were willing to embrace change during their SIE. It also explicitly addressed how gender dynamics manifested in career advancement opportunities and professional gender role negotiation. It represents a sophisticated theoretical reframing that

positions gender not merely as a demographic feature but as a fundamental, multidimensional construct permeating all aspects of women's SIE experiences.

7.6 SUMMARY

This study confirms that SIE is a powerful catalyst for significant change, profoundly shaping both professional trajectories and personal experiences. This research considerably extends the existing literature by focusing specifically on the experiences of mid-career women within the SIE context. The findings further contribute to the field by demonstrating how childhood and adolescent experiences can significantly shape motivations for SIE, fostering a distinct desire to push boundaries and pursue goals autonomously. The study's unique adoption of a ‘going gender’ lens enables a deeper and more nuanced understanding of the mid-career SIE experience. This approach illuminates the dynamic interplay of gender, mobility, and career dimensions, revealing the SIE journey as a holistic, dynamic, and evolving process.

The final chapter will detail the study’s key contributions to the understanding of women’s SIE career experience in New Zealand. It will directly address the overarching research question: *"How does 'going gender' contextualise a woman's career decision-making as an SIE in New Zealand?"* The chapter will explore the findings' theoretical, practical, and policy implications, offer recommendations for future research, and reflect on my own position throughout the study. It is important to acknowledge that while career development was the initial focus of this research, the ‘going gender’ lens revealed the inextricable link between professional and personal development as the study unfolded. This insight led to adopting a more holistic approach, directly answering the call in the literature for a more integrated and holistic understanding of women’s careers.

8 CONCLUSION

This concluding chapter synthesises the study's key themes and contributions on the experiences of professional SIE women living and working in New Zealand, directly answering the central research question: *'How does 'going gender' contextualise a woman's career decision-making as an SIE in New Zealand?'* Subsequently, it explores the study's theoretical and practical implications, offering recommendations for future research and reflecting on my own positionality.

8.1 RESEARCH OVERVIEW

This study investigated the career aspirations and experiences of 15 participants living and working in New Zealand. It explored their life stories to understand how they navigated their careers and personal lives as SIEs. The study aimed to provide an in-depth interpretive understanding of the intricate dynamics between gender, careers, and the international SIE mobility of the participants through the lens of the 'going gender' framework, resulting in the reconfiguration of the framework.

As **Chapter 2** outlined, the prevalence of SIE as a means of career progression and change served as a foundational aspect of this study, while also addressing the identified limitations in understanding the interplay of gender and performance. This supported the adoption of the 'going gender' framework, introduced in **Chapter 2**, which aimed to contribute to a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the dynamic nature inherent in gendered careers.

Chapter 3 presented a comprehensive and critical literature review to provide a foundation for the study. Canvassing the broader academic fields of international mobility,

SIE and internationally mobile gendered careers built a thorough review of the extant research and set the stage for this study's contributions.

The design of the study was presented and defended in **Chapter 4.** Grounded in subjectivism and aligned with an interpretivist and relativist worldview (Lincoln et al., 2011), the research methodology recognised the importance of the participants' perspectives and the researcher's interpretation. Narrative inquiry, particularly within the life story paradigm, was identified as a suitable methodological framework to delve into the motivations and experiences of the participants. As Atkinson (2007) asserts, the life story methodology provides a platform for articulating the unexplored and unknown spaces, lending credibility to narratives, reflections, and insights that have yet to be documented or understood.

Chapter 5 presented the rich, qualitative data derived from the participants' life stories thus far in a unique condensed story, offering a detailed account of each participant's personal and professional journey and illuminating the complexities of their individual experiences.

Chapter 6 then presented the critical organising themes derived from the analysis of the narratives, thereby identifying and discussing the key themes that emerged from the participants' stories and providing a structured data analysis.

The pertinent findings emanating from the thematic analysis were discussed in **Chapter 7,** where the insights gained across the participants' narratives and the thematic analysis, drawing on the extant literature, highlighted the significant contributions made by the study of these SIE women and their personal and professional trajectories.

This study found that New Zealand marked the first international move for some participants, whereas for others it was one of several international mobility experiences in their life thus far. A strong connection was found in this study between participants' childhood experiences and their current SIE social and cultural context, emphasising the importance of understanding these influences and dynamics in their career decision-making. The research further elucidated that following their arrival, there was a constant need for these women to negotiate and renegotiate their roles within societal and professional contexts, and once further established, in New Zealand. This was not a singular event but a continuous process, underscoring the importance of self-awareness and adaptability in response to evolving contexts. Ultimately, for the women in this study, SIE served as a means to unlock, facilitate, and hasten personal and professional change. While it may not have yielded the anticipated immediate increases in remuneration or immediate lifestyle improvements for themselves or their families, SIE proved to be an occasionally disheartening, yet ultimately self-affirming process through which they discovered themselves and established their careers in a new context.

While building upon existing use of the life story as a research method in the SIE literature (Myers, 2016; Myers & Thorn, 2023), this study distinguishes itself by emphasising the significance of considering the specific lens of childhood and adolescence experiences when examining the intricate interplay between gender, careers, and professional women's SIE. Further, this study explored the intricate dynamics between gender, careers, and SIE, thereby extending Stenbacka and Forsberg's (2020) 'going gender' framework, depicting gender as a dynamic phenomenon subject to contextual shifts.

The methodology and methods employed in this research concentrated on the women's lived experiences across their life course thus far, aiming to comprehend their motivations, experiences, and outcomes for both careers and lifestyles. The participants'

narratives, obtained through life story interviews, unveiled the pivotal influence of all life stages on their inclination and capacity to become SIEs in adulthood. Their stories highlighted the fundamental role of events and experiences from childhood and adolescence onwards in shaping their SIE journeys and fostering a desire to navigate their lives and careers within diverse global social contexts.

8.2 CONTRIBUTIONS AND IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

8.2.1 The Influence of Early Experiences in the Life Course

This research challenges and extends the conventional focus on immediate adult pre-expatriation factors (Andresen et al., 2023; Caselius & Suutari, 2023a, 2023b). While previous studies have acknowledged the role of various pre-expatriation factors, such as career planning strategies, spousal considerations, and immediate preparation activities (Gleissner & Stoermer, 2025), this study specifically highlights that the propensity for successful navigation of gender roles and SIE is often established much earlier, during childhood and adolescence.

This study's emphasis on the life course perspective, building on the work of Myers (2016; 2023), is crucial here. It reveals that early international exposure and internal mobility, through travel, education, and/or exposure to diverse communities, create a significant predisposition towards future mobility. This also cultivates a curiosity and an emerging understanding of the challenges of adapting to new cultural contexts.

This study found that early life experiences are critical touchpoints that inform later life choices and mobility patterns, particularly how women approach and navigate expectations across cultures. This challenges the idea of fixed pre-SIE gender roles (e.g., traditional expectations of women as primary caregivers) (Holstein & Gubrium, 2012;

Lind et al., 2021) and suggests that early experiences outside of their established cultural context enable individuals to observe different ways of being and living. Several study participants' propensity and confidence to ‘undo gender’ in various international contexts were formed remarkably early in their lives. This comprehensive life course lens is vital for understanding SIE as not merely an isolated event, but rather the culmination of a lifelong journey shaped by these early influences. It also offers significant implications for better integrating SIEs into contexts like New Zealand, as it helps understand their deep-seated motivations and adaptability.

8.2.2 A Going Gender Framework for SIE

Another contribution of this study is the reconfiguration of the ‘going gender’ framework, which was refined and contextualised for use specifically within the SIE context. The reconfigured framework demonstrates that 'going gender' in SIE is a dynamic and unfolding process that incorporates significant gender work, especially work undertaken in the pre-mobility and early mobility phases. This finding extends the work of Forsberg and Ståbacka (2020) by demonstrating that 'going gender' is conceptually 'messier', characterised by a more pronounced bi-directional and iterative process, when it is reconfigured to accurately capture the nuances of the SIE experience.

Recent existing migration literature (Langinier et al., 2022; Milani, 2023; Stine et al., 2018; Torres, 2024), including important work on 'going gender' by Forsberg and Ståbacka (2020), has indeed explored how individuals adapt their gender roles throughout the expatriation process, often incorporating pre-mobility considerations. However, this research makes a distinct contribution by demonstrating the dynamic and unfolding nature of gender role construction and deconstruction, specifically for SIE women, during their decision-making and preparation phases.

Driven by the inherent autonomy of SIE, these women uniquely face significant pressures to actively anticipate and prepare for significant gender role transitions well before they even leave their home country. This pre-emptive engagement is crucial because, unlike OAEs who might have corporate guidance, SIEs often navigate these potential shifts in gendered expectations and responsibilities largely on their own. This active, anticipatory work highlights a deeper level of pre-mobility gender negotiation than previously emphasised in much of the broader migration literature.

This pre-emptive 'going gender' is further complicated by the iterative nature of gender role negotiation throughout the entire SIE experience. The findings reveal that the 'doing' and 'undoing' of gender is not a smooth or linear progression, but a dynamic and often unpredictable process influenced by shifting cultural and professional landscapes. This iterative process highlights the fluidity of gender performativity in the context of SIE and challenges the notion of stable gender roles. By situating gender negotiation within the specific context of SIE experiences, this research offers a more in-depth and sophisticated understanding of how women navigate gender continuously across different cultural contexts in both the professional and personal sense.

8.2.3 The Nature of SIE: Accelerated Personal and Professional Change for Women in Mid-Adulthood

Finally, this study contributes by building on Suarez-Bilbao et al.'s (2023) work on how SIEs proactively craft their careers amid international complexities and unexpected changes. This research suggests that, often unexpectedly, for mid-adulthood professional women, SIEs accelerate their personal and professional change and development. As an extension, this research found that SIEs create a dynamic interplay between gender, personal growth, professional development, and culture, leading to life-changing

experiences that can influence and shape mid-career women's career aspirations and life paths. Several participants described how their SIE experience led to increased self-confidence, enhanced cross-cultural communication skills, and a greater sense of personal agency.

Building on existing research that acknowledges the accelerated nature of personal and professional change in SIE (Suarez-Bilbao et al., 2023) and the concept of SIE as a holistic life trajectory, this study further demonstrates that the SIE experience acts as a catalyst. It rapidly accelerates personal and professional development and drives a co-dependent evolution where these two domains are intrinsically intertwined. Hence, this research contributes a richer understanding of SIE not merely as a career strategy, but as a dynamic life trajectory catalysing broader, intertwined personal and professional changes for mid-career women. While the idea of personal change and accelerated change in expatriation is documented, this research specifically extends the literature by providing nuanced insights into the interconnectedness of these changes for mid-career women within the SIE context, moving beyond separate observations to highlight their reciprocal influence and profound impact on shaping distinct career and life paths.

8.2.4 Practical Implications

The research raises the need for support systems for SIE women in New Zealand that assist them with their professional needs and personal and social well-being. Organisations can be crucial in providing resources and programmes that support SIE women in navigating cultural adjustment, building social networks, and managing work-life balance in a new environment. Offering programmes that assist with transitioning between cultures and contexts could also be beneficial. Given that there is no ‘one’ SIE

experience, organisations could also utilise storytelling workshops to facilitate the sharing of diverse experiences and provide peer support for SIE women in New Zealand.

Persistent gender inequalities that women face in the context of international mobility were also found in this study of SIE women. Rather than focusing on gender equity in international assignments, which is more relevant to company-assigned expatriates, New Zealand policymakers, especially in immigration and education, should focus on issues relevant to women who have self-initiated their move to New Zealand to look for work. Recognising the valuable contributions that SIEs make to host countries, policymakers should develop policies that facilitate their smooth integration into New Zealand's labour market and society. In terms of immigration, this could include streamlining visa processes, providing language training and cultural orientation programmes, and ensuring access to support services.

The research emphasises SIE women's challenges in balancing their personal and professional lives in a new environment. To ensure that SIE women in New Zealand can thrive personally and professionally, policymakers should consider implementing policies that support work-life balance for SIE women, such as flexible work arrangements, parental leave policies, and access to affordable childcare. It is important to note that while these recommendations would benefit all women and men, they are particularly relevant to SIE women who may face unique challenges due to their voluntary migration and the need to establish themselves in a new country.

8.3 PERSONAL REFLECTIONS

Embarking on this research journey has been a deeply personal experience, prompting me to confront my assumptions and biases about gender, SIE, and women's

experiences in the workplace. As a heterosexual, well-educated New Zealand European woman, I occupy a position of privilege, and I initially approached this research with a certain naiveté about the subtle yet pervasive inequalities that internationally mobile women face.

One of my initial biases was a tendency to view SIE as primarily a career-enhancing strategy. I assumed that women who chose to work abroad were primarily motivated by professional advancement and that career-related challenges and opportunities would broadly define their experiences. As I further explored the SIE literature and delved into the life stories of the women in this study, I realised that this perspective was too simplistic. Their narratives revealed the intricate ways in which personal aspirations, family dynamics, and a desire for personal growth intersected with their career goals. I had to confront my narrow view of international mobility and acknowledge the multifaceted nature of these women's motivations.

Another assumption I held was that SIE women, by their self-initiated approach, would be highly independent and resilient, readily adapting to new cultural contexts and overcoming any obstacles they encountered. While the women in this study indeed demonstrated remarkable resilience and adaptability, their stories also revealed the personal impact of navigating unfamiliar cultural norms, dealing with bureaucratic hurdles, and often facing subtle forms of discrimination. I had to acknowledge the vulnerability inherent in the SIE experience, even for the most self-assured and accomplished women. This challenged my preconceived notions of being "successful" in an international career and broadened my understanding of the emotional landscape of SIE.

The research process itself was emotionally engaging. Listening to these women share their life stories, hopes, disappointments, and triumphs was humbling and inspiring.

I was particularly moved by their openness and vulnerability in sharing their experiences, reinforcing the importance of creating a safe and supportive research environment. Their stories challenged me to be more empathetic and attuned to the nuances of their experiences. I felt a responsibility to represent their voices accurately and respectfully. There were moments of frustration, too, as I grappled with the complexities of their narratives and the limitations of my understanding. However, these moments of challenge ultimately enriched the research process, pushing me to think more critically and deeply about the issues at hand.

This research has expanded my intellectual understanding of SIE and deeply affected my perspective on gender, career, and SIE. It has instilled in me a much greater appreciation for the resilience, resourcefulness, and courage of women who choose to forge their paths in the world. I am left with considerable respect for their journeys and a commitment to continuing this important conversation about the complexities of women's experiences in the global workforce.

8.4 Recommendations for Future Research

This study has shed light on some essential aspects of the SIE experience for women in New Zealand. However, there are still some gaps in our knowledge, and this section highlights the most pressing areas where future research could make a real difference.

8.4.1 Exploring Intersectional Experiences

Future research could explore the intersectional experiences of SIE women. While this study, focusing on cisgender and tertiary-educated women in New Zealand, has offered some valuable insights, it has also revealed how much is unknown about the

complexities of gender and international mobility. Intersectionality, that is, looking at how things like race, ethnicity, class, sexual orientation, and disability all interact, is vital if we are to truly grasp the diverse realities of being an SIE. Future studies might consider using research methods sensitive to these intersectional identities, allowing researchers to examine how these factors shape women's motivations, experiences, and what they achieve in the SIE context. This will give a more intricate picture of the complexities of the SIE experience and help develop more inclusive support systems and policies.

8.4.2 Widening the Lens of SIE Research

Another crucial area for future research is to broaden the scope to include the varied experiences of SIEs across the whole spectrum of jobs. This study has looked at professional and managerial roles. However, there are plenty of SIEs working in less skilled jobs, and they often face different challenges, such as precarious work arrangements, limited opportunities for career progression, social isolation, and/or the risk of exploitation. Future research needs to focus on understanding the lived experiences of these SIEs. Exploring their motivations, the obstacles they come up against, and how they cope is essential if we are to get a proper understanding of what it means to be an SIE and if we are to address the specific needs of this diverse group.

8.4.3 Longitudinal Studies of SIE Trajectories

Finally, longitudinal research is vital for understanding SIE's long-term impact on women's lives and careers. Future research could use longitudinal designs to track women's career paths, personal growth, and how their understanding of gender roles evolves. This will let researchers see the long-term effects of SIE, identify key turning points, and understand how SIEs adapt to changing circumstances as they navigate the ins and outs of international mobility throughout their lives.

While life story research, as employed in this study, offers a crucial retrospective perspective on these long-term processes, providing rich insights into past influences and adaptive strategies, combining this with prospective longitudinal designs would yield an even more comprehensive understanding.

8.4.4 Extending Career Models

Future research presents a compelling opportunity to extend the Kaleidoscopic Career Model and other women's career models by integrating the key mechanisms identified in this thesis. For example, the Kaleidoscopic Career Model's focus on the principles of Authenticity, Balance, and Challenge serves as a strong foundation, but it does not necessarily capture simultaneous parameter negotiation and the multi-level 'doing' and 'undoing' of gender, as became evident in my study. (Mainiero & Sullivan, 2005) suggest opportunities for theoretical refinement. Specifically, modifications or changes that address multi-level negotiations, integrated life transformations, and the active 'doing' of gender in global mobility contexts.

8.4.5 Summary

This study has shed light on some essential aspects of the SIE experience for women in New Zealand. However, the identified research gaps highlight areas where future research could make a real difference, leading to three crucial shifts needed to accurately capture the diverse and dynamic reality of women's SIE.

Firstly, broadening the scope of inquiry is imperative. This necessitates that future research move beyond the current focus on a homogeneous group of professional, tertiary-educated women. Studies must delve into intersectional experiences, exploring how complex axes of identity, including race, ethnicity, class, and disability, shape mobility. Furthermore, the lens must be widened across the entire job spectrum to

understand the unique and often precarious challenges faced by SIEs in less-skilled and precarious roles. Addressing this lack of empirical diversity is critical for developing genuinely inclusive theoretical frameworks and support systems that accurately reflect the global reality of the SIE population.

Secondly, a stronger focus on temporal methodology is important. To measure the long-term effects of mobility, prospective longitudinal research is required to track women's evolving career paths, personal growth, and the fluid negotiation of gender roles over the full life trajectory of the SIE experience, thereby complementing the retrospective insights already gained.

Finally, future research presents a compelling opportunity to refine existing theoretical models and develop new frameworks that adequately capture the complexity of global mobility. While established models offer valuable perspectives on career priorities, they currently lack the necessary mechanisms to fully account for the active, multi-level process of 'doing and undoing' gender in diverse global contexts. Therefore, future studies must prioritise integrating the concepts of contextual negotiation, structural, and systemic constraints into their theoretical foundations. This research agenda extends beyond simply refining one existing model; it necessitates the development of entirely new theoretical frameworks, or the comprehensive extension of current ones, to accurately account for the complex interplay of individual agency and external boundaries experienced by internationally mobile women.

8.5 CLOSING COMMENT

This research has directly addressed how 'going gender' contextualises women's career decision-making as SIEs in New Zealand, revealing the complex interplay

between motivations, experiences, and aspirations. As evidenced by the researcher's positionality, this study also represents a significant development in my own research practice. The findings demonstrate that 'going gender' is a dynamic and evolving process, beginning well before physical relocation and continuing throughout the SIE journey. Driven by various career and personal motivations (e.g., adventure, new life, freedom), SIE women were found to successfully navigate the challenges and opportunities of establishing a career in a new country. They used agency by drawing on pre-SIE international experiences, shaping their future career aspirations. Motivations and experiences led to expected and unexpected shifts in their professional and personal trajectories. Ultimately, this study shines a light on the resilience of these women SIEs as they navigated the opportunities, challenges, complexities and tensions of SIE. It offers valuable insights into the evolving nature of women's SIE and the dynamic ways gender intersects with their decision-making processes.

9 APPNDICES

9.1 APPENDIX A – TYPES OF MOBILITY

Type of Internationally Mobile Individual (IMI)	Who Initiated the Move internationally	Defined Time in Host Country	Position upon arrival in the Host Country	Assumed Skill/Qualification Level	Cultural and Social Influences	External Factors in the Host Country
Organisationally Assigned Expatriate (OAE)	Organisationally Assigned (M. Andresen et al., 2014)	Typically, individuals are assigned for a fixed duration (Farcas & Gonçalves, 2017; C. M. Vance & Y. McNulty, 2014)	A position is held for the individual upon arrival in the host country (Suutari et al., 2018b)	Assumed to be a highly skilled individual who obtains skills which are valuable to the employer and currently not available in the country they have been assigned to (Andresen et al., 2012; Cerdin & Pargneux, 2010)	These individuals are driven by their work commitments, and there is little influence of cultural and social aspects in their decision-making (Farcas & Gonçalves, 2017)	External factors in the individual's home countries are limited to their assignment by their employer (M. Andresen et al., 2014; Farcas & Gonçalves, 2017)
Self-Initiated Expatriate (SIE)	Self-initiated by the individual (Alshahrani, 2024; Doherty, 2013; Stoermer et al., 2020; Thorn, 2009)	Undefined time in the host country, dependent upon visa conditions (Andresen et al., 2013; Cao et al., 2014)	No prescribed position upon arrival (M. Andresen et al., 2020)	A skilled worker within an industry or occupation desired by the host country, thus allowing for easier entry (Habti & Elo, 2018)	Cultural and social experiences are at the forefront of an SIE's desire to become internationally mobile (M. Andresen et al., 2020)	Generally stable host countries, with no external factors forcing the individual to leave (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Douglas et al., 2019)
Migrant	Self-initiated by the individual, often to fill skills shortages in specific low-skilled industries (Douglas et al., 2019; Kunz, 2020)	According to some scholars, migrants often intend to remain in the host country permanently, subject to legal rights, employment, etc. (Andresen et al., 2012; M. Andresen et al., 2014)	Due to work visa requirements in some countries, many migrants find themselves having to organise employment before entering the host country (Colakoglu et al., 2018; Organisation, 2018)	Unskilled or low-skilled, although there is an increasing population of highly skilled migrants who are using international employment mobility to seek better lives and opportunities for themselves and their families (Colakoglu et al., 2018; Kinasih et al., 2020)	Those categorised within this category often look to better support themselves and their families (immediate and otherwise). This can be financial, but can also include better opportunities for education,	Economic necessity (poverty included), adverse living conditions and poor opportunities are often assumed to be fundamental external factors in these individuals' willingness to become internationally mobile (Castles,

						2003; Organisation, 2018)
Refugee	The person leaves their home country for fear of persecution due to race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion (Douglas et al., 2019).	Permanently, there is typically no reason or desire for these individuals to return home (Legrain, 2016)	Because these individuals are moving for reasons outside their control, they do not have positions for themselves once they arrive in the country of refugee (Backman et al., 2020)	Refugees are assumed to be unskilled individuals. However, recent literature is challenging this assumption (Castles, 2003)	Adverse conditions in their home environments drive these individuals, and therefore, the cultural and social setting of the host country will be a fundamental part of their integration (Castles, 2003; Legrain, 2016)	External factors in the home country are fundamental to the need for someone to see a refugee. There is such a degree of fear that these individuals will most probably never return to their home countries and are therefore categorised as refugees. There are 70 million such individuals globally as of 2017 (Douglas et al., 2019).

9.2 APPENDIX B – INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The Career Aspirations and Experiences of Tertiary Qualified, Internationally Mobile Women Currently Living in New Zealand

Discussion Guide

Introduction

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this study. Please be reassured that your contribution is confidential. You will only be required to share information if you feel comfortable about doing so. I, the researcher, the supervision team, and the transcriber will be the only individuals with access to your interview script. The interview process will consist of four parts. The first will look at the factors influencing the decision to become internationally mobile, as well as a brief discussion about your childhood and education. Secondly, we will look at your aspirations and expectations and how these were met by your experiences once arriving in New Zealand. Third, we will talk about how you were able to establish yourselves professionality in a new country and how your career goals have developed and changed since moving to New Zealand.

Interview Number: _____

Name (or pseudonym to be used in research outputs): _____

Criteria Checklist:

- ☐ Completed a minimum of a bachelor's degree at a certified tertiary institution.
- ☐ Identify as a woman.
- ☐ Internationally mobile, not currently residing in country of birth.
- ☐ Been living and working in New Zealand for between two and ten years.

Age: _____

Part One – Childhood, Education and Factors Influencing International Mobility:

Now, in your own words and in your own way, please:

1) Tell me about your childhood and education journey.
2) Tell me about your work/employment situation prior to leaving your home country.
3) Tell me about the factors influencing your decision to become internationally mobile.

4) What was the catalyst for you to leave your home country?
5) Who instigated the move? E.g., was it company or personally driven?
6) Were there any key people who influenced your decision to become internationally mobile?
7) What were your countries of preference when you considered relocating? Why. Probe
8) Did you consider relocating by yourself, or was your family a crucial part of your decision to come to New Zealand? If so, in what ways?

Part Two – Aspirations and Expectations

- What were your work/professional dreams, aspirations, and expectations when you first came to New Zealand? Tell me about these.
- What were your actual experiences of work and employment? Tell me about these.
- Looking back on your experiences of work and employment did you actually achieve your professional aspirations/goals?
  - Why and how?
  - Why not and how?
- What were some of the barriers to doing this (personal and professional)
- What were some of the enablers?
- How has your role and family situation impacted your professional/career experiences and achievements as an enabler and/or as a barrier? How long have you been internationally mobile?

Part Three – Experiences and Establishment in New Zealand

- How were your experiences pivotal in establishing your career (and broader life) in New Zealand?
- How were these experiences different from those you have been subject to outside New Zealand?
- Has establishing yourself given you a broader understanding and appreciation of your career? If so, how? If not, why?
- Part Four – Future Career Aspirations Following International Mobility to New Zealand.
- Tell me about your future career plans.
- How do these plans co-exist alongside your role within your family unit?
- What are the positive aspects which have come from your time in New Zealand?
- What are the negative aspects which have come from your time in New Zealand?

Note: The nature of a semi-structured interview allows for deviation away from the suggested interview schedule above. Despite this, the participants will be brought back to the imminent question once they have expressed their unique perspective or angle they wish to pursue.

9.3 APPENDIX C – ETHICS APPLICATION APPROVAL

26 July 2021

Candice Harris

Faculty of Business Economics and Law

Dear Candice

Re Ethics Application: 21/216 The Career Aspirations and Experiences of Tertiary Qualified, Internationally Mobile Women Currently Living in New Zealand

Thank you for providing evidence as requested, which satisfies the points raised by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC).

Your ethics application has been approved for three years until 26 July 2024.

Non-Standard Conditions of Approval

1. Inclusion of yes/no tick boxes beside the pseudonym bullet point in the Consent Form.
2. Inclusion of the period after which emergency services will be contacted should your supervisors cannot reach you after an interview.
3. Inclusion of the AUT logo on the advertisement for participants.

Non-standard conditions must be completed before commencing your study. Non-standard conditions do not need to be submitted to or reviewed by AUTEC before commencing your study.

Standard Conditions of Approval

1. The research is to be undertaken in accordance with the Auckland University of Technology Code of Conduct for Research and as approved by AUTEC in this application.
2. A progress report is due annually on the anniversary of the approval date using the EA2 form.
3. A final report is due at the expiration of the approval period or upon completion of the project using the EA3 form.
4. Any amendments to the project must be approved by AUTEC prior to being implemented. Amendments can be requested using the EA2 form.
5. Any serious or unexpected adverse events must be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
6. Any unforeseen events that might affect the continued ethical acceptability of the project should also be reported to the AUTEC Secretariat as a matter of priority.
7. It is your responsibility to ensure that the spelling and grammar of documents being provided to participants or external organisations are of a high standard and that all the dates on the documents are updated.

AUTEC grants ethical approval only. You are responsible for obtaining management approval for access for your research from any institution or organisation at which your research is being conducted, and you need to meet all ethical, legal, public health, and locality obligations or requirements for the jurisdictions in which the research is being undertaken.

Please quote the application number and title on all future correspondence related to this project.

For any enquiries, please contact ethics@aut.ac.nz. The forms mentioned above are available online through http://www.aut.ac.nz/research/researchethics

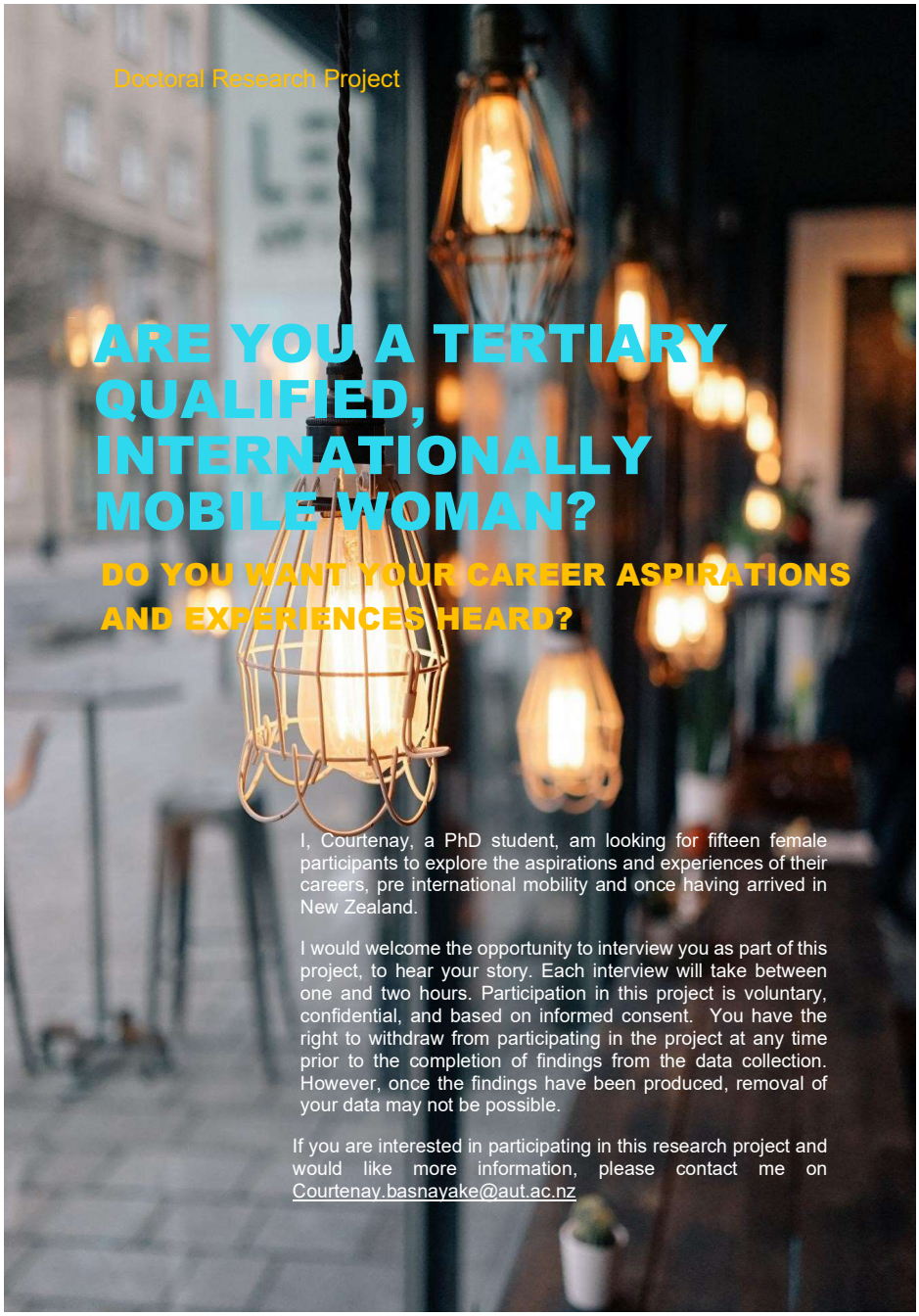
(This is a computer-generated letter for which no signature is required)

The AUTEC Secretariat

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc:Courtenay.basnayake@aut.ac.nz;barbara.myers@aut.ac.nz;Fiona Hurd

9.5 APPENDIX D – ADVERTISEMENT



9.6 APPENDIX E– PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Participant Information Sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced: 31st March 2021

Project Title

The career aspirations and experiences of tertiary qualified, internationally mobile women currently living in New Zealand.

An Invitation

Kia ora koutou, thank you for taking the time to consider this research study. I am a PhD student at Auckland University of Technology with an interest in the careers and broader life stories of international women living in New Zealand.

Therefore, you are invited to participate in a study on the career aspirations and experiences of tertiary-qualified, internationally mobile women. This would assume that you are not born in New Zealand and have come to the country as an adult.

As a postgraduate student, I am interested in how mobility, the labour market, and women coexist in New Zealand. The contributions and experiences of internationally mobile women in New Zealand are underappreciated. My previous research has focused on different mobility patterns and the policy frameworks for international mobility in New Zealand. Further to this, as part of my doctoral studies, I would like to further improve and contribute towards gendered career research in New Zealand, especially among skilled professionals.

You will only be required to share information if you feel comfortable about doing so. Interviews will be conducted in a private, one-on-one setting, with me, the researcher, the supervision team, and the transcriber, the only individuals with access to your interview script. I look forward to meeting you.

What is the purpose of this research?

The findings of this research may be used for academic publications and presentations. Specifically, the findings of this research will be used for the purposes of a Doctoral Thesis.

How was I identified and why am I being invited to participate in this research?

You have been identified through the advertisement posted on LinkedIn, Facebook, and Snowballing as eligible to participate in this research as an internationally mobile, bachelor's degree-qualified woman who has lived and worked in New Zealand for between two to ten years.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

If you are interested in participating in this research, you must respond to the email address provided below with a brief description about yourself and why you fulfil the criteria listed above. There is no exclusion to this study, so if you are willing and able to participate and there is not an oversaturation of participants, your volunteering is much appreciated. If you respond to the request for participants within one month from the date it is posted, you may need more time. However, I suggest reaching out in any case. Once I have returned correspondence with you, you will be asked to complete a consent form, which allows me to use your information (under a pseudonym if preferred) for this research. The consent form will need to be returned in person, prior to the interview being undertaken, or via email if the interview is to occur via Zoom.

Your participation in this research is voluntary (it is your choice) and whether you choose to participate will neither advantage nor disadvantage you. You can withdraw from the study at any time. If you choose to withdraw from the study, then you will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to you removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of your data may be impossible.

What will happen in this research?

Your involvement in this research will be limited to the provision of a one – to two-hour semi-structured life story interview. This interview is designed to guide the conversation whilst allowing room for unique personal perspectives and angles to emerge in the interview process. The location for this interview will be in your home city, with no requirement for you to travel extensively to attend. Before the interview, we will organise a mutually agreeable and private location for the interview to occur (this may be a physical location or via Zoom). This will be done at no cost to you personally. As you will be providing consent for the interview and for the use of your information, you will be provided with the findings later for your own personal interest and use.

What are the discomforts and risks?

As a researcher, all precautions will be taken to protect the identity of the participant. This includes excluding any facts which may expose your identity. Memories which are sensitive may be brought up in the interview process; however, if the participant chooses to end the line of questioning, this is acceptable. The participant can also conclude the interview if they ever feel they cannot go on comfortably.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

AUT Health Counselling and Wellbeing can offer three free sessions of confidential counselling support for adult participants in an AUT research project. These sessions are only available for issues that have arisen directly because of participation in the research and are not for other general counselling needs. To access these services, you will need to:

- drop into our centres at WB219 or AS104 or phone 921 9992 City Campus or 921 9998 North Shore Campus to make an appointment. Appointments for South Campus can be made by calling 921 9992.
- let the receptionist know that you are a research participant, and provide the title of my research and my name and contact details as given in this Information Sheet

You can find out more information about AUT counsellors and counselling at http://www.aut.ac.nz/being-a-student/current-postgraduates/your-health-and-wellbeing/counselling.

What are the benefits?

The findings from this research will be used by myself as the research towards a Doctor of Philosophy qualification at AUT. Beyond the purely academic and research-based outcomes there are no monetary incentives or benefits for doing this research.

The participants will have an opportunity to voice their own unique stories and experiences in New Zealand, and because of this study, there may be further developments either in areas of policy or in industry to better facilitate this. In addition, the benefits to the broader community include a greater understanding and inclusion of the particular social group being studied and an awareness of their involvement in the broader aspects of life in New Zealand.

How will my privacy be protected?

Your privacy will be permanently protected, with me, the researcher and my supervisors, Candice Harris, Fiona Hurd, and Barbara Myers, having access to the information, additionally, the individual transcriber having access to your interview in its raw form. If you do not wish to have your legal name published, you are welcome to use a pseudonym which will protect your identity. This is because, due to the unique nature of the life story interview, your own story and journey may be able to be identified by others.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

Each interview will consist of an interview totalling between one and two hours in length, as well as any additional time required to travel to and from the agreed interview location.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

One month will be given to consider this invitation to participate in this research.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

A full transcript copy will be provided at the end of the interview stage and sent to the provided email address for each participant. This will allow each individual to review the interview and add any information they feel would be valuable to the research and which may have been excluded from the initial interview. Further, a summary of the findings will be provided upon completion of the study to each participant.

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Candice Harris, Candice.harris@aut.ac.nz.

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary of AUTEC, ethics@aut.ac.nz, (09) 921 9999 ext. 6038.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Please keep this Information Sheet and a copy of the Consent Form for your future reference.

You are also able to contact the research team as follows:

Researcher Contact Details: Courtenay Basnayake – Courtenay.basnayake@aut.ac.nz

Project Supervisor Contact Details: Professor Candice Harris – Candice.Harris@aut.ac.nz

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 26th July 2021

9.7 APPENDIX F – CONSENT FORM

Project title: The career aspirations and experiences of tertiary-qualified, internationally mobile women currently living in New Zealand.

Project Supervisor: Candice Harris – HoD Management

Researcher: Courtenay Basnayake

¡ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet dated 31st March 2021.

¡ I wish to be identified by my legal name.

¡ I wish to be identified by a pseudonym. This pseudonym is: _____

¡ I have had an opportunity to ask questions and to have them answered.

¡ I understand that notes will be taken during the interviews and that they will also be audio-taped and transcribed.

¡ I understand that participating in this study is voluntary (my choice) and that I may withdraw from the study at any time without being disadvantaged.

¡ I understand that if I withdraw from the study, then I will be offered the choice between having any data that is identifiable as belonging to me removed or allowing it to continue to be used. However, once the findings have been produced, removal of my data may not be possible.

¡ I agree to take part in this research.

¡ I understand that I will receive a copy of my interview transcript.

¡ I wish to receive a summary of the research findings (please tick one): Yes¡ No¡

Participant signature: .....

Participants Name:
.....……

Participants Contact Details (if appropriate) :

……..

……..

……..

……..

Date :

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 26th July 2021 - AUTEC Reference number 21/216

Note: The Participant should retain a copy of this form.

9.8 APPENDIX G – CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Confidentiality Agreement

For someone transcribing data, e.g. audio-tapes of interviews.

Project title: The Career Aspirations and Experiences of Tertiary Qualified, Internationally Mobile Women Living and Working in New Zealand.

Project Supervisor: Professor Candice Harris

Researcher: Courtenay Basnayake

- ○ I understand that all the material I will be asked to transcribe is confidential.
- ○ I understand that the contents of the tapes or recordings can only be discussed with the researchers.
- ○ I will not keep any copies of the transcripts nor allow third parties access to them.

Transcriber's signature: .....

Transcriber's name: .....

Transcriber's Contact Details (if appropriate):

.....

.....

.....

.....

Date:

Project Supervisor's Contact Details:

Professor Candice Harris

Faculty of Business, Economics and Laws, Professor of Management

Candice.Harris@aut.ac.nz

.....

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 26th July 2021 (AUTEC Reference number: 21/216)

Note: The Transcriber should retain a copy of this form.

9.9 APPENDIX H – RESEARCHER SAFETY PROTOCOL

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

Guide for Drafting a Researcher Safety Protocol

DEFINITION & PURPOSE:

This is a guide to drafting a Researcher Safety Protocol and needs to be adapted for each research project.

Researchers need to assure their own safety as well as that of their participants and research assistants. The primary purpose of a researcher safety protocol is to assess the level and likelihood of risk and to provide appropriate arrangements to minimise and manage those risks.

Situations in which researcher safety is likely to be at risk may include times when:

- researchers are visiting the homes of others.
- researchers are undertaking sensitive research in a manner that puts them at personal risk.
- researchers are undertaking research in hazardous conditions.
- researchers are undertaking their research in a social or cultural setting with which they have minimal familiarity.
- researchers are involving people who pose a higher risk than would typically be the case (e.g., people with a known propensity for violence).
- the study impinges on the vested interests of influential persons.
- the study is subject to the exercise of coercion or domination (e.g., where the research is about social conflict or where participants may face political threat, discrimination, or stigma);
- there is an increased exposure to everyday risks (e.g., accidents, illness).
-

Researchers may find it helpful to read this research about levels of violence towards researchers in the field *(QUALITY.)*

The following questions may be used to help write a protocol that is relevant to the context of the research.

Project Title and Brief Description

Exploring the Career Aspirations and Experiences of Tertiary Qualified, Internationally Mobile Women Currently Living in New Zealand

Applicant

Dr Candice Harris – Primary Supervisor

Primary Researcher

Courtenay Basnayake

Where is the research being undertaken?

What current travel warnings are in effect in the area in which the research will take place?

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, there is presently a university travel ban on domestic air travel for research purposes. This will limit the ability to interview in person so that interviews will take place via Zoom or other alternative video software.

At whose property will the research be undertaken?

The researcher will only carry out face-to-face research at alert level 1.

The interviews will be conducted (if the current travel restrictions are lifted) at a mutually agreeable location outside of the participant's place of residence. This is to ensure the safety of the researcher and the privacy of the participant.

However, if, for some reason, the participant wishes to have an interview in her own home, then the researcher will adhere to this safety protocol. In this case, it is expected that:

- The participant and possibly the participant's family will be present at the research location.
- Permission for access is given by the participant and is implicit in the request to be interviewed at their home.
- The researcher will use their private car for transport.
- The researcher will familiarise herself with the location and safe parking provisions in discussion with the participant and via Google Maps.
- The researcher will inform her supervisors of the time and address of the research interview. The researcher will also text supervisors on her safe arrival and conclusion of the interviews.
- The supervisors will be available for phone contact during the interview time.

Who is likely to be present at the research location?

The participant will be present alongside their family and others who may reside at the location.

What access permissions are needed to undertake the research at the chosen location?

Permission must be ascertained from the participants in written form, explicitly stating that they consent to the researcher entering their residence for purposes of conducting the interview.

What maps and guides have the researcher consulted to ensure familiarity with the locations?

Google Maps, alongside live location sharing with the researcher's husband, will be used during the travel period and duration of the interview so that there is always someone with an accurate and up-to-date awareness of the researcher's location.

What reliable local public transport is available?

The researcher will hire a rental car in each location, or alternatively will have access to their own personal vehicle if the location is within permissible driving distance of Auckland.

Which reputable taxi firms are easy to access?

As above, vehicle rental services will be used.

Where is it safe to use private cars and leave them in the area?

Parking will be within eyesight of the interview location if on the street and, alternatively, will be within a secured parking building. This will be to minimise any risk to the vehicles. Additionally, the researcher's private vehicle has comprehensive vehicle insurance, which will cover any risk associated with parking it in a public location.

What local rendezvous or contact points are available for researchers?

If the researcher finds themselves in a vulnerable situation, the local police station will be the first port of call.

How close to your research location are hotels or safe accommodations?

At the time of booking, the researcher will ensure that the hotel option for the city or town is within safe proximity to the interview location(s), which will ensure that

in an instance where refuge is required, it is not difficult for her to return or her contacts to locate her.

Who will be accompanying the researcher?

The interviewer will be travelling to the interview location on their own but, as stated above, will be in contact with supervisors and her husband before and after the interview, and supervisors will be available if the researcher needs to contact someone. There will be no dependent children accompanying the researcher. There will be no translators, interpreters, intermediaries, or transcribers required for the interview.

How will the safety of any dependent children accompanying the researcher be assured?

The researcher's dependent child will be minded by her husband or another family member.

How will the safety of any translators, interpreters, intermediaries, or transcribers be assured?

Transcribers will work within their own home environments and, therefore, will not have any safety concerns.

What level of familiarity does the researcher have with the social context of the participants and the research?

The researcher operates as an insider/outsider. Similarities with the participants which exist include tertiary education and identifying as a woman, however, differences such as lack of international mobility also exist. This enables some understanding of the unique challenges which being a tertiary qualified woman entails, but also a need for understanding of the impact and influence which international mobility has had on their life story and journey thus far.

What level of familiarity does the researcher have with the cultural context of the participants and the research?

Culturally, as a Pakeha woman who has spent the majority of her life in New Zealand, there are few similarities between the researcher and the participants. However, the researcher has married into an internationally mobile Sri Lankan family who came to New Zealand in the early 2000s for employment purposes. This insight into the impact of international mobility on career aspirations and experiences was one of the many reasons which inspired the researcher to begin the research study she is on now.

What consultation has taken place?

No consultations have occurred at this stage.

What language support is needed?

As the participants will be tertiary qualified, it is assumed that their ability to understand and engage in conversational English will be adequate for the purposes of conducting a life story interview.

What local tensions are there?

There will be no local tensions.

How strongly active are any cultural, religious, or racial divisions?

There will be no active cultural, religious, or racial divisions to navigate throughout this research study.

What do local sources, such as the police or local leaders, say about risks in the research area?

There is little – no risk in this research area.

Which local 'community leaders' have been spoken with to explain the research and gain their endorsement?

Local community leaders have yet to be spoken to regarding this research. The researcher has ensured that throughout the interview and research process, the participants are brought into partnership and feel as though they are part of the overall proceedings. This is to protect the participants and ensure that they feel as though they have a say in the outcome of the research itself.

Does the research involve sports or activities that may be hazardous in nature?

N/A to this research study.

What safety protocols are in place?

See above.

Will sufficient qualified personnel be in attendance to supervise the activity or respond swiftly to any emergency?

See above.

Who will be available to provide assistance should it be required?

The researcher will have access to a cell phone, which will be used to contact her husband or members of the supervision team in non-emergency situations. Alternatively, if an emergency does arise, she will contact the emergency services required via 111.

How will the researcher ensure that those providing support will be aware of any need that arises?

Frequent contact will be made with the supervision team and the researcher's family during the period of travel for interviewing participants. This will occur daily and ensure that any needs which arise are met with speed and efficiency.

What will those providing support do if it is needed?

They will attempt to meet the needs which arise as swiftly as possible by addressing any issues, etc

What training or support is needed, and how will it be accessed?

A high level of support is in place to aid if required.

Safety protocols are in place. As stated above, the researcher will inform her supervisors of the time and address of the research interview. The researcher will also text supervisors on her safe arrival and conclusion of the interviews.

The supervisors will be available for phone contact during the interview time. If an unexpected situation arises in which the researcher feels uncomfortable, then she will shut down the interview and leave. Her supervisors will be available by phone, and should the need arise, they will contact the police in an extreme and unexpected situation.

What University policies are relevant to your project? Have you read and understood them?

The researcher is following AUT guidelines for postgraduate research and has read and understands these requirements and guidelines.

How have significant local actors, such as statutory and community organisations, been contacted?

Not at this stage, however, this may change when and if necessary/advised.

Who has been in touch with potential participants, and what advice have they given?

Contact with potential participants will be made when ethical approval has been granted.

Who else is aware of the researcher's itinerary and research schedule?

The supervisors will be made aware of the researcher's itinerary and schedule and have phone contact before and after each interview.

The researcher will contact her supervisors before and after all interviews that are completed in a participant's home. Please note that this arrangement of a home interview will be the exception.

If agreed protocols are not followed by the researcher, the supervisors will contact the researcher at the time of the interview and/or afterwards if the researcher is not in touch.

How will the researcher keep key support people informed of what is happening?

Daily updates will be provided to the Supervision Team if interviews are able to be conducted in person. This will ensure that the researcher is safe and all those involved are well informed of any travel plans/interviews for that day. Additionally, the researcher's husband will know the movements of the researcher with regular updates throughout the day.

How will key support people react if the agreed contact protocols are not followed?

If the supervision team are worried at any point, they will be provided with Courtenay's husband's contact details. This will enable them to contact Angelo, who should have the most up-to-date information on Courtenay's location/movements. This will be because he will be in the city/town with Courtenay and will have the best understanding of her movements.

9.10 APPENDIX I – DATA MANAGEMENT PLAN

Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

Guide for Drafting a Data Management Plan

DEFINITION & PURPOSE:

A data management plan describes how researchers collect, store, and manage the use of data collected as part of their research. It describes how data is being stored now and in the future. It describes who has access to the data and for what purposes. It records the conditions under which the data was collected. It describes who has control over access to the data.

Data collected as part of research undertaken by Auckland University of Technology (AUT) students or staff will normally be stored on AUT premises in a specified location. It is to be returned to the participants or destroyed once kept for at least six years. Health data is to be kept for at least ten years.

UT Staff and Students are recommended to read the Library's advice about Research Data Management and Te Mana Raraunga - Principles of Māori Data Sovereignty

The following questions are provided as prompts for writing the plan. You need to use them, taking into account the context of your project.

Project title and brief description

Exploring The Career Aspirations and Experiences of Tertiary Qualified, Internationally Mobile Women Currently Living in New Zealand.

Primary Researcher

Courtenay Basnayake

Supervisors or other researchers

- Professor Candice Harris
- Dr Fiona Hurd
- Dr Barbara Myers

Who will have the primary responsibility for the data at the different stages of its life cycle?

Courtenay Basnayake – Primary Researcher

What type of data will be produced, used, or generated (both physical and digital)?

The Data will be recorded via an audio recorder and transcribed into written format.

How will data be collected, and in what formats?

Data will be collected via an audio recorder.

How will the data collection be documented so that others can work out what is involved? Is there a data dictionary?

A Data dictionary will be used to document the recording details such as time and date, location, participant, and interview length details. Additionally, all storage devices, locations and access accounts will be documented and accessible to the whole team, inclusive of the Supervisors.

Will the data be reproducible?

The files from the audio recorder will be copied and stored on an external hard drive in order to prevent unexpected loss.

How much data will it be, and at what rate will it grow? How often will it change?

The data will include the recordings of each interview. This will total between 15 and 20 in total. There will be no change to these files after they are created.

Are there tools or software needed to create a process or visualise the data?

The voice recordings will be downloaded and then transcribed by a professional transcriber. This will be done by listening, pausing, and then writing out the interviews. Hence, there will be no requirement for any additional resources, tools, or software.

What costs, training, or resources are needed to implement this?

N/A

Will pre-existing data be used, and if so, from where will it be sourced?

N/A

Where are you collecting data?

New Zealand, the exact location is to be decided once participants are selected.

What jurisdiction requirements apply to the collection of data?

New Zealand Legal Jurisdiction.

If you are collecting personal data from non-NZ residents, are you compliant with relevant local data protection legislation?

N/A

Note: If you are collecting the personal data of European Union residents, you will need to comply with the General Data Protection Regulations.

What are the data storage and backup strategies? What would happen if it got lost or became unusable later?

The raw data will be stored on an external hard drive to ensure the participant's interview data is secure. This will always be locked away in a locker on the AUT premises. The locker is found on Level 3, WY.

Will any data be stored on portable devices (e.g., audio files on a mobile phone)?

The raw data from the interviews will be stored for the recommended period of time on an external hard drive.

How will the security of any temporary storage be assured?

The external hard drive will be password protected with only the researcher and supervision team having access to this information.

Will the data be securely stored or transferred to a secure data repository?

The data will be stored securely, as stated above.

What data will you keep, and what data will be destroyed?

The raw data will be destroyed in line with the recommendations from AUTEC.

When and how will data be destroyed?

The external hard drive will be wiped.

How will the undertakings about consent, confidentiality, deidentification, and other ethical considerations given to participants be assured?

Each participant will be required to sign a consent form allowing the use of their data. This form includes discussion around their willingness to be identified using their legal name or whether they feel more comfortable using a pseudonym. Participants will also be able to withdraw from the study at any stage if they choose to do so, and their data will be destroyed accordingly.

How sensitive is your data?

Individual stories gathered from the participants may be sensitive in nature, and because of this, the participants must be confident that their data will be secure.

How identifiable is your data (Will it be directly or indirectly identifiable? Will it be deidentified though potentially re-identifiable? Will it be permanently unidentifiable?) Will this alter? When?

The raw data gathered through the interview process will have identifiable characteristics. However, the participants will only be explicitly identified at any point once transcription has occurred if they wish to have their legal name used. This is to ensure that they feel like their information is not available and also gives confidence that their identifiable information is permanently unidentifiable.

What will happen to the identifiable information?

This will remain in the raw data form in a location known only to the researcher and supervision team.

Should some data be destroyed or returned? When and how? By whom?

No, the raw interview data will be protected and remain with the researcher and supervision team, with permission from the participants of the study.

With which communities or stakeholders has consultation occurred?

There has yet to be a consultation about the management of the data. The specific community involved is that of the internationally mobile tertiary-qualified women who are currently living in New Zealand.

How are any Māori data sovereignty issues being managed (please refer to https://www.temanararaunga.maori.nz)?

N/A

How are the principles of whakapapa, whanaungatanga, rangatiratanga, kotahitanga, manaakitanga, and kaitiakitanga being implemented?

The participants of this study are aware that they are in partnership with the researcher throughout the research process and, therefore, have ownership over their own stories. If, at any stage, they feel uncomfortable with continuing to participate in the study, they will be able to withdraw without any consequence.

What is the plan for organising, documenting, and using descriptive metadata to ensure quality control and reproducibility of these data?

A data diary will be used to document the exact time and date on which each interview is uploaded to SharePoint 2013 and the External hard drive. This will document essential information such as participant details, time, location, date, and length of interview.

What standards will be used for documentation and metadata, and what version controls are in place?

The ANDS Metadata Guide will be used to guide this process.

What community standards for metadata sharing or integration might be involved?

Have you discussed data sharing with your research collaborators or supervisor?

Yes, Data will be shared via SharePoint 2013 and OneDrive (according to the data Management Matrix) during the Active Phase. This is to ensure that the entire Supervision Team has access to the raw data as well as the transcribed data for the duration of the study. Once the study has moved beyond the active phase, the data will be stored either on SharePoint 2013 or an external hard drive.

What steps will be taken to protect privacy, security, confidentiality, intellectual property, or other rights?

Only the Supervision Team will have access to the data.

Is a data-sharing agreement needed?

No

What are the access concerns associated with your data?

There are no explicit access risks or concerns. However, if someone outside the researcher and supervision team were to get access to a laptop containing the SharePoint 2013 information, then it would be possible to duplicate and share the information. AUTs (Auckland University of Technology) policy on the security of

devices will prevent any unnecessary risk or concerns regarding this as these devices are verified upon access by the owner using a two-step verification process.

What process does someone undertake to access your data?

If an authorised member of the supervision team accesses the data, this will be recorded in the data diary, which will detail which data was accessed, for what purpose, etc. As this data is for the primary researchers' purposes, it would be likely that any other individual could access any information if discussed prior.

Who controls access to the data (e.g., primary researcher, student, lab, University, funder)?

The primary researcher will control access to the data, although this will be overseen by the primary supervisor to ensure all relevant policies and procedures are being followed according to the AUT Ethics guidelines.

What particular privacy or security requirements are needed (e.g., for personal data, for high-security data)?

No special privacy or security requirements are needed beyond those specified on the Data Storage Matrix.

Can your data be released immediately, or should you embargo (delay access to) the data?

No embargo is necessary.

What embargo periods need to be upheld?

See above.

Have human participants been advised about the plans for sharing data in their Information sheet?

Yes, this has been explicitly discussed in the Information Sheet.

When your research involves people, have you obtained appropriate consent for data sharing?

Yes, consent will be obtained through a signed consent form from each participant.

How will people's rights to access, correct, and remove information about themselves be managed?

Each Participant will be provided with a copy of their transcribed interview to review and amend as they see fit. This will occur prior to the data analysis stage of this research. This is to ensure that all relevant information is accounted for and documented in this study.

Does your research funder have specific data management and sharing requirements?

No

For how long should data be available?

The data should be available for six years in total.

If you allow others to reuse your data, how will the data be discovered and shared?

There will be no ability for others to use the data generated as a result of the interviews, as the consent forms explicitly state it is to be used for this research study and related publications only by the supervision team and the primary researcher. This is to ensure the security of the participants and their own unique stories. If, however, this is desired, new consent forms will be provided to the participants so that they can explicitly permit the sharing of their data. The ANDS Publishing and Sharing Data Tree will be used to make any decisions regarding the sharing of the data collected as part of this study.

What are the likely audiences for reused data? Who will use it now? Who will use it later?

As above.

When will you publish, and where?

The intended publication at this stage is a doctoral thesis and various other academic conference and journal article outcomes. The consent form allows room for other publications around the thesis to occur if the primary researcher is the only individual with access to the data. The ANDS Publishing and Sharing Data Tree will be used to make any decisions regarding the sharing of the data collected as part of this study.

What level of data access is the publisher likely to require, and how will participants consent to sharing their data with publishers?

The publisher will be the primary researcher.

What tools or software are needed to work with the data?

There will be no additional tools or software required to work with the data collected from this research study.

What are the plans for managing any breaches of privacy or confidentiality?

What processes are in place to prevent breaches?

Data Management, in line with university protocol, as well as maintaining the security of data within the supervision team, is the primary way of preventing any breaches.

Who will be responsible for notifying breaches to AUTEC and to the Privacy Commissioner when they are notifiable breaches under the Privacy Act 2020?

The Head Supervisor, Candice Harris and Primary Researcher, Courtenay Basnayake, will be jointly responsible for reporting notifiable breaches.

What are the plans for data preservation and archiving?

How will the data be archived for preservation and long-term access?

The raw data will be destroyed after six years. The transcribed data will be held on SharePoint 2013 or a Hard drive in a secure locker on AUT property.

How long should it be retained (e.g., six years, ten years, permanently), and how is this being assured?

The raw data will be preserved on the hard drive in a locker on AUT property for a total of six years.

What file formats are involved for electronic data? How will future accessibility be assured?

The file formats used for this research include MP3 files and Microsoft Word Documents.

Are there existing data archives that are appropriate for your data, whether subject-based, institutional, or public?

None

Who will maintain the data for the long term?

The primary researcher, Courtenay Basnayake, will be responsible for the data. This will be supported by the supervision team.

What training or support do you need, and what is available?

Training and support will be requested when required. If there are any pressing concerns surrounding data management, then the faculty representative will be contacted directly for help with any specific issues.

9.11 APPENDIX J - THEMATIC ANALYSIS TABLE

Sub-Question One		Sub-Question One and Two		Sub-Question Two	Sub-Question Two and Three			Sub-Question Three	
Education and Academic Journey	**Personal and Professional Growth and Development**	**Travel, Personal/Family Dynamics, and Support**	**Cultural Identity and Sense of Belonging**	**Career Challenges and Transitions**	**Work-life Balance and Wellbeing**	**International Perspective and Opportunities**	**Pursuit of Passion and Personal Fulfilment**	**Gender Equality and Advocacy**	**Resilience and Perseverance**
Education and Academic Pressure: The importance of education and academic achievement is emphasised within Iris' family. However, the contrasting experiences of Iris and her sister highlight the negative impact of confrontational and unsupportive approaches to education.	Pursuit of Personal and Professional Fulfilment:Iris' decision to move to New Zealand is driven by her desire to find new challenges, personal fulfilment, and a better work-life balance. She prioritises lifestyle opportunities over monetary gains and career advancement.	Independence and Family Support: Molly's parents encourage her and her sister to choose their own career paths, fostering a sense of independence. Their support allows Molly to explore different options and make decisions aligned with her aspirations.	Cultural Identity and Sense of Belonging: Iris's experience in New Zealand makes her feel a stronger connection and sense of home than her home country. She chooses Wellington as her settlement location, finding it the only place where she truly feels she can live.	Challenges and Resilience in the Construction Industry: Participant E faced challenges and hostilities in the construction industry, including being singled out as an Australian and experiencing gender disparities. She developed resilience and had to fight for her rights and fair treatment.	Work-Life Balance and Relationship Dynamics: Molly's marriage and the desire to be closer to her husband influenced her decision to shift back to the banking sector and accept a job at HSBC. Balancing her career aspirations with personal relationships and obligations becomes an essential consideration.	International Perspective and Growth: Angela's international experiences and exposure to diverse cultures were significant for her. She missed the excitement and knowledge that came with exploring new environments. She aspired to work for an international company or engage in projects with a global scope, embracing the opportunity for continuous learning and personal growth.	Individuality and Rebellion: Iris's rebellious spirit and desire to defy her family's expectations are evident in her choice to study political science instead of becoming a doctor. She actively seeks to assert her identity and preferences, even going against her family's musical preferences.	Gender Bias and Advocacy: Angela's journey highlighted the presence of gender biases in the workplace, particularly in senior management roles. She confronted these biases and advocated for fair treatment and recognition of her expertise. This experience deepened her understanding of the challenges women face in similar positions.	Resilience and Determination: Angela's story is characterised by her resilience, intelligence, and determination. She overcame obstacles, adapted to new environments, and seized opportunities. Despite setbacks, she remained determined to carve her path and make a meaningful impact on the world.

Academic Excellence and Expectations: Angela's academic journey was characterised by her intellectual abilities and achievements. She consistently excelled in her studies and was regarded as competent. Society's expectations of her as a high-achieving student influenced her decisions and career choices.	Pursuit of Knowledge and New Experiences: Angela sought new experiences and opportunities for personal and intellectual growth throughout her life. She embraced challenges, such as studying abroad and pursuing a Master's in a different field, driven by her thirst for knowledge and adventure.	Independence and Family Support: The theme of family and support is evident in Angela's life. She grew up in a close-knit extended family, surrounded by love and support from her parents and siblings. This foundation provided her with a sense of belonging and encouragement.	Language Barrier and Adaptation: Irisfaces the challenge of overcoming the language barrier as English is her second language. She must rebuild her life from scratch and adapt to the unfamiliar environment.	Professional Culture and Career Progression: Irisrecognises the differences in professional culture between Europe and New Zealand, and it takes her several years to reach a comparable position in her career. She reassesses her aspirations and work-life balance, prioritising personal fulfilment over climbing the corporate ladder.	Achieving work-life balance: Sophie's story also emphasises her pursuit of work-life balance. She made decisions based on what would be best for her growing family, including relocating back to New Zealand. She successfully balanced work and motherhood and took on the role of the higher earner in her family.	International Aspirations and Scholarship Opportunities: Tina's higher education and career advancement aspirations directed her attention beyond Vietnam. Initially focused on Europe and Australia, she adapted her plans when she did not meet the scholarship requirements for Australia and instead seized the opportunity to study in New Zealand.	Aspirations and Challenges in Leadership: Participant E aspires to become the CEO of a construction company but acknowledges the obstacles, including the "boys club" mentality and lack of diversity in the industry.	Pay Discrepancies and Gender Equality: Participant E observed disparities in pay and opportunities among her male colleagues, leading her to advocate for herself and other women. She pursued a master's degree focusing on why young women leave the construction industry.	Persistence and Future Outlook: Despite her challenges, Participant E remains determined to positively impact her industry, even if she acknowledges the difficulty of achieving meaningful change in her workforce.
Educational Journey and Appreciation: Sally's music degree and appreciation for her university education are highlighted. She acknowledges her parents' sacrifices and recognises the significance of being the first generation in her	Pursuit of Knowledge and New Experiences: Angela sought new experiences and opportunities for personal and intellectual growth throughout her life. She embraced challenges, such as studying abroad and pursuing a	Travel and Curiosity: Iris's exposure to travel, her grandmother's adventurous spirit, and her curiosity about the world greatly influenced her aspirations. She develops a high expectation of pursuing an internationally oriented career and has a deep love for	Sense of Home and Identity: Despite the initial challenges, Molly considers New Zealand her home and appreciates the deep roots she has established. She reflects on how her perspective has shifted and how her current experiences and relationships	Career Transitions and Company Culture: Participant E experienced company acquisitions and relocations, seeking a work environment aligned with her values and aspirations.	Work-life balance and well-being: Angelal's experience of transitioning from the bustling city life of Moscow to the more rural setting of New Zealand allowed her to appreciate the country's emphasis on work-life balance and people's	Long-term goals and aspirations: The theme of long-term goals and aspirations emerges as Participant K plans to move to Australia once she obtains citizenship. Her decision is driven by the belief that better opportunities and her	Evolving Priorities and Life Choices: Natalie acknowledged that priorities change over time, and life constantly evolves. She embraced shaping her path, focusing on personal fulfilment, and creating a	Passion for diversity and inclusion: Participant S's experiences, including attending a racially segregated school and facing pay gaps as a working mother, fuelled her passion for diversity and inclusion efforts.	Overcoming challenges and adversity: Sophie faced several challenges throughout her career, such as feeling out of place in male-dominated fields, experiencing social pressure to secure a job, and witnessing minimal change despite her efforts. However,

family to attend college.	Master's in a different field, driven by her thirst for knowledge and adventure.	exploring new horizons.	contribute to her sense of belonging.		desire to live fully. She aspired to promote mental health and well-being in corporate settings, emphasising the importance of a positive work environment and prioritising individual well-being.	daughter's education await them in Australia.	life that aligns with her values.	She found fulfilment in leading diversity and inclusion initiatives at ASB and significantly created a more inclusive workplace.	she persevered and overcame these obstacles by leveraging her skills, embracing her unique perspective, and seeking new opportunities. Her resilience and determination highlight the importance of overcoming challenges to achieve success.
Educational Journey and Challenges: Natalie's educational journey in Germany involved attending different kindergartens, facing struggles in a mixed school environment, choosing the highest level of schooling, and pursuing her passions outside academics. Financial constraints and limited scholarship options posed challenges	Career Exploration and Decision-Making: Natalie's career choices were influenced by her passion for travel, financial considerations, mentor advice, and personal aspirations. She explored architecture, business, management consulting, and sustainability initiatives, evaluating their alignment with her interests and goals.	The theme of family and support is evident in Angela's life. She grew up in a close-knit extended family, surrounded by love and support from her parents and siblings. This foundation provided her with a sense of belonging and encouragement.	Cultural exploration and adaptability: Angelal's experiences living in countries like France, Italy, the USA, and Russia demonstrate her curiosity and willingness to explore distinct cultures and adapt to new environments. She actively sought opportunities beyond her home country, immersing herself in diverse settings and pursuing education and career	Career Progression and Adaptability: Molly acknowledges the time it takes to reach a comparable position in her career in New Zealand and the challenges faced by skilled migrants. She focuses on building a relevant skill set and finding value in her workplace rather than seeking higher positions. She prioritises work-life balance and a fulfilling lifestyle over solely pursuing seniority.	Balancing longing and appreciation: H grapples with balancing her longing for home and appreciation for the opportunities and sense of belonging she has found in New Zealand. She navigates her professional path while staying true to her values and aspirations.	Internatinal Perspectives and Opportunities: Natalie's journey involved travelling, studying abroad, and experiencing different work cultures, which broadened her perspectives and influenced her career aspirations. She sought international opportunities and desired to bridge the gap between New Zealand and Europe.	Final Financial Stability vs Personal Fulfilment: Natalie's journey highlighted the tension between financial stability and personal fulfilment. While financial considerations were necessary, she recognised that true happiness came from aligning her career with her passions and personal life goals.	Equity and Representation: Participant E recognises the importance of equitable solutions, particularly for marginalised groups such as Māori, and believes that gender equality should be replicated in traditionally male-domIristed industries like construction.	Resilience and perseverance: Alma's life story highlights her resilience and perseverance in facing challenges and setbacks. From witnessing her parents' separation and navigating difficult circumstances as a child to facing obstacles in her career and immigration journey, she consistently pushed forward. She remained determined to create

but fuelled her determination to excel.			prospects in foreign lands.						a better life for herself.
Education and Career Guidance: Participant E's school experiences and the limited options for higher education influenced her decision to pursue engineering despite the suggestions of her career counsellors.	Personal growth and self-discovery: Sophie initially pursued a medical career but realised it was not her true calling. She made several career switches and explored different industries until finding a role aligned with her strengths and passions.	Sense of Gratitude and Privilege: Tina viewed the focus on education as a luxury rather than an obligation, feeling fortunate that her parents could prioritise her educational development and provide support for her future.	Relocating and Cultural Adjustment: Molly and her husband explore different countries as potential career and lifestyle destinations. They ultimately choose New Zealand, where they face challenges obtaining visas and adapting to a different lifestyle. Molly's experience as an Indian migrant in New Zealand informs her research and dissertation.	Embracing change and seizing opportunities: Sophie's career journey exemplifies her willingness to embrace change and seize opportunities that deviate from the conventional path. She welcomed new challenges and sought growth opportunities, leading her to make career transitions and take on transformation initiatives.	Striving for positive workplace environments: Sandra emphasised the importance of positive workplace cultures that value inclusivity, well-being, and diversity. She recognised the impact of toxic work environments and sought places where she could authentically express herself and make a positive impact.	Seeking a change and escaping challenges: Leonee and J decided to explore opportunities abroad due to the challenges they faced in Colombia, including corruption. Their desire for a fresh start and a better life drives the theme of seeking change.	Personal Growth and Self-Reflection: Natalie's experiences led to self-reflection, questioning her passion and goals and re-evaluating her career trajectory. She recognised the importance of finding fulfilment, enjoying work, and prioritising personal and family life over financial gains.	Academic Pursuits and Career Advancement: Tina's commitment to academia led her to pursue a master's degree and later a Ph.D. Despite the challenges of balancing work and studies, she persevered, reflecting on the significance of her academic accomplishments.	Cultural Values and Home: Tina cherishes the cultural values of New Zealand, including its welcoming and family-oriented community. These values contrast with the materialistic and competitive environment she experienced growing up, influencing her desire to raise her child in a nurturing culture.
Pursuit of Science and Engineering: Participant E's love for science and math led her to choose engineering as her career path, combining her strengths and interests.	Quest for personal fulfilment and true passion: Throughout her life, Alma embarked on a journey to discover her true passion and find fulfilment in her career. She initially pursued a law degree but realised it was not	Partnership and Sacrifice: Tina and her husband prioritise their family's collective happiness and success. They function as a team, supporting each other's professional endeavours and making decisions based on what is best for their family, demonstrating	Cultural adaptation and challenges: Sandra experienced cultural differences and challenges when moving from Delhi to Bengaluru and later to Chennai in India, as well as when relocating to New Zealand. She had to adjust to new environments,	Career transitions and personal growth: Alma's story highlights her career and personal growth journey. She started as a corporate lawyer, then pursued studies in psychology and psychotherapy, and eventually established her private practice.	Flexibility and Work-Life Balance: Natalie valued flexibility in her career, desiring to work remotely, be with her loved ones, and explore different opportunities. She recognised the importance of structuring her life	Exploring unfamiliar territories: New Zealand was an unfamiliar country for Leonee and J, as it was not commonly considered compared to countries like Australia, Canada, or the USA. The theme of	Passion for non-profit and public service roles: Throughout her career, H has discovered a passion for working in non-profit and public service-related roles that allows her to deliver results without	Cultural Observations and Hope: Sally's observations of the government's relationship with native people and the progress in New Zealand, including renaming and teaching Te Reo, inspire hope and	Building a Future in New Zealand: Sally's decision to put down roots in New Zealand, meet her current husband, and explore various career paths reflects her desire for a future in a new country.

	her true calling, leading her to explore psychology and psychotherapy.	their willingness to sacrifice for one another.	languages, and societal expectations.		around personal priorities and finding a job with the desired work-life balance.	exploring unfamiliar territories reflects their willingness to venture into a new and unknown place.	compromising her principles.	optimism for positive change.	
Pursuit of further education abroad: Sandra decided to pursue postgraduate studies in New Zealand to distance herself from societal pressures and expectations. She chose Auckland University of Technology (AUT) based on its practical approach and experienced lecturers.	Transition and Growth: The transition from a private Christian school to a public high school opened new doors for Sally and contributed to her personal growth.	Family Dynamics and Divorce: Sally's parents' divorce when she was eight marked a meaningful change in her childhood and influenced her perspective on family relationships.	Perception of home and belonging: Harriet's perception of Germany shifted due to political changes and conflicts. She has found a sense of belonging in New Zealand, appreciating the ease of making connections and a more united community.	Career transitions and exploration: Sophie's story highlights her willingness to explore various career paths and make transitions when necessary. She moved from pursuing medicine to actuarial science, then to accounting, and eventually found her passion in HR and diversity and inclusion efforts. Her career journey demonstrates the value of being open to new opportunities and proactively seeking personal and professional growth.	Prioritising well-being and meaningful work: Throughout her journey, Sandra learned the importance of prioritising her well-being and finding meaningful work. She sought environments that aligned with her values, even if it meant making sacrifices in terms of compensation.	Immigration and the search for a new home: Alma's story includes a significant theme of immigration and the search for a new place to call home. Before settling in New Zealand, she and her partner considered various countries, such as France and Canada.	Expertise and Impact: Angela recognised her expertise and the value she brought to her field, particularly in anti-money laundering and organised crime research. She sought fulfilment through making a genuine difference and effecting positive changes rather than solely pursuing financial success.	Comparison of Indigenous Issues: Participant E reflects on the disparities between the treatment of Māori in New Zealand and Australian Aboriginals and First Nations people, highlighting the need for progress in both countries.	Cultural Observations and Hope: Sally's observations of the government's relationship with native people and the progress in New Zealand, including renaming and teaching Te Reo, inspire hope and optimism for positive change.
Education and academic excellence: H excelled academically and had early exposure to education through her maternal grandmother, a primary	Pursuit of passion and career determination: Tammy followed her passion for engineering despite her parents' expectations. Her determination to continue	Gender dynamics and societal expectations: Keesha's life story sheds light on the gender dynamics and societal expectations prevalent in a highly patriarchal society like India. She	Challenges of employment and diversity: Sandra faced challenges in finding employment in her field in New Zealand, witnessing the struggles of others as well. She	Employment challenges and sacrifice: Leonee faced difficulties finding suitable employment in New Zealand, leading to frustration and disappointment. Her sacrifices, such as working in a	Commitment to making a positive impact: Sandra found fulfilment in work that contributed to a greater mission and allowed her to make a positive impact.	Immigrant experiences and barriers: Leonee acknowledges immigrants' difficulties, including language barriers and societal obstacles.	Healing and Counselling: Sally's experiences in counselling and her belief in therapy's transformative power demonstrate her	Balancing personal and professional life: Sandra acknowledged the challenges of balancing her personal and professional life, particularly	Resilience and adaptability: Tammy faced challenges in the job market in New Zealand, where she needed to be versatile and have multiple skills. Her

school teacher. She also had complete autonomy over her education, considering boarding school and pursuing higher education after high school.	her career after marriage and relocation to New Zealand highlights her commitment to her chosen field.	experienced a culture that prioritised men's success over women's and faced resistance from her father regarding her education and career aspirations.	recognised the lack of diversity in the advertising industry and eventually shifted to the not-for-profit sector.	popcorn company and cleaning jobs, highlight immigrants' challenges in securing desired employment.	She believed that everyone genuinely desires to contribute positively and emphasised the importance of valuing individuals' efforts.		personal healing process and growth.	as a woman. She expressed concerns about reinforcing gender stereotypes but prioritised her well-being and family while pursuing her career.	resilience and adaptability allowed her to overcome obstacles and continue progressing in her career.
Education and career choices: Education plays a leading role in Keesha's life story. Despite her passion for fashion design, her mother directed her towards engineering and enrolled in an engineering school. Her career trajectory took unexpected turns, from training as an engineer to excelling as a business analyst.	Career transitions and personal growth: Transitioning into the Professional World: Molly's initial experience in the investment banking sector during the recession is challenging and leads her to question her career choice. However, she eventually finds a better fit at Johnson & Johnson and later Britannia Industries, where she brings about significant changes in the HR department.	Travel and Broadened Perspective: Travel played a significant role in Sally's life, broadening her perspective on the world and solidifying her understanding of privilege.	Career exploration and dissatisfaction: H went through various career stages, including working part-time, mandatory internships, and holding roles in administration and project management. She experienced boredom and a lack of professional identity, leading her to pursue a master's degree in statistics.	Pursuit of passion and career transitions: Sandra initially faced challenges finding her career path but eventually found fulfilment in the advertising industry. She made bold moves to switch careers, leaving the hotel industry for advertising and later transitioning to the not-for-profit sector.	Career progression and job changes: Tammy experienced several job changes during her career in New Zealand. She strategically decided to relocate for a better work-life balance and shift her focus from technical work to management. The theme of career progression reflects her willingness to make changes and pursue new opportunities.	Embracing new opportunities and shifting priorities: As Leonee and J settle into their lives in New Zealand, their priorities shift beyond mere career focus. They embrace their new home's opportunities and freedom, considering the possibility of starting a family and building a future in New Zealand.	Personal and Professional Growth: Participant E's self-assuredness, drive, and pursuit of challenges have shaped her career choices and contributed to her personal and professional growth.		Relationship dynamics and resilience: Leonee discusses the impact of their international move on their relationship, emphasising the need to support and stay together despite conflicts.

Importance of education and family influence: Tasha's upbringing emphasised the significance of education, which influenced her decision to pursue a degree in computer science and engineering. Her parents' desire for her to become a doctor reflects the theme of family influence on career choices.	Unexpected Opportunities and Influential Figures: Tina's foray into the tourism industry led to an unexpected opportunity when a Singaporean company recognised her potential and offered her a position. Her boss, a tough and assertive woman, served as an influential figure, teaching her lessons about resilience and assertiveness.	Personal Connections and Romantic Involvement: Meeting people during her travels, including a romantic involvement in New Zealand, influenced Sally's life decisions and contributed to her journey.	Embracing change and finding home: Alma's story highlights her willingness to embrace change and adapt to new circumstances. Despite her challenges and uncertainties, she found a sense of belonging and home in New Zealand.	Pursuit of Research and Academia: Preeti's strong academic background and passion for learning drove her desire to pursue research and academia. However, she faced obstacles such as a lack of mentorship and guidance and discouragement from professors.	Work-life balance and sense of home: Tammy values the work-life balance and the sense of home she has found in New Zealand.		Impact and contribution: Sophie's dedication and contributions to the organisations she worked for, such as implementing a new IT system and revamping diversity and inclusion strategies, demonstrate her desire to make a positive impact.		Persistence and Resilience: Preeti's story is marked by her persistence, resilience, and unwavering spirit of discovery. Despite setbacks and challenges, she pursued her goals, including a PhD and sought alternative pathways to achieve them.
Education and Career Path: Molly's educational journey involves a shift from being a competitive student in private schooling to pursuing subjects she enjoys in college. She goes through a period of disengagement from her studies before	Career Challenges and Growth: Sally's career experiences, including being a choir director and working in the leasing office, involved challenges and dissatisfaction, leading to personal growth and realising her	Progressive upbringing and family support: Sandra's parents had a progressive mindset and did not impose traditional gender roles on her. They provided her with opportunities and supported her education, allowing her to freely explore her interests.	Career exploration and international experiences: Keesha's career as a business analyst took her across the globe, including a significant period in Paris.	Career Transitions and Discovering Passions: Throughout her journey, Preeti experienced various career transitions, from teaching physics to public speaking and training, human resources, and administration, and finally, finding her calling in teaching and training educators.	Appreciation for peacefulness and security: Despite the initial reservations and challenges, Leonee and J chose to stay in New Zealand due to its peaceful and secure environment		Personal and professional growth: Keesha's journey in New Zealand represents personal and professional growth. She reflects on the exposure, opportunities, and skills she has developed, comparing them		

discovering her interest in pursuing a business career.	career aspirations.						to what she might have experienced in India.		
Parental Expectations and Emphasis on Education: Tina's life story highlights the weight of her parents' expectations and the value they placed on education. The emphasis on academic achievements and the opportunities provided by her parents shaped Tina's educational journey.		Overcoming an abusive relationship: Sandra found herself in an abusive and controlling marriage but dared to confide in her family and end the relationship. She received unwavering support from her family, empowering her to break free and move forward.	Immigration and relocation: The decision to move to New Zealand is a significant theme in Keesha's life story. It highlights the challenges and opportunities associated with immigration, such as the need to navigate visa requirements, periods of unemployment, and the search for suitable employment in a new country.	Professional struggles and personal growth: Leonee struggled to regain her self-confidence and find suitable employment in a foreign country.	Balancing Personal and Professional Life: Preeti's educational and career journey was intertwined with personal milestones such as marriage and motherhood. She had to manage the responsibilities of her family while pursuing her studies and career aspirations.		Self-identiy and role fulfilment: Keesha's story highlights her role as a wife, mother, and careerist. She takes pride in her accomplishments and recognises her personal growth.		
Camaraderie and Peer Influence: Attending a specialised high school with peers who shared her appreciation for education fostered a sense of camaraderie and motivated Tina to pursue higher education. Her desire to study together		Economic instability and the desire for security: Harriet's upbringing in a family that experienced unemployment and job changes instilled in her a desire for economic security and stability.	International travel and fresh starts: Harriet arrembarked on a journey to Australia and New Zealand, seeking new opportunities and a fresh start. She found a sense of normalcy, connection, and personal growth in New Zealand and contemplated dividing her				Lifelong learning and professional development: Tasha's commitment to continuous learning is evident through her pursuit of a Master's in IT project management while working full-time. This theme emphasises the		

and connect with her classmates influenced her aspirations.			time between continents.				importance of ongoing education and staying updated in the industry.		
Adaptation to Different Education Systems: Preeti's educational journey involved transitioning between different education systems in India, Hong Kong, and New Zealand. She faced challenges adjusting to each system's curriculum, teaching styles, and expectations. This theme highlights the need to adapt and thrive in diverse educational environments.		Freedom and convenience of home: Growing up with a café in their family home, Harriet enjoyed the convenience and supervision provided by having her mother at home. She also cherished the freedom of being at home and watching TV.	Cultural Diversity and Identity: Growing up in a split family, experiencing multiple cities, and being exposed to diverse cultures shaped Natalie's unique childhood and influenced her perspective on life and career choices.				Importance of Mentorship and Support: Preeti's journey highlights the significance of mentorship and support in achieving academic and career goals.		
Gender Disparities in STEM Fields: Preeti's passion for astrophysics and her experiences in various countries made her aware of the gender			Cultural adaptation and community support: Keesha's experience in New Zealand involves adapting to a new culture, relying on her husband and the expat community for				Lifelong Passion for Learning: Preeti's story is driven by her lifelong passion for learning and self-actualisation. Despite her challenges, she		

disparities and glass ceiling faced by women in STEM fields. Despite societal expectations and biases, she pursued a bachelor's degree in science. She later considered a PhD, aiming to challenge the existing barriers and make a difference in her chosen field.			support, and establishing a sense of belonging within the Indian community.				remained committed to expanding her knowledge, pursuing higher education, and making a meaningful impact in her field.		
			Cultural shock and adaptation: Tasha's move to New Zealand, particularly the small town of Hamilton, brought a culture shock. The theme of cultural adaptation is evident as she navigates the challenges of adjusting to an unfamiliar environment and finding her place in a different work culture.						
			Cross-cultural challenges and language barriers: Tammy						

			encountered difficulties connecting with colleagues due to cultural differences and language barriers. This theme highlights the challenges of working in a multicultural environment and the need to bridge gaps in communication and understanding.					
			Sacrifices and longing for family: Leaving behind family, particularly Leonee's mother and grandmother, was difficult for Leonee. The theme of longing for family emphasises the emotional toll of being separated from loved ones and the challenges of building a new life away from home.					

9.12 APPENDIX K - DEMOGRAPHICS OF RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Participant Identifier	Age Range	Relationship Status	Dependents	Arrived in New Zealand	Country of Birth	Country of Citizenship	Countries outside of New Zealand where paid work has been undertaken
Natalie	30 - 39	De Facto	0	2013 (9)	Germany	Germany	Germany
Erika	30 - 39	Married	1	2008 (14)	Australia	Australia and New Zealand	Australia
Keesha	30 - 39	Married	1	2016 (6)	India	India	France, India
Preeti	40 - 49	Married	2	2015 (7)	India	India	India
Iris	40 - 49	De Facto	0	2013 (9)	Germany	Germany	Belarus, Ireland (studie only), Sweden (work experience)
Harriet*					Germany		
Sophie	40 – 49	Married	2	2006 (16)	South Africa	New Zealand	United Kingdom
Tina	30 - 39	Married	1	2014 (8)	Vietnam	Vietnam	Vietnam
Angela	30 - 39	Married	0	2013 (9)	United Kingdom	United Kingdom	United Kingdom, Finland, Netherlands, USA, Macedonia
Tammy	40 - 49	Married	1	2006 (16)	India	New Zealand	India
Molly	30 - 39	Married	0	2017 (4)	India	India	India
Alma	30 - 39	Married	0	2015 (7)	Russia	Russia	Russia

Sandra	30 - 39	Married	2	2012 (10)	India	New Zealand	India
Sally	20 - 29	Married	0	2018 (4)	United States of America	United States of America	United States of America
Leonee*					Colombia		

***Participants chose not to provide additional information for the purposes of the table.**

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