Self-Initiated Expatriation (SIE) and Older Women: Motivations, Experiences and Impacts

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Abstract

Since 1893 when New Zealand women were the first in the world to win the right to vote, they have persisted in their groundbreaking ways. New Zealand women have been Prime Ministers, Governor General, Speaker of the House of Representatives and Attorney General. Currently a New Zealand woman is Chief Justice and a former Prime Minister Helen Clarke holds the third highest position at the United Nations. This study continues this trail blazing tradition with a focus on a number of older New Zealand women who have challenged the male norm of continuous and linear careers (Myers, 2011; Sabelis & Schilling, 2013) and the neoliberal expectation of an extended working life (Rudman, 2006).

Anecdotal evidence suggests these 'ordinary' New Zealand women have effected 'extraordinary' life change as a result of exiting their established working lives to undertake self-initiated expatriation (SIE), a period of extended travel and work overseas (Doherty, Richardson, & Thorn, 2013a; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). This study draws on 'older workers', 'population ageing, 'careers' and SIE research literatures.

Four specific research objectives funnel the enquiry into the SIE phenomenon: the motivations, experiences, and triggers for SIE; the actual SIE work and personal experiences; whether SIE facilitates career and personal development; and whether SIE affords older women an opportunity to reflect on, clarify and enact longer term career and life-path goals.

Fundamental to this study is the ontological assumption that the world is open-ended and socially constructed. Subjectivism was core to the research process. Thus, I adopted a reflexive and interpretive methodology and carried out 21 in-depth life story interviews.

To ensure the integrity of 'narrative inquiry', I developed a five-step analytical framework and present the findings at four levels of analysis in a cycle of storying and re-storying. Firstly, each of the 21 interpretive life stories are documented. Secondly, five interpretive 'journey' themes are presented to facilitate an understanding of the participant's process of transition. Thirdly, a number of general themes are drawn out which link explicitly to the research objectives and fourthly I draw on key insights from all levels to develop a collective 'personal experience' narrative (McCormick, 2004).

Findings indicate that escape, unfinished business and the search for excitement were key SIE motivations. Enhancing career prospects were not an explicit driver. Individual SIE highlights were the cultural experiences and relationships developed through travel and

work and unexpectedly, participants developed considerable career capital. They developed significantly at a personal level, clarified their values and priorities, and began to realise that different life-paths were open to them that were rich with possibilities.

Post-SIE, the participants' lives continued to evolve. Initial work experiences reinforced earlier pre-SIE disillusionment within the organisational context. Many participants eschewed paid work, and took on university studies and unpaid roles where they felt more valued and autonomous. Economic imperatives no longer shaped participant's lives, and for those who worked, it was invariably a stepping stone towards a more holistic and authentic life-path.

Within the literatures of older workers, SIE and careers, work remains at the core of the discussion. This study contributes to understanding intersections of age and gender by studying women's experiences and the range of different meanings they attribute to work outside the usual structures of work and life. The participants in this research reflect a different way of being that is no longer tied to or centred around an economic model.

I argue for an interdisciplinary and life-course approach to provide a more holistic and less work-centric understanding of SIE and career. This broad view better addresses the complexity and heterogeneity of later life transition and change. Like the pioneering women suffragettes, the participants in this research were also 'path finders', and for them SIE was a time for refocus, renewal and rejuvenation, symbolising a significant shift in their 'ways of being' where the new 'retirement' has become 'rewirement'.

Table of Contents

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 material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university of higher learning.

The following publications and conference papers relate to work undertaken for this thesis.

Refereed journal articles

Myers, B. A (2011). Self-initiated expatriation (SIE) in older women: Exploring a different terrain. *Women's Studies Journal*, *25*(2), 101–106.

Conference papers

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Ethical Approval

Ethics Approval number 10/53

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Chapter 1: Introduction. Self-Initiated Expatriation (SIE) and Older Women: Motivations, Experiences and Impacts

Introduction

> There is probably no country in which the letters O and E resonate as strongly as they do in New Zealand. In just a few generations of our country's short history, the Overseas Experience, or Big OE, has become a national ritual…It's one youthful impulse that parents and employers understand, even encourage. (Sell, 2004, p. 10)

Overseas experience (OE) is a term unique to New Zealand and Australia. It is a period of self-driven and self-managed work and travel overseas during which younger people autonomously explore other cultures and countries (Inkson & Myers, 2003; Jokinen, Brewster, & Suutari, 2008). In the New Zealand context, the term OE emerged in the 1960s as an activity undertaken in early adulthood, after tertiary training or study and before embarking on a career and establishing a family (Bell, 2002). At that time, New Zealand's geographical position in the South Pacific meant that travel to anywhere beyond Australia and the Pacific region was a major event. Sell (2004) argues that OE began earlier in the 20th century, when "two earlier generations clambered to volunteer for world wars that would expand their horizons and shatter their innocence" (p. 4). Thus, travelling abroad on an OE has become part of the New Zealand culture, and although it is not undertaken by all young New Zealanders, many baby boomers did an OE in their twenties, including some participants in this research

The geographical isolation of New Zealand is also perceived as contributing to a unique Kiwi psyche that values independence, pluck, ingenuity, friendliness and egalitarianism. In a recent interview, Lisa Harrow (2012), a New Zealand actress based in London, stated:

> Had I been English, I don't think I would have had the courage to audition for London's Royal Academy of Arts (RADA). I wouldn't have had the backbone to believe that I could do it. But New Zealand's isolation empowers its inhabitants to dream their dreams. (p. 76)

Why older women and self-initiated expatriation (SIE)?

This PhD research on the motivations, experiences and impacts of self-initiated expatriation (SIE) on older women evolved over several years and was informed by three distinct threads of interest.

Academic interests

Twelve years ago, I was involved in a 'careers' research project with Professor Kerr Inkson exploring the experiences and impact of OE on young New Zealanders. I did not do an OE in my twenties, so I became fascinated by the experiences recounted to me during the interviews. Several years earlier, I tutored on a university paper entitled Women in Management and started teaching university management papers in which the issue of older workers was discussed. At that stage, most of the literature appeared to problematise older workers, and focus on how to manage them as a collective group.

I searched for older worker studies from the perspective of the individual older worker, but I could not find much in the literature at that time. However, I came across Patrickson and Hartmann's (1998) book *Managing an Ageing Workforce*, and an article by Onyx (1998) outlining the 'double jeopardy' that women face in the workplace. These materials further piqued my interest in older workers, especially older women workers. Thus, my interest in OE as a process of development and change continued, as did my interest in older workers and their perceptions of their careers and working life.

Populist discourse

In tandem with my developing academic interests in SIE and older women workers, I monitored the populist discourse around OE and older persons in New Zealand's fast-changing social and economic context. Globalisation and advances in communications, technology and international air travel in the early 21st century have enabled other age groups to embrace the OE dream at different stages of the life-course (Hoffart, 2006; Shepherd, 2008).

I became deeply curious about the tensions evident in the populist discourse on ageing, especially stories relating to older women. "Sassy at Sixty" (Street-Porter, 2008), "Ageing with Attitude" (Clifton, 2008) and "Ageless Elegance" ("NZ Herald Viva Supplement", 2013) are just a few of the headlines that exhort older women to be energised, independent and attractive. In the same newspaper, the beauty column appealed to older women to "defy the odds" and never go grey as it "has an age stigma attached to it…and coloured hair has the impression of grooming" ("NZ Herald Viva Supplement", 2013, p. 14).

In another local newspaper, the cover page headline stated "The Club Sandwich Generation. In their 60s, they're winding down at work. At home, they're taking care of their parents – and their grandchildren" (The Aucklander, 9 June 2011). The article itself featured a sandwich generation exemplar: an older woman, who worked part-time, ran

the household and cared for her invalided mother-in-law as well as two grandchildren after school. In the two-page article, the phenomenon of the sandwich generation was discussed. Older men were not mentioned, except to cite life expectancy rates and population ageing ratios (Hannan, 2011).

Allied to the ageing discourse, I noted the public discussions around older workers from an economic perspective. Older workers, labelled variously as the "grey-haired workforce" ("Grey-haired workforce on the increase", 2010) and "Grey matters at work" (Charman, 2015), are seen as carrying responsibility for future national economic success. The Ministry of Social Development (MSD) (2011) suggested that boomers "need to work longer and spend their full potential for the Government to afford their support payments. It predicts boomers could contribute billions to the economy – we just have to take advantage of its potential" (p. 13). In the popular management press, workplace skills shortages continue to be problematised as "New Zealand's Grey Quake" and imminent "grey tsunami" (Herbst, 2009, p. 30).

Personal reflections

As I read a myriad of academic and populist articles on older women (Handy & Handy, 2002; Hoffart, 2006), older workers, ageing gracefully, ageing disgracefully, I reflected on my mother's later years. At 59, she was diagnosed with a terminal illness and had already been widowed for five years. Her life became smaller as she became increasingly dependent until her death six years later. I thought how different her experience of being older was compared with what I was reading in the academic and populist literature a generation later.

I also noticed the conflicting messages that older women receive through the media. For example, retirement villages are a burgeoning industry given the demographic trends on population ageing. I have noticed retirement village advertisements that encourage women 55 plus to consider moving into villages for security, companionship and support. Yet the dominant populist discourse around older women depicts them as working past 65, caring for extended family while remaining attractive, smart, sassy and youthful!

I began to question how older women (and men) who fall outside the "success narrative" (Verhaeghe, 2014), that is, those who are unwell, unable to work or without family, might survive in a world where work, consumerism and individual responsibility appear to be taken for granted as the cornerstones of neoliberal society. My interest increased as the global financial crisis (GFC) deepened and took its toll on employment options for older

workers, and I found myself also wondering how I, in my late fifties, could continue to work for another 10 years plus, given the increasing demands of my academic role.

Choosing a PhD research topic

About that time, I coincidentally read a magazine article on older people who had completed an older OE. Although the title of the article was "OE for the Over-40s" (2008), a couple of the people interviewed were women over 50. I was intrigued with the article on a number of levels. I was curious about why these older New Zealand people were taking a significant career/work break and choosing not to work later and longer. I wondered if they were independently wealthy or if they had made provisions for their older age. I was curious about whether this older OE was about 'early retirement', and whether the stories of these older people, especially older women, could provide a role model for other older women. I was also interested in whether the motivations, OE experiences and impact on personal and career development were different for older people compared with the younger people in our earlier OE study (Inkson & Myers, 2003). Thus, I became very interested in this emerging phenomenon of older New Zealand women who appeared to be truly 'living their dreams'.

Given my academic and personal interest in the topic of OE, it occurred to me that researching older women who have done an OE would be an ideal way to combine my two key research interests. At the same time, I moved from a management role in the university to an academic position. The time was right and the topic was of great interest to me. Thus, I began to read the relevant literature in greater depth, and in late 2010, my enrolment in part-time PhD studies was confirmed by the university.

International careers: From OE to SIE

Within a range of career alternatives, it is evident that some older women and men are choosing to abandon the normative and more visible masculine career trajectory, by undertaking a 'foreign experience' (Hoffart, 2006, Hepozden, 2008, Shepherd, 2008). In the international careers literature, SIE (self-initiated expatriation) is a period of autonomous travel and work in another country that is usually conceptualised as a more youthful and carefree endeavour (Suutari & Brewster, 2000; Inkson & Myers 2003; Vance, 2003) much as the NZ example of OE. At the beginning of my PhD research, I used the term self-initiated foreign experience (SFE) and noted that various documentation relating to participant recruitment and information, ethics application and discussion guides used the SFE nomenclature. In 2010, I was a presenter in the U.S.

Academy of Management symposium "Self-Initiated Foreign Experience as a Field of Study: Some Issues of Terminology, Definition and Research Direction", where there was extensive discussion on terminology. While Chapter 2 explores in greater detail discussion around nomenclature, a consensus has emerged that SIE (self-initiated expatriation) was the most appropriate term, and since then I have used SIE in this research study.

Assigned expatriates (AE), employees of Multi-National Enterprises (MNEs) who are sent abroad have long been the focus of researchers in the field of International Careers and International Human Resource Management. This type of international work experience differs from the SIE experience and the migrant experience and there is a growing body of literature focusing on the differentiation of these terms (Al Ariss, 2010; Andresen, Bergdolt, & Margenfeld, 2013; Briscoe, Schuler & Claus, 2009; Dorsch, Suutari & Brewster, 2013). However expatriates who initiate their own international experience, (SIE) are less understood (Doherty, Richardson, & Thorn, 2013b; Andresen & Gustschin, 2013).

A groundbreaking paper (Inkson, Arthur, Pringle, & Barry, 1997) suggested that SIE (referred to as O.E. in the 1997 paper) was a common but unresearched aspect of many careers. In the past, prospective employees returning home from an SIE were often regarded by employers as lacking in career focus, commitment and career capital (Inkson et al., 1997; Myers & Inkson, 2003; Inkson & Myers, 2003). However, there is a nascent and flourishing careers literature on these experiences that challenges this view (Doherty & Thorn, 2014). More specifically it is suggested that career development is a substantial and visible outcome arising from what appears to be a serendipitous experience initially undertaken for personal, social and cultural reasons (Inkson et al., 1997).

The study

The overarching purpose of this research study was to explore the experiences of 21 older New Zealand women who withdrew from their established personal and working lives to undertake an SIE, a period of extended travel and work overseas (Suutari & Brewster, 2000). Subjectivism underpins the research methodology approach, which is consistent with my interpretivist and relativist world view (Lincoln, Lynham, & Guba, 2011), and I identified narrative inquiry as the most appropriate methodological framework to explore the individuals' broad SIE experiences.

More specifically, I identified four research objectives:

- to develop an understanding of the motivations, experiences and triggers for older women in the pre-SIE decision-making process;

- to develop an understanding of the SIE experience;

- to explore the extent to which an SIE affords older women an opportunity for career and personal development;

- to explore the extent to which an SIE affords older women an opportunity to reflect on, clarify and enact longer term career and life-path goals.

The first research question relates to the period before participants went on an SIE. Research questions two and three pertain to the actual SIE period, while research question four concerns the longer term career and personal development that becomes evident after SIE, and as a result of the SIE.

Overview of the thesis

Chapter 2

This chapter reviews the literature in careers, women's careers and SIE as a point of entry to understand the participants' later-life SIEs. The discussion of the SIE literature also includes a brief review of the expatriation literature that addresses the organisational or corporate expatriate and argues that SIE as an "emerging field remains both under-researched and under-theorised" (Doherty, Richardson, & Thorn, 2013b, p. 7). Discussion on SIE literature also points to the international volunteer literature (Fee & Gray, 2011; Hudson & Inkson, 2006), linking international volunteerism to the organisational SIE and drawing it within the SIE nomenclature (Doherty, Richardson, & Thorn, 2013a). While the review of the careers and women's careers literature is wide ranging, the SIE literature is examined from two perspectives, with a more specific link to the research objectives. The first perspective considers SIE motivations and the second perspective explores the various types of capital that participants may accrue during and after their SIE (Brewster, Bonache, Cerdin, & Suutari, 2014; Dickmann & Doherty, 2010; Dickmann & Harris, 2005; Jokinen, 2005, 2010; Osland, Bird, Mendenhall, & Osland, 2006; Thorn, Yao, & Arrowsmith, 2013).

Chapter 3

This chapter explores a range of literature as a backdrop to explore the motivations, experiences and development of the participants. Firstly, the literature on population ageing is presented, identifying significant demographic and labour market issues, including women's labour market participation rates and related issues (Callister, 2014; Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development [OECD], 2011). Secondly, the chapter discusses older worker definitional issues, examining the challenges of determining just 'who' is an older worker (Arber & Ginn, 1995; Moore, 2009; Shacklock, 2008).

Next, the concept of productive, active and successful ageing is discussed and critiqued, along with the changing nature of retirement (Davy & Glasgow, 2006; Everard, Lach, Fisher, & Baum, 2000; Sargent, Lee, Martin, & Zikic, 2013). The review points to the lack of gender in the retirement literature (Loretto & Vickerstaff, 2013, 2015), and how the notion of retirement is increasingly irrelevant to older people. The literature on adult development, life-span and transition is then explored drawing on both life-stage (Erikson, 1968; Levinson, Darrow, Klein, Levinson, & McKee, 1978) and life-course theories (Moen, 1996), to gain insights into transition and change in the individual life-path (McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2001). Finally, literature on aspects of personal meaning and wellbeing is briefly reviewed to explore concepts of purpose and authenticity in later life (Ryff & Singer, 2006).

Chapter 4

Chapter 4 outlines the methodology and research process that informs this research study. The chapter discusses aspects of epistemology, ontology and methodology that frame the research and identifies narrative inquiry as "both the method and phenomena of the study" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 5). The historical roots of narrative inquiry from the early 20th century are explored, leading to a brief discussion on the diverse range of research approaches within the framework of narrative inquiry (Lieblich, Mashiach-Tuval, & Zilber, 1998). As part of this discussion, I look to Pinnegar and Daynes (2007), who argue that a turn towards narrative in the second half of the 20th century reflected a dissatisfaction with other research approaches such as positivism (Faulconer & Williams, 1990), postmodernism and post-structuralism (Sarup, 1993). I outline the development of my own research understanding and practice, drawing on the four themes identified by Pinnegar and Daynes (2007), and clarify my narrative approach pertaining to this research study.

This chapter also outlines how the life story provides a holistic approach for the gathering of narratives, showing how individual lives and identities are constructed, and facilitates self-understanding (Atkinson, 2007). This is followed by an extended discussion on the research process. Finally, the chapter concludes with an outline and discussion of a five-step narrative model that I developed for the analysis, presentation and discussion of data (Crossley, 2000; McCormack, 2004; Mishler, 1986).

Chapter 5

Twenty-one individual interpretive participant stories (Bold, 2012; McCormack, 2004) are presented in Chapter 5. The names of the participants have been changed and in some cases a couple of details in the story were changed for confidentiality reasons. The presentation of findings via the interpretive stories enables the researcher to stay close to the life story data, preserve the integrity of the individual life stories, and situate these life stories at the core of the research. Each of the stories was created via three levels of 'storying' in a process of 'narrative analysis' (Polkinghorne, 1995), and is structured into three stages: before the SIE, during the SIE and after the SIE. Each participant's experience of transition, change and development is documented, thus maintaining narrative integrity.

This chapter also considers the narrative data in a more holistic way. Drawing on Frank (1995), generic narratives underlying the 21 individual interpretive stories are identified and presented as five distinctive SIE themes or journeys. The five SIE journeys are also structured in 'pre-SIE', 'during SIE' and 'after SIE' stages. The findings outlined in these 'journey' stories provide a bridge between the individual interpretive stories and the general themes discussed in Chapter 6 and also the personal experience story documented in an 'afterword' at the end of the conclusions in Chapter 7.

Chapter 5 is structured into five sections. Each section starts with the relevant individual interpretive stories and concludes with the 'journey' story. The five sections are arranged in a specific order starting with the 'The Tandem Stories' and concluding with 'The Spiritual Stories'. These five sections are placed as if on a continuum of increasing degrees of personal transformation and change with the 'The Spiritual Journey' reflecting the most radical and transformative of the five SIE journeys.

Chapter 6

In this chapter, key trends, threads and themes that filter through the 21 life stories are presented, analysed and discussed, signalling a move away from the focus on individuals

and subgroups of the previous chapter. The first section of Chapter 6 outlines the broad range of participants' SIE locations and considers their diverse occupational groupings before and during SIE. This first section also examines the motivations, experiences and triggers for older women in the pre-SIE decision-making process. The next section discusses the work and non-work experiences of the SIE and explores whether SIE facilitates career and personal development. The third and final section in this chapter discusses whether SIE facilitates longer term career and life-path goals for the participants. All three sections draw on the SIE, careers, women's careers, population ageing and older worker literature and I speak back to research reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3 for discussion. This discussion also incorporates other literature that might provide a different and more holistic light on this older SIE.

Chapter 7

In this final chapter, conclusions are documented, using the four research objectives as a framework for discussion. The chapter gives a more in-depth understanding of the complex interplay of SIE motivating factors for older women. Although participants experienced negative career issues before the SIE, they were motivated to undertake an SIE for mostly personal reasons, yet career capital was unexpectedly accrued as a result of the SIE. Participants also experienced considerable personal development outside their work contexts. The conclusions highlight participants' changed values and attitudes as a result of the SIE, which led them away from a work-centric notion of career.

This chapter also documents the contributions to theory and policy and the implications of the thesis, the limitations of the research and suggested areas for future research. The chapter concludes with the argument that, for older women, SIE is a catalyst for meaningful life transitions and the enactment of a more holistic, authentic and generative way of being.

Afterword

After the final chapter (Chapter 7) a personal experience story is documented. The collective or general meanings that lie behind the twenty-one individual interpretive stories and the five journeys (Chapter 5) are integrated and re-storied into this personal experience story (Crossley, 2000; McCormack, 2004) which allows further sense making of the SIE phenomenon and completes the cycle of storying and re-storying.

Chapter 2: Literature. Careers and Self-Initiated Expatriation (SIE)

> "Your soul knows the geography of your destiny. Your soul alone has the map of your future, therefore you can trust this indirect, oblique side of yourself. If you do, it will take you where you need to go, but more important it will teach you a kindness of rhythm in your journey."

> John O'Donohue

The careers and SIE literatures provides a framework for exploring the motivations, experiences and outcomes for individual older women undertaking an SIE. This chapter begins by briefly exploring historical and contemporary career theory. This is followed by a discussion on a new generation of career theory (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009) and the emergence of a niche careers literature focusing on women's career theory. In the second half of this chapter the SIE literature is explored. This literature has developed considerably in the last decade (Doherty & Thorn, 2014) and this review addresses SIE literature pertinent to the research questions in this research study.

Careers

History of career theory

The development of a career's literature initially drew from a range of disciplines including "sociology, psychology, educational studies, anthropology, economics and political studies" (Inkson, Dries, & Arnold, 2015, p. 15). Career theory developed from this early foundation into three broad strands: the sociological perspective, which grew out of the Chicago School of Sociology (Barley, 1989); the psychological or vocational perspective, (see Savickas & Baker, 2005) for an in-depth review of this career strand; and the organisational perspective that focusses on the management of employees via personnel and human resource management processes (Schein, 1978).

Although the careers literature has evolved from these roots this discussion and review of career theory is carried out in the wider context of the individual's relationship to the employing organisation (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009) and begins by considering the life stages of the traditional (male) career experience as a starting point (Erikson 1968), while drawing on threads across all three historical approaches to careers (Inkson et al., 2015). Early career stage theory framed periods of transition and change as psychological or behaviourally related (Super, 1980), age related (Levinson et al., 1978) or related to professional development transitions (Dalton & Thompson, 1986; Post, Schneer, Reitman, & Ogilvie, 2013). For example Dalton & Thompson (1986) identified the four

phases of apprentice, colleague, mentor and sponsor while Super (1957) identified four career phases i.e. establishment, advancement, maintenance and decline. Although the stages were not seen as specifically age related, age was often used as a benchmark for examining transition and change (Ornstein & Isabella, 1990), while career was depicted as progressively hierarchical rather than circular, in an unchanging organisational setting (Mirvis & Hall, 1996).

The concept of the life-cycle and adult development was integrated into the Erikson model based on a study of men (Levinson et al., 1978), while a later study (Levinson & Levinson, 1996) focused on women, identifying the ongoing tension women face in the gender differentiating roles of homemaker and career women. While the latter study went some way towards developing a woman's perspective of career development (to be discussed later in this chapter), the model was based on a number of limiting assumptions. For example career models continued to be conceptualised as linear and sequential, covering a limited life-span and drawing on a homogenous sample that "tended to support the male-as-breadwinner family structure" (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009, p. 1542; Sullivan & Crocitto, 2007). Nevertheless the life-span perspective is relevant in this study as it is an important vehicle for looking at the lives and career patterns of older people, who are living longer and expected to extend their years of work (Alpass, 2007; Vasconcelos, 2015).

Contemporary career theory

In the last twenty years there have been a range of global, societal, environmental, economic and technological changes (Bailyn, 2006; Baruch, Szucs, & Gunz, 2015; Sullivan & Crocitto, 2007) that have impacted on the workplace and in particular the nature of the employment relationship (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). An increasingly diverse workforce, changing organisational contexts and the GFC have significantly affected how individuals perceive and manage their career with increasing numbers of individuals moving into "forced entrepreneurship" (Richtel & Wortham, 2009 as cited in Sullivan & Baruch, 2009, p. 1542), short-term contracts and reviewing retirement options and plans (Wang & Schultz, 2010).

Demographic and social change has also impacted on individuals creating changes in career attitudes and behaviours (Inkson, Gunz, Ganesh, & Roper, 2012; Lee, Kossek, Hall, & Litrico, 2011). Hall (2004) also suggests that longer life spans and working lives have led to changes in family structures and responsibilities. While a number of individuals are seeking to enact career development and growth in a more self-directed

manner (Tharenou, 2009), Hall, Gardner & Baugh (2008) suggest that others are taking a break from the workplace as an opportunity to address family caregiving issues while adding value to their CVs through unpaid and voluntary endeavours. Increasingly, the traditional employer–employee exchange of job security for organisational loyalty has been called into question and while some individuals experience a forced organisational exit through restructuring, others are making changes as a result of individual reflection and re-evaluation (Ibarra, 2003), and choosing different employment directions to address non-professional needs (Lee et al., 2011).

Historical career theory reflects a more rigid and structured social context where a career path comprises a series of incremental roles that suggest increasing levels of status and extrinsic rewards. In a more complex or fluid societal structure "the individual has more latitude for creating his (sic) own positions or choosing from a number of exciting ones; he also has less certainty of achieving any given position", (Hughes, 1937, p. 413 as cited in Pringle & Mallon, 2003). Thus contemporary career theory defines careers more broadly than traditional or early career theory (Arthur, Hall, & Lawrence, 1989: Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) although there is limited consensus on a common definition or terms (Arnold & Cohen, 2008; Baruch et al., 2015). Drawing on a review of contemporary career theory Sullivan & Baruch (2009) define career as "an individual's work-related and other relevant experiences, both inside and outside of organizations, that form a unique pattern over the individual's life-span" (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009, p. 1543). This definition considers physical movements between jobs, industries and employers, the individual's perception of career events and outcomes and the impact of broad contextual factors such as economic trends, as well as personal circumstances such as relationships with family and friends.

Protean (Hall, 1996, 2004) and boundaryless (Arthur, 2014; Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) careers are two of the more influential contemporary career theories that reflect the changes from a progressively linear career path to a more open-ended career path. Hall (1996) used the metaphor of the Greek god Proteus as an analogy for career action. As Proteus could change his shape at will, Hall suggested that so too could the protean career actor as s/he moved from one work context to another demonstrating adaptability and flexibility, and driven by the need for freedom, self-fulfilment and intrinsic rewards. The concept has had significant impact on the development of career theory in the last 25 years and has relevance for employers and employees as they continue to "navigate the changing context of the contemporary workplace" (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009, p. 1550).

Therefore protean career theory (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Cerdin, 2012; Doherty, Dickman, & Mills, 2011; Hall, 2004) may provide some understanding of this SIE phenomenon as the protean career model recognises that individuals make career decisions that are influenced by personal values. However, the protean career actor still operates from a position where work is the key driver, even though the work must be compatible with personal values.

The boundaryless career concept offers an additional perspective for understanding contemporary careers (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) where a career is perceived as involving arrangements which are independent of rather than dependent on a traditional organisation and a single employer. Boundaryless career theory has also had a significant impact on how scholars have reconceptualised a range of career topics including retirement, career transitions and career development (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Fleisher, Khapova, & Jensen, 2014; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). While the model focuses on both physical and psychological boundaries, much of the research explores aspects of upwards physical mobility at the expense of psychological boundaries, and has been critiqued for a lack of research on less visible career movements (Simpson & Baruch, 2009; Simpson & Lewis, 2007; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009), and the over-emphasis on individual agency (Dany, 2003; Pringle & Mallon, 2003; Ituma & Simpson, 2009). For example some of these more hidden pathways are sideways career movements, career movements leading to an 'exit' from the labour market, and career factors that constrain physical and psychological boundary crossing (Sullivan & Arthur, 2006; Inkson, Gunz, Ganesh, & Roper, 2012). The model has also been challenged as advantaging educated professionals and disadvantaging 'lower-skilled workers, women and minorities' (Arnold & Cohen, 2008; Inkson et al., 2012, p. 328; Pringle & Mallon, 2003). Cohen & Mallon (1999) further suggest that boundaryless career theory condones the deconstruction of organisational career pathways. In this respect their critique of the model may also provide some insight into the participant's decision to undertake an SIE.

A new generation of career theory

Sullivan and Baruch's review article (2009) considered the developments in career theory in the subsequent 10 years since Sullivan's previous review (1999), pointing to the contribution of boundaryless (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996) and protean career theories (Hall, 1996). The article also highlights the notion that careers are the responsibility of individuals to manage and other developments which have given rise to the next generation of career concepts such as hybrid, integrating and evolving models. This new

generation of careers theory also reflects the shifting boundaries of emerging technologies in a more dynamic and organic global environment (Baruch et al., 2015).

Savickas (2007, 2012) suggests that career theory can be reconceptualised by accommodating an individual's work and personal factors using a 'career constructivist' framework. A constructivist look at life roles (Brott, 2005; Hartung & Taber, 2008; Savickas, 2007) explores how people use work as a means of developing a sense of self completion in their lives and develop a level of subjective wellbeing. While this framework is utilised for career assessment and career intervention strategies it also considers levels of satisfaction, meaning and happiness (Frankl, 1963; Baumeister, 1991). Building on Super's earlier career development theory, Savickas (2007, 2012) also explores changes in career orientation as the individual ages and integrates a life-span development perspective.

Thus career orientation within a later life context is emerging as a consideration in the careers literature. Inkson et al. (2013b) point to the ageing stereotypes of earlier adult development literature and suggest four types of more flexible work options suitable for later career. The first three of these 'phased retirement, bridge employment and self-employment' are discussed in the retirement literature (Wang & Shultz, 2010) where work still appears to a central 'life' anchor. The fourth option 'encore careers' (Freedman, 2007), explores another tangent, recognising that some older individuals seek different work contexts where they can contribute to the building of a more fair and equitable society.

Other variations on the 'encore career' noted by Inkson et al. (2013b) are concepts of career recycling (Sullivan, Martin, Carden, & Maniero, 2003) and career reinvention (Ibarra, 2004). In these concepts, as with the flexible options outlined in the previous paragraph (Inkson et al., 2013b), work remains the key focal point although there is increasing recognition of the importance of the individual's personal domain. Also, the importance of contributing to society as highlighted by Freedman (2007) and Inkson et al. (2013b) is gaining traction in some careers literature. Newman (2011, p. 138) identifies three features of a sustainable career including the "need for integration and ego integrity in later stages." The search for meaning in work through the creation of 'integrative' roles is however, discussed within mainstream organisational contexts.

Tams and Marshall (2011, p. 110) shift the discussion from "traditional business organizations", that prioritise profit and short-term decision-making to 'responsible' careers. The authors suggest that in response to societal concerns around "climate change,

poverty and social justice," (p. 110), some individuals seek employment and roles in organisations whose values are more compatible with their own. While Tams and Marshall's discussion is based on a research sample covering ages 20 to 60 years, only 13% of the sample were 50 years or over. Additionally 66% of the sample remains engaged in organisational employment in a professional or managerial role after effecting a career change. However a key contribution of Tams and Marshall's study on 'responsible careers' is pointing to the significance of 'values dissonance' experienced by some individuals in mainstream organisational employment.

Thus a nascent theme is emerging in the literature that gives more specific attention to the changing needs of individuals throughout their careers (Enache, Sallan, Simo, & Fernandez, 2011) especially in a later life context that challenges the historical narrative of decline (Super, 1957). Fundamental to this discussion is a growing awareness that individuals are seeking more flexible or different work options to accommodate a range of individual needs. Some older people are seeking more leisure time (Inkson et al., 2013b), others seek a more purposeful career and wish to achieve meaning in their work roles (Inkson et al., 2015). Disillusionment with profit driven organisational practices and the neoliberal framework perceived to be responsible for a range of social and environmental concerns (Tams & Marshall, 2011) is not experienced solely by older age cohorts, but may be linked to many older person's search for generativity in their careers. (Grant & Wade-Benzoni, 2009; Newman, 2011).

Although later life career changes are not always driven by a search for authenticity (Baugh & Sullivan, 2015), the emergent later life careers literature suggests that when individuals are 'older' they want different things from their earlier careers, either in the way in which they organise their work or in the nature of work that they undertake. Nevertheless most of the discussion on careers in later life remains within a 'work and organisational construct', even though personal values and perspectives are given increasing credence. However this new generation of career theory offers some models and frameworks to explore ageing and careers from a more 'cumulative' (Dany, 2014) and 'life-span' perspective (Lee et al., 2011; Van der Heijden, Schalk, & van Veldhoven, 2008). This emerging literature is directly relevant to understanding the transitions of older women, moving from a structured personal and professional life to an unstructured and autonomous SIE.

The development of women's career theory

The emergent women's career literature of the last 20 years affirms that women's careers are more holistic than men's careers. Yet women's careers remains an under-researched area at both individual and organisational levels (Burke & Vinnicombe, 2005; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009). Gallos (1989) suggests that earlier male-based theories mask the understanding of women's relational ways of being while Gutek and Larwood (1987) assert that women's career development ought not to reflect that of men although they did not offer a specific model beyond suggesting key concepts that seemed important. A number of subsequent studies on women's lives have identified the importance of relationships, connections and achievements (Cabrera, 2009; Chodorow, 1976; Giele, 1980). The development literature and the networking literature suggest that there are notable gender differences in the context and nature of relationships. Women emphasise the supportive and empathic nature of connections while men adopt a more instrumental approach to relationships (Umberson, Chen, House, Hopkins, & Slaten, 1996).

Sparked by Levinson et al.'s (1978) work, Bardwick's research on women's career development (1980) also highlights the differences between men and women's approach to work. While men identify themselves through their work with an emphasis on individuation, Bardwick argues that women undertake a variety of roles simultaneously. Bardwick (1980) also suggests some gender specific life transitions (for example the development of sexuality and mid-life transitions), but she does not address issues concerning older women in later life and follows a linear framework that mirrors men's career experiences.

Within "women's careers," relationships are identified as integral (Cohen, 2014; Gallos, 1989; Woodd, 2000) creating connections with others and the external world. Marshall (1989) conceptualises this relational connectedness as 'communion', in contrast to the concept of 'agency' (Pringle & McCulloch Dixon, 2003). While the concepts of agency and communion have contributed to the conceptualisation of careers (Marshall, 1989; Arthur, Inkson, & Pringle, 1999), there has been some disquiet over the dichotomous nature of this conceptualisation (Cohen, 2014; Lee et al., 2011). Namely women's career theorists overplay the role of relationships while men's career theorists have emphasised the significance of work.

Although some research suggests that the boundaryless model may fit well with women's relational way of being (Fondas, 1996) and allow women to better manage career and life transitions, other research suggests the opposite; that careers do not exist without

boundaries (Pringle & Mallon, 2003), and that women may in fact be disadvantaged by the boundaryless career model (Cabrera, 2007). The intelligent career model (Arthur et al., 1995; Parker et al., 2009) suggests that competencies of knowing how, knowing whom and knowing why, are essential to succeed in a boundaryless career. However the transitional nature of women's careers suggests that while older women workers may have competency in knowing how, individual older women who withdraw from the labour market may be disadvantaged in terms of knowing why and knowing whom.

Recent models of women's careers offer alternative reconceptualisations of individual career patterns (Maher, 2013; Maniero & Sullivan, 2005; O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005; Pringle & McCulloch Dixon, 2003). Some of these models are discussed in more detail in the following paragraphs and may provide additional insights into issues relevant to gender and women's careers, areas that Burke & Vinnicombe (2005) and Sullivan and Baruch (2009) identify as under-researched.

Pringle and McCulloch Dixon (2003) draw on the work of the early career theorists such as Bardwick (1980) and Gallos (1989) and previous careers research (Arthur et al., 1999) to conceptualise women's career development. They suggest that aspects of existing women's career theory do not appear to have the flexibility to encapsulate the holistic, wide ranging experiences and transitions of women's life and career development. They also state that in recent years there has been a call to develop a career model that has the capacity to embody the "emotional, spiritual and psychological as well as the outer achievements of an objective career" (Pringle & McCulloch Dixon, 2003, p. 291). The authors (2003) developed a model comprising four facets of women's careers: explore, focus, rebalance and revive. In contrast to traditional careers research, this model appears more evolutionary and holistic in nature and has the potential to integrate significant external life changes with internal processes. Thus, these four facets may also be a relevant model for exploring the career and life development of the participants in this research.

The Kaleidoscope career model (Maniero & Sullivan, 2005) conceptualises an alternative approach to career and life development theory. The authors place gender at the forefront of their analytical framework and suggest a new model that accommodates "career interruptions, employment gaps, top-outs, opt outs, as well as the new values of the current generation" (Maniero & Sullivan, 2005, p. 108). Maniero and Sullivan (2005) argue that three threads of "authenticity, balance and challenge" shape and shift through a woman's professional life-span recognising the relational aspect of women's careers as

well as placing the issue of gender at the forefront of the analysis. Subsequent studies drawing on the kaleidoscope career model (August, 2011; Cabrera, 2007) give further insights into why women across all age groups may opt out of organisations and the barriers they face when trying to opt back in. While the model focuses on women professionals, it may also be an appropriate framework to further explore the career and life development issues of older women workers who opt out of employment and undertake an SIE.

O'Neil and Bilimoria (2005) also explore the nature of women's careers experiences over the life-span. Using a three phase, age-linked model (the idealistic achievement phase, the pragmatic endurance phase and the reinventive contribution phase), the study explores women's reflections of their careers over time and includes the career stories of women from their 20s through to their 50s. While the study makes a contribution to understanding the work experiences of women throughout their working lives, practical implications are directed at employers and managers in the context of 'how to best manage and engage women in the workforce.'

Others strands of the careers literature considers women's concerns around career advancement (Burke & Vinnicombe, 2005; Kottke & Agars, 2005; Metz, 2005, 2011), the broad range of reasons women leave organisational employment (Metz, 2011; Cohen, 2014), gendered experiences of self-employment in later life in the context of encore careers (Loretto, Lain, & Vickerstaff; 2013; Pritchard & Whiting, 2015; Tomlinson & Colgan, 2014) and the need for organisations to change policy and practice to meet the needs of women employees (August, 2011; Bailyn, 2011; Cabrera, 2007, 2009; O'Neil, Hopkins, & Bilimoria, 2008). However research still tends to focus mainly on professional women and the disjuncture that they experience in their careers and how organisational employment continues to privilege men through hidden "gendered practices" (Broadbridge & Simpson, 2011, p. 470) and "male defined constructions of work and career success" (O'Neil et al., 2008 p. 727). Despite this it is encouraging that over the last 20 years a body of literature on women's careers has developed suggesting that women's careers are more holistic and organic than men's careers (Pringle & McCulloch Dixon, 2003), are negotiated and unfold in a broader life context (Cohen, 2014; Lee et al., 2011; Valcour, Bailey, & Quijada, 2007) and bring a different rhythm to career patterns over the life-course (Bailyn, 2004, 2011; Sabelis & Schilling, 2013).

Self-initiated expatriation (SIE)

The following sections explore the SIE literature. Firstly literature on the development of SIE as a distinct field of research is reviewed. This section also introduces the notion that gender is played out differently in self-initiated expatriation (SIE) when compared to assigned expatriation (AE). Literature on the international volunteer is also explored and a case is put forward that the international volunteer experience is more akin to the self-initiated expatriate experience than the assigned expatriate experience (Andresen & Gustschin, 2013). Finally the review explores SIE literature with a more specific focus on the research questions i.e. SIE motivations, experiences and aspects of career and personal development in the short and longer term in the lives of older women.

The development of SIE as a distinct field of research

As a field of research, SIE is one of a number of related terms that have been used in the literature when referring to a period of autonomous travel and work in another country undertaken voluntarily. At a 2010 U.S. Academy of Management symposium, Inkson and Richardson (2010) noted that while there tends to be consensus on using the term 'self-initiated' to differentiate from the organisationally driven 'expatriation' literature, within the field of 'self-initiation' there exists a range of terms. The term OE (Inkson et al., 1997; Myers & Inkson, 2003) has been variously denoted as "self-initiated foreign experience" (Inkson & Richardson, 2010, p. 1; Myers & Pringle, 2005, p. 425), "self-selecting expatriates" (Richardson & McKenna, 2002, p. 67), "self-directed expatriation" (Richardson & Mallon, 2005, p. 406) and "self-initiated expatriates" (Doherty & Dickmann, 2008; Jokinen et al., 2008, p. 980), the latter being confirmed currently as the generally accepted nomenclature according to Doherty, Richardson and Thorn (2013a).

As discussed in Chapter 1, a general understanding emerged from the U.S. 2010 Academy of Management symposium that SIE was deemed to be the most appropriate term by researchers in the field. Thus the nomenclature of SIE now covers a range of SIE experiences (Sutaari & Brewster, 2000; Inkson & Myers, 2003; Richardson & McKenna, 2002; Briscoe et al., 2009; Selmar & Lauring, 2011; Doherty, Richardson, & Thorn, 2013a). Despite the increasing numbers of published articles on self-initiated expatriates (Doherty & Thorn, 2014), the field remains under-researched and under-theorised (Doherty et al., 2013b; Andresen & Gustschin, 2013; Thorn 2009; Brewster & Suutari, 2005).

In their article on young people who go on an SIE, Myers and Inkson (2003) argued that SIE provides a vehicle for young women and men to experience considerable personal development and also recognisable career development. Surprisingly this research suggests that women's propensity to seek a safe travel and more secure work environment while on SIE gives them a broader and more integrated career experience when compared to men (Myers & Pringle, 2005). While this research is limited to younger workers, more recent research (Richardson & McKenna, 2006; Tharenou, 2008, 2009, 2010b) further suggest the influence of gender on self-initiated experiences.

Volunteer self-initiated expatriation

International volunteering, a "period of engagement and contribution by individuals who volunteer across an international border," (McBride, Lough, & Sherraden, 2012, p. 970), appears to be on the increase on a global scale. As individuals in developed nations become more aware of global disadvantage, oppression and the widening gap between rich and poor, many are moved to volunteer their services to help at a local, national or international level. When volunteering at an international level, generally the volunteer is from a developed country, moving to a third world country. In the United States, the increased stipend support for international service as a result of the 2009 Edward M. Kennedy Serve America Act, has resulted in an increase of international volunteers (Lough, 2010). In New Zealand the rate of increase is not known as New Zealand citizens volunteer through a range of international organisations and agencies. In a recent study of international volunteers recruited by Australian Volunteers International (AVI), a number of New Zealanders were included in the volunteer numbers (Fee & Gray, 2011). The NZ Volunteer Service Abroad organisation celebrated 50 years of international service in 2012 and has supported 3500 volunteers overseas during that time (http://www.vsa.org.nz/blog/vsa-in-the-news/in-the-news-october-2012).

Recent debate in the SIE field has centred on definitional issues and establishing greater "construct clarity" (Inkson & Richardson, 2010; Doherty et al., 2013a, p. 1). Andresen and Gustschin (2013) argue that international volunteer/development workers are not assigned expatriates as their motivations and experiences are more aligned with the features of a self-initiated experience. For the purposes of this research, I concur with Andresen and Gustschin (2013) although I accept that the five volunteers in this sample also illustrate some aspects of the 'organisational SIE' and 'OE' as per Doherty, Richardson and Thorn's (2013a) 'spectrum of global mobility'.

There is very little research on the volunteer SIE (Andresen & Gustschin, 2013) especially from the perspective of the individual older volunteer. Hudson and Inkson (2006) report on a longitudinal study of 48 New Zealand volunteers exploring their motivations, volunteer experiences, and the impact on their personal and professional development. This study appears to be the first on New Zealand volunteers working internationally. While making a significant contribution to volunteer theory, the longer term outcomes for personal and career development remain unknown as the final data was gathered one month after the volunteer assignment finished. Fee and Gray (2011) suggests that international volunteer work may serve as an 'accidental skills factory' that develops valuable professional knowledge and skills (Hudson & Inkson, 2006; Thomas 2001) and contributes to positive and successful ageing (Wilson, 2012). However much of the literature on international volunteerism focusses on project evaluation and the individuals who do the actual work remain invisible and silent (Andresen & Gustschin, 2013).

SIE motivations

In the last few years the SIE literature has reflected an increasing interest in what motivates individuals to do an SIE (Dickmann & Doherty, 2010; Dickman, Doherty, Mills, & Brewster, 2008; Doherty, Dickmann, & Mills, 2011; Doherty & Thorn, 2014; Doherty et al., 2013b; Doherty & Dickmann, 2013; Cerdin & Pargneux, 2010; Thorn, 2009). However the research tends to focus on professional and managerial samples (Richardson, 2009; Richardson & Zikic, 2007; Selmar & Lauring, 2010; Thorn, 2009). Other SIE subgroups such as international volunteers (Andresen & Gustschin, 2013) and non-professional occupational groups (Doherty et al., 2013a) are less researched although Andresen and Gustschin (2013) argue that the motivations of international volunteers are well aligned with the SIE experience.

The concept of career is integral to the SIE experience, albeit in a broad and more implicit way than the formally assigned expatriate experience. Doherty, Richardson, and Thorn's research (2013b), suggests that the intersection of SIE and career theory provides a valuable integrative theoretical framework for understanding and theorising SIE. Thus the motivation for undertaking an SIE may be explored via various career theories. For example the Intelligent Career (Arthur et al., 1995) has become a popular concept for understanding career transition especially during an AE (assigned expatriation) (Brewster et al., 2014). Knowing why, knowing how, and knowing whom are useful constructs for reflecting on career transition. In particular 'knowing why' suggests that an individual understands their reasons for career change. However in the context of an SIE, an

individual leaves an organisation and travels abroad before finding another position. The individual generally undertakes this outside the usual organisational management processes. In the case of older persons and non-professionals, they may not have a clear understanding or preference for the type of work they are seeking at the outset of their SIE, given the serendipitous nature of the SIE employment search process.

Career anchors are also considered useful in understanding the values, talents and motivations of an individual and how these are enacted in their working life. (Schein, 1978; Sutuuri & Taka, 2004). Anchors draw on the notion of the 'internal career' (Suutari & Taka, 2004) which is described as "a subjective sense of where one is going in one's working life," (Suutari & Taka, 2004, p. 834). Initially Schein (1978) identified five career anchors that career actors used to clarify their career direction; technical and functional competence; managerial competence; security and stability; autonomy and independence; entrepreneurial creativity. Later Schein added three more career anchors i.e. service and dedication to a cause; pure challenge and lifestyle. Suutari and Taka (2004) extended the career anchor typology and placed it in a context of international mobility with a new anchor 'internationalism' based on their research with global managers.

The motivations for leaving employment and/or searching for new employment or career transition in an overseas context cannot always be readily explained by employment or work factors alone. There may be a range of factors contributing to the decision to undertake an SIE and given that SIE involves autonomous travel as well as work, the SIE motivations may be better understood by considering a more complex interplay of push and pull factors that are not limited to the work context. Shultz, Morton & Weckerie (1998), Cerdin (2013) and Jackson et al., (2005), identify push factors as negative situations that drive an individual out of the workplace, possibly encouraging them to move abroad while pull factors are positive situations that encourage an individual to stay or leave the workplace.

Negative career experiences can influence an individual to consider an SIE. A lack of appropriate work opportunities leading to career disenchantment and disadvantage can motivate an employee to leave an organisation (Tharenou, 2010a). Similarly the promise of career challenge and advancement in an SIE role can also motivate the career actor to make changes (Jackson et al., 2005; Richardson & Mallon, 2005; Richardson & McKenna, 2006; Thorn, 2009). However international volunteer literature suggests that although career is an important motivator for SIE, it is not the most important

motivational factor for the international volunteer SIE, with 'values, understanding and personal enhancement' motivations taking greater priority (Andresen & Gustchin, 2013).

SIE research also suggests that negative personal reasons can be an important SIE motivation. Boredom (Richardson & Mallon, 2005), escaping from family (Thorn, 2009), from personal relationships (Inkson & Myers, 2003) and circumstances (Doherty, 2013; Doherty et al., 2011) are all cited in the broader expatriation literature when comparing the motivations of assigned expatriates with self-initiated expatriates. SIE is also undertaken for positive personal reasons. The desire to travel, explore and search for excitement and adventure are important personal SIE motivators (Inkson et al., 1997; Inkson & Myers, 2003; Richardson & McKenna, 2002; Tharenou, 2003; Thorn, 2009; Doherty, 2013). Relationships, friendships and other personal connections are identified in the literature as key reasons to undertake an SIE (Inkson et al., 1997; Inkson & Myers, 2003; Thorn 2009), although in some cases family relationships can also be a barrier (Tharenou, 2008). The desire to live in a different part of the world and learn more about history and participate in cross-cultural experiences is also documented as a personal motivator (Andresen & Gustchin, 2013; Doherty et al., 2011; Jackson et al., 2005). Altruistic reasons were noted in the international volunteering literature as reasons for doing an SIE (Andresen & Gustchin, 2013; Hudson & Inkson, 2006) and at a higher level, SIE was perceived as a 'vocation' or a 'calling' to engage in work that is profoundly meaningful and contributes to the wellbeing of society (Coles, 1989; Keyes, 2011).

While career and personal factors drive the decision to undertake an SIE, the literature on SIE motivations suggests that personal factors are of greater relevance to the SIE than for the AE (Andresen et al., 2013; Cerdin, 2013; Doherty, 2013), but are not of greater importance than career motivations within the SIE literature. Given that much of the SIE research to date draws on managerial and executive samples it is understandable that the significance of personal factors identified in the extant SIE literature, is less evident than in the international volunteer literature. While there is a willingness to embrace the increasing diversity of subgroups under the SIE umbrella (Doherty et al., 2013a), SIE literature still reflects a predominantly professional focus which privileges work motivations over personal motivations. Currently SIE motivations are under-researched and under-theorised (Doherty et al., 2013b; Andresen & Gustschin, 2013; Thorn 2009; Brewster & Suutari, 2005) and in particular there appears to be a lack of research considering the motivations of other SIE subgroups in a life stage/life-span context.

Career and personal development

There is an emergent literature on the accumulation of career competencies that result from more traditional expatriate assignments (Dickmann & Doherty, 2008; Doherty & Dickmann, 2009; Kohonen, 2005). The intelligent career (Inkson & Arthur, 2001) has more recently been applied to research on international careers (Brewster et al., 2014; Dickmann & Harris, 2005; Inkson & Thorn, 2010; Jokinen, 2005, 2010; Singh, Ragins, & Tharenou, 2009), particularly with regard to the organisational expatriate. Other ways of evaluating individual international career development have considered concepts of symbolic capital (Doherty & Dickmann, 2009), modes of engagement (Al Ariss, 2010; Richardson, 2009) and various kinds of scholastic, social, cultural, economic, internal and external capital (Al Ariss & Syed, 2011; Altman & Baruch, 2012; Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014).

Expatriate assignments differ from self-initiated assignments (Al Ariss, 2010; Andresen et al., 2013; Doherty et al., 2013a) thus, it is important to also explore the development of career competencies within the self-initiated context. To date, there is limited literature on career capital arising from SIE (Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen, & Bolino, 2012) even though SIE is recognised increasingly as a potentially important resource in the international economy (Doherty et al., 2011), indicating a significant gap in this area of research (Jokinen et al., 2008). What research there is has focused on professionals and managers, who anticipate career development and advantage from the SIE (Richardson & Mallon, 2005; Tharenou, 2010b), as do organisational expatriates, who view the psychological contract as an implicit promise of monetary and career advantage (Doherty & Dickmann, 2009).

The majority of the extant SIE research on expatriate development confirms the development of career competencies and consequent career capital and while it is argued that career development generally results from SIE experiences Rodriguez and Scurry (2013) offer a contrary perspective. They suggest that in some specific and highly regulated contexts such as in Qatar, there is little evidence to suggest that career development results from SIE. Thus context is important when exploring outcomes of the SIE experience especially given the diversity of the various SIE subgroups (Al Ariss, 2010; Andresen & Gustschin, 2013; Doherty et al., 2013a).

While Shaffer et al. (2012) acknowledge that research on the development of career competencies and capital is limited, the subject has received more attention recently (Al Ariss, 2010; Doherty & Dickman, 2013; Doherty et al., 2013b; Richardson, McKenna &

Dickie, 2014; Thorn, Yao & Arrowsmith, 2013). In contrast there appears to be very limited discussion on aspects of personal development that may have resulted from personal or non-work experiences despite the fact that the literature on expatriate motivations suggests that personal reasons are of greater relevance for the self-initiated expatriate than for the assigned expatriate (Andresen et al., 2013). Inkson and Thorn (2010) suggest that non-work SIE experiences impact on an individual's career and use the term individual capital. Bossard and Peterson (2005) identify work as a vehicle for personal development. Similarly Fee and Gray (2011, p. 532) suggest personal development, encompassing "self-confidence, resilience and ethical values," as an outcome of a volunteer SIE while Jokinen et al. (2008) argue that SIE has a strong impact on personal growth (Shaffer et al., 2012) which Jokinen et al. (2008) identify as the internal career. Hudson and Inkson (2006) identify self-development, as do Scurry, Rodriguez & Bailouni (2013) while Doherty and Dickman (2009) suggest that international assignments create a positive context for individual development. While the terms 'career', 'career competencies' and 'career capital' are universally understood and suggest a direct developmental outcome from career/work experiences, other terms such as personal development, personal growth, individual development and self-development are less explored. These 'personal' terms do not specifically relate to personal or non-work-related experiences and consequent personal development. Instead they suggest a broader or more holistic 'development' which is generally attributed to the overall SIE experience which privileges work and career outcomes over personal and more holistic individual motivations, experiences and outcomes.

Given the recent increase in the literature on career development resulting from the SIE experience, there has been a very limited exploration of long-term personal and career development effected by SIE. Drawing on current SIE research, it is suggested that living and working outside of one's own country effects long-term learning and development that impacts on career direction and opportunity (Doherty & Dickman, 2009; Richardson & Mallon, 2005). The suggestion of a long-term career impact is also reflected in the international volunteer literature (McBride et al., 2012) and although Hudson and Inkson (2006) identify learning and individual transformation, suggesting a longer term impact on the individual, the SIE literature and the related international volunteer literature give limited cognisance to the impact of SIE on longer term career and life-path direction.

Conclusion

Despite the increase of interest in SIE research, there is still a limited understanding of gender (Doherty & Thorn, 2014), age (McBride et al., 2012) and the nature of the actual SIE experience. Women comprise approximately 50% of SIEs (Tharenou, 2014) and appear to be developing career capital and work opportunities abroad that are generally not available in their home country. However based on evidence by Tharenou (2014) they still face 'glass ceiling' type limitations during their SIEs and lag behind men in the international promotional stakes (Richardson et al., 2014). Age is also under-researched. In their study on the impact of international service on volunteers, McBride et al. (2012) suggest that "Age, for example, is negatively associated with internationally related career intentions…older adults volunteers are often more interested in applying their occupational skills and expertise than developing them" (p. 6). This suggests that motivations and the development of career capital resulting from an 'older' (volunteer) SIE may not be consistent with mainstream SIE literature which has a predominant focus on professional and managerial expatriates in a more corporate and organisational environment. As international careers become increasingly diverse (Brewster et al., 2014; Inkson & Thorn, 2010; Myers 2011) SIE research needs to take into account the range of the various SIE subgroups (Al Ariss, 2010; Andresen & Gustschin, 2013; Doherty et al., 2013a) and consider the motivations, experiences, outcomes and longer term impacts of SIE in a broader context, as intersections of age and gender appear to be under-researched in the extant literature.

Chapter 3: Literature Review. Population Ageing and the Older Worker

"Age is opportunity no less,
Than youth itself, though in another dress,
And as the evening twilight fades away,
The sky is filled with stars, invisible by day."

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

Introduction

This chapter explores literature relevant to understanding the motivations, experiences and development of older women undertaking an SIE. Firstly, the literature on population ageing is outlined, identifying key demographic and labour market changes and trends. In particular, the literature highlights population ageing as a significant international issue and one of key concern for Organisation for Economic and Cultural Development (OECD) nations.

The second section discusses older worker definitional issues, examining the challenges of inconsistent and differentially constructed perceptions of who is an older worker. Following on from this is an exploration of the labour market participation rates of older workers, with an emphasis on factors that influence participation or withdrawal. Increasing levels of women's labour market participation, especially in New Zealand, and the gap between government employment policy and employer enactment of these policies, is also part of the discussion. This section concludes with some conjecture about possible disadvantage that older women may experience in the labour market.

The concept of productive, active ageing and successful ageing is considered next, as it is an integral part of the older worker issue within the context of an ageing population. These concepts are outlined at a theoretical level and then critiqued. The critique focuses on the argument that work, extended careers and economic growth, are privileged at the expense of a more holistic lifestyle. The changing nature of retirement and how retirement became established as a specific life stage is then discussed. The lack of gender in the retirement discourse is also noted.

The literature on adult development, life-span and transition is next explored. This section discusses a range of theories, drawing on both life-stage and life-course concepts to capture the individual development, transition and change of each participant throughout her life. Finally, literature on aspects of personal meaning and wellbeing is briefly

reviewed. The chapter concludes with a discussion on the limitations of older worker, positive ageing and retirement literatures as a framework to understand the SIE phenomenon at an individual and collective level.

Demographic and labour market changes and the older worker

Population ageing has by default become the term used to denote significant demographic transition issues (Dunstan & Thomson, 2006; Equal Employment Opportunities Trust [EEO Trust], 2012b). Changes from high fertility and mortality rates to relatively lower fertility and mortality rates impacts on the ratio of younger to older persons and has significant health, economic and social implications. Research on demographic changes in the advanced industrial nations suggests that increasing life expectancy rates and declining birth rates will reduce the supply of labour over the next two decades as baby boomers exit the labour market (Alpass & Mortimer, 2007; Loretto & White, 2006; Tikkanen, 2008; Phillipson, 2013).

Although population ageing is a phenomenon of developed and developing nations, the economic, social and cultural context of individual nations are unique. OECD countries vary considerably in projections of population ageing and labour market participation rates of older workers. While nations such as Denmark have moderate population ageing ratios and low labour market participation rates for older workers, others such as Spain have a high population ageing ratio and high labour market participation rates for older workers (Alpass & Mortimer, 2007). As these findings were documented before the GFC, it is likely that patterns of labour market participation rates for older workers have declined or further changed in some way (Henkens, Remery, & Schippers, 2008).

At the turn of the century, it was predicted that the European Union (EU) would experience a declining number of people in the labour market, particularly after 2010, although the extent of this was expected to vary across individual countries. It was suggested that approximately half of the EU countries would experience a significant decline around 2015 (De Jong & Edding, 2000). Public policy was devised in the 1980s and 1990s to address high unemployment levels and to encourage early retirement in favour of younger workers in countries such as Belgium, France and Germany. These initiatives additionally contributed to a shrinking labour market and a high-level of unused capacity for employment among older people (Taylor, 2003).

As the dynamics of the ageing population and the economic implications of supporting those in early retirement became better understood by the international community,

extending the working lives of older workers became a renewed matter of public policy (OECD, 2011, 2006). Various EU and individual country initiatives discussed at the Lisbon and Stockholm summits resulted in measures to increase overall labour market participation rates as well as participation rates for older workers (Buyens, Van Dijk, Dewilde, & De Vos, 2009; Nilsson, Hydbom, & Rylander, 2011). As a consequence, between 1995 and 2011, older male labour market participation rates in Germany increased from approximately 52% to 71%, in France from 41% to 47% and in the Netherlands from 41% to 68% (Phillipson, 2013).

In the United Kingdom (UK), labour market participation rates for the older worker also declined in the 1980s and 1990s, and then an increase began in the early years of the 21st century (Whiting, 2005). The UK government developed a number of programmes to extend working lives. These projects were initially conceived to address concerns such as the UK's failure to reach EU employment targets and the need to address the dependency and poverty issues that arise from an early exit from the labour market (Vickerstaff, Cox, & Keen, 2003; OECD, 2006). By 2013, 71% of the working-age population was in employment (OECD, 2014), with older workers comprising just over 25% of this UK workforce, and predicted to rise to approximately 30% by 2020 (Department for Work and Pensions [DWP], 2013). Meanwhile, government policy continues to encourage employers to engage older workers to address concerns that the UK is "running out of workers" (Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development [CIPD], 2012, p. 4).

In the United States (US), the median age of labour market participants is slowly increasing (Rix, 2004), although by 2013 the labour market participation rate of older persons was 60%, markedly less than New Zealand's rate of 74% (OECD, 2014). However, between 2000 and 2012, the proportion of older workers in the total US workforce increased from 13% to 20%, mirroring trends in other OECD nations (Schultz & Wang, 2011). Canada has a more rapidly ageing population. In 2012, 46% of the post-1945 population cohort was close to or already in retirement. Although the overall employment participation rates for Canadian older workers were similar to the US, at approximately 60% (OECD, 2014), the labour market participation rates of older Canadian men and women tracked differentially towards the turn of the last century. Between 1976 and 2001, men's (55 to 64 years) labour market participation rates declined approximately 15%, while women (55 to 64 years) increased their participation rates by approximately 10% (Human Resources Development Canada, 2002). More recent research (National Seniors Council 2011, 2013) suggests an overall increase in labour

market participation rates compared with the 1990s and an expected continuation of this trend.

Australia is also facing the challenges of population ageing. It is predicted that by 2050 one-quarter of the population will be 65 years plus and might expect to live another 25 years (Productivity Commission, 2013). The impact of population ageing on future labour market participation rates has been the subject of several research projects commissioned by the Australian Government (Drew & Drew, 2005). The Intergenerational Reports, the Commonwealth Treasury Report (Gruen & Garbutt, 2003) and the Productivity Commission (2005, 2013) note the continued trend towards early retirement by older workers at a time when employers face a worsening skills shortage. While labour market participation rates of older women workers have grown, they are less than other advanced industrialised nations (Encel, 2003) and in 2013, the overall labour market participation rate for older persons was 61.5% (OECD, 2014).

However, in most OECD countries, older worker labour market participation rates were greater in 2008 than in the 1970s (OECD, 2011). In the majority of situations, participation rates declined from the 1970s and then rose steadily over the past 10 years, although the GFC has impacted on this trend. New Zealand is one of four countries whose older worker participation rates have increased significantly, alongside Iceland, Germany and the Netherlands, while France, Greece, Hungary, Poland and Turkey have rates that are less than those registered in 1970. Older women's increasing workforce participation rates account for a large part of these overall increasing participation rates, although only 50% of women are economically active compared with approximately 78% of men within OECD countries (OECD, 2011).

Population ageing in the New Zealand context

Although the situation in New Zealand is similar in terms of demographic trends, population ageing is occurring at a slightly slower rate than in Europe and current labour market participation rates of older workers, particularly in the older age cohorts, are generally at the higher end of OECD statistics. Between 2004 and 2051, New Zealand's population is predicted to increase by one million people, and by 2051, 50% of the population will be 46 years plus (Alpass & Mortimer, 2007) and 1.37 million will be classified as older (MSD, 2013). By 2061, it is predicted that the New Zealand female population will comprise three similarly sized groups: 15 to 39, 40 to 64 and 65 years plus (Callister, 2014). In the 2013 New Zealand population census the median age was

38 although the median age of females at 38.9 years was higher than the male median age of 36.9 years (Statistics New Zealand, 2013). The number of older people is also rising (Statistics New Zealand, 2013) showing that in 2006 older people comprised 20.2% of the population, increasing to 23.3% of the population in 2013.

In terms of labour market participation rates, it is projected that the 2011 older worker participation rate of 19% will increase to 25% by 2016, and then to 31% 10 years later (MSD, 2013) Since the turn of the century, labour market participation rates for older men and women in New Zealand aged 65 years plus have steadily increased. Participation rates for women have increased to a greater extent, from 2% in the mid-1990s to 15% in 2014, while men's participation rates have increased from 8% to approximately 25% (Callister, 2014). It is expected that women's participation rates will continue to increase at a greater rate than men's, partly due to women's longer life expectancy. Of note, though, is that while female participation rates have incrementally risen, especially in the older (50 plus years) age cohort, they still remain lower than male participation rates, but are at the upper end of the OECD (Dunstan & Thomson, 2006; MSD, 2013; OECD, 2011).

There are also some factors unique to New Zealand that impact on these patterns. New Zealand's slower growing and rapidly ageing population raises issues such as predictions of a labour shortage and a shortage of 'skilled' labour, particularly in some of the industries and professions where there is a high median age (EEO Trust, 2009). By 2021, 50% of the population will be 40 plus years, including 17% in the 65 plus years age cohort. Twenty-two per cent of these will be European, 9% Asian, 8% Maori and 6% Pacific peoples. Population trends are impacted further by the differential birth rates among these ethnic groups as well as continued adult immigration (Davey, 2006b; EEO Trust, 2012b).

Additional contextual factors go some way to explaining the higher New Zealand labour market participation rates of older men and women when compared with other OECD nations. Public policy changes in superannuation (increasing eligibility to 65 years), the removal of compulsory retirement and changes to the Human Rights Act outlawing age-based discrimination have encouraged continued workforce participation. Nevertheless, the fact that New Zealand has a large population ageing ratio and less than desirable labour market participation rates for older workers suggests significant labour market and policy challenges (Alpass & Mortimer, 2007).

In the New Zealand context, increasing immigration, increasing fertility and increasing under-represented groups' labour force participation have been identified as strategies to address these issues (Davey, 2006b; Drake International, 2005). Increasing fertility is not considered a realistic strategy given the impact on women's paid work participation and increasing pressure on family resources. New Zealand women are on average having fewer children with an average age of 28 years for having a first child (Statistics New Zealand, 2012). This later age also impacts on fertility and IVF (in-vitro fertilisation) rates. As women delay having their first child, fertility issues are identified later. In New Zealand the average age for seeking IVF treatment is 37 years (Peek, 2006).

Immigration is a more feasible strategy. However, it is not without issues as New Zealand must compete in a global talent pool for appropriate immigrants and these successful adult immigrants also contribute to the levels of population ageing and associated challenges. Increasing the labour force presence of under-represented groups such as youth and prime-age women (25–54) is considered a more viable strategy, although Davey (2006b) suggests a range of approaches may be advisable in that it creates benefits for the workers, employers and society (Alpass & Mortimer, 2007).

Who is an older worker?

Shacklock (2008) suggests that defining the age at which one becomes an older worker is problematic given that age is socially and contextually determined by the perceptions of the individual, the organisation and society. Arber and Ginn (1995) highlight three aspects of age. Chronological age is identified as a 19th-century phenomenon represented by such things as the birthday card, wedding anniversaries and years of service recognition. Social age is evident when feelings and development are benchmarked against established chronological measures and associated expectations of social behaviour, for example, to feel older than one's age. Physiological age is a biomedical construct that draws on the ageing process as a standard of measurement. Hence, comments such as 'he has the body of a 30 year old' suggest a physiological perspective in contrast to 'he acts like a 30 year old', which reflects a behaviourally constructed perspective.

Thus, a literature review on issues relevant to older persons and older workers inevitably raises definitional issues of who is an older worker because ageing and being older is not simply determined by biological, chronological or physiological measures. Perceptions

are shaped additionally by sociological and historical contexts (Ryan, 2005). The following section explores various older worker thresholds reflecting the perspectives of;

- society and institutions

- the organisation

- the individual.

A later section reviewing life and adult development literature will further explore notions of age in relation to pre-defined life stages.

Societal and institutional perspectives

The OECD definition of an older worker is 55 years (OECD, 2014). Other research sets 50 as the baseline age and suggests some flexibility in the definition of who is an older worker (Alpass & Mortimer, 2007; White, 2012). In the UK, there appears to be an emerging consensus that 50 plus defines the age of the older worker (Loretto & Vickerstaff, 2013). The Joseph Rowntree Foundation research programme on the older worker is called Transitions after 50 (Hirsch, 2003), while the DWP research evaluations of the New Deal 50 + programmes (Atkinson & Dewson, 2001) implicitly sets 50 years as the lower age threshold for the older worker.

The Australian Department of Employment and Workplace Relations has identified workers aged 45 plus as older workers, arguing that these workers face disadvantage in finding employment (Shacklock, 2008). The Australian Bureau of Statistics classifies workers aged 45 years and over as mature workers. However, the age thresholds of 50 and 55 years are also used for various employment assistance programmes for the older worker (http://www.deewr.gov.au/employment/jsa/jobseekersupport/pages/over50.aspx). Mountford (2013) suggests that those born between 1946 and 1964 are older workers. Thus, the age of 50 plus is generally viewed as the beginning of the older worker cohort.

The New Zealand Department of Labour does not stipulate a specific older worker age threshold. The department's 45 Plus research project overviewing research on careers and related matters for unemployed mature workers implies that 45 is the age that one becomes an older worker (Department of Labour, 2006). A discussion paper (Alpass & Mortimer, 2007) on the ageing workforce and ageing occupations suggests a range of thresholds. The department also produces an annual report on older workers focusing on labour market changes and prospects for New Zealanders aged 55 years and over. In contrast, a report on older workers (McGregor, 2007) examining employment changes

for 50 to 64 year olds over the previous 15 years identifies 50 as the lower threshold for defining an older worker, as does Callister (2014) and the OCG (2013) report on the ageing workforce in New Zealand. Statistics New Zealand use the term mature worker rather than older worker in their labour market census projections, identifying an age range of 45 to 65 years. In a discussion on increasing labour market participation by under-represented groups, Davey (2006b) refers to prime-age women as 24 to 54 years and, by default, older workers as 55 years plus.

The organisational perspective

The organisational perspective on older worker thresholds further reflects a lack of definitional consistency. New Zealand employers consider a worker older at 50 (EEO Trust, 2006) to 55 years (EEO Trust, 2012a), whereas Australian employers consider 55 to be the benchmark for an older worker (Steinberg, Walley, Tyman, & Donald, 1998). Professional sectors also set thresholds for older worker status that are at variance with other professions and official policy. In New Zealand, there are serious concerns about the advanced ageing of some professions. The public service sector, tertiary teaching, general practitioners, nurses and midwives have been identified as having high median ages. In contrast, the median age in sectors such as advertising and hospitality is significantly younger (Alpass & Mortimer, 2007; EEO Trust, 2009).

The individual perspective

An individual's perception of who is an older worker is no less confusing. When individuals are questioned about the age one becomes an older worker, they may answer 45 or 55. When questioned about whether they are an older worker, the answer may be quite different. For example, they may perceive themselves to be as productive and effective as a younger worker or deny they are an older worker (Myers, 2001). The term older worker appears to be an outcome of how individuals compare themselves to others and is constructed in a broader cultural and social context (Arber & Ginn, 1995; Moore, 2009; Shacklock, 2008).

Defining older person and older worker thresholds identifies an extended range embracing the years from 40 to 65 plus, although the benchmark ages of 50 and 55 plus years appear to be more common. A number of challenges arise from this. For example, policies such as retraining, retirement and flexible work may have very different meanings for a 40 year old compared with for a 60 year old. It is likely that issues

pertaining to health, leisure, career development and superannuation will also have different meanings for the various age cohorts (Tikkanen, 2008, 2011).

Older workers and labour market participation: Factors that influence participation or withdrawal

Although labour market participation rates are generally increasing for older women (Callister, 2014; OECD, 2011, 2014), OECD (2011) figures also confirm that 50% of older women are not engaged in paid work. There are many situations that influence extended labour market participation or withdrawal and the following section considers a range of push and pull factors, including various stereotypes and discriminatory practices that impact on the decisions of older persons to continue to work or not. Push factors are negative circumstances that disengage or drive one out of a particular work situation. In contrast, a pull factor is a more positive or supportive attribute, circumstance or practice that encourages the older person to either stay or leave the workforce (Mountford, 2013; Shultz et al., 1998).

There are a range of factors that push the older worker out of the workforce. The EEO Trust (2006) identified financial circumstances as a significant reason for staying or leaving the workforce. Inflexible work situations, lack of job opportunities and (for women especially) the intention of partners and family-related caregiving responsibilities were key push factors. In contrast, opportunities to work part-time and have flexible hours were significant pull factors. Extended leave, higher pay, working from home, the opportunity to have interesting and challenging work, job redesign, being needed and valued, and experiencing reduced stress were identified as the key pull factors that would encourage older women to continue workforce participation (EEO Trust, 2006, 2008a).

The dominant discourse on the older worker is that employers will increasingly seek to employ older workers to address labour and skill shortages (CIPD, 2012; Dychtwald, Erickson, & Morison, 2004; Inkson et al., 2013b). Yet in a joint EEO Trust and New Zealand Work Research Institute study on the ageing workforce it is suggested that government policy makers are driving this discourse to a greater extent than business leaders and employers (New Zealand Work Research Institute [NZWRI], 2015; OCG, 2013). In fact, employers often perceive the older worker in a negative light, thus reinforcing stereotypes of older workers as less productive and more expensive than younger workers (Taylor & Walker, 2003). In a New Zealand EEO Trust (2012a) report on older worker myths and realities, the author calls on employers and government to work together on this issue, pointing to the

false assumptions and stereotypes about their performance….the most pernicious of these is that older workers cost more, are more prone to health problems, can't adapt to workplace changes and new technology, perform more poorly than younger workers, and represent a poor investment in training. (p. 6)

A study by McGregor and Gray (2002) found that older workers themselves perceived a decline in their effectiveness and efficiency. This is despite research suggesting there is a greater variation in levels of effective performance within age cohorts than between them (Warr, 1994) and that older workers are generally as effective as younger workers, and although they may be less strong and fast in their activities, they bring the advantages of wide experience and expertise (Callanan & Greenhaus, 2008; Davy, 2006b).

Older workers are sometimes perceived by employers and other workers to be inflexible and unable to adapt to new technology and changing job roles. International research argues that older workers learn as effectively as other age cohorts, provided the training is delivered in an appropriate context and linked to existing skills and experience (Maurer et al., 2008). Yet employer attitudes towards older workers may mean that they are sometimes excluded or have reduced access to training and development (Davey, 2006b), even when they have specifically expressed an interest in training (Taylor & Unwin, 2001).

Older workers may be viewed by employers as posing a higher health risk in the workplace and having higher levels of absenteeism than younger workers, despite research evidence to the contrary (EEO Trust, 2012a; Turner, 2000). High salaries earned by older workers through longer labour market experience are also seen as a major obstacle by employers, despite the increasing prevalence of performance-based remuneration (Hofacker, 2010; Patrickson & Hartman, 1995).

Although there are arguments identifying older workers as a viable source of labour, it appears that, even when stereotypes can be proven wrong (Maurer et al., 2008), the attitudes of some employers reinforce negative stereotyping of older workers as a homogenous group. Older workers are often the first target in organisation restructuring (Dorn & Souza-Posa, 2010; Lyon, Hallier, & Glover, 1998), sometimes with the implicit approval of unions. When faced with such practices, the older worker may prefer to withdraw or retire rather than be made redundant (Loretto & White, 2006; Taylor & Walker, 1997).

McGregor and Gray (2001) suggest that the true extent of discriminatory employment practices against older workers remains under-researched. Others go as far as to say that, when faced with the imperative of drawing on older workers, employers will not consider

them (Henkens et al., 2008). More recently, in New Zealand, it was suggested that increased labour market participation levels for older workers (and especially those of women) reflected employer expediency in a strong pre-GFC labour market rather than a fundamental change in employer attitude (Davy, 2006b). In contrast, EEO Trust (2009) research suggests that, although some employers retain negative attitudes to older workers, many are generally favourably disposed to older workers. Although the labour market participation rates are increasing for older workers, particularly older women, it seems likely that this is due to government policy initiatives relating to pension and retirement ages, rather than to employer initiatives. It is clear that at the organisational level most employers acknowledge the issue, but little is being done in terms of organisational policy and practice (NZWRI, 2015; Inkson et al., 2013b). Few organisations are actively planning to recruit older workers (NZWRI, 2014; Pitt-Catsouphes, Sweet, Lynch, & Whalley, 2009), despite the 2012 EEO Trust report that encourages employers to develop a business case approach to the employment of older workers.

Given the increasing numbers of women participating in the labour market, many of whom are working part-time (Callister, 2014) and the changes in government policy discouraging workforce withdrawal before the age of 65, it is likely that older workers, especially women, might participate in the labour market more, if the reality of organisational policy and practice were to match the rhetoric of government policy. This possibility raises additional questions that go beyond labour market trends and statistics. Considering the lack of preparedness of many employers, it is conceivable that older workers already in the labour market may experience discrimination or may not be managed appropriately. It is conceivable that older people who are not in the labour market may be experiencing employer reluctance to recruit older workers (Loretto & White, 2006), or cannot find appropriate or meaningful work, yet they do not have access to a government pension until 65 years. Considering the gendered life experience of women (Loretto & Vickerstaff, 2013, 2015), it is likely that women may be disadvantaged by a lack of employer readiness to recruit, retain and engage older workers in the labour market, despite their increasing levels of participation. Thus, any discussion on older workers, especially older women, needs to look beyond labour market participation statistics and trends, and consider other attitudinal and structural factors.

Positive ageing

The concept of productive or active ageing, that is, continued activity contributing to positive outcomes (Everard et al., 2000), has become an integral part of the older worker issue within the context of an ageing population. Ageing literature draws on a number of paradigms. Positive ageing is grounded in social and economic policy literature (Everard et al., 2000), and although individual activity and productivity is part of this discourse, positive ageing denotes a macro policy perspective whereby government social and economic policy delivers successful outcomes at a societal as well as an individual level.

Successful ageing (Bowling & Dieppe, 2005; Lamb, 2014) is a model of how to age well and differs from the positive ageing paradigm in that it focuses on

> individual agency and control; maintaining productive activity; the value of independence and importance of avoiding dependence; and permanent personhood, a vision of the ideal person as not really aging at all in late life, but rather maintaining the self of one's earlier years (Lamb, 2014, p. 41).

Although the following discussion focuses primarily on positive ageing, it is difficult to separate it from successful ageing, or from the term active ageing (Moulert & Biggs, 2013), referring to a third age of life when one is released from the obligations of paid work to pursue personal challenges and development opportunities (Wahrendorf & Siegrist, 2010). Eckerdt (2004) referred to this as "adulthood's great project of deferred gratification" (p. 3).

In the early stages of the ageing population debate, the OECD (1998) led the international discussions suggesting a holistic approach that integrates social and economic policies. Productive ageing literature argues that social, economic and employment policy must provide a more inclusive framework (Sonnet, Olsen, & Manfredi, 2014) that supports the wellbeing of the older citizen or older worker, thus facilitating contribution "in the ways that they choose" (Davy & Glasgow, 2006, p. 24), rather than dependence, in later years (Morrow-Howell, 2000; OECD, 2006).

Nevertheless, demographic change and population ageing has been problematised and perceived as a challenge rather than an opportunity (OECD, 2006). The New Zealand government's policy on positive ageing emphasises "independence, self-reliance and individual responsibility" (Davey & Glasgow, 2006, p. 25). This is a reflection of neoliberalism, where privatisation and 'user pay' policies established an individualised and competitively driven society in New Zealand in the late 20th century. While the discourse of positive ageing argues that older people may choose the way in which they

contribute, the positive ageing strategy has been critiqued in that it overemphasises work, extended careers and economic growth at the expense of a more holistic lifestyle. Positive ageing has also been critiqued in that much of the emphasis has been on reforming or delaying pension ages therefore delaying retirement (Phillipson, 2013). There has been limited policy action in other areas, especially at employer and organisational levels to improve the quality of work (NZWRI, 2014). These areas were identified as important to encourage older workers to stay or return to the workforce (OECD, 2006; Sonnet et al., 2014).

Positive ageing exhorts individuals to be responsible for their own health, independence and wellbeing. Successful ageing also reflects this concept of individual responsibility (van Dyke, 2014). Further critique of these neoliberal policies suggests a win-lose approach whereby older persons who are employed, healthy and independent are successful and those who are not employed, not healthy and not independent are not successful. Yet research suggests that as people age they follow increasingly diverse pathways (van der Heijden et al., 2008) and for some this may mean ill health, dependency or unemployment.

Although the OECD (1998) argued for integrative social and economic policies, for most OECD nations (including New Zealand), economic policy dominates the positive ageing discourse, with social policy reduced (Davy & Glasgow, 2006). Labour market participation has become by default a badge of honour for the older worker and those who cannot work or are sick are at risk of being labelled dependent and unsuccessful. Those who do not need to work because of the accumulation of wealth and assets are, in contrast, perceived as independent and self-reliant, the cornerstones of the positive and successful ageing discourse.

Although positive, productive, active and successful ageing are major policy initiatives across OECD countries, the work-centric aspect of policy implementation has privileged notions of 'working longer', 'extended careers' and 'permanent personhood' (Lamb, 2014) over other types of productivity, activity and ways of being within the ageing process. Without integrated social, economic and employment policies that accommodate difference and diversity in older age, older people who do not conform to the neoliberal discourse of economic rationality and growth will be further disadvantaged (Moulaert & Biggs, 2013).

Retirement

The concept of retirement has its origins in the late 19th century and became embedded into social and economic policy after the Second World War. Sargent et al. (2013) argue that retirement became a distinctive life stage for the first time at that point through age-based pensions and state retirement ages. Previously, older people's lives evolved out of their younger and mid-life experiences and adjustments were made as physical and mental abilities changed or declined. Sargent et al. (2013) provide a detailed discussion of the institutionalisation of retirement throughout the 20th century, also stating that by the 1960s women also experienced this life stage, albeit in a different patterning of activities and responsibilities.

Initial studies on retirement were generally drawn from the US and the UK and were often of limited relevance to the economic and social policies of New Zealand and other parts of the world (van der Heijden et al., 2008). Early retirement and older worker literature tended to be dichotomous in nature in that the decision to 'work' or to 'retire' was framed as a linear, discrete and work-centric process. Retirement was depicted as a 'giving up', suggesting that decisions had been made and an end point reached.

In light of the demographic changes discussed earlier in this chapter (Lewis & Ryan, 2014) and higher levels of education achieved across the population (Sargent et al., 2013), the social and economic context of OECD countries changed dramatically in the latter part of the 20th century, resulting in the formulation of government policy to retain older people in the labour market beyond the traditional retirement age. Since then, the notion of retirement has been researched and framed from a range of perspectives, but as with the positive ageing strategy, the economic aspect has been dominant (Inkson et al., 2013b; Moulaert & Biggs, 2013; Richardson, 1993) concomitantly the social context has been given less visibility, despite the World Health Organization advocating for a more holistic lifestyle strategy for individuals of an older age (Post et al., 2013).

Schultz and Wang (2011), in their review of the retirement literature, suggest that in the past 20 years retirement has been conceptualised in four domains: a decision-making process, an adjustment process, a career development stage or part of human resource management strategy. Thus, contemporary retirement theory is less linear, recognising that retirement is "often a messy and disrupted process" (Loretto & Vickerstaff, 2013, p. 65; Schultz & Wang, 2011), and that current unfolding retirement patterns are complex and diverse (Han & Moen, 1999; Inkson et al., 2013b; O'Rand & Henretta, 1999).

In the New Zealand context, McGregor (2007) suggests that an individual's intention to retire does not necessarily match the same individual's actual retirement date and circumstances. Davey (2006b) suggests that older workers are a valuable resource if they can be coaxed to return to employment in greater numbers and to stay longer in the workforce. Yet we know very little about individual older workers, the reasons they withdraw from the labour market, why they embark on new ventures, and whether they are actually interested in an extended working life.

Gender and retirement

It is argued that gender has been neglected in retirement studies (Loretto & Vickerstaff, 2013; Schultz & Wang, 2011) and what research there is, is compromised by benchmarking women's retirement patterns to those of men (Wong & Hardy, 2009). Post et al. (2013) suggest that there are three theoretical frameworks to consider when examining older women's retirement decisions: "the relational emphasis in women's careers, women's caregiving roles, and structural and economic constraints that diminish women's earnings" (p. 92).

Loretto and Vickerstaff (2013) posit that "retirement may mean very different things for women and for men" (p. 65), and in their most recent article they continue to emphasise that gender and age are "underexplored" and "under-theorized" (Loretto & Vickerstaff, 2015, p. 14). These authors further note that because of the relational aspect of women's work roles, it is possible that in retirement women seek roles that they feel they missed out on while they were in paid work. As increasing numbers of older women continue in labour market participation as well as continue in their domestic roles and engagement in unpaid work, they are likely to experience greater work–life imbalance and disadvantage (Moen, 1996).

Adult development and the life-span

An alternative perspective on individual older women undertaking SIE may be found in life-span theory, which explores aspects of adult development, transition, personal meaning and wellbeing, and intersections with ageing. Since the 1950s, researchers in the social sciences and psychology have identified that the adult years are a time of continued development and change (McAdams et al., 2001). Life-stage theory suggests that individual lives pass through specific stages (Erikson, 1968; Levinson et al., 1978; Super, 1957), whereas life-course theory draws primarily on the historical and social contexts of developmental stages as well as individual and cohort differences and experiences

(Harrington Meyer, 2014; Moen, 1996). Regardless of whether researchers adopt a 'stages' or 'contextual' perspective (Kim & Moen, 2002), life-span theory draws on both and recognises life milestones such as marriage in early adulthood and retirement in later adulthood and offers a broader and less 'work-centric' perspective on the older adult.

One of the earliest voices in the development debate from a 'psychology' perspective was Jung (1964), who suggested that personality development does not continue beyond adolescent and early adulthood stages, and that the middle and later years of adulthood become a time of increasing self-focus and introspection. Van Gennep (1960) however, considered the change from one stage to another taking into account societal and cultural context, arguing that the ceremonial 'rites of passage' that accompany this transition denote and legitimise the development and change.

Super's (1957, 1980) stages of development point to a progression through four phases: exploration, establishment, maintenance and decline and suggests that the four phases comprise a single cycle that may be turned several times. In this respect, Super's theory is more fluid than linear age-stage models of development.

One of the most influential developmental theorists in the second half of the 20th century, Erikson (1950), adopted the life-course perspective, emphasising life history and biography but he also drew on the concept of stages in the life-cycle. Fundamental to Erikson's research is an exploration of how the self engages with the external world and, in contrast to Jung, the notion that development continues beyond the years of childhood. Erikson suggests that there are eight ego stages throughout the life-course and that identity development precedes the formation of relationships in the early stages, whereas the last two stages, 'generativity versus stagnation' and 'integrity versus despair', are most relevant to older adults. During the 'generativity versus stagnation' stage of adulthood, Erikson suggests the focus is on the care of others. While parenthood is core to this stage, Erikson points to other generative roles for older adults, such as an effective employee, mentor and guide for the next generation. Without altruism, Erikson argues that the older adult becomes self-absorbed and developmentally stagnant. The final ego stage of 'integrity versus despair' centres on the process of older adults looking back on their lives and searching for meaning.

Levinson and Levinson (1996) looked to the work of historian-philosopher Gassett, who explored the experience and nature of five different generational cohorts that were shaped within a specific and unique point in history in his book *Man and Crisis*, first published in 1933. Based on this premise, the experiences of a particular generation of older persons

may be different from a subsequent generation of older persons. Given an ever-changing historical and socio-economic context this approach is more akin to a 'life-course' rather than an 'age/stage' perspective. Levinson and Levinson (1996) also suggest that research on the life-course of the individual has been limited and more particularly, the evolution of women's lives in adulthood. They argue that the study of individuals must consider all the connections and relationships across the interpersonal, institutional, occupational and community spectrum and suggest that there are significant gender differences.

Carol Gilligan (1982) also suggests that life-cycle theorists have neglected the experiences and voices of females in their developmental trajectories. She argues that for females, attachment and interdependence are core to their way of being and, in contrast to Erikson, that relationships and intimacy precede the establishment of a stable identity. "Only when life-cycle theorists divide their attention and begin to live with women as they have lived with men will their vision encompass the experience of both sexes and their theories become correspondingly more fertile" (Gilligan, 1982, p. 23).

In the past decade, research on the life-course has emphasised dissimilarity and individualisation, thus challenging established age-specific 'life-stage' developmental pathways (Kooij, Jansen, Dikkers, & de Lange, 2014; MacMillan, 2005). Retirement patterns in particular are seen as increasingly heterogeneous (Han & Moen, 1999), a result of complex and competing individual contextual factors as well as macro-economic shocks and demographic changes (Phillipson, 2013). Under the broad reach of 'life-path research' a life-course approach appears to offer a more holistic and flexible framework than a life stage approach as it "emphasizes the long term implications of factors such as historical events, cohort differences, timing and sequencing of personal decisions, and structural opportunities" (Harrington Meyer, 2014, p. 19).

Transition

Mid-life and later life can often be a time for change and reflection. Kets de Vries (1999) suggests that there is no avoiding the conflicts and challenges of middle age and identifies three key areas of mid-life change: physiological changes, changes in social relations and changing perceptions of work. For some, the mid-life is a constructive experience when retrospective reflections lead to the development of future goals and aspirations. For many others, the mid-life transition is a less positive and destabilising experience and the consequent stress creates considerable psychological pain and unease.

Regardless of the level of stress one faces in the mid-life 'generativity versus stagnation' phase (Erikson, 1968), most people experience changes in the family, home, community and workplace, which sets in motion a process of evaluating personal and career aspirations and the reality of current achievements. Kets de Vries (1999) identifies a number of negative responses to the mid-life challenge, including withdrawal and isolation, dysfunctional and impulsive behaviour, premature elderliness and being routine bound. In contrast, he also identifies some more generative-type responses ranging from the development of new interests and work goals to "doing a Gauguin", that is, making a significant and dramatic change in one's life and career.

Thus, life transitions may lead to better or worse outcomes. McAdams and Bowman (2001) suggest that what may be experienced as a tragedy or loss may later be perceived as a catalyst for personal or professional growth, a process of redemption over contamination. The notion of generativity is central to the transition literature (Erikson, 1968; Kets de Vries, 1999) and identifies self-knowledge and self-awareness as cornerstones to navigate life through work (Savickas, 2007) and the mid-life 'turns in the road' (McAdams et al., 2001).

Personal meaning and wellbeing

The literature of personal meaning is underpinned by a general acceptance that achieving 'wellbeing' is more than just striving to achieve contentment or happiness. The literature on human potential and wellbeing encompasses two main streams. The hedonic approach considers happiness as an outcome of the pursuit of pleasure while the eudaimonic approach considers wellbeing in terms of the degrees of self-realisation and meaning that one derives from life (Ryan & Deci, 2001; Ryff & Singer, 2006). In the latter approach, one moves into a state of 'becoming' (Parse, 2007) during a period of transition and change, and becomes open to alternative life-path possibilities (Frazier, Hooker, Johnson, & Kaus, 2000; Muñoz Larroa, 2013). Thus, self-fulfilment is achieved, which leads to an authentic level of happiness, which in turn enables one to grow and flourish (Haybron, 2008; Laceulle & Baars, 2014).

Understanding what people feel is most meaningful in their lives has been conceptualised in a number of models and is integral to the life-span literature, with particular relevance to the experiences and challenges associated with life transitions. DeVogler and Ebersole (1980) theorise eight sources of meaning, Fiske and Chiriboga's research (1991) identifies seven life goals and a range of studies suggest that there are several levels of

meaning, the highest of which is abstract and transcending self-interest (Brandstätter, Baumann, Borisio, & Fegg, 2012). Studies on wellbeing (Kim & Moen, 2002; Ryff, 1998) explore the values and sources of meaning in life for older people and suggest that older women (and men) have a strong need to search for independence, strength and autonomy. It is also argued that older women often achieve a greater psychological wellbeing than their male counterparts (Alleyne, 2008; Zaninotto, Breeze, McMunn, & Nazroo, 2013) and higher levels of assertiveness, satisfaction, purpose and happiness than younger cohorts (The Economist, 2010).

Conclusion

The literature on older workers, retirement and positive ageing does not appear to provide a broad enough framework to explore the motivations, experiences and development of older women undertaking an SIE. At the time of the research interviews, labour market participation rates for women continued to increase and the dominant work discourse was one of continued workforce participation into older age. Older worker, retirement and positive ageing literatures are predominantly work-centric and privilege economic policy over an integrated social and economic policy framework. Although the literature acknowledges the individual paths that people follow as they age (van der Heijden et al., 2008) relevant studies have neglected a gendered perspective. Until recently, researchers have not explored whether older women's pathways may be different from older men's pathways (Loretto & Vickerstaff, 2013, 2015) and this research study seeks to address this gap in the literature.

In order to understand older people and more particularly these SIE participants, it is important to look outside work dimensions and neoliberal-shaped employment policy and discourse, and take a more holistic approach. Thus, it is paramount to consider a wider range of literatures, for example, adult development, transition, life stage and the life-course, ageing, gerontology, and happiness and wellbeing, "to take fuller account of the cultural, developmental, and social understandings of retirement if we are to better comprehend the diversity of meanings of retirement" (Sargent et al., 2013, p. 12; McVittie & Goodall, 2012).

The concept of retirement no longer seems to adequately capture the complexity of older peoples' lives. For some older people, such as the participants in this research, labour market withdrawal may be a more appropriate term in that the decision to retire has not been reached, so it is understandable that the traditional notion of retirement is coming

under increasing scrutiny (Dychtwald et al., 2004; Inkson et al., 2013b). Sargent et al. (2013) suggest the reinvention of retirement into two streams. The first stream deconstructs retirement and maintains a work-centric focus whereby individuals engage in various models of work. The other stream retains the notion of retirement but acknowledges that it is a fundamentally changed concept. While Sargent et al. (2013) discuss the multiple meanings of retirement (p. 12), Dychtwald et al. (2004) says "it's time to retire retirement" (p. 48). In order to understand older people and their changing identities, researchers need to also look at non-work-related activities (Moulaert & Biggs, 2013).

There is a nascent literature on a different 'way of being' for older persons that do not fit well with labels such as 'older worker' and 'retirement' and cannot be defined or unpacked within an economic paradigm. Currently, there is an emerging curiosity about new ways of conceptualising and theorising later life experiences in a social, political and economic context that is very different from a generation ago (Moulaert & Biggs, 2013). This research study also addresses these curiosities and central to this discussion is a critique of society's acceptance of work as the central premise of human endeavour (Weeks, 2011).

Chapter 4: Researching the Lives of Older Women

> We are the storytelling species. Storytelling is in our blood. We think in story form, speak in story form, and bring meaning to our lives through story. Our life stories connect us to our roots, give us direction, validate our own experience, and restore value to our lives. (Atkinson, 2007, p. 224)

Introduction

Qualitative research is an inherently unpredictable and complex process of interpretive practices (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011a). This chapter outlines the research process that informs this study on older New Zealand women who have undertaken an SIE. The chapter introduces aspects of epistemology, ontology and methodology that frame this research and identifies narrative inquiry as "both the method and phenomena of the study" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 5). Drawing on the life story method, this chapter discusses how a focus on the telling of a life story provides a holistic approach for the gathering of narratives, showing how individual lives and identities are constructed and facilitate self-understanding, sense making and generativity (Atkinson, 2007; Baddeley & Singer, 2007).

Any research framework includes ontology (fundamental beliefs about humankind and the construction of reality), epistemology (understanding what is knowledge and truth and the evidence drawn on to support it) and methodology (how one gains an understanding of the world) (Lincoln & Guba, 2005). The ontology of this study is premised on the view that the world is socially constructed and that we reframe our identity and perspective through our discussions, interactions and the stories we enact with others. This social context is one of ongoing transition, change and reciprocity of influence between the individual view and the world view, resulting in multiple realities evident through symbols, language, labels and routines (Morgan & Smircich, 1980). The qualitative interpretivist paradigm facilitates sense making of this interplay of forces and considers the meanings people attribute to life experiences, through the development of propositions, models and theoretical constructs.

The assumption that what is perceived as reality is a social construction suggests an epistemological position that recognises the open-endedness of knowledge. Thus, in my world view, which emphasises interpretivism, a subjectivist epistemology facilitates the recognition of shifting, revelatory and unknown phenomena and supports the incremental development and creation of knowledge and understanding during the research process (Grant & Giddings, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 2005).

This theoretical positioning is in contrast to the positivist epistemological perspective premised on the ontological assumption that reality is objective and concrete, and that knowledge is derived from determining correlational and causal relationships between relevant facts and behaviours (Gephart, 1999). The ontological assumption that the social world is concrete and that reality is external, fixed and real fosters an epistemological approach that emphasises the importance of studying the elements and relationships of closed structures. In this 'positivist' and 'objectivist' paradigm, knowledge is constructed from analyses and measurement of facts, and generally draws on the natural sciences using a range of methods. Thus, validity and reliability are achieved by the gathering of numerical data, and are appropriate within the ontological assumption that the world is a closed structure.

The ontological assumption that the world is open-ended and socially constructed is fundamental to this research study. Truth, or meaning, emerges and is made visible from engagement with multiple realities in changing contexts (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011a). Subjectivism is core to the research process and requires a methodology that is open and facilitates research within the processes of social change. Taking this epistemological approach, notions of reliability and validity considered appropriate in a quantitative and concrete context do not apply.

As the researcher, I adopt an interpretive and naturalistic approach to the research subject (Grant & Giddings, 2002; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). In a research process requiring a high-level of reflexivity, I study the phenomenon of older women relating their self-initiated experience, and I listen to their individual experiences and justifications that are part of the narrative. I interpret what I consider is valid, drawing on my own understanding and knowledge in a systematic process of sense making. I go beyond what the participants have to say and interpret the self-understandings of their individual experiences in ways the participants may not have previously considered (Grant & Giddings, 2002). Thus, truth or meaning is constructed from thought and understanding rather than from observation.

Methodology

> We live in, through, and out of narratives. They serve as an essential source of psycho-socio-cultural learning and shape who we are and might become. Thus, narratives are a portal through which a person enters the world; play a formative role in the development of the person; help guide action; and are a psycho-socio-cultural shared resource that constitutes and constructs human realities. (Smith & Sparkes, 2009, p. 3)

An interpretive paradigm recognises and accommodates multifaceted complexities. With a focus on the individual and the particular, interpretivism facilitates exploration and understanding of phenomena. The following section on methodology considers the emergence of a diverse range of research approaches within the framework of narrative inquiry (Lieblich et al., 1998), and explores many of the key complexities and tensions that mark the narrative turn of the past 30 years. In this discussion, I set out how specific narrative research approaches are pertinent to my research study.

Contemporary narrative research has its roots in the early 20th century, when stories were used to study human experience in history, anthropology, sociology and, in individual case studies, in psychology (Spector-Mersel, 2010). Despite the rise of biography in the Chicago school in the 1920s and 1930s, the use of biographical or storied methods was overshadowed by the positivist paradigm from the late 1940s. However, amid the social revolution and calls for individual freedom of the 1960s and 1970s, some researchers became frustrated with the positivist paradigm, arguing "the inability of quantitative methods to appreciate human experience" (Spector-Mersel, 2010, p. 207).

In the 1980s, a number of narrative accounts, drawing on historical and philosophical roots, gathered increasing respect and credibility for narrative inquiry. Bruner (1986, 1987) suggested narrative knowing as a medium for conceptualising thinking in a different way from the logical and rational thought processes of positivists. Taking a constructivist viewpoint, Bruner (1987) argued that narratives describe and convey the essence of lived time, drawing on memory that involves selection at conscious and unconscious levels in an iterative, reflexive and interpretive process. Sarbin (1986), embracing a world view of contextualism, suggested that narrative is a rich metaphor for sense making in the field of psychology. Polkinghorne (1988) outlined a considered analysis of narrative knowing and argued that its central focus on making meaning is fundamental to human beings:

> Narrative meaning functions to give form to the understanding of a purpose to life and to join everyday actions and events into episodic units … It is the primary scheme by means of which human existence is rendered meaningful. (p. 11)

Other significant studies from the 1980s on narrative knowing (Geertz, 1983) and the articulation of identity through narrative (McAdams, 1985) contributed to defining the emerging field of narrative inquiry, and Martin (1986), in examining the work of a number of literary critics, acknowledged their contribution to the narrative discourse in human science research. Implicit in the momentum driving the narrative turn was the critique of positivism (Faulconer & Williams, 1990; Geertz, 1983; Rainbow & Sullivan, 1979), postmodernism and post-structuralism (Sarup, 1993).

Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) explored the diversity of narrative research approaches within this evolving field of narrative inquiry. They argue that a turn is a change of course, a new path moving away from one way of thinking towards another, and identified four themes that are core across the broad range of narrative research approaches.

> We realised these themes could be conceptualized as the individual and historical bases for the turn toward narrative inquiry, the bases on which a space for this kind of inquiry opened. These themes involved changes in the relationships of researchers and research participants, kinds of data collected for a study, the focus of the study and kinds of knowing embraced by the researcher. (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 6)

My own understanding and practice as a researcher of narrative inquiry has been, and I continue to see it as an iterative process that draws on both 'academic' and 'intuitive' processes. In the following discussion, I draw on the four themes identified by Pinnegar and Daynes (2007): the nature of the relationships between the researchers and the researched, the move from numbers to words as data, the move away from an appeal to significance given to the generalisable, and the valuing of multiple research understandings. These four themes acted as a broad framework to discuss the difficult issues that mark the field of narrative inquiry and enabled me to clarify and identify aspects of the narrative approach that are particularly relevant to my research and in doing so document my personal journey as a developing narrative scholar.

Narrative turn number 1: The nature of the relationship between the researcher and the researched

The authors Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) assert that in moving from a positivist perspective, that is, an objective, neutral and realist position, to one that is interpretive and focusses on sense making, the narrative researcher acknowledges the existence of a relationship between the researcher and the researched that engenders mutual learning.

Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) elaborate further on the researcher-researched relationship from a positivist perspective as circumscribed, fixed and without context. Looking back

on the first major research project I was involved in, approximately 10 years ago, I now consider the pathway of my own move to the narrative. I was a co-researcher on a study of young adults undertaking "the 'big OE', a period of travel, exploration, and personal development" (Inkson & Myers, 2003, p. 171). I understood at the time that we were researching in a qualitative paradigm and that any findings were not generalisable. However, I recall I was very careful when carrying out the interviews to preserve a sense of distance and perceived objectivity between the participant and myself.

At times, I found it very difficult to rein myself in during the interviews, especially when interviewing the young women in the study. Family reasons had precluded my going on an OE in my twenties. Suddenly, in my mid-forties, as a co-researcher, I had my very own portal into this exciting world of OE. I wanted to ask questions, follow up on curiosities and enjoy their wanderings! However, I disciplined myself to adhere to the question guidelines during the interviews, conscious of a need for consistency and comparability.

My private OE ruminations remained contained. I was extremely engaged with the stories and began to see the participants in a new and different light, yet I believed that my personal 'what if' imaginings did not impact on my objective stance during the formal interview process. I did not recognise or acknowledge any reciprocity between the researcher and the researched. On reflection, with the benefit of 10 years' hindsight, I see this as the beginning of a shift to the tenets of narrative inquiry, taking into account the relationship between the researcher and the researched.

A career move into a management position curtailed any further participation in research until my return to full-time academia and enrolment in this PhD study. My reading on aspects of ontology and epistemology led me to identify with a world view that emphasises interpretivism alongside a subjectivist epistemology. However, the methodology was more problematical. I had limited understanding of the rich diversity within the field of narrative inquiry (Mishler, 1995), and I was unclear how to connect the ontological and epistemological 'whats' with the methodological 'hows' (Spector-Mersel, 2010).

As with the previous study on younger New Zealanders, I wanted to work with individual stories and began a pilot study of five interviews with what seems in retrospect a remarkable display of naivety, given the well-documented challenges of narrative research (Crotty, 1998). The pilot was invaluable as it gave me the opportunity to experience the process of interviewing, unfettered by concerns with consistency and

outcomes. I had a sense of freedom, and from this experience, two key learnings emerged, reigniting my personal move towards narrative research. Firstly, it became clear to me that the stories could not be started just a year or two before the overseas experience. The participants were women in their fifties and sixties. Unlike the younger participants in the previous study, these participants had lived longer lives and gathered much more 'life' along the way. It became apparent that each participant had her own path, what came before, what was happening now and what she imagined for her future. The participants talked extensively of their lives, and in listening to their stories, I realised that a life story approach was more appropriate if I was going to capture and understand their zigzag experiences. I returned to the literature on stories and, more specifically, the life story, and through these readings gained an in-depth understanding of the impact of change, context and time in individual lives that are "constructed or influenced by culture or human interaction" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 10).

Secondly, as data collection for the full study commenced, I continued to try to maintain distance during the life story interview. I was listening to women talking about their childhood and other experiences that resonated within me. These participants were not the young adults from my previous study but women of my age and times. Paget (1983) discusses how her reflections during the course of an interview on the possible similarity between her own and her interviewee's life experiences influenced questions she asked and entered into her understanding and interpretations of the story being told. One of the early interviews was with Monica and she was talking about how her father's experiences in the Second World War impacted on her childhood . As I listened to Monica recount her story, I began to realise that Monica's family could have been my family! I had a father who was much older and had been to the war. As the story unfolded, I began to see more connections and parallels in our lives and the beginnings of a new understanding of my own childhood. Through her storytelling, Monica was no longer separate and distant. This connection between myself and other participants continued throughout subsequent interviews, and I felt both humbled and privileged to be part of their stories.

The call of these stories (Coles, 1989) captured my attention and imagination, and enmeshed me in the process of gathering them. At that point, I recognised a shift in my perceived objective stance in the interview. I gave away 'managing' the interview, and encouraged a more relaxed and iterative process to foster reflective and in-depth responses and discussion in a mutual engagement (Mishler, 1986). Reciprocity of

learning and change within the interview process became a conscious understanding and a significant marker of my move to a more relational way of being in the interview process.

> Thus, in this turn toward narrative inquiry, the researcher not only understands that there is a relationship between the humans involved in the inquiry but also who the researcher is and what is researched emerge in the interactions. In this view, the researched and the researcher are seen to exist in time and in a particular context. They bring with them a history and worldview. They are not static but dynamic, and growth and learning are part of the research process. Both researcher and researched will learn. (Pinnegar & Dayne, 2007, p. 14)

Narrative turn number 2: The move from numbers to words as data

The move from numbers to words has been a less significant turn in my development as a narrative researcher. As an early career researcher in later life, I bring to my research an already evolving world view shaped by numerous and varied unpaid and paid roles over the past 35 years. In an interview given by Maurice Gee, Gee reflected on the 30 novels he had completed. He spoke especially of the 'older' characters in his books, that being older "people have a kind of fullness that young people don't have, not necessarily wisdom, but experience" (Gee, 2012 as cited in McAlister, 2012).

As a young arts graduate in the 1970s embarking on a career as a secondary teacher, I was confronted with what I perceived as the limitations of numbers reflected in the subject choices taken by 15 to16 year old students. In the late 1970s and 1980s, prior to the global share market crash, I observed an increasing tendency of secondary school students, encouraged by their parents, to choose a full range of commerce subjects as their option choices. A typical study programme would involve accounting, economics, business studies and maths, with English being the only compulsory subject. I was concerned that students were specialising too early and limiting themselves to a world where numbers and formulas reigned supreme at the cost of the development of other, more open-ended ways of thinking. In my world view at the time, I believed there ought to be a range of options that reflected a balance across sciences, language, arts, physical sciences and commerce so that students could explore more widely across the disciplines.

Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) also point to the limitations of numbers when studying human interactions and identifed common themes in the move from numbers to word data.

> These themes include the sterility of numbers in representing the complexity of human interaction, the arbitrary and impositional nature of the assignment of

numbers to observations or accounts, the increasing desire of researchers to understand better the meaning of human interaction for the humans involved in the action, and finally, a hesitancy about the integrity and trustworthiness of data where only a number is recoverable. (p. 21)

On a data continuum where the end points are numbers and words, I believe I have always been positioned towards the end point where words constitute 'valid' data. My formative university studies in English literature and music, with a focus on plots, characters, settings and stories, developed in me a love of words, symbols and sounds as a medium for understanding and making meaning (Bal, 1977). Thus, at an early adult stage I unknowingly embraced interpretivism as a lens to view the world. Through subsequent life events and experiences, I have increasingly come to understand and articulate a subjective epistemological position that emphasises words within 'narrative inquiry' as an appropriate methodology to establish trust, validity and authenticity in the research process (Lincoln & Guba, 2005).

Narrative turn number 3: The move away from the general

The move away from the general is discussed in the context of the dominance of positivist science in human sciences, when researchers drew on large sets of data to replicate studies ensuring generalisability of findings (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) suggest that grand stories such as those defining American society and culture (Potter, 1954) in the context of the ideological struggles of the Cold War demonstrate the tendency for researchers to examine issues using a macro lens and present findings broadly applicable to whole groups.

Unlike many qualitative approaches, narrative research does not have a specific starting and finishing time (Andrews, Squire, & Tamboukou, 2008). However, the turn towards the particular over the past 30 years can be traced back to the global liberation movements of the 1960s and 1970s "that sought to replace Cold War orthodoxy with a worldview that was at once more nuanced and narrower" (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007, p. 23).

In agitating for social and political change and recognising marginalised groups researchers looked to other methods to render the invisible visible and to give voice to those previously disempowered and silent. Thus, the personal story was reclaimed by researchers, including feminist (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger, & Tarule, 1986; Squire, 1998), civil rights, sociolinguist and other minority groups (Labov & Walensky, 1967). It presented a fuller and richer way to understand experiences within a specific context and time.

Currently, there is wide variability in how researchers conceptualise narrative inquiry. as a field. Theoretical divisions centre on numerous matters such as whether narratives should focus on events, experiences or social patterns (Andrews et al., 2008), whether stories represent internal individual states or external social circumstances, and whether individual agency is relevant or not (Bruner, 1990). One of the more significant current debates is on small versus big stories. In the following paragraphs, I explore the debate that juxtaposes big against small and outline my personal move away from the general towards the particular, while arguing that big and small stories are both appropriate in my research study.

Researchers using the small story method believe it captures unprompted instances and happenings as individuals live out their lives (Bamberg, 2004, 2006), paying attention to the linguistic and social structures of everyday occurrences (Andrews et al., 2008). The small story draws on both spoken and written language, including text, twitter, diaries and other contemporary mediums, emphasising events and socially oriented research contexts instead of 'experience' and an individual orientation. It is argued that small stories enable the everyday social interactions to be explored, resulting in a closer and better understanding of how identity is reconfigured and how individuals make meaning of their lives (Bamberg, 2006; Georgakopoulou, 2006; Potter & Hepburn, 2005).

Big stories are narratives gathered in the context of an interview and semi-formal situations that require reflection, whether it is on an event, experience or part or whole of life. Big stories lead to the act of poiesis, which involves making sense of an important life event or dimension. Earlier critiques state that big stories falsify events from the past as they are recounted in the present time. Consequently, the retrospective re-ordering of past events makes it difficult to capture an actual past and the precise realities of life itself (Freeman, 2006). It is this aspect of reflection that causes disquiet among the small story supporters. Reflection requires the narrator to give more than the discursive context in which everyday talk happens. Big story critics argue that this reflection and sense making leads to ordering of events (Sartwell, 2000), narrative smoothing (Spence, 1983), closure seeking (Smith, 1988) and fictionalisation. They further argue that these retrospective narratives remove the teller from everyday life, and in this process, the teller attributes a perceived wholeness or legitimacy based on memories that are often overly imaginative and illusory. More recently, the concern directed at big stories has shifted away from issues of falsity and truth to issues of nearness or distance (Bamberg, 2006; Potter & Hepburn, 2005).

Freeman (2006) however, argues for the continuation of the big story alongside the small story and challenges the big story critique at two levels. Firstly, he questions the assumption that because the small story occurs in the context of the present moment of 'lived lives', it is accorded primary legitimacy in narrative form against which all other narrative types are scrutinised. This view marginalises other aspects of narrative inquiry and, in particular, the potential of big stories to reveal insights and understandings that are beyond the capacity of the small story approach. For example, Freeman argues that small stories may be real time, but the small story is only one reality and the lack of temporal distance precludes us from seeing and understanding situations and experiences more fully. Freeman (2006) points to Gadamer (1975) quoting,

> "What a thing has to say, its intrinsic content, first appears only after it is divorced from the fleeting circumstances of its actuality" (p. 265) creating a "productive possibility of understanding" (p. 264) through insights which may be of "great promise and great peril" (Freeman, 2006, p. 135.)

The big story legitimises memory as it removes one from the distractions of the everyday and the ordinary, facilitating in-depth consideration of context across time and space (Gusdorf, 1980).

Secondly, Freeman (2006) questions the assumption that the reflective distance engendered by big stories leads to a bias and inflated misrepresentation of the narrated self. The self that arises from big story reflections is indeed a bigger and more pervasive version, but that does not mean it is a static, one-dimensional and unrealistic individual portrait. The emergence of self via the big story is consistent with the cultural mores of modern western society and resonates with many individuals, as they consider their evolving lives across the life-span. Interviews are a vehicle for big story reflections and perspectives that cannot generally be located in the present. Thus, Freeman (2006) argues that "narrative reflection, far from being a step removed from life, is itself a part of life" (p. 135) and is a legitimate narrative form. Hence his call for narrative inquiry scholars to restore the big story to its "rightful place in human scientific enquiry" (p. 135).

My position on big and small stories in this research study concurs with that of Freeman (2001, 2003, 2006). Small and big stories are relevant and complementary, as both involve varying degrees of reflection to elicit narrative meaning (Andrews et al., 2008). I am also influenced in my methodological approach by the contribution of literary works as exemplars of the big story suggesting that plot, which is the core of the story, emerges from a succession of episodic small stories. Thus, I draw on big stories as an overarching framework, integrating smaller stories into the research gathering and analysis process.

In an earlier research study on young New Zealanders undertaking OE, my understanding of narrative method was at a more macro level. Working in a post-positivist paradigm (Grant & Giddings, 2002), I analysed the stories of the participants, drawing out themes and gender differences, and looked to individual stories to illustrate findings. In retrospect, I consider that my approach emphasised the general over the 'particular'. While I did not consider the findings generalisable, I identified common threads and trends within this specific group. In my current research study on older women, my approach has moved, signalling a change in emphasis with a greater focus on the particular than in my previous research.

In articulating my narrative approach, I primarily draw on a big story (life story) approach positioning the big story as distinct and different from the grand story. These grand stories, such as Kennan's (1947) study on 'the' Soviet character, are an aggregation of individual stories developing universal theories, cultural codes and ways of being with a view to influencing and managing human behaviour (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007). In contrast, my big story approach, integrating aspects of the small story, does not focus on gathering facts to establish standards, rules or stereotypes as in a grand story. Within an interpretivist paradigm, I document the women's stories. I describe and reflect on each experience of transition and change, and in the rich sense making that results from these reflections, I stay close to the participant, maintaining a focus on the particular. In preserving the integrity of the research process within a narrative inquiry framework, I confirm my own movement away from the 'general' to the 'particular'.

Narrative turn number 4: Multiple research understandings

The final 'turn' identified by Pinnegar and Daynes (2007) marks one's development or emergence as a narrative scholar. Turn number 4, an understanding of multiple research paradigms, reflects an acceptance that 'validity and truth' mean different things and are given distinctive nomenclature, depending on the epistemological view and theoretical perspective adopted by the researcher.

Polkinghorne (1995) describes narrative inquiry as a group of research designs under the umbrella of qualitative research. He identifies two approaches in the field of narrative inquiry: the paradigmatic type, which develops categories and themes from analyses of the storied data, and the narrative type, which produces explanatory stories through analyses of events and experiences (Bruner, 1986). In both approaches, Polkinghorne sees the plot as the centre of a framework for organising and understanding text and themes, while acknowledging that across the broad field of qualitative research, researchers attach

a range of other meanings to the term narrative, leading to varied and at times fuzzy narrative research practice.

Narrative inquiry straddles several paradigms and is the subject of ongoing academic debate. In an exploration of narrative inquiry, Clandinin and Rosiek (2007) map the tensions, borders and borderline spaces in order to clarify the field and bring greater "philosophical precision" (p. 36) to how the terms narrative and narrative inquiry are used. Lincoln et al. (2011) argue that the "paradigmatic controversies, contradictions and emerging confluences" (p. 97) are understandable as the fields of qualitative research develop and mature (Lincoln & Guba, 2005). Spector-Mersel (2010) agrees with Lincoln and Guba's (2005) observations and further suggests it is timely to consider 'narrative' alongside other interpretive paradigms. Contemporary scholars agree that the field of narrative inquiry is complex and diverse (Clandinin, 2007; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Spector-Mersel, 2010) and that analysis of narrative is undertaken using assorted theoretical and methodological perspectives.

My way of knowing

Although the narrative turn of the past 30 years has spawned many narrative pathways, my understanding of narrative has evolved more recently. Before this research study began, I perceived narrative as a technique to do qualitative research and I had limited understanding of the relationship between theory and method. An exploration of qualitative research literature facilitated my move away from a dominant focus on methods towards a more considered exploration of ontological assumptions, epistemological perspectives, methodologies and methods, and the connections and relationships between them (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011a; Grant & Giddings, 2002; Lincoln et al., 2011; Mishler, 1995; Morgan & Smircich 1980; Sandberg, 2005).

I understand that the field of 'narrative inquiry' is much debated. However, this level of academic dialogue has enabled me to develop a better understanding of narrative inquiry in two significant ways. The first is that 'types of narrative' as a research method are numerous and illustrate how versatile the narrative is when positioned within different theoretical perspectives and methodologies (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011a). The second is that 'narrative inquiry' as a research methodology needs to be closely aligned to my ontological and epistemological perspective, that is, my understanding of the nature of reality and my relationship to it. As a developing narrative scholar, I now have greater understanding of these blurred ways of knowing (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007), and accept

that narrative inquiry methodology may be appropriate for a range of research questions drawing on different theoretical perspectives across interpretive paradigms.

While my world view emphasises 'interpretivism', I also recognise that there are other paradigms that go beyond establishing an understanding of experiences and contexts. The radical paradigm seeks to bring about social and structural changes to address inequalities experienced by the oppressed (Grant & Giddings, 2002). Critical theory (Couzens, Hoy, & McCarthy, 1994) and feminist theory (Squire, 1998) are two such social theories that lie at the heart of the radical paradigm. The radical stance is premised on the belief that we live in an unfair world where injustices are structurally embedded into the fabric of society. A feminist world view, is committed not only to giving a voice to the diverse individuals who comprise the silent minority, but also to challenging and changing the systems and processes that lie at the heart of these injustices (Belenky et al., 1986), and to empowering the individuals through these processes (Wright & Ranby, 2009). While interpretivism is the paradigm within which I am anchored in this research study, there are some understandings that emerged in the research process suggesting that the participants were marginalised. Therefore, the discussion, analysis and conclusions chapters include some discussion at an individual level on participant development, change and empowerment; as well as discussion at a more collective level around disadvantage, thus touching on more 'feminist' (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2007), and to a lesser extent, 'critical' perspectives.

My way of knowing is based on the ontological assumption that the world is open-ended and socially constructed, and that there is no one objective truth (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011a). Rather, knowledge is constructed through lived experiences and interactions with others. As the researcher, I participate in the research process alongside the participant to ensure that the knowledge that is being produced is a reflection of the participant's views of their reality. Subjectivism is core to the research process and requires a methodology that is open and facilitates research within the process of social change. Taking this epistemological approach, my way of knowing is validated through establishing trustworthiness in the research process (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

Cognisant of my relativist world view and my subjectivist process of thinking (Lincoln et al., 2011), I identified narrative inquiry as the appropriate methodological framework to explore, understand and interpret the individual experiences of the older women in my research (Schwandt, 2007). I believe that as a researcher I now practise a more relational approach to the gathering of stories while maintaining a careful focus on the particular.

Drawing on Pinnegar and Dayne's (2007) framework on the four themes common to the narrative turn, I have been able to map my own journey towards narrative inquiry. While I have greater clarity on the whats and hows of my research, I continue to experience the tensions and contradictions of narrative inquiry. However, I recognise that, as in the wider field of narrative inquiry, understanding this indistinct nature of knowing (Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007) provides a catalyst for rich debate. As a developing narrative scholar within the interpretive paradigm, there is ample room for further dialogue, which will inevitably move, change and reshape my understanding and practices of narrative inquiry methodology.

Life story as a methodology

The increase in narrative over the past 30 years is extensively documented in social science literature (Atkinson, 1995; Clandinin, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, 2011a, 2011b; Gubrium & Holstein, 1998; Kenyon & Randall, 1997) as well as across many other disciplines, including ageing and gerontology, education, health sciences, history, literature, nursing, philosophy, religion and psychiatry (Cole & Knowles, 2001b). Narrative researchers have focused on varied methodological approaches and the terms they attribute to these studies of people's lives are wide ranging. Terminology such as autobiography, autoethnography, biography, case history/study, ethnography, narrative, life history, life narrative, life story and oral history is peppered throughout narrative research and often used indiscriminately (Atkinson, 2007). In order to have a more accurate understanding of these narrative terms, it is less important to define specific meanings and more helpful to look at each term holistically, carefully considering related aspects of ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods. This section explores the life story as the specific narrative inquiry methodology for this research study. I distinguish life story from other narrative accounts such as life history and oral history, (with which it is often used synonymously), and then explore aspects of life story methodology pertinent to my research study.

The life story is a written or oral account of a life or part of a life, as told by the teller. It is a way of looking at a single life both in-depth and holistically (Cohler, 1988; Josselson & Lieblich, 1993). Cole and Knowles (2001b) suggest that both life story and life history are individual stories that capture the idiosyncratic essence and complexity of a single life. When pointing to the purpose and analysis of the life story and life history, the authors identify key differences, arguing that life history takes the narrative beyond the particular of the individual and personal level, and considers the story within a broader

more general context. Rosenthal (2004) and Spector-Mersel (2006, 2010) distinguish life story from life history, arguing that life history is a more factist account of a life, whereas life story is how we present and refashion a past life in narrative. Atkinson (2007) and Cole and Knowles (2001a, 2001b) make an important distinction between oral history and life story, suggesting that in oral history the researcher shapes the process definitively through asking questions, searching and editing information to produce a whole story, often written in the third person. In the life story, the researcher is more sympathetic and less directive, allowing the teller to develop the story in his or her own way and transcribing it verbatim.

When interviewing the participants in the pilot study, I drew on narrative literature. Despite my early readings around 'narrative', looking back I realise that my actual narrative practice was more populist than academically informed. In the full study, I looked to the life story as my narrative inquiry methodology, although I concede that my understanding and research practice of the life story evolved during this process and continues to do so as I further reflect and write about my research study.

Thus, the process of gathering life stories in this research was premised on the following understanding. A life story is the story that participants choose to tell. They tell it as fully and honestly as they can and are guided in this process by the researcher so that what is real and most important is captured in the tellers' own words and in their own way (Atkinson, 2007). The life story honours the individual and personal. The life story interview is a subjective process, facilitates sense making and allows the teller to avow meaning of her life over time.

It is more than just telling the researcher about her life, but it is about how the researcher and the researched relate to each other in the telling of the experience. It is this researcher role that embeds the term 'inquiry' into the research process. As an inquirer, the researcher, using open-ended and reflective questions, encourages the teller to make sense of the story. Later in the research process, the researcher analyses the verbatim transcript, drawing on a specific theoretical framework, which then sits parallel to the storyteller's unique subjective meaning. These dual actions of 'inquiry' move the life story from an atheoretical to a theoretical approach within the framework of narrative inquiry methodology (Atkinson, 2007).

As a research methodology, the life story creates a link across the continua of narrative methodologies. In the context of this research study, the life story captures the wholeness of the big story (Freeman, 2006) and the closeness of the small story (Bamberg, 2006;

Georgakopoulou, 2006; Potter & Hepburn, 2005). The life story generates data that is "both-unique-to-the-individual and universal-for-the-individual" (Atkinson, 2007, p. 238), enabling a balance between the ideographic and nomothetic approaches (Atkinson, 2007). It also fuses the telling and living of a story, thus capturing subjective 'lived experience' and 'lived life'.

The life story empowers the teller, ensuring that she has editorial control. It is not intended to be a precise and accurate account of a life, to document historical truth, but to establish the teller's personal and individual 'story', and in this sense, the life story is considered 'trustworthy' rather than 'truthful'. As a research methodology, the life story is respectful of the viewpoint of the participant, gives a voice to the 'unknown' and 'unrecognised', and gives space and credibility to stories, reflections and insights often not previously documented or understood.

The research process

Atkinson (2007) suggests that carrying out life story interviews is best approached scientifically but executed as an art (p. 236). He points to the 200 plus possible life story questions outlined in *The Life Story Interview* (1998), arguing that just as there are better artists, so too there are better interviewers. While an excellent interview requires flexibility and adaptability, it also requires meticulous planning and careful execution on the researcher's part. Seidman (2005) comments on the demands of interviewing research as especially labour intensive, requiring significant amounts of time and financial resources. Atkinson (2007) identifies three steps in the life story interview process: planning, doing and transcribing. This next section outlines the research process as in Atkinson's (2007) three-step framework. In a subsequent section, I identify theory drawn on in the life story analysis process and outline my newly developed narrative analysis model.

Planning the research

In my proposal for this research, I planned to interview women about their SIE in later life. More specifically, I stated that this research study sought:

- to develop an understanding of the motivations, experiences and triggers for older women in the pre-SIE decision-making process;

- to develop an understanding of the SIE experience;

- to explore the extent to which an SIE affords older women an opportunity for career and personal development;

- to explore the extent to which an SIE affords older women an opportunity to reflect on, clarify and enact longer term career and life-path goals.

In Chapter 1, I noted that previous research carried out by Professor Kerr Inkson and myself (2003) on young New Zealanders undertaking SFEs (now known in the international literature as SIEs) reported positive benefits in terms of their personal development and their career development. I also highlighted some anecdotal evidence that increasing numbers of older New Zealand women are nowadays seeking similar foreign experiences (Shepherd, 2008). I wanted to situate this research in a context of social, economic and demographic change. More particularly, I identified older women as the focus for my research because they face a markedly different future than that of their foremothers, with increased life expectancy, longer career spans, increasing responsibilities inside and outside the home and greater financial demands (Davey, 2006). I wanted to understand the motivations, experiences and personal and professional outcomes for individual older women.

I chose the in-depth interview as my research method. Qualitative interviews can be either unstructured or semi-structured. The unstructured interview tends to use a single question encouraging participants to respond in a way that can be conversational and non-directive. In this research, I followed a semi-structured interview format because the open-ended questions encourage flexibility and freedom across a range of broad topical areas. The semi-structured interview requires a planned interview guide facilitating data analysis. However, in order for the semi-structured interview to be fully effective, the interviewer must have skill and experience in the in-depth interview process (Gillham, 2000), and while I did not consider myself an expert in the in-depth interview, I believed I had some experience from my earlier research study on younger people. In the interviews in this research study, I drew on a life story approach (Cole & Knowles, 2001b), with a focus on pre-departure experiences, the period of the SIE and subsequent experiences on the return home.

I am very interested in other people's stories because storytelling can facilitate an unfolding of oneself through the exploration of experiences and related feelings and take us through the transitions of the life-course. Stories help make sense of changing stages, world views and identities (McAdams & Bowman, 2001), and the life story gives us focus, validates our individual contexts and is restorative (Atkinson, 2002). The in-depth

interview allows the researcher to explore the individual's experiences, values, decisions and ideologies, and the process of interviewing uncovers information at a deeper and more personal level than the survey, focus group or informal interview (Johnson, 2002). Drawing out people's ideas in their own words is particularly significant when studying women's stories, ensuring that their experiences are no longer invisible (Simpson & Lewis, 2007), thus challenging the androcentric nature of bias within traditional social science research (Reinharz & Chase, 2002).

The in-depth interview is also a form of inquiry that recognises the diversity of older people, ensuring that the interviewer is not preoccupied with age and that the participant is free to reflect on issues beyond the narrow construct of age (Wenger, 2002). Age and gender are selection criteria in this study; however, within the interview situation they did not have an explicit focus. The actual questions were designed to elicit a participant's life story, accentuating the time periods of the SIE and contextualised by events before the SIE and development after the SIE.

As my research proposal developed, the issue arose of how I would refer to the women in my research study. I rejected terminology such as 'interviewee', 'researched' or 'respondent' as these terms seemed to cast the person being interviewed in a passive role (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Similarly, I dismissed the term 'subject' as it was common to positivist research and implies a power differential and subservience. I did not consider the term 'informant' appropriate as it suggests a fact-finding approach. Additionally, the term 'informant' carries a negative connotation of giving information under duress as popularised in war stories, is too colloquial and may not be understood internationally. The term I chose, 'participant', reflects my engagement in narrative inquiry methodology, my purpose in carrying out the interviews and the active relationship I wished to have with the individuals being interviewed. In this research, the purpose of in-depth interviewing is not to elicit facts, to develop hypotheses and to make judgements but rather to understand the lived lives of these women and the reconstructed meaning they draw from these experiences. In order to achieve this, I needed to be involved with the person being interviewed in a relational rather than an objective level. I do not believe that the term 'co-researcher' was appropriate given the ontological and epistemological perspectives discussed earlier in this section. Thus, I consider the term 'participant' encapsulates the engagement and participation required of both parties and suggests an equitable relationship built on mutual respect and trust (Seidman, 2005).

The interview discussion guide (refer to Appendix 7) comprises four sections using a similar framework to the one used in the earlier study on younger New Zealanders (Inkson & Myers, 2003). The first section explores the participant's life experiences prior to setting out on the SIE. Initially, I thought that the scope of this would vary and be shaped by individual context. The second section enables the participant to tell her SIE story, that is, travels undertaken, paid and unpaid work experiences, relationships and decision-making processes. The third section considers the participant's story of returning to New Zealand and life experiences since, and the fourth section is a reflection on the impact or influence of the SIE from a personal and professional perspective.

Data gathering involved a pilot of five interviews and a full study involving 21 participants. The decision to interview 21 participants was not clear-cut. Guest, Bunce and Johnson (2006), in an analysis of literature providing guidelines for non-probabilistic sample sizes in qualitative interview research, identify only seven studies that address the issue of actual sample size. There is little consistency in the studies, with recommended sample sizes ranging from five to 36 depending on whether the study was ethnographic, phenomenological or grounded theory, and whether the sample was more homogeneous or heterogeneous. Drawing on their own study involving 60 in-depth interviews with women in two West African countries, the authors identified a data saturation level at 12 in-depth interviews, noting that basic elements contributing to meta-themes were evident at as early as six completed interviews. However, because my research draws on narrative inquiry methodology emphasising the individual and the particular more than generalised meta-themes and grand stories, five interviews seemed too limited and 36 interviews seemed unwieldy. I considered 21 interviews a sensible number, sitting midway in the 5–36 interview continuum and appropriate for my research question and methodology. However, the sample size is considerably larger than the 12 in-depth interviews recommended by Guest and colleagues (2006).

Ethics

Before recruitment of potential participants could begin, I applied to the university ethics committee for approval of my study. I submitted an application for the pilot study, and after this was completed, I submitted another application for the full study to allow for any changes to the research process as a result of the pilot experience. The ethics application process was extensive. The principal document was the ethics application form, which gave details of the research, that is, the research question, background and rationale for the study, details of recruitment, sampling, participant safety and an

explanation of how the research addressed the principles of participation, partnership and protection of the Treaty of Waitangi. Additionally I submitted a participant information form, a consent form, a researcher safety protocol, a transcriptionist confidentiality agreement and a copy of the discussion guidelines (refer to Appendices 2–8 for ethics application documentation).

Approval for the pilot study was straightforward, but when I applied for approval for the full study, there was a change in the ethics committee personnel as well as a change in some of the committee processes. I was required to provide to the ethics committee a separate statement of psychological support for participants in addition to the details provided in the principal document on how I would facilitate psychological support for participants if required. I met with the head of AUT University's centre of health and wellbeing and explained the research. He then wrote a letter giving details of 'psychological support' available and I incorporated these additional details into a revised participant information sheet (refer to Appendix 4). As my participants were from different regions, the support was able to be accessed by phone as well as face to face. While no participants felt the need to access this support, the act of discussing the research with an experienced counsellor and the provision of additional counselling sessions if needed were useful. Not only did it give me more confidence in dealing with potentially difficult interview situations, but I also believe it was respectful of the women who participated in the research.

Recruitment and selection

The criteria for inclusion in the study, participants had to be aged 50 years or more, to have been overseas for six months or longer, to be engaged in paid or unpaid work and travel (that was not the result of an international transfer) and to have returned to New Zealand for a minimum of three months and a maximum of five years. Participants may or may not have undertaken an SIE when they were younger. All participants who fulfilled the following selection criteria were invited to participate (Inkson & Myers, 2003).

- While acknowledging the considerable heterogeneity of age and experience denoted by the term 'older' (Wenger, 2002), the 50 years benchmark is identified as a time when women are more likely to be moving on from the primary care responsibilities of family and approaching personal and professional transitions.

- The six months benchmark for time away is considered an appropriate minimum time for participants to step out of the structures and routines that have been integral in their lives for up to 30 years. The requirement to have been involved in both work (paid or unpaid) and travel suggests an involvement and exploration of a new world that goes beyond the tourism experience.

- The return home is driven by many reasons (Inkson & Myers, 2003). A minimum period of three months was set to give the participant a chance to adjust and reflect on the time away in a personal and professional sense. The five-year maximum benchmark is thought a suitable length of time to consider the impact of the SIE, and it is likely that after five years other influences will be shaping their personal and professional lives.

Potential participants were not easily identifiable. For the pilot, I drew on personal networks to interview five women from the Auckland and Wellington regions. In the full study, I planned to draw on a range of networks, utilising a combination of selection and snowballing recruitment techniques. One source of participants was a result of a newspaper article in the *NZ Herald* in June 2008 (Shepherd, 2008) about older people heading overseas to travel and work. The journalist had interviewed me and included my plans for this research in the article. The sample for the full study also drew on the pilot study participants, who suggested additional participants from their own personal and professional networks. Finally, my own personal and professional networks were employed to identify and recruit participants, who in turn were asked to identify others. I contacted Volunteer Service Abroad (VSA) and met with senior managers in Wellington to discuss my planned research. They were extremely supportive and sent information about my study to their volunteers who had completed VSA assignments. I met with a personal contact who is the editor of a well-known New Zealand lifestyle magazine. I explained my research and she kindly suggested that I write a letter to the editor with details about my research. Finally, I met with a professional colleague who is a director of a well-known recruitment organisation in Auckland. She also disseminated information about my research to individuals registered with her recruitment organisation. In all cases, the women were asked to contact me directly if they were interested in the study. My personal and professional contacts did not have any knowledge of who was interested in the research and who actually contacted me.

While the sampling process drew on selection and snowballing as outlined above, I was aware that there are some limitations in these processes. Firstly, the sample draws on

women who have returned to New Zealand. It does not draw on those who have not returned. Earlier research on younger people going on an SIE suggests that there may be others who have not returned and instead have remained overseas for an extended period. Secondly, a snowball sample potentially limits the sample to established groups and networks of friends and colleagues, with the likely result of a pool of participants with similar backgrounds and experiences (Inkson & Myers, 2003; Myers & Pringle, 2005). As the sample size was up to 20 women, I took particular care to limit each contact to one or two participants and ensure that my sample came from different regions in New Zealand so I could draw on diverse experiences and backgrounds.

When I was contacted by women (generally by email) interested in the research, I responded by telling them about myself (that I was a thesis student and full-time academic), my current research and also my previous research on younger people completing SIE. I asked the women if they were interested in participating and included a copy of the participant information sheet to give them more information about the research. If the women returned my email confirming interest, I sent them a range of documents, including an explanation of the study, another copy of the participant information sheet and a consent form. I also discussed with them the possible timing of the interview. Because I was planning to interview across several New Zealand regional areas, I wanted to schedule the interviews as efficiently as possible.

I received confirmation of interest from 23 participants in total, 21 of whom qualified for the study. Thus I accepted all 21 although I had set the study sample size at 20. One participant confirmed interest as a result of the newspaper article. Another participant came from a pilot study referral. I completed interviews with both of these women. Six participants came from the VSA network and 15 from the lifestyle magazine source. Although I interviewed all six VSA participants, I did not include one of them in the research because she was a career volunteer, having worked on overseas assignments throughout her adult life. I interviewed all 15 of the contacts from the lifestyle source and again did not include one of these participants in the research data as she had completed an SIE in her late 30s and was accompanied by her partner and three children. While both of these women did not meet the qualification for inclusion in the study in a number of areas, they were very keen to share their stories, which also gave me valuable insight into a different kind of SIE experience.

Table 1. Sample source

Source	n
Newspaper article referral	1
Pilot study referral	1
VSA	6*
Lifestyle magazine referral	15*
Total	23

Note. *One volunteer did not meet the criteria.

Chapter 5 contains the individual interpretive stories of the 21 participants in the full study. In summary, 11 were single at the time of departure and travelled alone, eight were married and accompanied by their partner for the majority of the time, and two were married and were not accompanied by their partner most of the time. Key sample information is outlined in Appendix 1 while further discussion of participants' SIE locations and their diverse occupational groupings (before and during SIE) is outlined in Chapter 6.

Doing the research

Interviews were carried out in Auckland, Hamilton, Tauranga, Wellington, Nelson, Christchurch and Dunedin in a staged process over a 12-month period. Eighteen interviews were carried out in participants' homes, two in their workplace and one in my own home. The interview carried out in my home was for participant convenience as her own home was being renovated and she did not want to do the interview at her workplace. When arranging the interviews, I was cognisant of researcher safety (Seidman, 2005) and the 'researcher safety protocol' (refer to Appendix 8) recommending that interviews not be carried out in the researcher's own home. I discussed this issue with my supervisor, and given that the participant had expressed a preference to do this, I organised the interview and informed my supervisor of the time and date.

Sixteen interviews were completed in one sitting, three interviews were completed in two sittings and a third interview was completed in four sittings. The majority of the interviews were one to two hours long, whereas the interview that involved four sittings was almost six hours. Each interview was carried out in a similar manner. This would involve my arriving at a set time, introducing myself and having a general chat to give both of us the opportunity to relax and develop a rapport. Once this initial phase was completed, I would explain the process of the interview, review the participant

information sheet and the consent form with the participant, give details on the basic format and taping of the interview and reiterate confidentiality.

As stated earlier in this chapter, the pilot was invaluable as it enabled me to experience the process of interviewing, and from this, two key learnings emerged: the adoption of a life story interview format and the beginnings of a more relational way of being in the interview process. As part of the pilot, I interviewed a married couple. It was not my intention to include men in the study, but given it was a pilot study and my intention was to review the data gathering process, and both partners wished to participate, I carried out the two interviews separately but consecutively. I realised that even though the interviews were conducted separately and the individual stories were rich, there was understandably an element of cross-checking in the storytelling. I reflected on this experience during this early stage of the research process. I believed it was important to preserve the integrity of each story, and I realised that I could not do this by gathering a story out of respect and curiosity that was outside of the research question. Additionally, I did not think I could establish the level of trust in an interview situation in which the partners were interviewed separately. In this sense, this pilot interview experience was very helpful as it also gave me some an opportunity to reflect on how to handle interview situations in which a partner may be on the periphery of an interview.

In the full study, there were several women who had gone on their SIE with their partners. When arranging the interviews, I asked that we have access to a private area where we could run the tape recorder and continue uninterrupted, unless of course the participant wanted to have a break. In the majority of cases, I conducted the interview at a time when the partner was not present or we were not interrupted. However, there were three interviews when a partner or family member entered the interview domain unexpectedly. One occasion was when a partner asked if we wanted another cup of tea. At that time, I stopped the tape and we had a general conversation and then restarted. On another occasion, we were interrupted by the unexpected arrival of a member of the participant's extended family who wanted to sit in and listen. I felt that this was going to compromise the story, which was extremely personal and challenging. I asked if we might continue another time and reassured the participant that I was very happy to do so.

The third occasion was when the two partners lived in a confined space and were both home at the same time. Although the partner did not initially engage in the interview (he did so later), I was concerned about the impact on the participant and the telling of her story. As the story was one of the longer interviews, I suggested we take a break and then

come back to it at a mutually convenient time. This gave me the opportunity to think about the issue further. I realised that the participant seemed happy and relaxed about her partner's presence. Thus, I resolved to accept whatever situation arose in the subsequent interview.

When I returned for the second interview, the partner was also present and became engaged only to the extent of clarifying dates and other factual matters. It occurred to me as the interview unfolded that this interview context was entirely appropriate for this participant. There were some challenging personal issues arising out of the SIE experience that they had addressed together, and although the participant told 'her' story, I acknowledged both of them as part of the interview process, believing that a more inclusive and equitable approach (Seidman, 2005) was important to establish trust and reciprocity in this specific interview context. All three of these interviews were held in areas outside of Auckland. On two of these three occasions, I organised to return to complete the interview. I was concerned that if I had continued with these two interviews, feeling unsure and distracted, I might lose the integrity of the story and the trust of the participant.

Although I did not transcribe the pilot interviews, I listened to each of them several times. I was dismayed to hear that in some of the earlier interviews, I interrupted the participant in my efforts to address the questions in the discussion guidelines. I realised that when doing the life story interviews in the full study, I needed to adopt a less intrusive style and become more comfortable with the pauses and the silences. It was my intention to keep any researcher interruption and asking of questions to a minimum. I was conscious at the outset of creating as much as possible a natural and free storytelling context, thus drawing out complex and rich stories and unlocking previously undisclosed and unknown levels of experience (Sandina, 2007). I encouraged the participants to tell their own stories 'in their own words and in their own way', reassuring them that there was no right or wrong way to tell their story, letting the interview unfold naturally (Atkinson, 2007), and using open-ended questions to explore but not prompt. I wrote notes in my research diary and followed up on any matters at the end (Seidman, 2005). I reviewed the interviewer experience after each interview, asking myself what went well in the process and what might I do differently another time, bearing in mind the unique individual context of each interview experience.

As the interviews continued, I developed a greater trust in the process, letting the interview unfold and my skills/expertise as a narrative inquiry researcher evolve.

Nevertheless, the interviews were challenging, and in the full study, I soon discovered that scheduling two interviews on the same day (for example, when visiting Wellington) was unwise. From then on, I resolved to do no more than one interview per day, even when I was travelling to another region.

At the end of the interview, I thanked the participants for the pleasure and privilege of gathering their story. I reassured them of confidentiality and asked if there were any further questions. I encouraged any comments about the research experience, sharing with them some of the benefits of a life story interview (Atkinson, 2007) and invited them to contact me in the future if they had any further questions, comments or areas for discussion.

Transcribing the life story and storage processes

There is much debate on the transcription process, often centred on the benefits of researcher transcription as an essential part of the various research activities (Minichiello, Aroni, & Hays, 2008) versus transcription carried out by a third party. My decision to outsource the transcribing process was driven by pragmatism. The demands of full-time employment and extensive travel to carry out the interviews made it difficult for me to complete the transcriptions in a timely manner. As I had access to funding for the transcription process, I elected to work with a transcriptionist (refer to Appendix 6).

I met with the transcriptionist to discuss my ideas and give guidance on how I wanted the transcription carried out (Riessman, 1993). I also introduced her to the confidentiality agreement. I wanted the transcriptions to record the whole interview, ensuring that the utterances were captured but not other nuances of language and tone. I asked the transcriptionist to document what was said but not how it was said, as I did not want a third party engaged unwittingly in any preliminary interpretive action.

The decision to transcribe the manifest content of the life stories in this way was not taken lightly (Elo & Kyangas, 2007). I was conscious of the debate surrounding the tyranny of the transcript (Andrews et al., 2008), suggesting that interview transcriptions privilege the spoken word over other data gathering methods. As I was working within an interpretivist paradigm, I believed that I was able to capture both content and context through the first-person text-only transcripts (Atkinson, 2007). I was also aware of discussion suggesting that the differences between transcription research and other narrative approaches to data gathering can be overstated, and that the substantiation of reality in the form of transcription text provides valid material for interpretive procedures

(Flick, 1998). Cognisant of the debate, during the interviews I made notes on various aspects of the interview and also some non-text observations. As part of the analysis (discussed in the next section), I planned to listen to each interview several times, considering the pauses and silences within the individual interview context as well as referring back to the interview research notes.

After our initial discussion, the transcriptionist signed the confidentiality agreement and completed the first transcription (refer to Appendix 6). Subsequently we discussed some changes in presentation. When I was satisfied with the process and format, I forwarded the digital life story recordings to the transcriptionist through a Dropbox password-protected system. Given that I was working with a company that employed several transcriptionists, I stipulated that I required the same transcriptionist to complete all the interviews, not only to ensure consistency in the transcriptions, but also to re-emphasise the confidential nature of the research.

Transcribing creates hard copy as part of the data gathering process (Plummer, 1983). Hard copy also includes sources such as consent forms and audio tapes. As per AUT ethical guidelines, the consent forms are stored securely on AUT premises in the faculty research office secure storage for a period of six years, after which they will be destroyed. Digital audio files (password-protected) have also been retained. They will be deleted on completion of this research study. As part of the life story interview process, participants were asked if they wished to receive a summary of findings of the research and/or the transcription. While all of the participants wished to receive a summary of the findings on completion of the research, a process that Lincoln and Guba (1985) refer to as 'member checking' and contributing to the trustworthiness and credibility of the research process, only one participant (who was writing her own memoirs) wished to receive a copy of the transcription.

Life story analysis

Analysis of qualitative data is a complex process (Riessman, 1993). When interpreting a life story, we do not write about what is told to us; rather, we interpret and attribute another kind of meaning to this story (Ochberg, 1996). Bruner (1991), drawing on Roman Jakobson's well-known definition of the role of the artist, suggests that interpretive activity seeks "to make the ordinary strange" (p. 13).

Transcription and analysis are integrally linked because the transcript is structured to facilitate the researcher's thinking about the meaning of the interview. Ochberg (1996)

likens researchers to painters rather than photographers, in that researchers reflect on and interpret stories over time, rather than deciphering them in a single moment. People do not tell their stories in the passive voice, but recount their experiences with intentionality (Bruner, 1991). Interpretation begins in the researcher's mind during the interviews, and interpretive influences become even more explicit during semi-structured and unstructured interviews. Ideally, the analytical framework ought to be conceptualised at the beginning of the research process and justified with reference to the context in which the research is taking place. It needs to support the research question and add to the knowledge and understanding of the area of inquiry.

At the start of my research, I developed the research question cognisant of narrative inquiry methodology, thinking that thematic analysis would be the primary mode of analysis. However, my research journey has been a significant and ongoing learning process. I identified thematic analysis to draw out themes for the pilot, but as I commenced the interviews in the full study, I became increasingly aware and in awe of the power of the individual stories. I struggled to conceptualise how I might capture the essence of each individual story, drawing on thematic analysis as the core analytical method. During the interviews, I returned to the narrative inquiry literature, searching for analytical models that better served the research question and context. The more I read, the more I became confused and frustrated. I believed that if I was to honour the individual stories of the women in my study, I had to have a well-defined and analytical framework at the outset of the process.

Bold (2012) states there is no set process to collect, analyse and present narrative data and no one theorist leading the approach to narrative analysis. I wanted to preserve the integrity of the individual life stories, stay close to the life story data and situate these life stories at the core of the research. I also wanted to understand and describe the process of transition, change and development that the women experienced. Thus, I developed my own analytical process to best serve the research questions and life story interview context, cognisant of the importance of addressing the issue of rigour in my research process. After examining and drawing on the work of other researchers, I developed a five-step analytical framework. The framework is briefly outlined below, followed by more in-depth discussion, including an explanation of each step and how I applied the models (Bold, 2012).

Step 1.	Reading the life story.
	Constructing the individual interpretive story. Draft one.
Step 2.	Listening to the life story.
	Reconstructing the individual interpretive story. Draft two.
Step 3.	Reading the life story, focusing on turning points, epiphanies, metaphors, poetics.
	Reconstructing the individual interpretive story. Draft three.
Step 4.	Analysis of plot (beginning, middle and end), characters and settings.
	Constructing the storied themes.
	Reconstructing the storied themes.
Step 5.	Thematic analysis.
	Discussion and analysis of themes.
	Constructing the personal experience narrative.

Although the framework is presented as a simple linear process, doing the analysis was a more complex, messy and iterative process (Denzin & Lincoln, 2011a).

Step 1: Reading the life story

Riessman (1993) suggests that the researcher begin the analysis of narrative data by reading the transcriptions carefully before moving to the next stage of analysis. As the storyteller and the researcher establish a subjective relationship in the interview, analytical ideas move and change as the researcher becomes familiar with the transcribed data (Mishler, 1992). In order to give equal consideration to all 21 stories throughout the process of analysis, I divided them into three sets of stories and started each (analysis) step with a different set of stories. I revisited the research questions and returned to scrutinise individual transcripts, reading them as big stories (Freeman, 2006) while keeping an open mind and identifying features and points of interest that jumped out at me (Riessman, 1993).

One of the challenges I faced in the process of analysis was how to summarise each story while maintaining its integrity within a narrative inquiry framework. I rejected a factist approach, and searched for a way to capture the essence of each participant in an

individual summary story. I came across McCormick's concept of interpretive stories, in Bold (2012). These are stories that are created in stages, and the concept appealed to me in that it reflects Polkinghorne's (1995) understanding of 'narrative analysis' as "studies whose data consists of actions, events and happenings but whose analysis produces stories" (p. 6). This contrasts with the 'analysis of narratives' process, which limits analysis to drawing out categories and themes (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007).

I created one interpretive story for each participant as a way to describe and understand them in a meaningful way. Each story is rendered increasingly rich as it is constructed and reconstructed through a cycle of analytic activities. As well as moving away from a factist summary approach, it enabled me to remain close to the individual participant and the particular. At this point in the process of analysis, I wrote a draft interpretive story for each participant. When writing the various drafts of the interpretive story, I endeavoured to preserve the voice and character of the individual by including not only their quotes but also participant vernacular. I also noted any features that interested or intrigued me for future consideration. Alongside this process, I developed a spreadsheet to record demographic and other life story facts.

Step 2: Listening to the life story

Crossley (2000) also emphasises reading and listening as an essential first step in getting close to the data, echoing Riessman's (1993) suggestion to stay connected to each interview through repeated reading of the transcripts and listening to the recordings. In this step, I listened for some of the more significant 'small stories' embedded in the 'big' life story that resonated with me and the research questions (Freeman, 2006). Listening in this way gave me additional insights that in turn shaped how I chose to represent the narrative. Drawing on Labov's notion of examining conventional data to identify the inner 'hidden' scripts (Bruner, 1991), I considered two factors: 'what happened and why it is worth telling' (Bruner, 1991, p. 12). As part of the second question, I included Bruner's idea of intentionality. I was interested in why the participant thought the story was worth telling as well as why I (the researcher) thought the story was worth telling.

Next, I returned to the individual interpretive story, listening to the voice within (Chase, 2011, Denzin & Lincoln, 2011a), synthesising new data and insights, and moving further through the second cycle of construction and reconstruction. I noted any additional insights for possible future consideration and added newly identified demographic and other life story facts to the demographic spreadsheet.

Step 3: Turning points, epiphanies, metaphors and poetics

Narrative analysis is often approached by examining significant moments and critical points in the story (Bruner, 1991, 2002; Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007; Wilson, 2007). In a narrative study on women whose lives have been disrupted by depression, Wilson (2007) refers to turning points as a time or occasion when the participant took charge or there was significant change of circumstance. Bruner (1991) refers to precipitating events as a breach in the canonical script signifying a change in the participant's way of being and life direction. An epiphany, meaning to manifest, derived from the Greek word epiphainein, is also utilised for narrative analysis (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007). Denzin (1989; 1990) proposed four different types of epiphanies: cumulative, illuminative, major and relived, suggesting an exploration of the epiphany as an entrance into understanding narrative lives.

The third step involved a close examination of each transcription to identify significant moments, experiences or insights. In this process, I used the terms turning point and epiphany synonymously (represented by the term TE), identifying these TEs as points of significant change, insight and direction. Cognisant of the next step in the analysis process (Step 4, analysis of the plot), I identified these points sequentially, that is, before, during and after the SIE. Adapting Tuval-Mashiach's (2006) concept of mapping, I briefly plotted the significant TEs of each participant across her life-path to explore the transitional processes before and after the TE.

I also looked for metaphors during this part of the analysis. Although the metaphor is a well-established analytical device, it offers additional interpretive insight into the life story through focusing on specific phrases and words that give symbolic meaning (Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007). The metaphor can lead us to see things that are implicit and silent, and it has been applied extensively in career studies (Inkson, 2002, 2004, 2007; Inkson & Amundson, 2002).

The search for subtext and for smaller stories within the bigger life story can be facilitated through an examination of the participant's unique language patterns and poetic structures (Riessman, 1993). Just as metaphor offers another perspective for analysing and interpreting, poetics (linguistic techniques in poetry and literature) embedded within the narrative is another approach to explore hidden voices and emotions (Kendall & Murray, 2004). Engaging with the poetic in the narrative connects the researcher with the participant at a more emotional level, creating a conduit to the inner and more hidden recesses of experience and meaning.

Analysis and interpretation via poetics is a subjective and demanding process (Wilson, 2007). Thus, I have not employed this approach comprehensively across all 21 interviews. I tended to use poetics to complement other analytical approaches and in some cases when the transcript data 'called' out to me through distinctive motifs of words, sounds and pictures. As Wilson (2007) states, "this approach is to some extent intuitive" (p. 82), and like her, I drew on my experiences as a student of English literature and music to search for inner meaning and to consider "influences such as readily available cultural stories and myths" (Wilson, 2007, p. 82).

After completing the analysis of turning points, epiphanies, metaphors and poetics, I returned to each interpretive story, integrating newly found experiences and insights, reconstructing the draft through a third circle of reflexive analysis. If required, I noted any additional matters of interest and updated the demographic spreadsheet.

Step 4: Analysis of plot (beginning, middle and end), characters and settings

At this point in the analysis, I moved away from my situated closeness to the individual and particular, to consider the narrative data in a more holistic way. In his study on wounded storytellers, Frank (1995) suggests that the construction of underlying generic narratives presents another conduit for listening, interpreting and understanding, without diminishing the uniqueness of the individual story.

The construction of SIE themes or groups began with a re-examination of the interpretive stories and related findings from Step 3 to consider similar and different kinds of narrative (Bruner, 1991, p. 14). I also re-examined findings from Step 2, especially those pertaining to the question 'why is the story worth telling?' As I constructed the themes or groups, I determined that each would have a beginning, middle and end to reflect the dynamic ordering of life events and experiences (Mishler, 1986, p. 248). I embraced the life story form in the construction of themes or types of journeys to retain 'narrative analysis' integrity. I synthesised and integrated ideas and insights into these storied themes, ensuring that analysis was not limited to the drawing out of general categories and themes (Polkinghorne, 1995).

During this analysis process, I reviewed Step 1 again. I re-read the transcriptions and went back to the notes on features of interest. I reviewed Steps 2 and 3 in a similar way, and cognisant of the research questions, I looked for similarities and differences across the individual interpretive stories. Initially, I identified seven dominant themes that distinguished one story from another. After discussion with my supervisors and going

back to the transcriptions, the individual interpretive stories and related documents of analysis from Steps 1 to 3, I reduced these themes from seven to five. Each of the 21 individual interpretive stories fitted one or more of these themes, but usually one of the themes was dominant; therefore, the participant was identified as belonging to that particular theme. Once I had identified the themes, I went back to the individual interpretive stories to ensure there was consistency with the theme in which I had placed the participant. At this stage, I felt that I reached a saturation point with the data. Then, drawing on my analyses of similarities and differences, I re-storied the individual interpretive stories into five distinctive themes.

Chapter 5 is structured into five sections and presents these five themes, which are referred to as journeys, as well the 21 individual interpretive stories. Each section starts with the relevant individual interpretive stories and concludes with the 'journey' story. The five sections are arranged in a specific order starting with the 'The Tandem Stories' and concluding with 'The Spiritual Stories'. These five sections are placed as if on a continuum of increasing degrees of personal transformation and change with the 'The Spiritual Journey' reflecting the most radical and transformative of the five SIE journeys.

Step 5: Thematic analysis, discussion and analysis of themes, and constructing the personal experience narrative

Step 5, which gives rise to Chapter 6 and the 'Afterword' (after the conclusions in Chapter 7), completes the movement from the particular to the general. In Chapter 6, thematic analysis is employed to explore the themes that percolate through the 21 life stories, facilitating a more in-depth understanding of the meanings that lie behind these stories. Step 5 facilitates an exploration of these underlying meanings at two levels. Firstly, in Chapter 6, using a more traditional or established qualitative analysis, I integrate illustrative findings in a discussion and analysis of the key themes pertinent to each of the four research questions. Secondly, in the 'Afterword' I return to and embrace the spirit of narrative inquiry by drawing on key insights from the interpretive stories to develop a collective 'personal experience' narrative (McCormick, 2004).

The personal experience story completes the cycle of narrative analysis. A key concern in step 5 is not how narrative as text is constructed "but rather how it operates as an instrument of mind in the construction of reality" (Bruner, 1991, p. 6). It is argued that developing one principal narrative (Bell, 1998; Riessman, 1993) is a valid approach to interpret a set of different stories (Bold, 2012), in a final weaving together of findings and insights in a general story (Crossley, 2000). Using thematic analysis of the interview

transcripts, and insights and findings from Steps 1 to 4 (Riessman, 2008), I gave primary attention to what was said, rather than aspects of how it was said. I chose to draw on thematic analysis rather than structural analysis, as it is more appropriate for developing understanding of the meanings behind the stories, the reasons for actions and the justification of choices. Structural analysis, in contrast, is most useful when seeking common elements in stories. As I crafted the personal experience story, I focused on the experiences from the life stories and the significant meanings and insights that emerged from these data (Bold, 2012).

When constructing the personal experience story I developed a general storyline around the research questions (Crossley, 2000; McCormick, 2004). Using a life story framework, I maintained narrative diachronicity, enabling events and experiences to be understood the way they relate over time (Bruner, 1991). Next, I explored the propositions, discourses and myths embedded in the life stories and considered how the participants identified with, disputed or challenged normativeness and convention in their storytelling (Bruner, 1991; Riessman, 1993).

Constructing a personal experience narrative is not about creating an older women's utopia. It is not a grand story or meta-story that seeks to recast individual experiences as a collective social or cultural hegemony. Nor is the personal experience story a panacea for solving personal and professional issues. At one level, it is intended as a consoling plot, which describes and makes sense of experiences such as SIE within a big story and "that by being interpretable is or becomes bearable" (Bruner, 1991, p. 16). At another level, the personal experience story honours and legitimises the everyday and lifelong experiences of participants whose voice may otherwise be lost. It is a way to illustrate understanding and insights about these individuals who share a specific social, economic and cultural context and time (Belenky et al., 1986; Labov & Walensky, 1967).

Chapter 5: Individual Interpretive Stories and Journeys

"Only those who risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go."

T. S. Eliot

Introduction

This chapter presents the narrative data in five sections and each section considers the data at two levels. At the first level several individual interpretive stories are documented and at the second level a more collective or holistic 'journey' story is presented. The five sections are arranged in a specific order starting with the 'The Tandem Stories', then the 'Internationalist Stories', the 'Redemptive Stories', the 'Integrationist Stories' and concluding with 'The Spiritual Stories'.

In her book on women travellers, Mary Morris (2002) draws on John Gardner's notion "that there are only two plots in all of literature. You go on a journey or a stranger comes to town" (p. 8). Morris suggests that literature up until the latter part of the 20th century portrays women as mostly 'waiting' (often for a stranger), and seldom, if ever, going on a journey as do their male counterparts. Morris further suggests that even in the genre of travel writing, women's "voices have not always been recognised and heard" (p. 9).

The 21 individual interpretive SIE stories presented throughout the five sections in this chapter are extraordinary tales from ordinary women. None of them is a Lady Montagu, a Vita Sackville-West or even an Edith Wharton, who grace the pages of Morris's book on women travellers. They are private and unassuming women from diverse and modest backgrounds, and they have been, as Gardner suggests, 'waiting'. They have been waiting for 30 to 40 years, and in that time, have developed an ennui or dissatisfaction with their existing life and a burgeoning curiosity about the wider world. No longer prepared to wait, the 21 participants in this study have recast themselves as the 'stranger' and undertaken a journey that is unique in its construction and astonishing in its outcome.

There are broad similarities that thread through and across the individual stories, creating distinctive patterns, voices and 'types' of SIEs. When charting these distinctive SIE patterns, I drew on Frank (1995), who suggests that the formation of underlying common narratives and themes is another approach to make sense of experiences while maintaining the uniqueness of the individual stories. I also considered McAdams et al.'s (2001) arguments that the narrative study of lives facilitates sense making of phenomena such as SIE. McAdams et al. (2001) also argue that narrative inquiry enables the

researcher to unravel the experiences of individuals and groups whose stories may otherwise remain untold (Simpson & Lewis, 2007).

In the iterative spirit of narrative inquiry, I re-storied the 21 individual stories into five SIE 'journey' stories. In an article on career metaphors, Inkson (2004, 2007) looked to the earlier work of Morgan (1986) considering career within a metaphorical framework. Inkson developed nine metaphors to describe different aspects of a career and to explore how careers operate. Inkson depicted careers as inheritances, cycles, actions, fit, journeys, roles, relationships, resources and stories. The metaphor of a 'journey' struck a chord with me because the SIE is a journey in both a metaphorical and literal sense for the participants. Thus, the metaphor of the 'journey' seems a fitting nomenclature for these older age SIEs.

Each of the five SIE journeys adopts a different lens to examine and make sense of the complex nature of this SIE phenomenon. Some participants' individual stories reflect just one of the 'journey' stories, while other participants' stories fit with more than one of the 'journey' stories. In the latter situation, there was usually a dominant thread in the individual interpretive story that determined its placement in one of the five journey stories. The following discussion of the five SIE journeys suggests that while individuals in one of the groups have experienced considerable life enhancement, individuals in the other four groups have mostly experienced significant life change. Thus, the journeys are presented in five sections as though on a continuum, starting with the group that experienced life enhancement and finishing with the group that has undergone the most radical and transformative life experience.

1. The tandem stories

Individual interpretive stories

Cheryl

> *It does make you more self-reliant and confident. Having to do this, to be quite forthcoming about everything, to submit CVs and go for interviews and being a bit forceful, and travel on the tube and just sort yourself out.*

Cheryl was brought up in Essex and had a happy childhood. But England in the 1970s was dire, so when Cheryl's father was made redundant, the family emigrated to New Zealand. Cheryl was 17 and had already started working, but she was open to *giving NZ a go*.

Cheryl married a Dutch immigrant at 21 and had the first of two children at 28. The sharemarket crash triggered her return to work because her husband was unable to find building work. Later, they moved to the South Island and improved their financial situation by working and renovating houses. Cheryl did not enjoy living in a small town, and when the opportunity came, they returned to the city, where she worked as a legal executive.

As the children were growing up, Cheryl dreamed of travelling. She didn't feel isolated in New Zealand, and in fact, she thought that life here was more free and open than in England. Once the children were independent, Cheryl became bored with her work. *You hear of people suddenly getting cancer or something and dying in their sixties or seventies...we just felt we'd like to do something a bit more exciting than working in the same jobs.*

Cheryl had an EU passport and her parents, who were in their eighties, encouraged her to travel. While most friends were supportive, some weren't interested in travel or couldn't understand how they could throw caution to the wind; however, Cheryl was not discouraged. She resigned rather than take leave. Although she thought they would be away for two years, she wanted the time to be open-ended.

Having waited for her children to grow up, Cheryl was ready for an adventure; the planning had started some years earlier. Now their son was already overseas, and both Cheryl and her husband had extended family in England and Holland. *We thought it would be good to do it while we were still young enough to get jobs...we reached a stage in our lives where we had no mortgage and we just decided to do it.* Their daughter stayed in the family home and planned to join them after a year. The day of departure was a planned

no frills affair. *We'd just say…goodbye, and unload the bags, have a hug and say…see you in a year.*

The first stage of the SIE was planned around a visit to the US to attend a wedding. They stopped in New York for a week and then flew to London, where they were met by their son and cousin. They explored England, Ireland and France, camping while they travelled. World war battle sites and cemeteries were a focus of the European travels as they tried to understand the history. *It was like one exciting thing happening after another and not having to get up and go to work…just taking each day as you found it really.* Next, they headed to Holland to catch up with family and take in the excitement of world cup football. By now, they had been away for about two months. They returned to England to stay with Cheryl's aunt in the *ancestral council house* until they found employment. Cheryl had lived in the house with her parents and aunt until she was four.

Cheryl found work quickly. Although she was working officially three days a week, she was asked to cover for other absent staff members. She worked as a legal secretary rather than a legal executive and stayed there throughout the SIE. She made good friends and is still in touch with some of them. At the end of this working period, they spent a month travelling around Europe before returning to New Zealand.

While Cheryl enjoyed the work, the travelling and exploring were the highlights. They went sightseeing with their son and also went on excursions to Bruges, Venice and Paris. Cheryl was more interested in exploring areas through walking than by visiting museums and art galleries. Highlights were Grenada, Cyprus, Venice, Sicily and other parts of Italy. Drawn by antiquity and faded grandeur, they travelled in winter as well as summer. Food was also a drawcard, but it was not as important as the experiences of walking and exploration.

Cheryl and her husband planned to be away two years. She could have stayed longer; however, her husband wanted to return. *H* is a real Kiwi bloke so there's nothing he likes more than getting out, mowing the lawns, doing a bit of building…he wasn't doing anything like that, even though he was working as well during the week. I think he just missed it all.* With both children in England, it was difficult for Cheryl to leave; however, her mother was diagnosed with Alzheimer's. When they flew into Auckland, it was pouring with rain. Cheryl was totally deflated and missed her children, and for several weeks she just went through the motions. Eventually, she contacted old employment networks and was offered a job. Ironically, the return to a working routine helped her move through the depression.

Cheryl has been back for two years. She has always considered work an integral part of her life; however, it is the money that is important. Work is still very instrumental and it is her family that is the core of her life. What has changed is that she is no longer waiting for her children to grow up so she can explore and travel. Cheryl is more content and her outlook is now global. In an ideal world, she would spend six months in New Zealand and six months overseas. However, the traditional concept of retirement remains, and it is likely that Cheryl will stay in her current role until then. It is a comfortable life and the only shadow is that her children and future grandchildren are unlikely to live in New Zealand. If this is the case, Cheryl and her husband have decided they will return to the UK to live.

Cheryl has quenched her thirst for travel. The SIE was primarily her dream and her husband went along for the ride. It was Cheryl who found it more exciting and was more reluctant to return home. It was she who came out of the shadows. *Being a middle-aged woman you sort of feel that you become invisible…they don't know…we're the ones with the money! You're not asked for your opinion. You're not suddenly an important person anymore.*

For Cheryl, it seems that the SIE was exciting and life-enhancing rather than challenging and life-changing. She was never scared, money was not an issue and she felt very secure. Life is no longer waiting to be lived. SIE enabled Cheryl to *live in the moment and live to the max*, and while life post-SIE includes aspects of routine and pragmatism, it is lived in the present with greater flexibility, freedom and autonomy. There are enhanced levels of confidence, assertiveness, resilience and self-reliance. Cheryl appears to have developed a stronger sense of her purpose and place in the world.

*H = Husband

Meg

> *I've got to the stage where there is so much more to life.*

Meg was born in 1950, the youngest of three girls. Her early life was happy and uneventful. She found work as a typist. *I walked down Queen Street and thought…I'd like to work in that building, walked in and got a job.* Meg married at 22 and had two children. *My life was sort of ordered, nothing strange, nothing weird.* Meg grew flowers for the markets before the couple bought a Kerikeri orchard. When the orchard was closed down, she worked in retail and housekeeping, and after the children left, Meg and her husband bought a café. *My marriage started to crumble, he expected me to run it all.* But Meg was determined. *I'm going to make this work if it kills me.* It nearly did. *I attempted suicide; what stopped me was my kids.*

Meg left the marriage with *just the clothes I stood up in.* She stayed with friends, house-sat and worked in a supermarket. She met a man, but her knight in shining armour morphed into a stalker. She decided to move to Auckland, and a friend suggested they try internet dating. Meg was reluctant but *by the time we'd finished the bottle, both our names were on the site*, and Meg met H.

Without a job and accommodation in Auckland, Meg was very stressed. *I thought, you're flaming daft, put your trust in God. I got down on my knees and said, Lord, I can't do this, I'm handing it all over to you.* Within two weeks, she had a home-care job and accommodation, and the Kerikeri house was sold. Meg and H married in 2004. Two years later, they visited England, and Meg thought they could live as cheaply there as in New Zealand. After returning home to what seemed like a mundane and unchanged reality, Meg felt boxed in, thinking there must be more to life.

Meg wanted to push herself and test herself out in a new environment, so they decided to go overseas. Soon afterwards, they had arranged to sell their rental property and import a caravan into the UK, and there were some plans to work there. Friends thought they were crazy, but Meg's parents and children were encouraging. They waited until Meg's mother celebrated her 90th birthday, and when the sale of their rental property fell through, they raised a loan, rented the property and left for the UK undaunted!

Meg and H, who was born in England, based themselves at the home of H's cousin during the SIE. They toured Wales, Scotland and almost every English county. One evening, they received news that Meg's mother had died. Early next morning, Meg went for a walk. *There were squirrels collecting nuts and the trees and colours seemed very clear. I*

was very aware of my surroundings…and that I was an awful long way from home. Meg went to St Paul's Cathedral and sobbed throughout the service. Afterwards, the vicar approached. *She said, what was your mum's name…can we put her on the prayer list?* Meg lit a candle for her mother, and three weeks later, she returned to New Zealand to comfort her father. Had H not remained in the UK, Meg doubts she would have returned.

That Christmas they joined Meg's son and girlfriend in Cornwall. They walked to the village square for carol singing and afterwards everyone retired to the pub. *It was an eye-opener for me, a Baptist girl…the vicar loves the pub!* Meg invited the stayers home to the caravan. *We ran out of mulled wine…but it was wonderful.* When they toured Europe, they visited Normandy during the 65th D-Day anniversary celebrations and attended remembrance ceremonies at the village Cenotaph. *The New Zealand flag was flying…these old chaps, with their medals, with tears flowing down their faces.* Meg was profoundly affected by an inscription on a grave: *To the world he was only one, but to us he was the world.* Meg stood on Gold Beach for the official commemorations and the reality of her uncles' war experiences hit home. She began to see New Zealand differently. *New Zealand is a beautiful country but I've discovered it's really insignificant in the world.* They returned to the UK and applied for work but it was hard to come by. *Work would be some icing on the cake…but we fell flat on our faces with that.*

While in the UK Meg and H renewed their wedding vows and it was a magical experience. The ceremony was held in the church where H was baptised and on the exact date when his parents were married 65 years before and his grandparents were married 100 years before that. But…the money ran out and they booked their fares home. Meg regretted leaving new friends, H's family and her wider world, but was accepting of the return, especially as her daughter was recently engaged.

On their return to New Zealand Meg and H found that the job market was tough. *It's so difficult…being in my sixties.* Meg returned to home-care work, but H couldn't find any employment. Meg missed the English social life. *I did yearn for England.* New Zealand friends had moved on. Meg became depressed amid mounting financial pressure. Their relationship deteriorated and they sought counselling. Meg also sought treatment for depression. After six months, they took stock. *I would hate to say how many jobs H applied for…we finally decided that H would be the househusband.*

Their overall situation slowly improved and they have learned not to *sweat the small stuff.* They had planned to sell their rural property and buy elsewhere in New Zealand; however, Transit New Zealand has earmarked their land for motorway development and thwarted

Meg and H's plans. Despite the setback, Meg is coping well. She believes that the SIE and post-SIE experiences have been life-changing. *I think that actually the good and tough times…were really good for us…because we've learnt a lot.*

Money no longer dominates their lives. Through SIE, they learned to live a simpler and smaller life, and this has now translated into their post-SIE life in New Zealand. *We don't need lots of stuff.* Meg feels that life is good. She has returned to England for a visit for her son's wedding. The caravan in New Zealand is now their permanent home. Her first grandchild is due soon in New Zealand and she has joined a marketing and sales group with H, where she has found companionship and opportunities for development. Together, they can travel at a moment's notice, and there are further plans to travel outside of New Zealand.

SIE was a wondrous experience for Meg. *I've seen some fantastic things. I found New Zealand isn't the be-all and end-all.* SIE has helped Meg reach out from the comfortable but contained world she inhabited pre-SIE. She has roots in New Zealand, but now she has family and friends halfway around the world. Meg enjoys her work, finding it meaningful, but believes her options have been limited by the recession and her age. She feels valued by her employers, who support her flexible lifestyle.

At 62, Meg has evolved into a forward-thinking, happy and resilient woman. *I've learnt to expect the unexpected and roll with it.* Meg's marriage is the core around which her life revolves. Before the SIE, *we were getting up in the morning, going to work, coming home…there didn't seem to be any kind of motivation in our life.* SIE and the post-SIE period have challenged, enriched and enhanced Meg as an individual and within her marriage. Now, Meg is leading a more full, engaged and colourful life. It is not always easy, but it is more simple, more connected and more meaningful. Her horizons are so much wider, literally and figuratively.

Patti

> *The SIE was the happiest time we've actually ever had and our little cottage was probably the nicest place we've ever lived.*

Patti was born in 1950, the second of four children. There were few luxuries, but farming made for a wonderful childhood. She passed her University Entrance and went dental nursing. At 19, she married her childhood sweetheart and moved to a Southland farm. They had two children, but after 12 years, the marriage broke up. *It wasn't an option to go back dental nursing*, so she enrolled in a business course. *I'd be up at 3 am to go dagging sheep and then off to polytech.* It was exhausting. *My children were five and seven, and they'd get themselves organised for school and home again.*

Once the farm was sold, Patti moved to town. She went to an employment agency and they suggested she manage a building society. *I'd never worked in a bank…I didn't have a clue!* After two years, Patti left the position and moved to her new husband's farm. Her daughter was at boarding school and her son attended the local school. One evening, she met the manager of an insurance company. *Next thing I'm selling insurance to farmers*, and there was considerable travel and pressure. Eventually, they decided to sell the farm and move to the city.

Patti became an insurance adviser, and later she became a manager in another city from where she commuted. After three years, she took on a managerial position in Christchurch. *I was away from seven in the morning.* Five years on she was exhausted. *I was sitting in the doctor's waiting room and I vividly remember seeing this picture of a retired couple dancing along the surf. I thought…I couldn't do that.*

Another restructure was announced. *I took early retirement.* Patti did not work for several months. *I was so burnt out.* Her son encouraged them to visit the UK. Patti discovered that H qualified for an ancestral visa and she qualified as a dependent spouse. Now the possibility of an SIE became real. *We actually haven't got a heap of grandchildren to hold us back.* Friends were interested, but a little sceptical of their plans.

At Christmas time, Patti's mother gave them books on England, saying, *you're going to need these! If anything happens to us, you're not to come back.* Thus, Patti was given her mother's blessing to travel, something her mother would dearly love to have done. Now that the decision had been made, Patti and H updated their CVs.

In London, they were met by Patti's son. *He picked us up at the airport and made the transition easy for us.* Patti contacted agencies and they got a few interviews but no offers

of jobs. *It was a fantastic way to see England…they show you around their stately home, give you a drink and your train fare.*

Age was an issue, but there were advantages to being a New Zealander. *Oh, Kiwis? How old are you, darling? How old is your husband? You're fine, darling…but he's far too old…never mind, come and see me.* When they visited the job agency, they were greeted by the butler, and once they had chatted, the agent seemed impressed and said, *I've got just the job. It's fabulous…somebody famous! We won't tell him how old H is…you don't look that old, darling (…she's poking him), you haven't got an ounce of fat on you.*

Patti and H were offered employment. Patti was to be the housekeeper while H was to be the driver, handyman, pet whisperer, gardener and researcher! Mr and Mrs A (employers) were generous, providing a car and plenty of time off to travel. Every winter, Mr and Mrs A insisted they go somewhere warm such as Egypt or Kenya for a longer holiday. There were shorter trips also to Europe and *every part of the UK you can drive to.* There was one trip with H's daughter, and Patti's son often stayed for the weekend. After three years, Patti and H returned to New Zealand briefly for a wedding. Patti's father and H's mother had died during that time but Patti and H had opted not to return to their funerals.

They met some famous people, but immersed in their country duties, they didn't make many close friends. *We actually found English people quite different.* They became indispensable to their employers and their experience was ironically an inspiration to their Kiwi friends. *We put quite a few Kiwis into jobs over here!* Patti returned once more to New Zealand to see her daughter and new grandchild. Her son had already returned to New Zealand. Patti thought, *you can see the world but if you don't know your own grandchildren, you've missed out on a lot of life.* They gave several months' notice. *We were definitely ready to come home.*

When they returned to New Zealand, Patti and H stayed with family. They were asked to manage a holiday house, but Patti wanted life on her terms. *No, it was not for us…to work for people overseas and do…that's one thing, but in New Zealand, no way!*

Patti realised she was not ready to stop work. *I think I always knew that I would work still because of the age difference.* It wasn't about big money, challenge and success, as Patti was no longer interested in a corporate role. Patti wouldn't allow employment to dominate her life at the expense of her wellbeing ever again. She contacted a friend in the banking business, and a short time later, she had an interview and got a part-time job.

According to Patti, the SIE *made a huge difference…in lots of respects.* Interestingly, their close friendships back in New Zealand are with people from overseas. *Our next-door neighbours…they live in San Francisco…we see more of them than anybody else in town because we've got a lot in common.*

The extensive travel has increased Patti's knowledge and experiences. *The people we've met…we've experienced so much more…we would spend a week in a village and get to know the place. Rather than sort of being on a tour where you whizzed in and whizzed out.* Patti and H are much more interested in international events. *A lot of things happened in the world, we had all this news coming in…it definitely broadened our horizons.*

At the start of the SIE, Patti was concerned about finding a job because it was 14 months since she had been made redundant. They visited an aristocratic contact who explained the process of job hunting. *Lady Buxton said…it's a matter of being in the right place at the right time, it's all about timing here.* Patti learned to live with uncertainty and grasp opportunities as they arose. When they found their 'couples' employment, Patti learned to live and work at a more gentle rhythm, far away from the rigours of restructuring that dogged her New Zealand corporate experiences.

SIE excited, challenged and engaged Patti. In partnership with H, Patti has reconfigured her life and their life together. They are a team. Personal wellbeing is the core of Patti's post-SIE life, and around this centre is woven the fabric of all that is important: her husband, children, grandchildren, friends and interests. Now, Patti works to live. It is a more mellow, simple and peaceful life. *You don't need all the trappings.* The four-and-a-half-year SIE was a cameo, a magical mystery tour, *the happiest time we've actually ever had and our little cottage was probably the nicest place we've ever lived.*

The tandem journey

The three women in this group had experienced uncomplicated and contented childhoods. Meg was the youngest of three daughters. *I had a good childhood. I was almost like an only child because my sisters were off to school before I was born. I was the bonus child.* Patti was the second of four children. *I was very shy but we had a good childhood because we were brought up on a farm, and as with most people on a farm you don't have much ready cash...but you certainly have a wonderful lifestyle.* Cheryl lived with her family in England until they immigrated to New Zealand in her late teens. *My childhood was pretty average...a sort of standard English family life.*

At the time of the SIE, two of the participants had divorced and remarried, while Cheryl had been married for over 30 years. While Meg and Patti had experienced some personal and professional challenges in their adult lives, all three participants were in supportive relationships and living stable but uneventful lives, yet their professional or working lives were unsatisfactory. There was either too little or too much work.

Several months before the SIE, Patti took early retirement. *I was so burnt out and tired.* Meg had lost her sense of purpose in her work. These participants felt disengaged and stuck in a rut, particularly in their working lives. *At that stage work was getting a bit dull. After you've done it for so many years...you just feel like you need to get out of there and see what is happening outside* (Cheryl). They thought that there's got to be more to life than this. They wanted to do something more exciting and take some risks. *So we decided to push ourselves...and that's exactly what we did.* (Meg).

SIE

The participants planned the SIE with their husbands. Interestingly, the language they used in the research interviews was often prefaced with a collective 'we'. In one of the interviews, the participant's husband sat alongside her, sipped tea and offered comments. In another interview, the participant's husband sat in the next room, checking in with us occasionally to see if we needed anything and to clarify some SIE facts. The third interview was carried out at the participant's workplace, which precluded this 'interactive' interview experience. As an interviewer, I wondered whether to ask if I could meet the participants alone. But as the interviews unfolded, I let the participants set the tone for the physical space and place in which they were comfortable and I began to understand that, for some women in this study, SIE was intrinsically a tandem journey.

The pre-departure planning was shared, as was the SIE decision-making. None of the work plans of the three participants took precedence over those of their partners. Cheryl and her husband settled in London and applied for work through agencies. Patti and her husband were a team as they searched for work. *We wanted a couples' job and I guess we were just trying lots of things to see what was out there.* Meg and her husband initially planned to develop a property together. *When we first decided to do the SIE we thought that we would go to England...buy a house there...renovate it...sell that and come home. Then we decided no, it's just a little bit dicey with buying and selling properties over there.* The recession had struck and the couple were aware that work might be hard to find.

The working experiences for Patti and Cheryl were very settled in that they had one employer for their entire SIE. Patti worked as a housekeeper on a country estate, while her husband also worked there in a variety of roles. *So we stayed there the whole time...he was just absolutely lovely to work for.* Cheryl worked for the same legal firm throughout her SIE. Patti and Cheryl deliberately sought undemanding work that did not have any requirements to complete training or professional registrations. *I did consider maybe I should look at a different area but once you're skilled in one area and you kind of enjoy it and you know what you're doing...why go somewhere else?* (Cheryl).

The work that they undertook was a means to an end, to fund the travel. Both Patti and Cheryl soon became valued members of staff, so much so that they were able to negotiate considerable flexibility for travel. *We thought we'd just make ourselves totally indispensable so that they couldn't live without us* (Patti).

> *I think they found out that I knew more than I was letting on. I got transferred from where I was working to another team which did complicated work. I worked there for a little while and then someone in another team was having problems so I got transferred there.* (Cheryl)

Work proceeded uneventfully for the participants, and the travel experiences for all three were enthralling. While all the SIE participants travelled widely, the tandem group were inveterate travellers. Patti and her husband travelled frequently within the UK and in Europe, and were supported by their employers.

> *We worked it out that we actually had about 105 days off a year for travelling and they supplied us with a cottage and a car. We did a two-week trip to Egypt and spent the first winter there...they insisted we went for a decent winter holiday to somewhere warm...in January we would take a big holiday. Most of our time was just little trips...all over Europe and every part of the UK we could possibly drive to. I remember times we'd go and sit at pubs and cinemas, and at Cowes we*

watched the boats. It was so relaxed and no worries and basically everything was paid for. (Patti)

For Cheryl, the travel was also the highlight of the SIE. There was a two-month tour of Holland, France, Ireland and England before she settled into her work. After that, there were many more excursions.

> *We went to Paris and Bruges on the Eurostar, to Venice for long weekends, we also did a couple of trips in England. We went to New York, to Grenada in Spain, to Mykonos in Greece, to Cyprus, to Italy…we had a week in Sicily.* (Cheryl)

Meg and her husband purchased a large, 30-foot-long caravan and started their road trip in the UK. They based themselves at a relative's farm until the caravan was ready. *We picked it up at Russ-on-Why, on the border of Wales. From there we toured. We went up to Scotland, we did every county in England, except for Merseyside.* They crossed the channel and toured through Europe spending time mixing with local communities in France and Belgium and camping in local camping grounds on the way.

> *A message went round the camping ground, anybody was welcome to join in, and the bit that really got me, right in the middle of my heart, was…we were standing there, the whole thing was said in French which we understand very little of and all these old soldiers were standing around in a semi-circle…and as the speeches went on…I'm getting goosebumps now…they were remembering things that we've never ever seen but can only just imagine. Then we were invited back to the town hall, it was like the RSA…to have a drink with these old chaps…shake their hands…it was just a fantastic day.* (Meg)

The focus on travel and understanding the historical and local contexts was important for the participants. *It's a chance to see places that you read about…and to actually be there, it was just wonderful!* (Cheryl). *We would spend a week in a village and get to know the place* (Patti). Interestingly, cultural exploration and experiences were not a priority. Apart from attending a Proms concert, some West End shows and a museum or two, the three participants did not immerse themselves in cultural pursuits. *My husband's not a great culture vulture. We did a few museums and things…we went to Paris but we've never actually been in the Louvre because I don't like huge museums and art galleries to start off with* (Cheryl).

The decision to return home was not as straightforward for the participants as it seemed for their husbands. Cheryl was more keen than her husband to undertake the SIE. *He just went along for the ride!* Both of Cheryl's children were living in the UK when it was time for her to return to New Zealand.

It was always planned to do about two years. I could have stayed on quite happily. It was hard to go. I didn't want to leave them, then also my father had contacted me to say that my mum had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's. (Cheryl)

After a four-and-a-half-year SIE, Patti was ready to come home. Her husband had suggested they return earlier but she was not ready then.

So by the time we came home, we'd been away for a long time…I had a bit of a cancer scare and I had a biopsy…I remember sitting in the hospital and saying…this is just the worst…just for the fact that we'd have had to come home. We'd met people who were coming home after two years and I'd think – I don't know how you can bear to go home yet. There's still too much to see. (Patti)

Meg and her husband ran out of money after 12 months. Meg felt ambivalent about her return to New Zealand. She accepted that she must return, but in her heart, she was not quite ready, unlike her husband. *Yes, it was a mixed feeling…of sadness that we were leaving, but I was looking forward to meeting my daughter's fiancé.*

Thus, it seems that these participants were more reluctant than their husbands to return home, especially in the case of Meg and Cheryl, who were away for one and two years respectively. However, the pull of family and financial pressures meant that pragmatism prevailed and the participants accepted that their SIE was at an end. Once the decision was made, the participants looked forward to returning to New Zealand. There was some sadness at leaving friends, although the participants tended to establish just a few quality friendships.

We only made friends with two lots of people…we actually found English people quite different. The first trip we ever did, we went up to the Christmas markets in Germany and we met a girl on the way and she actually didn't live very far from us. She's just been out here, but she lives in France now. Yeah, I mean, that's a lifelong contact. (Patti)

Undertaking SIE for the three participants in this group was a tandem journey. Although the participants were pushed beyond their comfort zones, being part of a stable and supportive unit left them free to work and, more especially, to travel without fear or trepidation. *I was never scared or worried. I never lost any sleep or anything…absolutely…you've got a bit more earning power so you sort of smooth out the bumps and you've got emotional support and company.* (Cheryl)

Post-SIE

All three participants decided to return to paid work on their return home, believing they were not ready to retire.

H is quite happy in his job and I'm quite happy here and the people I work with are all a similar age group so…we can all retire together. (Cheryl)

We were actually only home a few weeks and we realised that – hey, we're not ready to retire. (Patti)

Meg and her husband had difficulty in finding work. Eventually, Meg found some work. *H would be the househusband* (Meg).

The participants drew on former contacts to secure positions.

I phoned a friend that I used to work with and she'd often said to me…if you're looking for a job, give me a ring first…her HR person phoned me and said… have you got a CV? So I pulled out the CV again which I'd sort of updated before I left the UK…I had an interview and a choice of two roles here. (Cheryl)

Finding work was not as straightforward for Meg, who was older than the other two participants. Nevertheless, she fell back on earlier contacts. *Being in my sixties was difficult but finally I rang up a not for profit organisation and they said…yes…we'll have you back. So I was very pleased they were welcoming me back.*

The three participants returned to the same type of work or industry that they were involved in before their SIE. Paid work was still part of their lives but it was no longer the centre of their worlds. *We can pick up and go. I can throw my job in. Once we've paid off all our bills then I can throw my job in if I want to* (Meg). They were not looking for challenging work or unpaid volunteer work. Nor were they intent on reigniting their careers. Their attitude to money and work was instrumental and work appeared to be also valued as a conduit for social contacts and independent outlets, aside from networks of family and friends forged around their coupledom. *I think it's a great social thing because otherwise it's quite difficult to meet people…whereas working does put you in contact with lots of people…clients or other people you work with* (Cheryl).

Traditional ideas of retirement were not changed by the SIE experience. Retirement was viewed as a dichotomous notion, defined by whether one works or doesn't work, driven by a chronological benchmark of 65 years and individual perceptions of retirement readiness.

We thought it would be a good idea to do the SIE while we were still young enough to get jobs…to get around and sightsee and take a few risks, rather than moving into retirement age. Now we'll probably both be in the same jobs until we retire. (Cheryl)

I actually have to have something else to do as I am not at retirement age...H wasn't far off going on the pension so we weren't so worried whether he would work. (Patti)

Thus, the professional/work lives of the participants were contained and a strong work–life delineation was evident in their post-SIE lives. While work dominated their pre-SIE lives, post-SIE work was sidelined, separated and sublimated to their personal lives. In this personal domain, their relationships with their husbands, family and friends were prioritised.

The shared experiences of the SIE created a new foundation on which to further develop their relationships. All of the participants acknowledged that, through the ups (and some downs) of the SIE experience, they had grown together as a couple. *We understand each other a lot more now, we are enjoying life, we don't sweat the small stuff any longer, if we died tomorrow I wouldn't regret a thing* (Meg).

It was good for our relationship...we've got common memories and we can talk about things and we'll say...oh, yeah...and he'll say...well I'm not going to that place again! (Cheryl)

Children and grandchildren are now a major focus in their lives. Patti's children have returned to live locally, while Meg and Cheryl still have children living overseas. The draw of the children is significant, and while New Zealand is considered home, the participants would relocate overseas for children and grandchildren.

Well, if our children have children, would we be willing to never see our grandkids...you just miss out too much on too much...why should the relatives over there in England or the in-laws, have benefit from the grandchildren. It's a participation thing...as much as my husband hates living in Europe and he hates the crowds and he hates this and he hates that, he's said he will not want to live over here if grandchildren are living in another country. (Cheryl)

With a grandchild on the way, Meg is adamant that she would also return. *Oh, gosh, yes I have a little bit of fear that my son and daughter-in-law are going to decide to pick up and go back to England...I think I would pack up everything in one second flat!*

The three participants have been involved in major home development projects with their husbands on their return as they continue to nest and invest for their retirement years. Patti and Cheryl have undertaken significant house renovations. Meg and her husband planned to move to a new rural property more suitable for their retirement years, but their plans have been delayed as their current land is earmarked for motorway development.

The renewal of old friendships is not a priority for the three women. It is as if they have moved on from that pre-SIE place and now wish to develop just a few significant new friendships. *We've done different things to them, it's just that we are not in the same position as when we left* (Meg).

For these three participants, the SIE has been a wonderful life-enhancing experience. *Oh yes, yes, we wouldn't take it back for anything. It was fantastic. It's a lifetime experience* (Patti).

> *We felt like we were in a box and we needed to get out…and we did…now I'm open to all sorts of suggestions about what we do and where we go…we're more than happy…absolutely.* (Meg)

Travelling and working as a couple undoubtedly shaped and at times constrained the SIE for the three participants, just as it might in a different way for those who travel and work alone. The personal lives of the three participants are now deeply enmeshed in their relationships with their husbands. Surviving parents, children and grandchildren and a few close friends are an integral part of this personal domain. Yet the SIE has opened up the participants' lives and broadened their perspectives. SIE has laid the foundations for a more engaging and meaningful post-SIE life, where work has been relegated to the back stage and the personal has taken centre stage.

2. The internationalist stories

Individual interpretive stories

Jo

> For me, I felt that when I was overseas I was as true to myself as I've ever been in my life.

Jo grew up on a farm. Her brother died very young. *Mum was very stoic and gentle…she never put her needs out there. It was really hard on Mum…it affected our family in a deep, negative way.* Home was ruled by a domineering father. *He was a father to be afraid of. He'd abuse us verbally, not physically and Mum would never say, oh that's a bit harsh. We were scared of his tongue.* Nevertheless, it was a good but isolated life, with the annual highlight being a visit to her grandparent's farm, where there was much love and laughter.

Jo was a bright student. *Dad didn't want me to go to university but the teachers made a stand for me…we want this girl to go to uni.* Without a clear career plan, she completed a bachelor's degree and a graduate teaching diploma and was the only family member to attend university. After teaching for one term, Jo went overseas. She returned three years later, resumed her teaching and married H. H wanted to become a farm labourer while Jo taught. They became sharemilkers and had the first of four children while Jo continued to relief teach.

After 10 years, they purchased a farm on the West Coast of the South Island. It was a tough life, far away from family and friends; however, it was primarily her husband's dream and Jo was supportive. They clawed their way into farm ownership, but H, realising they couldn't afford to buy a farm up north, started to think of other ways to farm and inquired about a volunteer (farming) SIE. Meanwhile, with ageing parents, Jo and H returned north to a lifestyle block. During this time, Jo was elected to the school board and began her own consultancy business. She enjoyed this work, and it was a reminder of her personal and professional capabilities.

Some years later, H was interviewed for a farm position in the Pacific, and VSA, recognising Jo's extensive paid and unpaid work experience, suggested she go in a designated position rather than as a supporting spouse. Their parents thought a volunteer SIE was a good idea. Jo and H saw it as an opportunity to live in a different culture and help others, but Jo was also sad to leave her fledgling business and board activities. H was charged with redeveloping a farm, and Jo's official role was administration, and she was grateful for VSA's foresight in assigning her a specific but flexible role.

The farm seemed impossible to save. Despite this, the volunteer SIE was also a joyous experience. Never had they laughed or worked so hard together. On their days off, they would ride their horses. *To see the animals grow up to be saleable stock. We achieved that!* After 13 months, they returned home briefly for their son's birthday. Several months later, three days before their next visit home, H answered a knock at the door and was met with men armed with guns, machetes and metal bars. He was bound, and forced onto the floor with a gun held to his head. Simultaneously, other invaders rolled through the windows. Jo was forced to collect valuables.

> *The boy seemed more frightened than me, I remember him saying – hurry up...I would say back...just hold on sweetheart, I've got to think about where that is...don't rush me...this is a hard situation. He was saying – yes, Mrs...as if we were almost friends...I'm not particularly a calm person, but that day I was like somebody else...and all those weapons.*

The invaders tied Jo up and left. H escaped and immediately chased the invaders. For Jo, the experience was surreal, but H, who is usually in control, was powerless to give protection. People understood H's terror and anger, but they did not always understand Jo's story.

> *I never felt we were in danger of being killed...but whenever I re-told the story he would shoot me down and say...anything could have happened, they had three guns. I agree with him, but I used to feel upset too that my version never seemed to be valid. Yet, that was how it was for me.*

Despite pressure to stay in New Zealand, *we stuck to our guns and went back.* The invasion drove a wedge between them. Jo had always fitted in, her partner had the career plan, but now it seemed that Jo wanted her voice heard. She wanted to stay and H wanted out. In their final month, a staff member was killed in a farm accident. It was incredibly stressful, but they got through this and returned to New Zealand for Christmas, six months after the home invasion.

Jo did not have any set plans on her return to New Zealand. They purchased a business and it has been fantastic for H. Jo also works there but more in the background, doing the books. *My life at the moment is quite narrow, it's draining looking after Dad...the business is draining and I'm not doing any community work.* Jo's mother died two years after her return. The death of her mother and the responsibility of caring for her father have been very upsetting for Jo and perhaps a reminder to her that she is once again putting her commitment to her family ahead of her own needs.

The volunteer SIE gave Jo an opportunity to focus on herself. *For me, I felt that when I was overseas I was as true to myself as I've ever been in my life.* During her SIE, Jo gained insight into a way of life in which she was fully engaged in meaningful work and was respected personally and professionally. Family is very important to Jo. *I want to support H. He doesn't do the administration side of the business…I do that and that holds me back…but I'm OK to put say five years aside to do it.*

Jo was loving, respectful and supportive of H, while on SIE and in the current business, but she acknowledges her marriage is under pressure. *Our marriage has been through its most difficult phase in later years…like bringing up teenagers was challenging and farming on the West Coast was challenging…our marriage got harder ever since that home invasion.* The tensions have continued as Jo and H move into uncharted territory. *You know, I always feel grateful that there's enough love in our marriage to make it work…we do have shared values but we have some that aren't, which puts pressure on it.*

One of Jo's core values is the commitment to caring for family and the importance of the grandparenting role, but *I'd love to have that freedom again to not just be supportive…it would be freeing to only have to do something yourself.* The volunteer SIE allowed Jo to connect with a more global family and opened up pathways very different from those trodden by her mother. Before the grandchildren arrive, Jo wants to do another international volunteer SIE. H will support her, but he will not go with her full-time. In giving her current situation a five-year use-by date, Jo is very aware of life's possibilities and is committed to being true to herself. *I think awareness is something that's just amazing…if you've got awareness, you've got so much power and so much choice.*

Gillian

> *Listen to your own heart and follow that pathway…even if it is just a little terrifying.*

Gillian's life-path was preordained by her father and a fundamentalist church, where girls were expected to serve and obey. As a first born, Gillian knew little else. *I look back and I'm embarrassed, I just accepted it…filled my life up with other things.* Denied the right to attend university, Gillian trained as a secretary, a radiographer, went to Bible college, married at 21, and set sail for Asia as a missionary, intent on saving the world.

The first two years were wonderful, but when Gillian became pregnant, she withdrew from church duties. Gillian became isolated and her spirit was at a low ebb. The return to New Zealand heralded happier times, until a subsequent transfer ended this idyllic spell. Gillian's husband was appointed to a new church role, but she was excluded from the assistant pastor role and felt increasingly at odds with the church. With her marriage and faith crumbling, *I was going to need a job…I needed a degree…I thought…well a business degree's not a bad thing.* Eventually, her marriage ended and Gillian continued her studies. However, she worried about how a full-time job would impact on her children once she completed her degree, so she enrolled in a PhD programme and worked part-time. University studies opened up an exciting new world, and finally life seemed to be on a more even keel.

Gillian began a new relationship. She was swept off her feet and quickly married but soon realised her husband had serious mental health issues. When her daughter left to travel, Gillian thought, *I don't need more dependents…maybe I'm a coward, but this is not what I want.* As the marriage broke down, ironically, Gillian's career rocked upwards. *I realised I could do things…it was wonderful, but terrifying.* Gillian was dazed by her own success. *Gosh, they'll see through me one day.* After several years, Gillian felt *the challenge was gone*, and moving into senior management filled her with dread. *I'm a big picture person, management was details. I was offered opportunities but I just felt sick in my stomach.*

In her early fifties, Gillian still longed to travel and so she resigned. Her employers offered leave, but Gillian responded, *Absolutely not, I packed my life up. I wasn't coming back to this city.* She wasn't concerned about leaving her mother as her sister was living nearby. Gillian flew to the US to meet her other sister, to London to stay with her daughter and then to Grenada to do a TEFL* course. She didn't have an English passport, which limited her employment options. After the course, she travelled in Portugal, then took a house-

sitting job in England, organised by her brother. There, she caught her breath and applied for positions, quickly accepting one in Istanbul. *I thought…gosh, I didn't think about Turkey. What am I doing? So, very exciting and very, very terrifying.*

Gillian arrived in Istanbul and was horrified. *They had made a mess-up…the director said…you start tomorrow…you've got six classes. I thought, oh no!* Gillian was accustomed to the unexpected, but Istanbul was different and she was flying solo. *I'd been shown once how to get to school but I am always terrified.* Professionally, it was demanding. *The hours were hard, I would start at 8 and teach till 10 at night.* Gillian loved her new 'independent thinking' colleagues. *There were some weirdos, but the majority were fabulous, they had different values from everybody back in New Zealand. I felt my age when I arrived…but I realised that's not how they saw me…I was with my kind of people.* Finally, Gillian had found her tribe.

Istanbul was chaotic. *The traffic's horrendous, going away for a weekend, you couldn't do it…I felt quite trapped.* She managed to visit Gallipoli and Bulgaria, but mostly she stayed in Istanbul, immersed in her new tribe, her new photography passion, capturing the beauty of the city through her lens. *I really loved Istanbul. I lived along the Bosphorus, I'd get up early and walk in the mornings. It was beautiful.*

Language teaching did not come naturally; *however, I kind of cracked it…I could make it work. My students loved me, this is what amazed me.* Despite this, Gillian was ground down by the relentless cycle of classes. At Christmas, Gillian joined her daughters in the UK. She felt restless on her return to Istanbul and knew that if she broke her contract, it would be difficult to get another elsewhere. She began to consider other work options in New Zealand. She loved Istanbul, *I felt like I belonged there,* but she did not love her work. Life was closing in. It was time to go.

The return to New Zealand was about searching for breathing space, perhaps another challenge, restoring finances and the longing for New Zealand's open spaces. Initially, Gillian stayed with her mother and took on a senior public sector role. Two daughters had returned to New Zealand to be married, so Gillian bought a house and one year morphed into three. Her job was disastrous. *I've not had enough work the entire three years, it's soul-destroying.*

As redundancy loomed, Gillian focused on developing interests and paying the mortgage. *I need to give out, to grow…there was a heap of growing done just coping with living in Turkey and learning to be a teacher…but I needed other things, once I'd sussed those*

out. Doubtful that an organisational career could ever satisfy her again, Gillian explored photography, web design, and writing fiction and blogs.

Before her SIE, Gillian was at a crossroads. SIE opened up new possibilities and the three years back in New Zealand have been a time of consolidation and preparation for the next life stage. Some overseas travel has been a bonus. Personally, Gillian has strengthened family relationships. Her mother always seemed a *bit of an ice queen*, but now Gillian understands her better. When Gillian returned from Turkey, she bought a motorbike, expecting her mother to disapprove. However, she simply said, *I just want you to be you.*

Gillian is at another crossroads. She expects her redundancy notice and is planning another SIE, teaching English in China. This time teaching will not be her only focus. Gillian has developed other interests that she is passionate about and may have potential for generating income while she is internationally mobile. Sadly, Gillian has not found her tribe back home. Feeling like a *lone wolf*, Gillian plans to change the longing to belonging on her next SIE, but she doesn't look too far ahead.

Gillian is nearly 60. *The age thing is playing with my head.* She cannot see a clear direction. *It is a mystery…I am living for now,* and although it is scary, she is confident something will work out. In the past, Gillian often bowed to others. *I parked a whole side of me, I did things that were counter to me.* Since her SIE, Gillian gives more space to herself in her quest for a meaningful life. She is not there yet, but she has clarified the parameters and values that shape her search for belonging. Most importantly, she has learned to trust her own judgement and back herself. It is important, says Gillian, *to listen to your own heart and follow that pathway…even if it is just a little terrifying.*

* Teaching English as a foreign language

Colleen

> *It stretches you...makes you rethink the way you do things...makes you less constrained by others...I became a complete person.*

Colleen is the youngest of three girls, *brought up in a home that wasn't desperately unhappy by parents who probably had a fair degree of incompatibility.* Her father was a doctor and her mother, a vibrant and creative woman, was devoted to her children. In Colleen's eyes, her mother *was probably bored stiff.* Colleen went to art, music and singing lessons. When she was seven, her father went to England for six months and her mother accompanied him, *as was expected of her.* The housekeeper struggled with the children, especially with lippy Colleen. Fearful that the girls complained about her, the housekeeper never posted their letters. They received postcards from their parents, but there were never any phone calls. *We got looked after by someone they'd advertised for, which was quite extraordinary...we didn't like it at all because we were quite spoiled and this lady was extremely strict.*

Colleen attended university in a different city. Her father valued university education and had high hopes for his daughters. So when they each married at 19, he put up a fight, arguing the eldest *was far too academic to be married!* Colleen's university career was short-lived. She became immersed in the drug scene, and then converted to Christianity and married. Colleen abandoned her studies in favour of the church when she became pregnant. She had three daughters and was busy and happy but poor. Later, when her marriage broke up, Colleen went on a benefit to recover, focus on her children and continue extramural study. On completion of her studies, she took a teacher aide position, married her second husband, who also had children, worked in his business and then enrolled in teachers college.

During her teaching years, Colleen overheard younger colleagues discussing SIE plans. Both Colleen's and H's children were independent and had left home, so when H's business got into difficulties, they closed it down and began to discuss an SIE. The only barrier was Colleen's ageing mother. *Do you wait till they die? It was difficult because it was sort of an ideal time in regards to the children's lives.* Colleen felt she had been drifting for some time and wanted an adventure. Once the decision to go was made, the house was packed up, Colleen registered for relief teaching positions online and they flew to the UK via Singapore. *We were ignorant...we'd never used bank cards and we didn't have Singapore money!*

They arrived in London and Colleen began work two days later. They flatted with H's son. There were snowstorms on the second day and Colleen came home in the dark. The education system was different and there was little support, yet Colleen loved her new London life. *I just remember the first telephone box I saw, it was all just so exciting!* For three years, Colleen worked in the same school. The children were challenging and rewarding, but unfortunately the culture in the school was toxic. Colleen was the only foreigner on the staff and with her new-found sense of freedom, she spoke out when school issues concerned her while other teachers were silent. Lippy Colleen was back! London life was great. *We'd just go on the train…to shows, museums, art galleries.* Their explorations took them all over England, Europe, to places such as Italy, Egypt, the Nile, and Morocco. They immersed themselves in cultural experiences. *We climbed Mt Sinai through the night to watch the sun rise…in Marrakech in the square teeming with people, we watched the sun go down, listening to the call to prayer.*

Colleen found the English education system very prescriptive and drew on her New Zealand knowledge to develop a uniquely Kiwi approach. Her students and their parents appreciated it, despite the conflict it created with the principal. After three years, Colleen moved to a different school, where it was easier to be foreign. There she gained her UK teaching registration.

Colleen expected London to be like home, *because I'd had a relatively English-style New Zealand upbringing.* In London, she attended a lecture on New Zealand soldiers in World War I. The speaker talked of the Kiwi soldiers dreaming of their New Zealand home, and how they infuriated British officers with their lack of respect for tradition. Colleen began to think about her own sense of foreignness and felt she was engaged in a similar struggle in her first workplace. *The longer I stayed there the more alien I felt and the more like a Kiwi I felt…there was a significant kind of mind shift whilst I was there.*

During her five years based in London, Colleen returned to New Zealand twice for family reasons. Her SIE was gloriously exciting and she wanted to stay forever. However, H wanted to return, her mother was unwell, her daughter's marriage had broken up and there were now grandchildren in New Zealand. Finding work immediately wasn't a priority, as they were in a stronger financial position than before the SIE. However, Colleen got an excellent teaching position quickly and found that teaching in New Zealand had changed dramatically.

It took Colleen a year to adjust to life in New Zealand. She missed the excitement of London and had difficulty understanding the New Zealand way of thinking. *One of the*

things I loved about London was that you were really anonymous and you could walk through the city stark naked without anyone commenting…it had a profound effect on the way I felt about myself really and I liked it…back here, I found people talking to me in shops, it's quite irritating. The SIE has been liberating, and since returning, Colleen has worked hard in her teaching, but she has also learned to pace herself. She has travelled to visit her children overseas, but for now there are no immediate plans for another SIE. Colleen is happy to be home. *Mostly…I like our NZ way of life better than theirs in terms of the way they relate to life. I think we're better at letting go of things that don't work out…and moving forward in life.*

It was important for Colleen to have an adventure. *It's so much fun, so stimulating…it puts life in perspective, it makes you value the important things.* The SIE pushed Colleen's boundaries. Speaking out in her teaching role was the start of this metamorphosis. Colleen is now more intentional. She is no longer afraid of the 'lunatic' within her. *One of my favourite quotes out of Middlemarch is 'the sane people do what their neighbours do, so if there's a lunatic at large, one might know and avoid them'. I think that's kind of the feeling you get living in New Zealand, that sense of constraint, we have to be relatively like everybody else.*

The SIE was an extraordinary time of cultural, spiritual, professional and intellectual enrichment. It has unleashed an interest in further study and given Colleen a clear sense of what it means to be a Kiwi and an understanding of New Zealand's place in history. *I appreciate being a New Zealander way more than I did before…I always wanted to plant English trees, but now, I just enjoy iconic New Zealand things like pohutukawas.*

SIE has left Colleen strong, assertive and at peace with herself. She feels she is *more complete.* The SIE has consolidated her relationships with her husband and adult children. Currently, her post-SIE life is centred on family, relationships and meaningful work, with plans to travel again in the future. Colleen is more confident about who she is, what she does and where she is going. Life is now more clear and intentional.

Connie

> *I've got outsider's eyes now. I am from New Zealand but not of it now. SIE has changed me in that way.*

Connie was born in Auckland in 1948 and moved with her family to a farm in Cambridge. She was a rebellious child, disappearing for hours to read and escape. She attended a traditional Catholic girls boarding school and remonstrated against the strict regime. The nuns made her deputy head girl, a subtle way of exerting control, or so Connie thought. Connie's father sent her to Waikato University, thinking he could keep an eye on her there.

University was a blissful time, such was the joy of learning. She married at 22. *We were both very silly and very young. I think my parents were quite relieved I'd got married.* Connie's husband encouraged her to attend training college and although she never wanted to teach, she thought she would have empathy with difficult adolescents. Connie felt she was floating through life. She was a full-time mother for six years and eventually went teaching because there was a vacancy at a local school.

At 38, Connie's life changed dramatically. Her marriage broke down and shortly afterwards, two brothers were killed in separate accidents. Previous to these tragedies Connie's father had drowned after suffering a heart attack while Connie was with him. At the time Connie was teaching special education children and decided to move to secondary teaching, thinking it would reduce the high levels of stress in her life. After five years, she felt she had plateaued in her career and in her personal life as she had experienced two unsatisfactory post-marriage relationships.

In an effort to kick-start her life, Connie returned to the Waikato and enrolled in postgraduate study. It was good to be closer to her mother and family. Her mother was feisty and encouraged her children to develop an inquiring mind. *She was a boiling pot with a lid that was always being pushed back down on it.* But the loss of her two brothers and witnessing her mother's grief made it too difficult for Connie to stay. *I can't stay forever, I've got to do something out of the ordinary…it was just a feeling I'd burst if I didn't do something…before it was too late.*

When Connie completed her studies, her mother saw an advertisement in the *New Zealand Herald* for English language specialists in Hong Kong. She gave it to Connie, implicitly encouraging her. Connie applied successfully and left immediately, anxious to move away from her mother's grief and her own sad memories, towards a more challenging and independent life. She worked in a secondary school for refugees and

loved it. She was optimistic from the start, taking more charge of her life decisions and moving outside of her comfort zone. She lived in a village and didn't care what her friends thought, with her family very supportive of her venture.

After four years of working in Hong Kong and travelling extensively across China, Connie returned to New Zealand as she was concerned for her son and she thought her ageing mother may need support. However, her son was in a relationship and planning to travel and her mother was coping well. Connie found it difficult to slot back into New Zealand life. Work opportunities were limited and unsatisfying, so she applied for more contract work overseas.

This time Connie was based in Shanghai. She travelled widely and worked as an English language consultant, supervised students in Beijing and worked as an English language examiner. The position was exhilarating, but eventually she tired of the corruption and accepted a position back in Hong Kong at her previous workplace. This was a great move. She was paid well, and for the first time in her life, she didn't have to worry about money. Connie was able to travel across Asia, and she was doing work in which she was challenged and respected. All her friends were Chinese and she did not socialise in the expat community. Her work and life were centred on her love of cultural experiences, and she felt emotionally and financially free for the first time in her life.

After she had been in China and Hong Kong for three years, Connie's sister was diagnosed with cancer. Connie quit her contract and returned to New Zealand to nurse her. Her sister did not live long and Connie thought she would stay in New Zealand to support her nephews. But the grief of yet another family loss seemed unbearable. *As a family, that was the last straw. Instead of drawing together…we sort of fragmented and I couldn't stand my mother's grief...I couldn't stand living in it.* One month after her sister's death, Connie returned to Hong Kong.

This time, however, Connie couldn't settle and her heart was calling her home. Connie wanted to be an active grandparent, providing the support and stability that she felt her son lacked as he grew up with a largely absent father. The return home has been successful overall. Connie now leads a simple and less consumer-oriented life and feels liberated. She has reconnected with family and friends. In returning to New Zealand and facing her grief, Connie is now able to accommodate her losses more readily.

Professionally, it has been a difficult transition. Coming from Asian society, Connie found that working in New Zealand education as an older woman is very difficult. *Age is respected in China. You are wise when you're old. Here, you're just old and whatever*

negative connotation that goes with that. My experience out of New Zealand as a teacher, I don't think is validated in New Zealand at all. After three years working on monthly and very short-term contracts, Connie has not been able to find a tenured position and feels very undervalued.

> *My experiences haven't counted for anything. I'm the most qualified and most experienced teacher in my department…there are people who are sitting there for 20 or 30 years…doing the same thing…and if I say…could we do this…but we don't do that here. We've always done it this way. So I want to punch a hole in the wall, actually.*

It is ironic that Connie was able to achieve her personal and professional goals when in Asia. Now back in New Zealand she brings her *outsider's eyes*, which give her a wider perspective. She believes that her post-SIE teaching life in New Zealand has curtailed her creativity and energy, and also the sense of empowerment and achievement she experienced overseas. Connie considered going back to secondary teaching but is required to retrain. Now she has decided she will continue contract roles until she is in a position to take up some more volunteer/unpaid work overseas that is more aligned with her values and way of being.

Connie's SIEs were mostly driven by the need to escape. *I was this little great leaver behind person. If I didn't like something…if the water got too hot…I just jumped.* Yet SIE gave Connie a strong and renewed sense of self-worth. SIE gave her the chance to escape personal losses and rebuild her life around successful relationships and a meaningful career. In returning home, Connie has chosen to put herself, her family and personal relationships at the centre of her life for now, while contemplating future international assignments. Connie is no longer escaping. Primarily she is at peace with herself, still remonstrating and challenging in some respects and most definitely walking to her own international beat.

Monica

> *I feel good…I've got choices, I've got a profession that is saleable…it's given me a sense there's a whole world out there…that you can do anything you want to.*

Monica is a middle child in a 1950s family. In many ways, it was an ordinary childhood, but Monica was careful around her father. *Dad's not well…just go to the swimming pool. There were always mood fluctuations that dominated the house. I played a lot of tennis. That was like an escape to get out of the house.* As a child, her father's war experiences cast a shadow over the family's postwar lives and Monica learned to be silent, unobtrusive and quietly independent.

Monica trained as a nurse, married at 20, and at 25, she travelled overseas with her husband for six months, although she would have liked to stay longer. *It wasn't a major life change, but it was great.* She returned to nursing and soon their first child was born. Twenty years later, Monica and two friends celebrated their 50th birthdays exploring France and Tuscany for five weeks, with Monica also visiting London briefly. *In '76, it was all about having a good time…whereas going back, I definitely took more notice of the bigger picture of London.*

By now, Monica's daughter was living in Ireland. For some time, Monica had wanted to follow her father's wartime footsteps, so along with her son, she flew to Crete, and with her sister, they traced his path through Crete until he was captured and became a prisoner of war. From Crete, Monica and her son met up with the rest of the family in Ireland. It was magical, but for Monica, there were still unanswered questions about her father's wartime experiences.

A couple of years later a colleague returned from an SIE in the UK. *It was like a revelation…I hadn't thought about going to work…I thought…oh, gosh, that sounds such a great idea.* Monica began her SIE planning, but it took a year to get the documentation together for the ancestry visa and British Nursing Council Registration. Monica's daughter and H were supportive but he didn't want to take leave to travel as well. Her friends said, *Oh, what's H going to do? And I think…he's a grown man!* Just before her departure, her son suggested they go to the UK together. *I was feeling this sense of…gosh, it's my time…you can't come with me…I want to do it for myself!* For Monica, empty nest syndrome was not about letting her children go…but her children letting Monica go.

After some family discussions, Monica left on her SIE alone! *I felt like…God, I can't believe this is happening.* The nursing work was challenging. *Going to a huge city, you are unknown. I learned to do my job as best I could and then let it go. That was quite*

liberating. During her non-work times, Monica travelled to Europe, and when she was in London, she boarded with a friend. H joined her for some travel as well. During her SIE Monica felt proud. *I've been working most of my life, I had that financial independence which I think is probably, on reflection, because Mum never had any.* But the SIE enabled her to grow that independence. *If I wanted to spend all day lying in the sun in Hyde Park, I could…and not feel disappointed if I didn't have someone to do it with.* A highlight was another visit to Poland with her sister, where they travelled to the site of their father's prison camp. Monica was overwhelmed. *Oh, God, I can't believe I'm here…to picture where he was…then reading his memoirs…it all made more sense…there was a sense of closure.*

H wanted Monica to return for his 60th birthday. *He'd say…I'm missing you…come home soon.* Monica thought, *I'm not coming home…I love it here.* Monica hoped he might become more independent. *That just shows the difference between us!* Monica stayed in the UK and reluctantly returned to New Zealand for Christmas. Monica and H spent Christmas in the north, then H flew home to work and Monica decided to do a road trip. It was a nostalgic journey, visiting childhood holiday destinations and reframing her understanding of her father's story. *Christmas holidays and Dad would take us to Rotorua or Raglan or Tauranga, the Mount.*

Monica did not want to stay in New Zealand for long, but she planned to return to London in June with H to visit their son and do another SIE. *Then I thought, why don't I go back earlier?* So Monica returned at the end of April and worked as an agency nurse. This time the jobs were harder to find, but she loved the freedom and independence. *It was like…it's only about me now.* Monica did some travelling with H when he arrived to visit her and their son who was also living in the UK. The SIE went quickly and returning home a second time seemed a more natural progression. However, after several months back in New Zealand, Monica is still a little restless. She has returned to her work and both children are now living overseas.

Monica's SIE focus was travel. *I wasn't there to foster my career,* yet she has experienced considerable career development. She adapted to new holistic health environments and developed new skills and knowledge, especially in medical technology. *I certainly did learn heaps because I was in a new speciality.* Looking back, Monica realises that she has a profession that is internationally mobile.

Monica left on her SIE at an opportune time. *I had no threats about anything, no worries, the kids were independent. Everything was quite settled here.* Personally, the SIE has had

a significant impact on her life. Stepping outside her established life took courage. *To leave your comfort zone and go somewhere different and set up a new life.* For Monica, the SIE was a very personal journey. She was not worried about her relationship. H missed her but gave her the space and time to follow her dreams. *He's great…other than saying he missed me, hurry home…it was never, you don't care about me…and he loved his trips!*

Monica has always been the quieter one in the marriage, at times feeling invisible. She believes that in a long marriage one can get a *bit co-dependent,* and take on an *identity of 'us' rather than 'me'. Then you start to wonder, who am I?* Thus, an unexpected SIE outcome has been the opportunity to rediscover herself and become more visible. *It is important that I am me, and not an adjunct of someone else…a wife and a mother.* SIE has given Monica a *bigger, wider view of the world.* She feels she is less judgemental. *I think I'm more tolerant on a bigger scale, like I can see that there's not one right or wrong way to do things.*

At 59, Monica is still a little unsettled. She misses the vibrant SIE life and at times feels out of sync with some friends. SIE has enabled her to emerge as a more independent, courageous, open-minded and internationally mobile woman. She has followed her father's wartime footsteps, reconciling the darker memories and recognising all that was good in him. She has redefined who she is, in her family life, and found her place in a wider world. There are more SIE adventures planned. *I feel good…I've got choices…I've got a profession that is saleable…it's given me a sense there's a whole world out there that you can do anything you want to.*

Janet

> *Yes! This is for me!*

It was an ordinary and stable childhood, despite Janet attending nine schools, courtesy of her father's air force lifestyle. Janet was a middle child, although her older brother died when she was a toddler. During Janet's secondary schooling, the family stayed in Auckland. Janet's mother had been ill for 18 months when she died at 41, during Janet's first year at teachers college. Janet married at 19 and settled into a semi-rural lifestyle. She had two daughters, and as they grew up, Janet taught in primary schools and completed her bachelor's degree extramurally.

Turning 41 was a difficult milestone, but Janet decided that the year would be a celebration. *I was going to do anything and everything for that year to live life to the full.* On the Routeburn Track, she climbed up to the Saddle and stood in wonderment. *I'm so lucky to be alive, to be enjoying this…then I thought…I can make the most of every day for the rest of my life… for however long that is.*

Janet became involved in Montessori preschool education. *This is amazing…different to anything I've seen before.* The preschool owner arranged for her to visit another Montessori school, and Janet was sold on it! Her husband also. He said, *You have to do this thing!* Janet inquired where she could train. *Oh, you need to go to Bergamo…we laughed and said – that's not really possible.* However, Janet's two daughters were now adults. Gradually, she realised that a teaching sabbatical was possible, and encouraged by her family, she successfully applied for a place on the prestigious international programme.

Janet saved madly. Unexpectedly, she was invited to meet local parents advocating for the integration of a Montessori primary class in the local state school. *It was one of those spine-tingling moments when they realised that they had a teacher and I realised I had a class.* The parents paid her tuition fees, and Janet and her husband rented their house. Friends thought it a brave and surprising life turn, but to Janet it wasn't, as she had determined to live her life to the full many years before.

Janet flew to London and travelled for three weeks with her husband and daughter. Boarding the plane to Bergamo, Janet felt panic-stricken. As they flew over the medieval city Città Alta, Janet relaxed, and with her husband in tow, she travelled across the city to meet the accommodation agent. *It was between a student and us…this lady was*

interested in New Zealand so I pulled out photos of home. We got the apartment and I felt bad for the other student.

Janet worked and partied hard! *The workload was horrendous…but we had a fantastic time with the students…I hadn't had a student life way back because of my mum dying…unless you looked in the mirror, you just thought you were one of the students.* Weekends were for play. They walked locally and went on day trips to Venice, Verona and the coastal trails. Although they briefly visited schools in Europe and Scandinavia, they didn't travel extensively as Janet's focus was study and living an Italian life.

The year flew by and they were due to return home in July. As the Montessori class back home was not starting until February, Janet had several months free. Before finishing the study programme, Janet applied for a three-month teaching position in Switzerland. The employer paid the travel expenses of candidates, *so, off we trotted…but they offered me the job…I was a bit surprised.* This posed a dilemma for Janet as her husband had to return to New Zealand. After much angst, Janet accepted the position. Their final fling was a week in Florence. *H has a photo of me sleeping in every tourist attraction in Florence!*

When Janet and her husband left New Zealand, they had only ever spent two nights apart. Now Janet was going it alone. They returned to New Zealand, unpacked the house, contacted friends and then Janet returned to Switzerland. Janet worked with the children from 8.30am to 12.30pm in a classroom located in the exquisite surroundings of a convent. In the afternoon, she cycled and explored, and on weekends, she took the train to different Swiss locations. The Swiss teaching experience was awesome, but it was less so for her husband back home…*I think H didn't enjoy it so much. For me, I think it really helped the whole experience. It was a beautiful way to kind of finish it and to know, yes! this is for me!*

Janet returned to New Zealand unprepared for the darkness that descended on her. *Coming home was great but I was really depressed…New Zealand was in black and white and the rest of the world was in colour.* She desperately wanted to catch the first plane out of New Zealand. *Driving to school one day, I thought about driving off the road. I was that down.* Working with her counsellor, Janet realised that the adjustment was a process. Taking life one day at a time, she set herself a goal of one year to recover. *Work kept me going…it was different for H…he'd had a wonderful holiday…maybe for people who have a choice when to come home…maybe it's different. But, I didn't decide…it was decided for me.*

Janet successfully applied for another position in Siena. *But what was I going to do with H? What was I going to do with my Montessori class?* Janet declined the offer, but ironically, the process *helped me through, gave me something to cling to.* Eventually, the darkness receded. *New Zealand's back in colour.* With plans for the appointment of a second teaching specialist, Janet is free to return overseas. In Switzerland, a parent said, *do you realise that you have become an international commodity?* Now Janet understands her Bergamo qualification and experience make her internationally mobile.

When Janet and H married, they determined that home and family, and not money, were the priorities. Now it is international travel and work. Janet (and H) have grown stronger. *I couldn't, wouldn't have done it without H…probably he didn't have a choice but he still let me go.* Post-SIE, Janet seems a different woman. She has followed a passion, claimed her own space and grown in confidence. *I would never have done this thing…I was not that person…suddenly you are the face of that thing…so you just have to become that person.*

Janet has been a good daughter, wife and mother, but in her fifties, she sensed other possibilities. Through SIE, she has recreated her personal and professional lives, holding close the people and places that are most dear to her. SIE did not start this process – this is her mother's legacy – but it provided a vehicle for Janet's search. It has not always been easy, but through SIE, Janet has developed a life that is more internationalised, enriched, purposeful, peaceful and full of possibilities.

> *So it's a little scary…but I'm excited…I don't think I'll just teach quietly in NZ for the rest of my days…but that will be part of it…before I probably would've thought I didn't have a story…but I do have a story now!*

The internationalist journey

The SIE was an internationalist journey for six of the participants. Although their motivations, work and travel experiences were diverse, all of these participants have achieved a significant international professional profile as well as personal development as an outcome of the SIE.

The stories of Monica and Gillian reflect the quintessential internationalist journey as a single dominant theme. The other four participants have aspects of some of the other four themes in their stories. For example, Janet's husband was a major part of their decision-making process to undertake SIE. It could be argued that theirs was a tandem journey, but when considering the impact of the SIE on the development of Janet's professional skills and international career potential, it appears the more dominant theme arising from her SIE is that of the internationalist journey. Similarly, both Jo's and Colleen's SIE stories reflect aspects of the tandem journey, and Connie's story also resonates with aspects of the redemptive journey.

As with all five groups, there were a range of motivations driving these participants: searching for adventure, international study, contributing to the development of third world countries, escape from both personal and work-related issues and unexpected opportunities.

> *People say wow, that was brave. But it was just here's an opportunity...I was accepted for the course, so what is there to argue about?* (Janet)
>
> *So that one came up and we just jumped at it. I was just going to go as a support person but VSA just said...you'll be better off if you've got your own assignment.* (Jo)
>
> *A close friend that I worked with...her daughter was living in London and she wanted to work over there...I thought...oh, gosh, that sounds such a great idea.* (Monica)

As was the case with all the participants in the study, each participant in this journey was undertaking her SIE for more than one reason. However, none of these six participants envisaged career development and advancement as a driver.

> *Because I had the travelling thing as the focus, I didn't want to make work too difficult for myself.* (Monica)

SIE

The nature of the work undertaken and the resultant learning during the SIE are what distinguish this group from the other four groups, although there are synergies with some

participants in the fourth group, the integrationist journey. The actual SIE experience enabled the participants to advance or study for new qualifications and/or to accumulate experience in a new field, all within an international context. For example, Monica undertook short-term study and examinations to register as a nurse in the UK and was deployed in several medical areas, some of which were new to her.

> *I made a start on getting my nursing documentation together. In fact, it ended up taking almost a year. I had to apply to the British Nursing Council to get my registration...I had to sit an international English language test...I had to sit an Overseas Nurse's Programme...and I could only do it in London where I had to study for a month.* (Monica)

Janet, a primary school teacher, had become increasingly interested in a specialist approach to education. When she inquired how to train in the specialist field, she was surprised at the answer. *The principal had said...oh you need to go to Bergamo...but actually we were already planning to take a term off work...so we thought...well...we could perhaps do that* (Janet). It was a demanding programme, and Janet immersed herself in the work and the international student community. *It was the most gruelling thing that anyone could do on the planet...but we had a fantastic time with the students.* (Janet).

Colleen found work in primary school teaching in the UK. As her qualifications were not initially recognised in the UK system, Colleen applied for formal registration.

> *They don't recognise your qualifications. They put you in front of the worst class...but they'll only pay you as an underqualified teacher. I had to go through a long process...although it was a negative experience in that you get treated like you are just not qualified, they (inspectors) were very affirming people.* (Colleen)

Connie took up an educational role in Asia and amassed professional experience across several countries.

> *The second time I was based in Shanghai and I worked as an English language consultant...my job was to help train the teachers...I also got work at the Chinese University in Shanghai...I worked for the British Council as an IELTS examiner...I kept being asked...I found it interesting, stimulating and exciting.* (Connie)

In contrast, both Gillian and Jo decided to work in fields that were new to them on their SIE. Gillian studied TEFL teaching in Spain.

> *I flew to Grenada and I had a four week TEFL course...so that was cool...so then I had this certificate and I had no job...I realised I wouldn't get a job in the UK because I didn't have an English passport. I applied to Turkey, Bulgaria, Russia,*

Slovenia…and I just said, whichever's the first decent job offer I get, I'll take it. So, there I was, on my way to Istanbul, and I thought…gosh, I didn't think about Turkey. What am I doing? So, very exciting and very, very terrifying. (Gillian)

Jo, on a volunteer assignment in the Pacific, worked in an evolving role in which she gained a range of administrative, interpersonal and cross-cultural skills and experience. *I ran the office…I did it all there because we were obsessed with getting that farm up and running…we just loved it…but oh, it was really hard* (Jo). Overall, work was not the main drawcard of the SIE, but being paid in foreign currency was a pragmatic way for the participants to finance their travels. This was less applicable to Jo as an international volunteer in a third world nation.

The travel experiences of the six participants were varied. Four of the participants were constrained in the amount of travel they were able to do as the context of their SIE experience privileged work and limited travel opportunities. Janet was fully engaged in her life as a student, leaving little time to explore Europe.

In the weekends, we did a lot of walking and exploring Bergamo and the surrounding areas. But we didn't get to Rome and the Amalfi Coast…we just didn't have time…you had to do school observations so we lived in Lake Como for two weeks…and Norway and Sweden for 10 days. (Janet)

Once Gillian's teaching started, she also travelled less than expected. There were few holidays and her long work hours in the beautiful sprawling and chaotic city of Istanbul meant that it was difficult to travel outside of the immediate city environs for short breaks.

I really loved Istanbul…but I got quite stale…we couldn't get holidays…I did explore as much as I could…but I felt quite trapped. (Gillian)

Jo's volunteer SIE was on a remote Pacific island. The assignment was all encompassing, leaving little time for travel. *We were just sort of seven days a week looking after these people.* (Jo).

Both Jo and Connie lived and worked in vastly different cultures where they felt comfortable and at ease. Connie's travel was inextricably bound to her various work roles in several Asian cities, and it was the cross-cultural aspect of her experiences and the friendships she made that she valued the most. *I have a great circle of friends…that had become like family and I miss them. I travelled and lived among Chinese…I just felt at home there. I never lived anywhere in the so-called expat areas* (Connie).

Monica and Colleen travelled more extensively than the other participants in this group. Monica took extended leave on the completion of contracts, while Colleen travelled during the weekends and between school terms.

> *I said I didn't really want to get too entrenched in one particular job because I was here to do travelling as well. The first year I went to Switzerland, France, Croatia, Spain, it was great. I felt happy…sort of proud of myself…so I was on a real high. The money I was earning was going into just what I wanted to do, and H was fantastic.* (Monica)

The stories of the six participants grouped together as I have done above, undertook SIE for a variety of reasons, and work (including study and unpaid work in this instance) was important only to the extent that it would provide the resources needed to explore and travel. It was the personal agendas that drove the SIE. Janet wanted to learn more about education, which was something she was passionate about. Jo wanted to make a contribution to a third world nation. Connie wanted to escape from her personal challenges. Colleen and Gillian wanted a later-life adventure and Monica wanted to spread her wings. Ironically, the nature and context of the work undertaken meant that work was more significant in the SIE than any of the participants had anticipated.

Post-SIE

One of the unexpected outcomes for the participants was that the qualifications and experiences gained during the SIE gave them an international career profile. On their return to New Zealand, the participants realised that they had the skills and experience to secure further international contracts. Post-SIE adjustment was a significant issue to varying degrees for all participants in this study and is discussed in more detail in the following chapter. However, the participants in this internationalist group returned home cognisant that their international CVs and the lure of more international work and travel made it difficult for them to adjust to life in New Zealand personally and professionally. It was as if there was unfinished international business, and their levels of frustration became increasingly evident as they tried to re-establish their lives in New Zealand.

Connie returned to New Zealand after several years working in a variety of senior educational positions in Asia, having acquired postgraduate qualifications in English language teaching prior to her SIE. In Asia, she was treated with respect personally and professionally. Although she is happy on a personal level, professionally she is deeply disturbed about her work experiences in the New Zealand education system to date.

I came back and I couldn't get work for seven months. I was told I was out of date with the education system and I was furious, and I am still furious...I've just been working on fixed term contracts, but I never know where I am. I find that doesn't create any sense of commitment to the institution. I have found New Zealand an ageist, bigoted society. Age is respected in China...it's just as if my experience overseas doesn't exist. I feel a huge disassociation as an educator. I do feel as an older woman...not valued...and I feel invalidated in a professional sense. (Connie)

Connie acknowledges that the SIE has changed her and she believes that her *outsider's eyes* will ensure that she continues to grow personally and professionally. Work remains very important in her life, but for now she is enjoying her personal domain and planning future work overseas in a context in which she is valued and respected.

SIE has changed me...New Zealand is not the centre of the world. I think it's globalised me...or given me a perspective that wasn't there. I've seen awful things...I've come back and I've got this discomfort and this displacement. All of that is well worth the price...because it's a growing process for me...and I would like to go back to China and work there. (Connie)

Gillian returned from her SIE expecting to settle back into her professional life. She took a senior role in the public service thinking she would not be back in New Zealand for long. Another SIE was possible, and Gillian planned to use the time back in New Zealand to consolidate her financial situation and strategise the next SIE so that she has a portfolio of work to challenge and sustain her. Surprisingly, her public service role has been very unsatisfying. Personally, Gillian has not found a tribe to connect to in New Zealand unlike her first SIE in Instanbul. She remains unchallenged and wishes to travel again to continue to grow and learn both personally and professionally. Currently, she is waiting for her position to be disestablished, and after that, she intends to undertake another SIE in Asia.

New Zealand is a little country a long way away and we're very parochial. I'm very keen to go and live elsewhere again. I've got a plan and I'm probably going back to teaching English again in China in a few months, but I feel like I've got other things in my life that are going to enable me to do it. I know what the pitfalls are now. (Gillian)

Janet completed her one year study programme and was offered a three-month contract in Switzerland, and as she says,

It was a beautiful way to kind of finish it and to know, Yes! this is for me! (Janet)

After the Swiss contract, Janet returned to New Zealand and struggled to cope with the apparent loss of her international life. *When I applied for the Swiss job H said...look,*

that's great, I'll support you in any way, shape or form, but I want to come back and live here…so maybe I felt trapped when I finally came back? (Janet).

Janet and H worked through the issues, and over a period of time Janet (and H) realised that their return to New Zealand did not mean that they would never do another SIE. Janet is passionate about her SIE experience and now realises that she will definitely do another. *I think it's important to go and meet different people and have experiences…I could, would, should've done it earlier. But, maybe I wouldn't have got as much from it, I don't know…but, I do want to go and do another stint somewhere.* (Janet)

Jo's SIE threw some unique challenges her way. A home invasion and the accidental death of one of the workers have left an indelible print on her life. Jo loved the SIE experience, despite the trauma she experienced. However, her current family situation, family business and the reluctance of H to do another SIE mean that Jo does not have any immediate plans to further her international volunteer career.

> *I'm not really sure what my expectations were on return. I would have like to have got the workshop business under way again, but I wasn't that confident about that either. The new family business helped me not have to do that too. At the moment I really want to support H. Then there's my father…* (Jo)

Rather than redevelop her own business in New Zealand, Jo would prefer to do another international volunteer SIE, and this is understandable given that her first SIE gave her the ability to focus on herself and be involved in work that she cared about. *Well, I think I'd probably rather do VSA again…and H's happy about that too and he could come and go. Like he still really believes in volunteer work, he just really doesn't want to do it himself* (Jo).

Monica and Colleen, who travelled more widely in their SIE, also experienced adjustment issues on the return home but not to the extent of other participants in this group. In Monica's case, this could be explained by the fact that, at the time of the interview, she had already completed a second SIE. Thus, Monica is more settled now and acknowledges that the two SIEs have added significant value to her career, both in New Zealand and overseas. *I think probably the main thing would be the diversity of people that I worked with…I mean in the hospital where I did end up working for a few months I certainly did learn heaps because I was in a new speciality* (Monica).

Colleen took a year to resettle in New Zealand. She enjoyed being back on a personal level, appreciating the New Zealand lifestyle. Like Connie, Colleen found working in the New Zealand education system stressful and demanding, but for different reasons. *I found*

my first year back in the NZ education system, incredibly stressful…doing assessment until it comes out your ears (Colleen). For now, life centres around family, friends and work, and while there are no immediate plans to undertake another SIE, it is likely that Colleen will pursue another international adventure.

> *Since the earthquake, there hasn't been much life in Christchurch…I feel very lucky in that our house has still got sewerage and hot water…life is quite limited here…which is quite sad…I would imagine we will go again sometime…but not at the moment.* (Colleen)

The six internationalist journey participants set out on their SIE for many reasons and their experiences of work and travel were diverse, but none of them envisaged that significant professional development and international career opportunities would be an outcome. Thus, the SIE enabled them to accidentally grow their international professional profiles through the augmentation of existing skills and experience, and the acquisition of new skills, qualifications, registrations and experiences.

On their return to New Zealand, the participants found it difficult to resettle. This is partly due to some reluctance to return to New Zealand and the fact that the participants did not always get recognition and respect for their international professional achievements. Most of the participants worked through these varying levels of frustration and adjustment and realised that they wanted to continue to be challenged and to grow through further international work and travel.

The desire to return overseas for work and travel remains strong for these participants. At the time of the interview, three of the participants had specific plans for a second SIE or had already completed another. The other three were also planning further episodes of international travel and work. The SIE has been a process of significant change. While the SIEs were triggered by a range of personal motivations, extraordinary international career benefits have accrued.

3. The redemptive stories

Individual interpretive stories

Kathy

> *I need to just start to believe in myself a bit more...to be in an environment where you've got belief all around you.*

Kathy grew up on a farm. She was born in 1952, the oldest of four children. She had a difficult relationship with her mother and later discovered that her parents had lost their first child. *She was never able to see or touch him. They had no funeral...my mother went home empty-handed...I was born 18 months later.* Kathy now understands her parents' heartbreak, but it doesn't change how isolated she felt during her childhood. *Everything about me was different.* Kathy's childhood goal was *to marry, have babies, live happily ever after.* Career options were limited. *I'm a caring person...I thought nursing would be great.* She moved to Invercargill to train as a nurse but became very homesick and returned to live on the farm. Kathy worked in the local bank and at 19 married her teenage sweetheart.

It was a difficult 22-year marriage. *There was much fear but I didn't want the insecurity and stigma of single motherhood.* She tried marriage guidance and recalls crying throughout the sessions. The family moved cities and Kathy attended evening classes. *It opened up for me more thinking...I didn't know how to get inside myself and work out my feelings.* Kathy heard about counselling on the radio and went for two years before leaving her husband. The division of assets was traumatic. *I couldn't fight anymore, I just agreed.*

Later Kathy met a kindly man. When she moved into her new house, he also came along. *I'd never had attention like that.* Kathy drifted into the relationship but became dissatisfied over the years. Several years later, she visited her first grandchild in Otago and as she flew home from the visit, she remembers *looking out at the clouds, thinking, it's a new generation. What am I going to do now? I asked myself lots of questions.* Eventually, Kathy and her partner separated amicably. The house was sold, and although Kathy was tempted to move south to be with her family, her daughter encouraged her to use some of her money to spread her wings and travel.

Kathy's daughter booked her a 31-day European tour and suggested that she stay on in the UK afterwards. Kathy was nervous, but simmering in her mind was a story she had heard about older women working in the UK. Before the SIE, Kathy visited her grandchild again. She loved being there and didn't want to leave. *Oh, I've got to go. I've*

paid. That was the only reason I went. The heart-wrenching goodbyes were short-lived. Kathy flew to London, departed on her European tour, and loved the history, architecture and especially the Swiss mountains.

After the tour, she visited an old friend in Italy. While there, Kathy was searching for work, and during that time, she also helped an elderly neighbour in her allotment. During their gardening discussions, the neighbour recalled that Kathy's old friend was like *a frightened little rabbit* when she first arrived in Italy. Kathy also identified with that description. After several weeks, the relationship between Kathy and her friend deteriorated unexpectedly. S*he ranted...how I couldn't get my act together!* Kathy was devastated and left. At the train station, she emailed her daughter, who was online. Bolstered by her daughter's words of comfort and encouragement, Kathy caught a train to Bellagio, where she was struck down with her first ever migraine. She rested in the tranquillity there , and after she recovered, she set out for Switzerland.

In the Swiss mountains, among friends, Kathy felt nurtured and safe. *Cowbells, snow...it was Heidi in the mountains!* Later she returned to London, toured Ireland and then felt brave enough to stay. She applied for caring positions, avoiding official agencies as she didn't have a visa. Kathy's first client was an elderly woman. *The family became like my own.* When the woman was hospitalised, Kathy stayed *to cook...visit the hospital, massage her feet.* After the woman died, Kathy continued as a gardener until she found another position. After a few weeks in the new position, she returned briefly to New Zealand for her son's graduation.

Once she was back in the UK, Kathy was offered a job by the daughter-in-law of her first client. This new client had Alzheimer's, which was demanding work, so after several months Kathy took a break and toured Scotland and later Central Europe. Her uncles had served in the Second World War, so she visited many war sites and was profoundly moved. *It's absolute suffering...no book could give you that feeling.* Kathy again returned to New Zealand to visit family, and when she returned to the UK, she worked with another Alzheimer's client. *I grew from that work...but it was isolating, demanding.* Christmas that year was magical in the Cotswolds with her client's family. Next, she visited Scandinavia, the Baltic States and St Petersburg, and she always travelled three star, cheaply but safely.

About this time, Kathy contacted an old school friend, P.* Their mothers had been best friends in New Zealand. They clicked, and P offered Kathy his house as a bolt-hole. Kathy developed feelings for P but was reluctant to broach the matter. *Girls aren't forward, are*

they? Eventually, she wrote a letter but never heard back. Several months later, the evening before her flight to New Zealand to attend another family wedding, Kathy received an email from P saying he would like to try to establish a relationship.

Kathy returned to the UK and later moved into P's home. P didn't want Kathy to work and gave her an allowance instead. Kathy tried to contribute, becoming the housekeeper, but it unsettled her. P organised a partner's visa for Kathy, who struggled to develop friendships with other English people and became increasingly isolated. There were challenges in the relationship, and without the distraction and stimulation of work, Kathy turned to her garden and her counsellor. *I discovered a love for gardening…it's been my saviour as time went by.* There were more trips to New Zealand, and eventually they moved back permanently. By this time Kathy had not worked for three years and was anxious about her future.

Coming home was wonderful. Kathy felt part of a family again, but her socialising caused more relationship friction, and Kathy decided to take a relationship break. Now, several weeks post-separation, Kathy is poised for more change. Understandably, she is apprehensive. *I don't want to rush and make mistakes.* Work-wise, Kathy is considering options that enhance her sense of wellbeing. *I could do any sort of thing…I'm not aspiring to a fortune.* Her priority is to work to live and also develop some creative writing and gardening projects.

Travel is still on Kathy's agenda. SIE has enriched her life. *Absolutely…if I died tomorrow, I would've been so glad I've done what I've done. I'm not wealthy financially, but I'm extremely wealthy in what I've learned and experienced out in the world.* Kathy plans to return to the UK and stay with SIE friends. There are no SIE regrets. *I'm glad I've had all the experiences…it's made me stronger.* Kathy believes the relationship breakup is a temporary setback. *I need to just start to believe in myself a bit more…to be in an environment where you've got belief all around you.*

Kathy's children are a major support. *They say I'm strong.* The isolated child and startled rabbit of yesteryear is gone. Before her relationship with P, *I was in charge of my own destiny, I could choose to travel, to do a job, to leave a job.* As Kathy contemplates her future she is more knowing of herself, aware of the qualities and values that she intends to weave her life around and within. Independence, freedom, autonomy, acceptance and belonging are her blueprint for forging a more resilient and positive life-path.

*P = Partner

Jocelyn

> *It broadens your horizons, outlook on life, acceptance of other people and I learned not to judge others.*

Jocelyn was the youngest of three girls. It was a traditional upbringing with few luxuries, so Jocelyn created an imaginary world of travel and adventure. Encouraged by her father, a public servant, she joined flight operations, and then applied unsuccessfully to be a commercial pilot and an air traffic controller. At 21, she passed her private pilot's licence and reapplied to air traffic control, and this time she was successful. Later Jocelyn took leave and travelled overseas. In her thirties, she separated from her partner, and then met her husband, a charming widower. *I lost myself there and then...he abrogated all responsibilities in the home.*

In the 1980s, her husband, who Julie loved absolutely, convinced her to sign her assets over as security for his business. The business collapsed and Jocelyn lost everything. Later, she used a redundancy pay-out to purchase another house, in her name, as well as some flats, in partnership with her husband and in-laws. When her husband was arrested on fraud charges, Jocelyn rented out the house and relied on her friends for support. Eventually, the charges were dropped. Jocelyn longed to put the nightmare behind them, so they borrowed money to travel. *I would never have done that earlier.*

When they returned from their short trip, Jocelyn's nephew was diagnosed with cancer and her brother-in-law became paralysed, so for five years she supported the family. Her brother-in-law died, and then Jocelyn's husband became ill and confessed to a long affair. Shocked, Jocelyn nursed him through chemotherapy and then left, but she was horrified to discover he had appropriated her share of the flats. *I had to get out...to go.* Sadly, her nephew died, and shortly afterwards her mother died also. Jocelyn was at a very low ebb. *I think you absorb it...eventually...you never get over it.* With her marriage in tatters, she believed she would never realise her dreams of an SIE and a New Zealand road trip with her husband.

Jocelyn changed jobs for a change of scene and found herself working in an extremely difficult environment.* After a short break overseas, she considered her options carefully. *I finally recognised...I can go overseas...by myself...my stepkids encouraged me to go for it!* Jocelyn resigned, extricating herself from this difficult situation to follow her SIE dream. She flew to the US and then to the Loire Valley to join a New Zealand garden tour. Afterwards, she travelled to the home of friends in Somerset, where she based herself throughout the SIE. *I was nurtured...and being loved, I knew that I could go on.*

Jocelyn had many old friends across the UK from her earlier OE. *I couldn't have stayed so long without these friends.* Her goals were to volunteer on an archaeological dig and walk Hadrian's Wall. While in Somerset, she researched potential digs. *I wanted to return to Israel.* There were also trips to France, Egypt and Italy with friends. She visited Malta, working alongside local farmers, and booked a tour of the Hypogeum. On the way there, she met someone who was to become her soul mate. *I met this chap on the bus and we talked...he was so impressed I knew about the Hypogeum...I was so impressed he knew about it!* They arranged to meet that night in the village square; however, a thunderstorm erupted and Jocelyn thought, *no man and his dog would go out in this.* Much later, SM** arrived at the hotel, *absolutely bedraggled.* They went out anyway and *we chat, chat, chatted*, and had 10 wonderful days together. Jocelyn returned to London on Christmas Eve, and in early January she visited SM in Germany.

Later, Jocelyn went on the archaeological dig. She loved it despite being grilled by Israeli authorities before departure. *The airline hadn't had volunteers before so I was absolutely interrogated before I boarded.* She stayed in a kibbutz and was the only volunteer among academics. *I was the oldest there by an absolute long shot, even older than the archaeologists.* Walking Hadrian's Wall later in the year was equally awe-inspiring!

Initially, Jocelyn didn't want to do caring work, but jobs were difficult to find. Her first position was caring for a woman whose Somerset connections led to some animal sitting jobs, including goats! One employer insisted on having a New Zealander to care for her dogs. *Each dog had a written schedule…it was hilarious.* Jocelyn also did some volunteer gardening in England and Europe.

SM became central in Jocelyn's SIE. She was considerably older than him, but it seemed irrelevant. SM wanted Jocelyn to live in Germany. *I couldn't pick up the language, I couldn't leave family and friends…I tried…it's not often you meet your soul mate.* Jocelyn suggested she live there three months each year. *No, he wanted all or nothing.* Eventually, it was time to return home as Jocelyn's travel funds were dwindling and a family wedding was planned. SM flew to England to say goodbye and also announced that he intended to visit New Zealand. Jocelyn was delighted!

It is now a year since Jocelyn returned to New Zealand. At first, she stayed with family and friends and looked for some temporary work, unsuccessfully, until SM's arrival. Jocelyn began planning their New Zealand road trip, but became uneasy. *I wanted him to come, and then I just thought…I can't go and live there and I know that he's not ready to come and live here.* Jocelyn thought it was too hard. *There would be that wrench again,*

I can't put myself through it, I can't put him through it. Jocelyn made her decision. *I asked him not to come…and I'm still grieving.*

When Jocelyn left on her SIE, her family life was dysfunctional, but her focus is now on recreating a sense of family with her stepchildren. Jocelyn's SIE fulfilled her dreams and was cathartic. *I'd come to terms with a marriage breakdown and the absorption of grief. The SIE definitely, oh, definitely helped me find myself again.* She is grateful for the SIE opportunity.

> *I would encourage anyone…it broadens your horizons, your outlook on life, your acceptance of other people, not to judge…to see how the world is not being cared for, to be awakened to the propaganda that we feared, to be awakened to forming our own impressions, to being in at the heart of it.*

It wasn't always easy. *It takes courage to do it alone, even though I was cherished by friends, you've no one else to fall back on.* In a tough situation, *I had my St Christopher medal…I got great strength from it…from the power of prayer.*

Jocelyn is adjusting. She is still looking for an administration position and has some limited concerns about her financial future. Jocelyn is not planning another SIE but will travel again. She is considering university studies in history and archaeology and some volunteer work. She has re-established her relationship with her stepchildren and manages the boundaries with her ex-husband very well. Jocelyn has reconnected with old friends in New Zealand and maintains her international SIE friendships.

During her SIE, Jocelyn was drawn to the land. She rambled and indulged her love of gardens as she worked through her grief, and found acceptance and peace among the foreign people and distant places that became important to her. Now back in New Zealand, Jocelyn plans to return to her home, and in recreating her garden, it is likely that she will find the space in her head and her heart to further clarify her life-path and embrace her stronger, happier and more confident SIE self.

* Few details provided due to confidentiality requirements.

** SM = Soul mate

Kerry

> *I still can't believe I'm as fortunate as I have been and what I've been able to do.*

Kerry was born in 1939 and her brother two years later. When her father returned from the war, two more children were born. Kerry was a dutiful daughter. *I was expected to help my mother. She wasn't very maternal.* In Kerry's family, boys and girls were different. *He went to the workshop with Dad, I stayed at home.* Kerry wanted to go to university. *It made me cross, I wasn't supported...my brother was.* When Kerry's mother suggested office work, she said, *That is ridiculous!* Kerry was quietly firm and gained a university studentship. She loved university, graduating with a master's degree, making her parents proud and paving the way for others in the family. *It was OK for the siblings to go to university then!*

Kerry married at 21 and went teaching. They moved to London, where her husband did postgraduate medical studies. Back in New Zealand, the family relocated to a South Island town and Kerry worked in the general practice alongside her husband. They were good years, cut short by her husband's sudden death. The consequent pressures on Kerry were daunting. She moved to Dunedin to work, returning in the weekends to her youngest daughter, who stayed with neighbours. Later, Kerry moved into a university pastoral care role, planning to return to her home to run a bed and breakfast on retirement.

After several years working in Dunedin, Kerry received a call from her daughter, who had been diagnosed with cancer. Immediately, Kerry resigned and headed to London, where her daughter was based. It was a traumatic time. When her daughter was through the worst, Kerry stayed on, savouring the London experience after a 35-year absence. She returned home restless and aware of new possibilities. *The children had graduated...I wasn't obliged to be available...there were no grandchildren...my parents had died.*

Kerry was envious of friends who were retired and planning to travel. *There was no point feeling sorry for myself...there must be some way to do it.* Then she read a UK agency advertisement for carer positions and also learned of her eligibility for an Irish passport. So, *I got the passport and got the offer of possible work in the UK,* and at 63, Kerry left on her big adventure. Kerry had a return ticket in case the SIE didn't work out. *I wouldn't have been too disappointed at that stage...but you've got to take risks.* Kerry was finally free to take her chances.

Initially, Kerry stayed in a Kensington hostel. There she met other women, and they explored London and went on walking holidays together. *It was a good way to get to*

know England and the English. After completing her carer course in Suffolk, Kerry's first position was in Kent. The town was fascinating, and the client insisted that Kerry explore it. The pay was great; Kerry was better off financially in England, and the travel opportunities were another bonus. Kerry stayed there until she left for a cruise on the Red Sea.

Kerry registered with several carer agencies. She declared her age but didn't mention it to clients. Kerry worked in different locations – *I didn't want to get stuck in a groove* – and while the work was hard and stressful, she loved the life. She developed a passion for culture. *I love concerts, I love the theatre, I like going to the galleries. Things that I'd never been exposed to here.* In her walking trips, Kerry revelled in the countryside and the people. In her work, she felt part of the families, and she was always welcomed at her London bed and breakfast, which enabled her to spend time with her children who lived in London at various stages. Kerry felt as though she belonged. Eighteen months after arriving in the UK, she had a fantastic holiday with a New Zealand group in Turkey. But she became homesick and decided to return to New Zealand for Christmas.

Unfortunately, back in New Zealand Kerry broke her arm. During the year-long recovery, she purchased a house in Dunedin but couldn't sell her family home. Kerry decided to return to the UK. *It would have been more difficult for me to find a job here in New Zealand because of my age, and I wouldn't have earned the same money.* Between assignments, Kerry went on several European cultural tours and Italy became her favourite destination. There were two more visits home for graduations and weddings, and each time, Kerry returned to the UK to caring positions and was embraced by the families. *They were people I would never had come into contact with...the pleasure of what I'd seen...what I'd done.*

After several years, Kerry returned to New Zealand for hip surgery. She did not recover well, reluctantly accepting her caring days were over. *It wasn't fair on employers, the work is very physical.* Kerry sold her rural home – *it's too lonely for a single person* – and with house renovations under way, she visited her son in the US, her daughter in Argentina and then the UK. *It was lovely...and nostalgic, but because I was looking forward to getting settled, I didn't feel sad about returning.*

There are pros and cons back in New Zealand, but Kerry is grateful for her SIE. *If you'd asked me prior to 2000 about how I envisaged my life, I would not have dreamt what I have done.* She misses the English lifestyle – *I feel disloyal...you're more at the centre of things* – but is happy in Dunedin and has a son and his partner living there also. Kerry

enjoys being part of the cultural life of a university city, but there are frustrations. *The U3A particularly irritates me, they're running a course about suffragettes...I'd love to go.* Sadly, Kerry must wait for a U3A member to die – a disconcerting detail for those on the waiting list!

Kerry's SIE has not changed her radically; rather, it has drawn out qualities and interests. Her SIE was demanding, and she learned to be more flexible and adaptable. Her husband's death forced Kerry into independence, but once she moved on from family responsibilities, her independence and confidence grew. *There were times when you were entirely concentrating on the children...and you tended to neglect yourself...and then I got the opportunity to do the travel...I went with no expectations...as it turned out it exceeded my dreams.* Kerry is unstinting in her praise of an older SIE. She is financially better off and had extraordinary experiences in her work, travel and cultural activities. Life was humdrum pre-SIE. While she left with some hopes and expectations, the experience has broadened her horizons and exceeded her dreams.

At 72, Kerry exudes a peaceful pragmatism. *You just learn to take whatever is presented to you.* After a 50-year working life, Kerry's focus is now on the personal rather than the professional. She is not concerned about her limited financial resources and lives carefully. She plans to travel but currently is establishing friendships and interests to sustain her in the years ahead. Kerry is adapting. She has accepted the harsh realities that fate dealt to her with quiet dignity and learned to seize opportunities that have enabled her to sparkle and shine. *I still can't believe I'm as fortunate as I have been and what I've been able to do.*

U3A = University of the Third Age

Thea

> *I'm just so pleased that I did go because there's nothing more that I feel I want or need to do and I think I've been extremely well blessed.*

Thea was born in 1947 and has one older brother. Her father, a veteran of two world wars, was a domineering man and her mother never challenged him. *She was never happy to accept responsibility for anything…he had a fearsome flash temper…at some point in my teens I actually got to stand up to him.* Life at boarding school was great but home life was difficult. Thea wanted to join the convent but her parents were *totally hostile to that notion.* Thea also wanted to go to university to study law, and they said, *There's no way you're going to university.*

At the end of the sixth form, Thea had to leave school. *My brother was very much preferenced over me in all sorts of ways.* It was not a family that looked to broaden their horizons, and Thea suspected she was expected to look after her parents. Thea tried nursing but left her studies to take up a position at NAC.* She applied for a transfer to escape from home, became an air hostess, married and then worked for a medical specialist. Thea's first baby, who died, was born prematurely when she was 20. *It's probably the worst and the best thing that's ever happened to me.* Two more daughters were born, and later they moved to Auckland, where another two daughters were born.

When the children were aged 8 to 14 years, Thea's husband left her. She applied for 14 jobs in the first fortnight, and for the next 10 years her family life was chaotic. *He at one point kidnapped the children.* During this period, Thea remarried and moved cities. Within six months she realised *it was a hopeless mistake…so…as gently as I could I extricated myself from that situation.* Thea returned to Auckland to re-establish her life. Thea found a senior administrative position and was happy for several years, but then…*there was endless reorganisation…and a voluntary redundancy scheme… I started to think, maybe I will go.*

Thea's life as single mother was demanding. *I was parenting always with one hand tied behind my back. Once they got into their early twenties I thought, they just have to deal with this now.* When Thea was 50, she felt tired and worn down, *so I sent them an email…I said…I actually need to move on in my life from being a mother, I'll always be here for you, but I no longer will feel responsible for you. So I'm cutting the cord…and I think they all went shock, horror.* Thea was confident they would be OK, and she knew she had done her best. *I'm very proud of them. They have professional careers and three of them have chosen to be mothers.*

Thea's aunt had left her a small legacy, so she applied for voluntary redundancy. It took 12 months before her employers declined her application as they did not want to lose her, but Thea was ready to leave anyway. *By then I'd sort of passed 'Mach 1'.*** Thea heard about a colleague who had done an SIE and thought, *that would be a neat thing to do,* but some friends thought it was a barmy idea! Thea's father had died and her brother was estranged. It was a difficult decision to leave her mother. *Some thought it was wrong, but that was my responsibility. I kept in touch with her…but there was never, ever a response.* Having had her application for voluntary redundancy turned down, Thea applied for early retirement. The idea of an SIE had taken hold and she was ready to fly.

Thea flew directly to London and began work as a carer. Her first assignment was in Oxford. Over 10 years, Thea had 88 assignments throughout England. Caring was not always easy. In one case, she resigned after three days. *He said – I believe you're leaving. I demand to know why…he went on and on…so in the end, I said – I find you intolerably rude. Oh, he said – well that's that.* Thea also travelled extensively in Europe, her favourite destinations being France and Italy. She also travelled to the world war sites, immersing herself in relevant history and fiction. *Often the reading pushed me to want to go somewhere…this way or that way.*

Thea was paid well but she had to manage her money carefully because when she wasn't working she wasn't earning. She was living life on the edge, but was excited and energised. When based in London, she explored cultural opportunities. *I'm mad on music and the theatre…any time that I was in London…that's what I did when I went for a month…every day and/or every night.* In some ways, the job was unsociable, with just one day off a week. Despite this, Thea made friends who she still keeps in contact with. Living in her clients' homes also enabled her to save and purchase an investment property in New Zealand during her SIE.

Thea was not homesick and returned to New Zealand regularly to see her mother. Between assignments, she stayed with various daughters in London, and this gave her the opportunity to develop their adult relationships and meet the next generation, the grandchildren. When one of her daughters married, she asked Thea to give her away as a mark of respect and admiration for Thea's unstinting love and support while she was growing up.

In the latter part of her SIE, Thea worked with dementia clients. *That was the work I graduated into, not by choice, but I was very good with dementia clients.* She started to travel to the US, loving the vibrancy of New York. After 10 years away, Thea considered

returning home. Now 62, she thought it would be difficult to find work in New Zealand and resolved to stay in England and work until she was 65, returning to New Zealand for short visits. A week before Thea was due to visit New Zealand, she learned her mother had a stroke. *I wanted to do what I said I would do…to care for her as there was nobody else.* So Thea returned to New Zealand and plunged into a frenetic few months organising her mother's care and selling her own investment property. Amazingly, her mother improved a little, so Thea went on a whirlwind trip back to England to wind up her SIE and return to New Zealand for good.

As soon as she returned to New Zealand, Thea went to her doctor with persistent backache. She was diagnosed with cancer and booked for immediate surgery. Thea was incensed.

> *You can just unbook me, I'm not having surgery. This is one of the great benefits of working with people at the end of their lives. You just come to think about things, or I did, and decide what you want and what you don't want.*

Thea said, *I want a biopsy and a CAT scan, before you put a scalpel anywhere near me.* So they did what she wanted. The specialist suggested chemotherapy and then surgery.

Thea's work with the elderly has been beneficial.

> *It's given me a huge amount. I don't think I've ever had a desire to live into advanced old age and I most certainly don't now, having spent time with people in advanced old age. We don't necessarily have a choice…but with the cancer, my whole emphasis was quality time. I said to them, I want everything black and white…so I've had it between the eyes and I was persuaded to have the chemotherapy.*

Within a year, the tumours returned and this time Thea refused more treatment.

Now, Thea has created a new garden, a restful place to sit and reflect. She is grateful for a marriage that gave her five daughters, the opportunity to study for a degree and develop a career in mid-life. But SIE has been a major influence on her acceptance of dying. *If I hadn't gone…I think I would feel, if I'm honest, quite cheated now.* SIE was *the icing on the cake.* It gave her the opportunity to travel, meet different people and reconnect with her children and grandchildren.

Thea would rather *go a bit sooner than wait too long.* The loss of her first daughter taught Thea about grief. The SIE has given her another perspective on older age, illness and death. Treatment has given her time to adjust. Thea is not angry. There are some regrets but they sit comfortably with her. Thea is at peace. *It's only death, I'm not afraid of it.* She understands it is hard for her girls and thankful they have each other, knowing that

in her death, she will be reunited with her first daughter, when their ashes are buried together. *I think I've just had a jolly good life. It may not have always been an easy one but nobody's life is easy, but it's been a jolly good one. I've got a lot out of it…and now…I'm looking forward to having a good death.*

* National Airways Corporation

** Mach 1. Definition: speed of sound. A colloquial term used by Thea meaning that she was already committed to the action and there was no turning back.

The redemptive journey

The likelihood of attaining 50 plus years without experiencing some personal and professional challenges is very low, and many participants across all the groups experienced personal and professional loss to varying degrees. The participants in the redemptive journey group experienced particularly high levels of ongoing stress and trauma in their pre-SIE lives.

These participants were generally older than others. Growing up in the war and immediate post-war era, they seemed to follow the social mores of the time, but that didn't stop them questioning the fairness of the roles imposed on them by parents and society. Aspects of gender are explored in greater depth in Chapter 7 as the issues are relevant to the narratives/stories of this group of participants, but it is the participants' childhood perceptions regarding their parents that are discussed in this section. All four participants spoke about the unsatisfactory nature of the relationships with their parents and, in particular, their mothers, as they railed against the constrictions of being a girl in the fifties.

Thea was frustrated by her mother's passiveness in a family in which male privilege was unquestioned.

> *I really wanted to be a nun and my parents were totally hostile...I was at boarding school, which I loved. I didn't have a particularly happy life at home...they said – if you don't give up this idea we're pulling you out of school and there's no way you're going to university. I had to go to work...my mother thought it would be nice if I went nursing...I couldn't stand living at home...I have come to the conclusion that my parents' absolute hostility to my entering the convent was that I was really destined to look after them...that was my role.* (Thea)

Kerry also recalled a childhood in which she was expected to be a dutiful daughter.

> *My mother would do the washing on Saturdays...so I could help her. I had to do the shopping...cooking...general housework. I was only about eight when my sister was born...I was expected to do a lot of the caring for her. It's what was expected of the eldest daughter...and I wanted to be helpful.* (Kerry)

Kerry aspired to go to university but her parents were not supportive. *I'd just got School Certificate...my mother suggested that I leave school – you could work in an office...and I had trouble keeping a straight face because I was doing an academic course...I couldn't type or do shorthand. I said – That was ridiculous.* Kerry returned to school. *I was in the sixth form and she suggested again that I should leave. I applied for training college...then physiotherapy, and they turned me down because I wasn't old enough...I*

was only 16. The following year, the government introduced the studentship scheme to support people through university. Kerry applied for a studentship and was accepted.

Jocelyn was the youngest of three girls. She was raised in a traditional household. There was little spare money and people did not travel a lot in those days, so Jocelyn configured a world of adventure in her imagination. *Well, I've lived to travel really.* One of Jocelyn's sisters went nursing. Another sister was sent away from home. *And it was sad circumstances…she never had the opportunity to do what she wanted.* As her secondary schooling drew to a close, Jocelyn dreamed of future exploits and escapades, but accepted her father's advice to find stable and secure employment and joined the public service.

Kathy's childhood was overshadowed by a difficult relationship with her mother. She always felt different from her siblings. Later she discovered that her parents lost their first child. As an adult, Kathy has a more compassionate perspective, but it does not change the sense of abandonment she felt as a child.

As the four participants transitioned to adulthood they married. However, three of the participants separated or divorced twice in their pre-SIE adult lives and another was widowed. Their thirties, forties and part of their fifties were spent fighting family and financial chaos. When their children reached early adulthood, the participants realised that finally there might be an opportunity to do things differently. Each participant approached this realisation and turning point in her own way.

Thea married at 20 and her first child died at birth. When she was in her mid-thirties, Thea's husband left her with four young daughters, and Thea's life became a battle ground, as she tried to finance and parent her four daughters. During this time, she remarried and moved cities but quickly realised the marriage was a mistake. Thea returned to her former city and re-established her career. Personally and professionally, there were some good times, but at 50, Thea was exhausted. Increasingly frustrated by her employment situation and the demands of sole parenting, Thea took early redundancy and announced to her daughters that she was no longer responsible for them and that she was heading overseas on her SIE. *I felt I'd given them my best shot, which may not have been perfect, but it was under terrible circumstances…and in fact, they've all done very well, I'm very proud of them.*

Kerry completed her university degree, married at 21, trained as a teacher and had six children. Suddenly, when she was in her late forties, Kerry's husband died. It was a devastating shock and the financial pressures were daunting. *The children were at university and boarding school…they were keen to stay and even though I knew it was*

going to be extremely difficult...I thought it would be better to leave them there. Kerry found work in Dunedin, and after many years, when her oldest daughter was diagnosed with cancer, she resigned and headed for London to support her. When her daughter was through the worst, Kerry stayed on for a few weeks. She hadn't been in London for over 35 years. She loved the experience, and when she left for New Zealand, she began to think about the possibility of returning to the UK.

Jocelyn separated from her partner when she was in her thirties and later married a widower with three young children. For the next 20 years, Jocelyn was assailed by one crisis after another. It was an extremely challenging marriage, and Jocelyn also supported her sister, who was nursing her terminally ill husband and son. Throughout this period, Jocelyn continued to work full-time and support her extended family. Then, Jocelyn's husband was diagnosed with cancer, and although he confessed to a long-term affair, Jocelyn supported him throughout his treatment. After the treatment was completed, Jocelyn decided that her marriage was over and with it her dreams for travel in New Zealand and overseas. Her stepchildren encouraged her to think again, and over a period of time, she realised that an SIE was possible.

Kathy had three children, and her first marriage was very difficult and broke up after 22 years. *It was easier to stay...I had the financial security for me and for the children.* Later Kathy entered another relationship, but after some time she became restless. *I became more and more unsettled.* Finally, they mutually decided to part. Encouraged by her daughter, Kathy planned a tour of Europe with the possibility of staying on. In her head, she understood it was a good thing to do, but in her heart, she was frightened of what lay ahead.

SIE

Escape was an important motivation for SIE for these participants. The desire to travel had always been there, but as single women with heavy family responsibilities and limited financial resources, it was difficult for them to see how it could happen. Travel and exploration were the focal points of the SIEs, and work was a means to finance it. Ironically, the participants who were keen to leave their caring roles behind found employment as home carers as this type of work offered several advantages. The only requirement to do caring work was an induction programme. Once the participants had established their credibility, they were able to choose contracts in locations that suited their financial needs and travel plans. Most of the caring roles were demanding but

rewarding and gave insights into the lives of people they would never normally have known. *It was hard work...nearly all the jobs have been very good.* (Kerry).

> *My lady had a friend whose daughter sang professionally and on Christmas Eve they were singing at the little chapel in the Tower of London and she invited me to go to the midnight service...the only other people there were people who worked in the Tower of London.* (Kerry)

These kinds of experiences were very special to the four participants. They lived in the clients' houses and often became good friends with the families. This made the participants feel valued and also gave them a sense of belonging.

> *She spent three weeks in hospital. The family asked me to stay on and I was able to be at her funeral...I felt very privileged that they wanted me to be part of it.* (Kathy)

Between contracts, the participants travelled or stayed with family and friends, and did not need accommodation, minimising their living costs. Family homes in New Zealand were rented out to cover mortgage payments and provide supplementary capital. The financial cost of an SIE had been regarded as a major barrier, but an unexpected consequence was that participants were better off financially at the completion of the SIE than if they had stayed in New Zealand. Two of the participants purchased rental properties in New Zealand during their extended SIEs, and the other two improved their overall financial positions.

> *The money you earned gave you the ability to do things that I would never had otherwise had the opportunity to do. So that was a big consideration. It would have been more difficult for me to find a job here because of my age, and I would not have earned the same amount of money.* (Kerry)

Outside of work, the participants travelled widely throughout Europe and the United States. Many of the trips were organised tours, enabling the women to have an adventure while still feeling safe and secure.

> *I joined this archaeological dig... It was all organised... accommodation... everything, I was the only independent volunteer...they were all PhDs...and I have never had a tertiary education...it was very hard work but an absolutely wonderful experience.* (Jocelyn)

Two of the participants developed new relationships during their SIE. These relationships brought additional Jenny into their lives but also complex challenges at a stage in life when the women had only just re-established a sense of confidence, stability and equanimity. Jocelyn was keen to develop her relationship. *He wanted us to be together*

full-time, and I tried...but I couldn't stay away from New Zealand permanently...my family and friends...but I did consider it and my stepson encouraged me. As she prepared to return to New Zealand, heartbroken, Jocelyn was surprised by SM's (soul mate) sudden announcement that he intended to visit her in New Zealand.

Kathy's life changed markedly during the SIE when she moved in with her partner. She was happy at the outset, but after she stopped working, she felt a loss of independence and confidence.

> *I did go to a gym...but I found I couldn't meet people there...I could smile at people but English people are a little bit more reserved anyway...and newcomers don't fit very easily into those established groups.* (Kathy)

In between caring contracts and travel, times spent with family and friends were cherished and every opportunity to attend concerts and the theatre was taken advantage of.

> *I love concerts, I love the theatre, I like going to the galleries. Things that I'd never been exposed to here. I'd always been interested in these things but had never had the opportunities to experience them first-hand and I found that exhilarating.* (Kerry)

The SIEs enriched their lives beyond expectations. *Absolutely...if I died tomorrow, I would've been so glad I've done what I've done. I'm not wealthy financially, but I'm extremely wealthy in what I've learned and experienced out in the world* (Kathy).

Although the participants worked to support their travel and adventures, one cannot underestimate the primacy of work in the redemptive SIE. Their work was demanding.

> *I tell people about the wonderful opportunities...perhaps I gloss over the nature of the work a little...when I first went over on what I thought was going to be a working holiday, I thought it was going to be mainly holiday with some work, but in actual fact it's mostly work with some holiday and it really is quite demanding.* (Kerry)

> *I want to give a very positive reaction...I think it was very special. I think I was...I'm not going to say lucky, to be able to do it because I think that we work hard to do these things. We create them. I'm grateful that I have been able to do it...I would encourage anyone to do it.* (Jocelyn)

Post-SIE

The return home was prompted mainly by family reasons. Thea and Kathy returned to New Zealand to be closer to their elderly parents. Jocelyn returned because her funds were running low, and ill health forced Kerry home.

Work had always been an important dimension in their lives but was less relevant once they were home. Despite the fact that family responsibilities resurfaced, the participants appeared to prioritise their personal lives. Three of the participants returned from the SIE in a more comfortable financial position than when they departed. They are not rich, but they could manage without an immediate return to work.

Jocelyn's immediate focus was to prepare for SM's arrival and reconnect with family. As time went by, Jocelyn began to think more about how her future might look. She was keen to do some university study and volunteer work, and to find a part-time administration role. Gradually, she came to the understanding that SM's visit would be emotionally distressing, so she asked him not to come.

Kathy had not worked in the UK for three years. When she returned to New Zealand with P, she felt re-energised connecting with family and friends. The adjustment process as a couple was difficult, and after much consideration around her future life direction, Kathy decided to take a break from the relationship. Once that decision was made, Kathy turned her attention to consider work opportunities.

> *Being back amongst friends and family where I felt loved and nurtured has been great. I feel a sense now of so many exciting possibilities…but I must have enough time off to nurture my own soul…I can pick fruit, do care work…housekeeping. It won't make me a fortune but I'm not really aspiring to that.* (Kathy)

Kerry returned to New Zealand for a hip operation. She recovered slowly and reluctantly accepted that her caring days were over. Now in her early seventies, Kerry has sold her country home, and with the proceeds from her rental property, she has resettled in Dunedin. Kerry is grateful for the SIE experience.

> *I've just been very fortunate that things did work out. There were times when you were entirely concentrating on the children...and you tended to neglect yourself...and then I got the opportunity to do the travel...I went with no expectations...as it turned out it exceeded my dreams. (Kerry)*

Now Kerry is quietly attending to the business of creating a new life for herself. After 50 years of working, Kerry is focusing on the personal rather than the professional and is confident that she can deal with whatever life throws at her. *My life has taken so many twists and turns…now I just take whatever opportunities are presented…I'd like to think I'd travel again...but at the moment I'm just concentrating on getting myself settled* (Kerry).

Thea returned to New Zealand to oversee the care of her seriously ill mother. There was no urgent need to work as Thea had returned from her SIE in a sound financial situation.

Amid the flurry of resettlement, Thea developed severe back pain and was diagnosed with advanced stage cancer. Ironically, her mother (aged 96) rallied and stabilised. At the outset of this ultimate personal challenge, Thea took charge. Her caring work with people nearing the end of their lives enabled Thea to think about what she wanted, and what she didn't want. Thea decided that whatever time she had left would be on her terms, and the SIE has been important in her acceptance of dying.

> *If I hadn't gone…I think I would feel if I'm honest, quite cheated now…my diagnosis was never good. I don't think there is anything left to deal with or reconcile. There comes a point where you just accept what is. I can't see anything to be angry about. You know, we've all got to die, we've all got to go there. I've got so much to be thankful for.* (Thea)

Jocelyn, Kathy, Kerry and Thea experienced significant stress and loss in their pre-SIE lives, requiring them to put aside their personal needs to focus on the wellbeing of family and work to support them. The SIE gave them an opportunity to step away from family responsibilities and to explore a different way of being. Work was an integral part of this experience, not only to finance the travels but also as it gave the participants an opportunity to process their loss and grief and move forward.

On their return to New Zealand, the participants' personal lives took precedence over their professional lives. Post-SIE, they appeared to be more independent, resilient and aware of what they wanted. Without such a pressing need to work, the participants experienced a level of personal freedom and autonomy that even the SIE could not deliver.

A successful SIE does not make one immune to the vicissitudes of life, and all four of the participants in this group faced post-SIE challenges, none more so than Thea, confronting a diagnosis of terminal cancer. Yet the participants addressed the various challenges with clarity, personal understanding, wisdom and dignity. No longer prepared to let others control their lives, the SIE afforded them the opportunity to become whole.

4. The integrationist stories

Individual interpretive stories

Susan

> One of the joys of SIE was that you came without any kind of baggage and you just turned your hand to whatever needed to be done.

Susan was born in the UK and had a happy middle-class upbringing. At 17, she expected life to unfold according to a master plan. She wanted to do something different. *I said to my headmistress, I want to do a year's VSA before university and she said don't be ridiculous, girl, you don't know anything about life, you'll be no use to anybody at your age.*

Susan duly attended university instead of VSA, married and had two children. The changing values of the nation in the 1980s worried her. *Our MP was taking money for asking questions in Parliament...he was jailed...and many people said good on him for taking the money.* At that time, Susan and her husband watched the Oxford Union debates. *David Lange had an amazing presence...we'd been looking at various places to go...NZ seemed the place to be.* They moved to New Zealand in 1988. Eighteen months later, Susan's marriage fell apart and she raised her young girls alone. Later, Susan met her current partner through the Quaker church.

During her mothering years, Susan held different senior full-time roles in the public service. *After many years of that, I kind of went OK, so what's new?* Susan was not interested in a managerial role and was unable to find stimulating employment opportunities elsewhere. In a career hiatus and when her children were adults, Susan read an advertisement for a VSA research manager. *It just seemed to kind of speak to me. I said to H how about going to X*...he just said, yep, sounds like a great idea.* Susan successfully applied for the position, with her partner in a supporting role. VSA wanted them to leave immediately, but they waited until Susan's daughter turned 21. Friends were mostly encouraging. Susan jokingly suggested that, given the children were not leaving home, then she would. However, Susan was concerned about her daughters and her mother in the UK. Her father had died earlier.

Susan and H arrived in X in time to attend Waitangi Day celebrations and met many Kiwis. It was a fantastic start, although the position had changed, with new responsibilities added for teaching English and sourcing funding. *As soon as money flowed, everybody wanted their fingers in the pie, there was lots of politicking.* Living in

a system that is corrupt by western standards was hard to reconcile, but Susan loved working with the students and developing the research centre.

There were opportunities to travel to other Asian countries, but Susan and her husband stayed mostly in their assignment locality. Susan lived within a 10-minute walk to work, the shops and restaurants, where they socialised with Kiwis, expats and locals. At the end of two years, Susan was sad to leave but looking forward to life back in New Zealand.

The readjustment to New Zealand was unexpectedly challenging. *I went into the supermarket…it had 24 different varieties of yoghurt and I was completely stumped…Suddenly this vast choice was right in front of me and I couldn't cope…and I just had to go home.* Susan thought she would find a job easily, but interviewers weren't interested in her. *Look, I've just had this fabulous two years setting up a research institute, and we've done some interesting fieldwork and give me a job please and people went oh, boy, that was an interesting time, but it's not really relevant to NZ.* After six months of unemployment, Susan was desperate and took a personal assistant (PA) role, then some project work in the public service. Later Susan was approached again by VSA to take up a position in a different country from the previous VSA role . *Well, it was good for the ego…being shoulder tapped, gosh, yes. So I went back to H and said well, X? And he went – yeah, X, wow!*

The job, developing a knowledge management strategy, had disappeared by the time Susan arrived. As she was a qualified accountant, Susan negotiated another assignment developing financial policies, procedures and training modules. It went well, but X was a tough environment. They lived on the coast and Susan walked to work. They travelled a little through X and a neighbouring country. X was beautiful, but there were risks. *I felt safer in the neighbouring country than in X. X's got huge security problems, you had to watch your back the whole time.* Susan was ready to come home after eight months, while her partner would like to have stayed. Back in New Zealand, the transition was easier for Susan a second time because she knew the trigger points.

SIE gave Susan the freedom to try different things. She has a better understanding of relationships, different values and ways of thinking. She believes she is also a better listener, having lived alongside people whose first language is not English. SIE has made her more aware of context, especially around values. Honesty and transparency are important to Susan, and she thought they were universal values, but to the X people, they were confusing concepts. *They say the only transparent people are hungry ghosts…so when I go on about transparency being good, they were totally flummoxed.* Thus, Susan

has developed a more global and cross-cultural perspective. While she has learned to be more forthright, she has also learned to live with ambiguity and complexity.

Life back in New Zealand is more simple now for Susan and her husband than before they left on the SIEs. They do not own a car; instead they walk and use public transport. There are no plans to do another SIE as her partner has poor health. There are also no plans for short-term travel as being a tourist does not interest them because they have become concerned about the impact of international travel on climate change.

Before the SIE, Susan assumed that her public service career would track upwards until retirement. Now, two years after her return, Susan is no longer motivated by the traditional organisation career, and her current work in the public service doesn't give her the space to be as innovative and empowered as she was on her SIE. Susan plans to move to part-time work in 18 months to explore permaculture, and become more involved in the Transition Towns movement. Paid work is now less about career and achievement and more about creating cash flow to support a developing sustainable lifestyle. For Susan, paid work is unsatisfactory but a means to that end.

SIE has taken Susan beyond her comfort zone.

> *It will sit you up, make you think about what on earth you're doing…I used to just toddle through life assuming everything would just carry on as it always did and certainly being thrust into that kind of environment where you're in a different culture, different climate, different everything else is, I think, a jolly good thing to do.*

SIE has diverted Susan from a conventional life. *It certainly shifted my thinking about some of the bigger issues about poverty, about climate change.* Susan is more resilient, independent and confident. *Am I happier? Definitely. Yes, yes, yep. Am I content? No, No. Never be content, only cows are contented.* At 57, Susan is in an intentional state of becoming. She has clarified the values and relationships that are important to her. The inner essence and outer perspective of her self are being reconfigured through the development and transition to a more sustainable and meaningful way of being.

* X = Country where SIE was carried out

Lucy

> *Now if I'm not in as much control as I think I should be...I just let it go...and it settles and comes right...now I know there's a reason for the season.*

Lucy's mother lived life according to a rule book. Her father was different. He would ask Lucy about her goals and say it doesn't matter how you get there, as long as it's legal. In her heart, Lucy identified with her father's approach, but in her head, she knew she must follow her mother's. Thus, Lucy was a good girl, excelling at school, becoming head prefect and marrying at 20.

Lucy was the breadwinner while her husband completed postgraduate study in New Zealand and the UK. In the UK, she became involved in community work. Two children were born there, and once back in New Zealand, Lucy worked part-time in NGO* roles. When the children were adults, she returned to full-time advocacy management roles.

Then, her 30-year marriage ended. *I'd made attempts to talk...like...can we do something exciting? I knew I would hurt him dreadfully and I didn't want that. But there was something that said I had to do it.* Lucy is still a good girl at heart. She remains on positive terms with her former husband, and there have been times when she wondered whether their marriage would have survived if he had just agreed to an adventure or two.

Soon after her divorce, Lucy's parents died. She continued her NGO role but became worn out by three organisational restructures in four years. At a conference in 2003, Lucy met a doctor from India. She asked spontaneously, *Is there anything a slightly jaded administrative sort of person could do for you?* He said – yes! *So I booked a flight...I remember thinking, what are you doing...going to a country with a billion people...you know one man who you talked to on a beach at a conference!* Nevertheless, Lucy went to India and worked tirelessly with the doctor for three weeks and enjoyed every minute.

Back in New Zealand, Lucy continued her NGO work but took a short break to travel to France with friends. There, she discussed the idea of an SIE. *B** and I looked at each other over a whiskey and said – why don't we have an adventure...so we did.* Lucy resigned her position and the two friends took a break in Thailand en-route to London, and from there, they agreed to follow their individual pathways.

Just before Lucy's departure, a friend suggested that she apply for a volunteer assignment in Asia-Pacific. Lucy applied for it, but the position fell through. Later, New Zealand VSA contacted Lucy in the UK to discuss another potential position in the same country. Lucy was interviewed by phone and was offered the position. She stayed in the UK,

travelling with her daughter and visiting friends before returning to New Zealand for the requisite training and medical checks.

Lucy's role was a management adviser in a medical clinic. She loved it, working six days a week in a different culture among growing civil unrest. Lucy lived among the locals. *It was never scary for me personally. You could say that some of the things we did should have been scary but the civil unrest wasn't directed at foreigners.* When the volunteer staff were evacuated, Lucy accepted the decision but returned two months later when the situation eased. However, due to the political unrest, Lucy was unable to travel further afield. After several months, the situation worsened again and volunteer programmes were suspended. This time Lucy was angry at leaving the people. *You just see people with absolute panic, tyres burning in the streets, people bringing someone in with a machete wound or an arrow in them. But because I wasn't feeling targeted, I just wanted to counter their fear.*

After returning to New Zealand, Lucy did some contract work, formed a new relationship and visited China. The volunteer organisation offered her a new paid role, back in the same region, and Lucy was keen to return. In her new role, she negotiated with the government and NGOs to establish a volunteer agency and continued in her former clinic role one day a week. The work gave Lucy scope to develop new skills and knowledge, and she also developed valuable relationships in the expat community. *The decision to work overseas provided a chance to start from scratch…where no one knows you…you're responsible for making friends…learning a new culture and getting on with life.*

Four years after the first assignment, Lucy returned to New Zealand. While she didn't feel she had achieved all her goals, she was very proud of her work and planned to return one day and take her daughter with her. *I wanted one person from my family to know why the country was special to me.* Lucy was looking forward to seeing her family and friends, but she was also saddened by the end of a relationship in New Zealand just before her return. Back in New Zealand, Lucy was unsettled, so she applied for another volunteer SIE, but her application was declined. She had also planned to go to Europe with friends for several weeks to help renovate an old house. They were close and supportive friends, and in their company, Lucy began to adjust and refocus. *It was a very nurturing environment.*

On her return to New Zealand, Lucy applied for a management role in a New Zealand NGO. *But the minute I sent my application in I was instantly googling development jobs!* However, Lucy also knew it was important to re-establish herself in New Zealand. *I don't*

want to feel that I'm being driven out of this place. Lucy was asked in the NGO interview, *Are you going to race off to another adventure?* Recognising that it was time to make a commitment, Lucy signed a minimum two-year contract.

Lucy has now been back three years and considers her volunteer SIE as life-changing. *You learn about yourself…what you can do without…it's a way of paring down your life to what's really important.* Lucy doesn't angst over money, and is interested in a more simple life. She is more confident and happier to take risks. *I think people would say that I always appeared confident, but I feel more confident in myself now in terms of trusting my instinct, whereas before I would feel something instinctively and then I would doubt it.* While personal circumstances constrained Lucy's earlier work–life choices, now she is more conscious that any work she undertakes must not only feel right for her but it must also be the right thing for society. For Lucy, work has become a more holistic life term that encompasses all that she does, and it must be personally meaningful and socially responsible.

The volunteer SIE was initially an escape and an adventure. But the SIE experiences have also been a catalyst for significant personal and professional growth and change. Lucy is living in the present and optimistic about the future. The rule book is long gone. Nowadays, Lucy is guided by her inner voice and lives a more empowered, purposeful and authentic life. *Now there is a sense of me choosing what I do, rather than following a pattern or role set by other people and outside factors.*

* Non-governmental organisation

** B = A friend

Jenny

> *I'm trying to allow myself to do what I really want to do.*

Every year when the cows had dried up, Jenny's father would bundle his large family into the caravan and go exploring. It was wildly exciting for Jenny, a welcome diversion from her life as the eighth child in a family of 11 children. Her family considered her too assertive, and while she was the only sibling to attend university, Jenny believes that she has led a largely submissive life, shaped and constrained, firstly by her Brethren father and then by her business-obsessed husband.

After studying history at university, Jenny worked in the public service and then became a primary teacher. She wanted to travel but her husband didn't, so she did short solo trips before having children. *I've always been keen on travelling but my husband never was. He considered it a waste of money.* It wasn't an easy marriage, and it became important to her to earn some money to bolster her self-esteem.

When the children were old enough to be left temporarily, Jenny persuaded her husband to travel. It was a disaster. *Within two days I knew our marriage was stuffed.* She vowed to return overseas one day and do it her way. Her husband didn't believe that she would leave him, and Jenny did not find the strength to do so until her father died and her children were independent. Jenny finally left her husband after 30 years and then began an 18-month battle over matrimonial property. It was a living nightmare, and to survive the process, Jenny devised the carrot of an SIE. She was poverty stricken during that time. *The assets were locked up by the lawyers. I think that made me more determined to go.*

Eventually, Jenny accepted a pay-out, 40% of the assets. She was exhausted but wanted to get on with her life and applied for her Irish passport. *Going overseas meant that I could distance myself from all the shit that had happened.* The only barrier left was her mother, who was difficult to manage. *I felt guilty for my sisters' sakes that I wasn't going to be sharing the burden…I wasn't going to let it stop me.*

Operating on a cocktail of exhaustion and adrenalin, Jenny flew into London early one sunny morning. Before nightfall, she had set up her bank account, checked her emails, contacted English friends, picked up job-related magazines and purchased a phone. She went to stay with an old friend and continued with this arrangement between work and travel commitments.

Jenny applied for work as a carer, and then headed to Manchester to visit friends. She quickly adjusted to life as a traveller, happily staying with friends and living cheaply for

two months before the job started. The caring work was 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with two hours off in the afternoon. It was demanding and made worse by the fact that Jenny was working illegally, without a national insurance number. She worked in this position for the next six months, insisting that the agency allow her to work alternate weeks. In her downtime, she explored England, her favourite escapade being a canal boat holiday, and she visited several European cities.

As Jenny became accustomed to the lifestyle and accumulated some money, she began WWOOFing* on smallholdings. The SIE settled into a pattern of some caring, some WWOOFing, then catching up with friends or travelling. Jenny relished meeting people, discovering the magic of the local pub. *You'd just stand at the bar and then I would turn around and say...well...can anyone recommend me a good local beer? That's all you needed. Everyone would start chipping in about it and then they would start talking to you.*

She visited relatives in Ireland and Wales, but the highlights of the SIE were the sharing of conversation over meals and delving into the rich tapestry of other people's lives. Too soon, it was time to return to New Zealand, but Jenny was not ready to leave the UK. Her New Zealand employers were expecting her back after a year's leave. After a New Zealand road trip, Jenny returned to work but felt burdened by her job and the emotional drain of re-establishing friendships. In the midst of this turmoil, she seriously injured her back. After 18 months, Jenny had not settled but felt she had recovered enough and she returned to England. It felt like her second home. Her friends welcomed her. She worked as a carer for several weeks, earning enough money to fund her frugal lifestyle. Caring was a means to an end. WWOOFing and travel were the drawcards.

Many years earlier, Jenny's dream had been to own a lifestyle block and she thought her husband shared this dream. *Right near the end, he told me that he'd led me on...he'd said it was a waste of money...building a hay bale house and getting solar panels...that's just for rich people.* When her marriage ended, Jenny thought the dream was gone too. *I thought that I was past it...because we'd split...I can't do it on my own.* But as Jenny continued WWOOFing, the dream resurfaced. She began to note ideas, realising that she was just as capable as the people she was working for. *I'm learning things. Every farm I go onto, I'm learning something new from every single place.*

After eight months, Jenny returned to New Zealand. Although she had resigned, her former employers offered her another contract, which she accepted for the short-term while her longer term plans began to take shape in her thoughts. SIE enabled her to

explore who she really was, away from the constraints and judgements that go with familiar and established lives. *Nobody has expectations of you. You're just somebody who's come in…like my family label me…my friends label me as a certain type of person and I don't want to be.* Every time she did something new, she grew less fearful. Every time an employer told her she was a great worker, she grew more confident and started to believe in herself again.

Each day is greeted with enthusiasm and interest and an unbridled Jenny. She believes she is more adaptable, resilient and happier. She values relationships with people greatly and the pursuit of material things far less. She is more patient, with the angst of the past giving way to a more trustful way of being. No longer past it, Jenny's dream of a sustainable and organic lifestyle has been reclaimed and reconstructed. She plans to return overseas for one more SIE, driven not just by the desire to travel but also to learn about running a small organic lifestyle block. *I'm trying to allow myself to do what I really want to do…like I do overseas...I see people…some of them are older and I'm thinking…right, even though I'm almost 60 I can do it…I've still got years ahead of me.*

For Jenny, SIE was a precious gift. It has opened her world but, in doing so, has created a tension between her two global homes. Out of the tension have come challenges, creativity and the energy to forge a new way of being that embraces her values, her love of exploration and her love of the land.

* WWOOF = Willing Workers on Organic Farms

Cassie

> *The most rewarding, enlightening…what's another big word…amazing and life-changing experience of my life…yeah! I think I have evolved into quite a different person.*

Cassie was born in 1948 on the East Coast of the North Island, the eldest of three daughters. Hers was an ordinary working-class upbringing with a 'mechanic' father and a 'stay at home' mother who was, at heart, *a very intelligent, vivacious, energetic, adventurous woman who was never able to use it…because my father was extremely risk-averse. They divorced eventually.*

Cassie recalls leading her younger sisters astray at times, but her early life was shaped by growing up in the provinces in the 1950s. Her vocational choices were nursing, teaching or a commercial course. University was not an option, her father saying, *You're not going to university, because you're not smart enough.* She trained as a dental nurse, and then became a social worker for 10-years, completing on-the-job training.

When the children were born, Cassie didn't return to work. After moving to the city, she worked in various administration roles. She believes she was a good worker and established a career without qualifications by *sheer good luck.* When the children were grown, Cassie drew on her social work skills and worked in senior human resource positions. Travel was part of family life, and Cassie and her partner travelled to safe places when the children were small and then became more adventurous, heading to Asia, when the children were adults.

In her fifties and in senior organisational positions, Cassie felt unchallenged and disenchanted being a slave to corporate restructuring, while her empathy was with the people she managed. She was highly valued but wasn't attracted by the senior management career path. *Where do I go next?* Cassie saw an overseas management position with VSA advertised in the newspaper. Her partner was supportive. She applied and didn't get the job, but VSA offered her another position. Her mother, who lived alone, was also very encouraging. *This is exactly what I would have wanted to do.* Cassie's daughters were only concerned about their father being alone, so one daughter moved home and became her father's *flattie.* Friends were less understanding and somewhat perplexed with her decision to strike out alone.

Cassie arrived in Asia for her orientation, but the job fell through. Undaunted, she waited until her new assignment, funded by the World Health Organization, was approved. Cassie was responsible for the establishment of a national payroll database for health

workers, which was a huge task. She worked with local staff, and the cultural issues were challenging. Looking back, she wonders if she would have undertaken the assignment had she known how difficult it would be. She developed key relationships with locals to get the tasks done, and some of her staff developed transferable skills under her guidance. Cassie became very close to one staff member, and this relationship gave her some protection in a challenging and unpredictable work situation. *He said…don't do that. It's too dangerous.* Against the odds, Cassie completed the project, but the real highlights were the people she worked alongside

Corruption was rife and threatening, but Cassie learned to adjust. She realised that she couldn't change the system, so set out to make a difference within her world. She socialised with expats and volunteers who worked in NGOs, but they didn't experience the corruption she faced working in a local organisation. Cassie didn't talk about this as when she did, she received comments such as, *I think you're being paranoid.* During this first posting, she had a wonderful lifestyle outside of work and travelled to some other regions when her partner visited. After 12 months, the assignment was completed and Cassie applied for another project. Her partner, who had taken voluntary redundancy, was keen to join her.

After a short break in New Zealand, they returned to their volunteer SIE. Cassie was responsible for building the capability of an agricultural training organisation. To turn the organisation around, Cassie came up against the local way yet again. She never felt unsafe and was constantly working through others. Her partner worked also but was an essential support as Cassie's job was physically and mentally exhausting. There was also some personal travel in this second posting. For example, they travelled to Myanmar, where they got alongside local people and explored unknown areas.

In her work, Cassie facilitated change. *I didn't need to front things, I don't need to be famous, but I like to see things happening. No one mentioned my name, but I had built an organisation.* This is the creative work she loved doing most, rather than retrenching staff as in her New Zealand work. Nevertheless, it became impossible to stay. *The gap between rich and poor was worsening and the endless high-powered corruption and misuse of aid money devastating*, so they returned to New Zealand at the end of the project.

Confronting consumerism back in New Zealand was hard. *I knew it was going to hit me in the face…nobody understood at all*. The recession had started and Cassie was seen as underqualified, over-experienced and too old. Interview panels told her she didn't fit the New Zealand organisational context and she lost her confidence. *Nobody wants you*

because you're old. I'm 62, only when I look in the mirror. So what do I do from here…I have no idea but society tells me at 62 there is no job for you in NZ.

Cassie was unsettled and unable to find a job in New Zealand, so she applied for another VSA position. Although she was accepted, she decided to enrol in university study instead. Over the following two years, Cassie has developed a life that is more in tune with her values and interests. Her university studies in development build on her recent overseas experience and *allow me to avoid the workplace here, because I still find it deeply unsatisfactory.* Cassie has completed an English as a second language (ESOL) qualification and is tutoring students on a voluntary basis.

Since their return from SIE, Cassie and her partner have radically changed their lifestyle to reflect their changed values. *We were both big earners and spent the lot. I was a clothes horse…but that's no longer satisfying…we don't own a car…it's around quality.* Quality is *knowing about what's going on in the world…it's about only bothering about relationships that have depth. I can't be bothered with the cocktail set anymore…it's about caring…caring about what goes on in the world and doing something about it.*

While she is content, *definitely more content…and I'd be doubly content if I could leave New Zealand*, she is also more selective and introverted. Whatever she does must be challenging and meaningful, and she believes working in a New Zealand organisation, where older women are often invisible, is unlikely to offer these opportunities. Cassie has regained her confidence. She loves her studies and her voluntary work but still has a yearning for a more international perspective. Elder care responsibilities currently restrict Cassie to New Zealand, but in the future, she hopes to work on a Pacific aid project or continue her university work in development studies. She is optimistic, although *not entirely comfortable here.*

Cassie is grateful for her SIE volunteer experience. SIE has been *the most rewarding, enlightening…what's another big word...amazing and life-changing experience of my life …yeah! I think I have evolved into quite a different person.*

Sharon

> *SIE has opened up my world. For the first time in my life I have travel stories of my own. Most New Zealanders have been somewhere…Before I went on SIE I was 55 and I had no memories of going anywhere and doing anything. I do now…I loved SIE.*

Sharon was born in the 1950s. She has one brother and several half brothers and sisters. Even though Sharon was in the top academic class, her mother said, *I can't afford to support both of you. Your brother's going to university and you have to get a job.* Sharon was distraught and became estranged from her mother. She left home at 16, worked at the local council and married. Sharon had three children, two boys and a girl, but sadly, the oldest, a boy, died at age four. After 16 years of marriage, she separated from her husband.

When the children were independent, Sharon moved south looking for a change in scene. She worked in a financial institution before being diagnosed with chronic fatigue syndrome. After she recovered, she bought a financial advisory business. Unfortunately, the industry collapsed and Sharon was forced to sell at a loss. Her illness flared again, but she had to work. She found employment, but it was a very stressful environment. *It's a shrinking industry so I decided this was a good time to do an SIE. My sensible part says – You can't… you've got a mortgage. But if I said – well, I'm going overseas and I'll worry about it when I get home…for some reason that made it acceptable…just deferring it in that fashion meant that I could do it.*

Sharon had always longed to travel. *I read lots of travel books…although I don't actually like flying.* Her husband hadn't been interested, and since her separation, her health and finances had held her back. Now Sharon was determined. *My mother was keen for me to go…she actually paid the airfares.* She organised a mortgage holiday, found a house-sitter, contacted her international quilting networks and registered with various volunteer agencies. She didn't have much money, so she knew she could only be away for three to four months.

Sharon was met by her former sister-in-law at Heathrow. It was the first time Sharon had travelled long-distance and she was homesick. *I was on a train…I had music on my iPod…Holly Smith, I blubbed…I can't do this.* But she kept going and *the second day I took the tube by myself and went to the V&A to see the quilt exhibition.* From London, Sharon visited Wales and then went to Liverpool en route to the Isle of Man. *The whole trip was staying with quilting and blog friends or people hosts.* From the Isle of Man, Sharon flew to Dublin and stayed with a quilting friend until she started her first volunteer posting in Galway. It was not what Sharon expected.

> *My hostess was dodgy. She owed money everywhere. She was talking to a guy on Skype…he wanted to marry her for residency! I was cleaning the kitchen the first afternoon when this chap came by to fix her toilet. He comes out of the bathroom and he's stark naked…and my hostess simply said, shall we have a cup of tea?*

Next was a stint in Devon. *I actually like making cheese so I chose some places that were making cheese.* From there, Sharon went to France and spent three days in Paris, the only time she was alone. She stayed in a one-star hotel! *There was a spiral staircase…the room was tiny…in the evenings I would sit with the big windows wide open and do my knitting and watch what was going on. It was lovely.*

Another farm beckoned in Bordeaux. It was run by a Dutch couple who made cheese, but it was perhaps Sharon's loneliest time.

> *There were two chairs by the fire for them…but none for me. They had Dutch people visiting and I helped with the cooking…so what I found interesting was that the friends would translate for me…but this couple would never say to me what they were talking about.*

The last volunteer job was in Provence. Sharon's job was to plaster the straw bale studio, but it was another unusual situation.

> *On the first floor there was a toilet in a cupboard and an alcove off the bathroom and that's where I slept. If anybody used the bathroom, I couldn't come out…the town clock struck the half hour, then the hour, then again five minutes later…in case you missed it!*

Come evening, when everyone disappeared to the warmth upstairs, Sharon retired to her alcove. *I had a window and I looked out. I loved this village. It used to have a wall around it and 12th-century windmills.* Sharon stayed with blog friends in Aix-en-Provence and then went to Savoy to attend a quilt fair. She planned to move on to Italy, but her New Zealand house-sitting arrangements had fallen through and she was worried about her pets. Sharon returned to the UK until she caught her flight back to New Zealand. She is proud of her SIE. *It extended me as a person…I worried whether I could mix and live with different people and travel on my own.*

Unable to find work back in New Zealand, Sharon applied for the unemployment benefit and planned to move south to be mortgage free. *I started looking at a change of direction…overseas I had thought about what to do when I came home…I had lots of craft-related ideas.* When researching craft ideas, she came across a visual arts degree at Southland Polytech. *It's not an automatic acceptance but I applied and was accepted.*

A year ago, she worked in the finance industry. Now, *I wouldn't care if I never worked again for other people*. Sharon has changed. *I'm not prepared to do crappy jobs…like I have no choice. Now I think, I can do whatever I like.* SIE has made her realise that *you have to make things happen.* Sharon is less concerned about her finances and lives simply. *I've become less consumer-orientated.*

Sharon starts her degree studies soon, putting to rights the opportunity that was denied to her as a teenager. Additionally, the studies are in the visual arts, a lifelong and untapped passion. Sharon is focused on doing things that have real meaning. Currently, she is leading a voluntary quilt-making initiative to support Pike River families*. *I sent the call out…it's become huge.* Interestingly, Sharon claims her initiative is *purely selfish…hoping what goes around, comes around.*

Longer term, Sharon has more dreams. She would love to do another SIE, and this time she may reduce her age by 10 years. *I did lie about my age…I don't consider myself old…but I was worried other people overseas might.* Sharon also dreams about a gallery and land where she can *grow and make things.* She is not concerned about finding a job. *It's the sort of thing my mother asks. Well, what sort of job are you going to get after this? I don't really care…I want to do it because I find the course really appealing to me.*

For the first time in her life, Sharon is doing what she truly wants to do. Overseas travel and work in later life has shaken Sharon up. *It's not hard when you're older and unencumbered…if I can do it, anybody can.* Sharon's SIE was a 'frugal foreign foray', done on the smell of an oily rag. *Life is so much better than before the SIE…yes, it's tough financially now…but that's OK.* Sharon is more independent, resilient, confident and adaptable. She has an international network of creative friends, a more meaningful life-path and *SIE stories to die for!*

* Pike River Tragedy November 2010. New Zealand's worst mining disaster since 1914. In the mining explosions of 2010, 29 miners were killed. The mines were subsequently sealed and the 29 bodies have never been recovered causing much grief and anguish for the families.

Diana

> *Life is like going down a wider river.*

In 1997, Diana travelled to Asia* with friends to attend a wedding and *felt an absolute love for the place.* She vowed to return. At that time, Diana worked in management consultant roles and was engaged in stressful restructuring projects in the public and private sectors. At the same time, she was trying for an IVF baby, a later-life decision. After another brief visit to Asia* with her partner, Diana became unsettled. The IVF had failed and her mother had died.

Diana continued in her demanding work in New Zealand for another year before making some changes. She enrolled in a master's degree programme and continued her private consultancy work. Diana formulated two career options with her partner on completion of her studies. The first was to return to organisational development consultancy work in government departments and the second was to seek employment in Asia.*

Diana was a highly motivated careerist whose professional life formed the core of her being. Towards the end of her study, Diana experienced a traumatic relationship issue and the couple separated. Her ex-partner spent much of his time in Asia, living Diana's dream, while she stayed in New Zealand returning to a stressful senior consultancy role.

Eventually, Diana went travelling in Asia. *I was by myself basically to start a healing process and who knew where it was going to go. I was doing it independently.* She met up with her former partner, and during that time, they decided that they had a fundamental love and would stick together. They travelled to Asia,* hopeful of finding work. By now, Diana had decided to leave her corporate life behind and follow her dreams. *When you had the life experiences like I had, you take absolutely nothing for granted…life may change completely…just like that.*

VSA advertised an NGO position in Asia.* *It fell into my lap.* Diana's sister kept an eye on their elderly father, and her partner's two children were independent. Both Diana and her partner were financially secure. They completed a joint application, but VSA appointed Diana and her partner went in a supporting role. Diana and P set off for Asia* awaiting a work visa, which gave Diana time to find accommodation and generally orient herself. She worked in an advisory role that included some training and publishing activities for three months, although she had limited knowledge and experience of the latter. The parent organisation was dysfunctional and corruption was a major issue. Diana's work changed into an organisational development role as she focused on capacity

building and establishing funding streams and constitutional guidelines. *There was so much to learn and the people were really neat. Yeah it was stressful, but it wasn't, because I really loved what I was doing. I've loved every job I've had there.*

The culture was collective, and Diana was comfortable drawing on these participative processes to seed change and growth rather than impose structures and ideas and focus on downsizing and retrenchment, as typified her New Zealand corporate experiences. Diana considered the development of her staff a priority, and several employees have gone on to study at postgraduate level on scholarships. The four-year assignment was a wonderful life experience.

> *It was like we landed with our noses in the butter…we had a two-burner gas bottle stove and no glass in the windows and things like that. But again it was an absolutely beautiful old Asian* house, so it was a wonderful environment. It was basic but it was also luxurious.*

The highlights beyond the workplace were the friendships made and the opportunity to travel within Asia* and to neighbouring Asian countries. During her time in Asia,* Diana also recorded recipes, while her partner photographed and documented ethnic groups. They established close friendships with local people, other volunteers and business people, and many of these connections continue.

But there was a dark side to their Asian* SIE that made them feel extremely uncomfortable at times. Diana felt some disquiet in an increasingly political environment. *Yes, it's a paradise on one side but it's got this real deep bad stuff under it.* When Diana completed her SIE she and P briefly returned to New Zealand to attend to personal business matters before heading back to a different Asian country, to purchase a beach condo in a small fishing village to further their Asian dream.

Driven by her love of cooking and growing interest in cultures, Diana has completed her first publishing project and fashioned a new post-SIE life.

> *I suppose it was that early anthropology thing…they were building a road from China…as soon as the trading route started getting established we knew that the cultures were going to change very fast…P wanted to document the cultures and I wanted to record the food…because food is a fundamental glue of society.*

There are no long-term plans. *Who knows? We just take it as it comes.* Family is not drawing Diana back to New Zealand, although she misses her father and will stay longer in New Zealand on the next visit. Life is evolving for Diana. There are a number of potential publishing projects with P. Their personal relationship has been re-established and strengthened, although Diana no longer takes anything for granted.

The impact of the SIE is less about the networks and connections that were made and more about the attitude and values she has developed. The SIE has given Diana a deeper understanding of consensus, and now she accepts that change cannot be forced. Perhaps this is how she has been able to rebuild her relationship, accepting that change and reconciliation must be nurtured within its own rhythm. By *taking time, smiling and letting things go.* Diana gives more time to things, is less goal focused and accepts the power of process.

Integral to this attitude is greater awareness. Nowadays, Diana focuses on being present in the now rather than on how things should be. *I think that's what the rest of my life is going to be like. I don't know what's going to happen or where it's going, but I'm damned well going to be enjoying it, or living through it with awareness.*

Diana lives a more simple life and is more resilient. *I now feel you could take anything away from me and I'd still be…I'd still survive and I'd still figure a way out there. I think being in Asia* and the volunteer experience has shaped that.* Most importantly, the SIE has greatly extended her world view. Diana is living her life as she wants. Work and life values are inextricably fused. Her present life has meaning and her future life is rich with possibilities. *Life is like going down a wider river.*

* Asia. Actual name of the destination and SIE volunteer placement withheld due to the sensitive nature of events that occurred.

The integrationist journey

The participants in this group were from diverse backgrounds. Generally, they had conventional and contented childhoods. With the exception of Sharon, there was no overt conflict or anger about their experiences of growing up. They were aware that they were treated differently from their brothers at times, but they tended to accept the situation or found a way of managing it at least until they were adults. Lucy's mother had a rule book and never questioned the rules.

> *Later…I was wanting to take risks…because I had followed the rules. I had got married…in the early '70s, you got married to validate the fact you were having sex. I think five years later I would probably have had more courage to break out from those rules.* (Lucy)

Susan accepted her parents' blueprint for growing up.

> *It was a very normal, apparently quite a boring childhood in many ways because we just assumed that our parents would be there and of course they were and we just assumed that they would make a good home for us and they did…and it all seemed like it was going to tootle along quite happily.* (Susan)

Sharon did very well at school and it wasn't until she was planning to attend university that she confronted the reality of being a girl in a single-parent family.

> *My mother said to me in the sixth form – You're going to have to leave school at the end of this year and get a job because I can't afford to support both of you. She was a single-parent and there were no benefits in those days.* (Sharon)

Overall these participants had a stable and relatively happy upbringing. They did well academically, and three of them attended university directly from school while two were not supported by parents to go to university. All of the participants developed a curiosity about life and travel beyond the experiences of their own childhood.

> *I was always the leader of the pack because I was the oldest, and I did get into a lot of trouble and persuaded my sisters to get into trouble, as I tried things that pushed the boundaries. They took us on holiday every year. In those days, I guess they were considered adventurous. When our own children were small we went to safe places like Australia…and later we wanted to do something a bit more edgy, so we went to Thailand and worked our way from Bangkok up to Chiang Mai on trains and we thought we were just so adventurous.* (Cassie)

Even though Susan was not permitted to do a gap year before university, she held onto her dreams of travelling the world. *I was curious about the world and at that young age I thought right, well I know all about domesticity and family and I really wanted to see other cultures, the way things were done elsewhere in the world.* (Susan)

When they were adults, the participants worked in a variety of senior positions in large organisations. They loved their work, but once they reached their fifties, several of them became dissatisfied with their roles and limited career opportunities.

> *I basically had a decision point…whether to actually go back into corporate life, because I was a director…you know…so I thought OK, how am I going to deal with this?* (Diana)

Cassie was disenchanted with constant corporate restructuring.

> *I'd gone into human resources thinking it was actually a people-focused industry but in the corporate and government departments I found it was extremely process focused and the people actually didn't count very much. I ended up being in situations that I disliked around restructuring and having empathy with the people but having to be the slaves of the corporate bosses…I came to hate it.* (Cassie)

Susan's experience was similar, and she became frustrated with the lack of respect or recognition of her long work history.

> *My working life was starting to tick over…I didn't really want to leave…but I also didn't particularly want to join the senior management team…I found that the jobs that I was applying for…people sort of flicked through my CV and said…but you haven't started as a junior here and worked your way up.* (Susan)

At a personal level, several of the participants' marriages had broken down and there were other instances of stress and illness during their adult lives. There appeared to be a good level of resilience among the participants and mostly they coped well. Once their professional lives no longer seemed tenable, the participants became open to other possibilities.

Diana had already given up her corporate role in New Zealand and was looking for contract work in Asia. *So we went over to Asia but there were no real work opportunities there…then one day I was reading the newspaper and there was this VSA advertisement for a training adviser for a small NGO.* (Diana)

It was time for a change, and at long last, the timing was right. Cassie wanted to live among the locals overseas. Jenny wanted to reward herself with an international sojourn. Susan wanted to follow the dreams she formulated at 17. Diana was searching for a more gentle way of living. Sharon wanted to create her own travel stories, and Lucy wanted to inject some excitement in to her life.

SIE

All the participants on the integrationist journey worked as international volunteers. Susan, Cassie, Diana and Lucy took on international aid assignments under the auspices of VSA. They were not paid a salary, but they received an allowance that they considered quite adequate. Jenny and Sharon did international volunteer work in a different capacity. Jenny began her SIE in the UK working as a carer and also completed stints as a volunteer WWOOFer. Although the work on the farms was unpaid, Jenny and Sharon received free food and accommodation in exchange for their labour.

It was not unusual for the international aid volunteers to arrive in the country and find out that the volunteer position had fallen through or the original position description had changed significantly. Initially, Cassie thought her volunteer SIE was impossible. *I didn't believe it when I was first told…I thought…it's ridiculous…it's impossible! I'm just going to go home with my tail between my legs…but because it had been put in front of me, I just kept going* (Cassie).

Susan's first volunteer SIE also seemed overwhelming. *The big issue was that the director had very different ideas about what I should be doing…he said I want you to teach English and get money. And I said well, neither of those things are in my assignment* (Susan).

The broad scope of the volunteer positions meant that, as the participants took on new responsibilities, they learned to create and build futures rather than retrench and tear down structures as had been done in their recent organisational experience.

> *The job lasted about three months then things were becoming very obvious that the parent organisation had issues to do with corruption…the constitution was a disaster and there wasn't a functioning executive committee…so I actually moved into an organisational development role.* (Diana)

> *I just solved problems…I wasn't a data entry expert but I found someone who was. I negotiated with WHO for the money…that year was the most exhausting year of my working life. But at the end of it I thought – wow! I developed the ability to sit behind and to make things happen.* (Cassie)

> *I learnt more about how other people think differently…and how I cope with people with totally different value systems. Hopefully I've learnt to listen more carefully with people whose first language is not English.* (Susan)

Jenny and Sharon also learned much in their farming assignments.

> *I'm accruing all sorts of knowledge…and I'm learning things…every farm I go onto …I'm learning something new from every single place…even if it's just how to make dandelion coffee or plucking hens or how to scrub down the hen houses properly to prevent disease being spread.* (Jenny)

I was in the middle of nowhere in Devon, on a little lifestyle block...she was an artist and cheese-maker...she milked goats...I actually like making cheese. (Sharon)

All the participants in this research study experienced some difficult times. The four international aid volunteers were exposed to particularly challenging situations that introduced them to different values and practices.

There are lots of scary things that happened...working in a corrupt environment feels so unsafe. Sometimes I'd have my stomach up here about things that were going on...it was full of graft and nepotism and buying your entry...we came up with a system...but it got to the point where we were being threatened for even suggesting it. (Cassie)

I mean the civil unrest wasn't directed at foreigners and it certainly wasn't directed at Kiwi foreigners...there were helicopters going whop, whop, and there were men with guns wandering around, which, when you come from NZ, guns are not part of your everyday experience. (Lucy)

The international volunteers worked hard and become part of the community. *VSA's philosophy is that you live in the community, whereas a lot of UN workers put themselves behind barbed wire fences...I shared a house with a local family. I think you find your supports in that community amongst the people* (Lucy).

Overall, the participants travelled less than expected. Sharon's volunteer SIE was much shorter than those of the others; thus, her travel was limited to visiting a few contacts and organising travel to the farms that she worked out.

Some of my travelling days were amazingly complicated...for example, when I came back from Dublin and went back to England I got a lift to the bus station, then I caught a shuttle bus to the airport, and then took a plane from Dublin to Exeter, then I caught three buses and finally my host picked me up from there. (Sharon)

The other volunteers were unable to travel extensively due to political unrest, their isolated geographic locations and the demanding nature of their assignments. However, whenever they did travel, their experiences were centred on exploring the lives and values of the local people.

We did get to talk to a lot of people which was fascinating and they were very keen to talk. They would be looking over their own shoulders but they would not tell us anything until they felt they could trust us. We were part of peoples' lives because they trusted us. (Cassie)

Mostly, the participants were accepted and welcomed in their assignments. They knew they could not complete their assignments on their own in a foreign environment, and

therefore, they worked alongside others to learn and facilitate change. In reaching out to others, personal and professional boundaries became blurred, resulting in a unique SIE experience.

> *I just thrived on it. I really loved being there. There was so much to learn and the people were really neat. Yeah, it was stressful, but it wasn't, because I really loved what I was doing. I've loved every job that I've had there.* (Diana)

Post-SIE

The SIE for all six participants on the international journey was an exceptional experience, but the return home to New Zealand posed some unexpected challenges. At a non-professional level, most found the adjustment hard. For Cassie, coming home after nearly four years was devastating, but to stay was even more galling. The gap between rich and poor was worsening and the endless high-level corruption and misuse of aid money shocking to witness. *We couldn't deal with it anymore, the anger became too huge.* Confronting western consumerism in New Zealand was also disturbing. *I knew it was going to hit me in the face and it was really difficult to deal with. Nobody understood at all* (Cassie).

Lucy had a major relationship breakup before returning to New Zealand and was ambivalent about how she would manage this as well as finding her place back in New Zealand.

> *The hard bits were not coming back to the relationship…there were plans in place…then I thought, no I have to re-establish myself in NZ. I don't want to feel that I'm being driven out of this place. This is my town too.* (Lucy)

Professionally, the challenges were equally as daunting. Cassie couldn't get any work and was told that she was overexperienced and underqualified. Susan thought that she would be able to find a position, but after several interviews, she knew she wasn't going to get a job easily. At one interview, she felt dismissed as the discussion unfolded into a Lonely Planet conversation. *Now tell me about X, it's a very interesting country, isn't it?...we're thinking of going there for our holiday.*

Before the SIE, the participants were frustrated by their work roles and career opportunities. After the SIE, they hoped to find a similar level of respect, challenge and autonomy in their employment to what they had experienced on the SIE. When this did not eventuate, the women investigated other options more in keeping with their changed life perspective.

When you've been away for a while you look at things a bit differently. Certain things just don't matter to you anymore. I did apply for jobs and I got a couple of interviews but I didn't get the jobs. I thought…well, I don't care about those things, I'm just really not interested. (Sharon)

While Sharon was on her SIE, she started to think about a change of direction in her life. Once she was back in New Zealand, she learned about a visual arts degree for which there were no student fees. Sharon decided to prioritise her artistic interests and fulfil a lifetime dream of attending university. *No…it's not about employment. I wouldn't care if I never worked again for somebody else.*

Jenny found work on her return to New Zealand, but it was not satisfying. Her two SIEs had reawakened her love of the land and her dreams of a sustainable lifestyle. She finally realised that working and living on an organic lifestyle farm was possible. At the time of the interview, she was planning to return to the UK for one last SIE to travel as well as gather further knowledge and skills.

I've got a lot to learn and there's so much to be done…I'm eager to do it…and the WWOOFing…I just love it so much. I'm pretty sure I will get that piece of land and live that life! It just might not be in two years' time…but I will, definitely. (Jenny)

Cassie could only find temporary work and it was not challenging. Thus, she turned to university study and volunteer work. It seemed more meaningful and more in tune with her personal values allowing her, *to avoid the workplace here, because I still find it deeply unsatisfactory* (Cassie).

Diana appeared to adjust to life post-SIE very quickly. She relocated to another part of Asia with her partner and set up a joint business, harnessing the knowledge and skills they gained on their SIE. While the other participants are still reconstructing their lives according to evolving beliefs and values, Diana appears to be there already.

We've pared our lives down to things that are really important…and the things that aren't…we've just got rid of, or ignored. So we're both doing our things at home…doing the kind of work we want…living the kind of life we like. (Diana)

The volunteer SIE gave the six participants an opportunity to take greater risks and work autonomously. Working in third world nations and on farms also exposed them to different values, ethics and more than one perspective. On their return to New Zealand, several of the participants failed to find satisfying work. The frustrations of their pre-SIE work experiences seemed compounded as, post-SIE, the participants acknowledged the dissonance between their own evolving beliefs and mainstream organisational practices.

As a result of the participants' wishes to live a more simple, sustainable and creative life, organisational work was eschewed in favour of volunteer work, university study and other projects that interested them and enabled them to make a meaningful contribution to society. These activities now thread through their whole lives as if personal and professional boundaries, established notions of retirement and the traditional structures of formal employment were obsolete.

The SIE has enabled the participants to clarify their core values. Post-SIE they have been establishing a more authentic way of being in which their values, beliefs and practices align and their professional and personal lives are fused. For the six participants, SIE has awakened the possibilities of a radical and different way of being and laid the foundations for significant life transformation and integration.

5. The spiritual stories

Individual interpretive stories

Penny

> *Now I'm living the life that my soul wants to live.*

Penny was born in 1946. She had an older sister and a younger brother. *I considered myself different to the others...the black sheep...but I was also this little ballerina...in with all the theatrical people.* At 12, Penny met her husband, who stayed at Penny's house sometimes, and she became pregnant at 15. *My kind and gentle father...treated me as if I was dirt on the floor...yet they should never have let me be with someone six years older.* Penny was sent away in disgrace to another family, and her father decreed that the baby would be adopted. *I scrubbed skirting boards with toothbrushes...cooked meals...looked after children...polished silver...did all the housework...I was just their dogsbody.* Penny went to a doctor for her antenatal care and was perplexed that he carried out internal examinations every visit. *I didn't know that's what you don't do...he was virtually abusing me.*

In the latter stages of her pregnancy, Penny found some personal strength and declared, *I'm marrying this guy...I'm not giving up my child.* Her mother attended the wedding, but her father refused. *But, that's the times I lived in.* The baby was born and life was tough. *I was accounting for every penny, including the penny that went in the toilet slot.* Eleven months later, a second child was born. After a short time, Penny became pregnant again and was very ill. She went into early labour. *I was fighting for my life...they shook me awake...my husband and minister...it's a boy and I didn't know who was dying...him or me.*

Penny was heartbroken when her baby died. A doctor talked to her about contraception and Penny was able to plan her family for the first time. Much later, a fourth child was born, and with her family complete at 21, Penny began early childhood teaching studies. *I actually felt I was starting to become a person.* Her parents visited more regularly, yet Penny never lost that sense of abandonment that she had felt when she first became pregnant and was sent away from home.

When she was 49, Penny's son's fiancée died tragically, and she began studying parapsychology, seeking answers for this tragedy. Penny was also very unhappy in her marriage. At one stage, she visited a friend for a break and stayed longer than she had intended. *H rang and said...when are you coming home? I said, I'm not, and that shocked*

me as much as him. Penny had no idea that she would respond in such a way and did not return home. She found a new job and accommodation as a single person. H came to visit her, asking her to return to him, and eventually she accepted H back in her life.

Years later, when H needed surgery, Penny left work to care for him. *We had a mortgage...so I had to sell our home.* They moved into a house on their daughter's property, and Penny planned to support her daughter, who was pregnant. Penny was thrilled at the prospect of being a grandmother, but sadly, her daughter lost her baby at six months and there was no hope of further pregnancies. Later, Penny contacted a hospital to offer her support in a voluntary capacity. *If I can't have my own grandchildren, I'm going to be a grandmother to someone else's children!*

Penny's marriage continued to be a source of unhappiness. Her dilemma was, *do I stay for the rest of my life and be miserable to keep him happy, or do I leave and make him miserable to make me happy?* Penny made an appointment with WINZ*, and to her surprise, she learned that she could survive financially on her own. So, after 48 years of marriage, Penny finally left her husband for good.

Penny moved out of the house on her daughter's property to rent elsewhere. Cocooned in her new-found country cottage, she felt *the least alone in my life.* One evening, she watched a programme about international volunteer work. Inspired, Penny, aged 65 years, organised a five-month SIE. She flew to Canada to become a WWOOFer on Vancouver Island. It was way outside her comfort zone. *Up pulls this old Bedford, broken windows, no side mirrors... this young dude threw my bags in the back and we went clanging along the highway.* Her new employers ran a wedding and events business. Penny stayed in a small cabin on the property, where she was more of a housekeeper and nanny and also did some gardening work. She got on very well with the guests and learned much about gardening and managing an events business. But there were some different challenges; for example, bears, snakes and cougars were part of the wildlife. Penny hoped that she would never see a cougar. One wedding guest said if she did, it would be too late!

Penny became very fit as the work was physical and she also did hot yoga. She was included in family picnics and went tubing for the first time. She felt ready to give anything a go. *They talked me into it...Oh, he said...I forgot to tell you...there are two drops...all I remember is being under water and fighting to breathe...I have a fear of always being lost.*

Penny's SIE passed quickly and she also took some brief holidays. Before leaving Canada, she travelled to Vancouver and then to Banff, where she met a group from the

Buffalo Nation, dancing and demonstrating. *I went up to the chief, tears in my eyes and asked if I could shake his hand and give him a hug.* Penny had often dreamed of dancing tribes and was interested in the Inuit people. *In one of my meditations, I had a spirit guide, it was Sitting Bull and he was an ancient medicine man.* Watching the demonstration and the dance was a profoundly moving experience for Penny, *I was overwhelmed…it felt like a soul connection.* Next, she joined a bus trip to Lake Louise and Lake Moran. After that adventure, she flew to the UK and travelled around Cornwall, Devon, Wales, back through England and up to Scotland.

Since she has been home, Penny has moved to an apartment where she is part of a community and has returned to her voluntary hospital work. She has decided not to return to paid work in an organisation as she feels it requires her to be a different sort of person from the one she is now. Penny has already travelled to Europe on a brief tour since returning from Canada, and despite her limited resources, she is planning another. *I'll have to ask the universe for help.*

After her separation, Penny likened herself to a mouse. *Visualise a mouse coming out of his hole in the wall, grabbing some cheese and rushing back in. That was me. I'd go to the hospital for my children, and I'd scuttle back to my cottage.* Retreating to her country cottage was about licking her wounds, and later, her SIE was a journey to find her real voice. *Finding the inner me…I wanted to be the person I really wanted to be.* In her SIE, Penny challenged herself emotionally and physically. *It's easier not to do it…but l pushed myself…got rid of the fear.*

The SIE was a deeply spiritual journey. In the process leading to her SIE, Penny believes the universe played its part. *The universe pushed me, but not anything I couldn't handle.* Penny was raised to believe that when you think of yourself you're being selfish. *I was always doing things for other people.* Now, *I'm doing it for me and it's quite liberating, I'm answerable to myself.*

Penny's life is constructed around her personal values and beliefs, to love and to serve from the heart, without fear, obligation and constraint. Penny increasingly draws on spiritual teachings and tries to be compassionate, grateful, positive and less judgemental in her actions. Her life is broader and more open. Penny continues to imbue all her activities with energy and passion, in her voluntary work as a grandmother, in her small business, where she strives to add spiritual and personal value to the lives of others, in her relationships with family and friends, and in her travels. She is stronger, more confident, more resilient and trustful. *The biggest word is trust. Trust in the universe,*

believe in yourself. Trust what you're doing is right. The universe does look after you. Post-SIE, Penny's life is more whole. There is congruence between her head and her heart. *That's the biggest difference. All those years I was happy outwardly, but I was crying inside…now I'm not. Now I'm living the life that my soul wants to live.*

* WINZ = Work and Income New Zealand

Willa

> *Buddhism has given me some answers…I'm a great believer in the largesse of the universe…what you put out is what you get back…this is the last stage of your life…you save the last for best, so I set out every day to make this the best day of my life.*

Willa had a happy childhood with her parents and siblings. She especially remembers how she loved and admired her father, who raised his children in an agnostic and left-wing household. He had a strong sense of social justice, so when he caught her making fun of the smelly Nicholls kids from down the road, he washed her mouth out with soap! Willa left school without School Certificate but still managed to talk her way into a local newspaper job. Marriage and the birth of her son followed quickly, but after several years, Willa left her husband and moved to Auckland with her son. It was a radical decision in those days, and without family or state support, Willa was unsure how they would survive. She cleaned houses and later stumbled into a highly paid public relations role. Willa was surprised by this turn of events and kept quiet about her lack of qualifications. *I wore the shoulder pads and big hair…you know the look! I made the job up as I went along and I wanted for nothing.*

After many years of living an enviable lifestyle, suddenly her beloved partner of three years died at 50. The loss sent Willa into a tailspin. *I read the* Tibetan Book of Death and Dying*…went to grief workshops.* Then I thought – *what if I died suddenly…had I made my dreams come true?* When she emerged from her grief, she realised she didn't want to work in the corporate world anymore.

Willa's son was heading off on his own SIE. It was an adventure she had promised to do with him since he was a little boy, the mother pirate and her little pirate travelling the world together. So Willa took leave and went to Europe with him. *I felt fully alive for the first time in a long time.* At the end of the trip, her son urged her to travel more. *Do it…follow your dreams.* But Willa replied, *I can't….I'm too old…it's too hard…I'm too frightened and it's too late.* Her son replied, *Too bad*, as he continued on his adventures and Willa returned to the security of her public relations (PR) role.

Willa was restless and two incidents started a process of exploration. She met a guru who said, *To be all that you can be, you must do the things that excite you and are of service.* The second incident happened when she awoke from a dream with the word Sedona etched on her lips. She travelled to the US to follow her dream and discovered that Sedona was only part of the puzzle. Another dream of dancing masked men encouraged Willa to visit the Hopi Indians near the Grand Canyon. She saw a group of American Indians doing

a rain dance and travelled further on to Old Oraibi, the oldest continually occupied village in North America where she met Grandmother Treva, an inspirational tribal elder and wisdom keeper. Willa learned about the Hopi struggles and belief that *happiness lies in contributing to the wellbeing of others.* At last, Willa's life began to make sense.

Willa returned to New Zealand and finally resigned her corporate role. In a newspaper interview, she said she wanted to live with the wisdom keepers. Willa was contacted by people who wanted to go with her, and so began Willa's Adventure Tours. Willa was dismayed there were so few women business leaders and wisdom keepers in New Zealand. *The oldies are in retirement villages...marginalised.* So she sought out the *toughest and most sage teachers* as she travelled.

After one of her tours, Willa met Grandfather Titus, a revered Hopi elder, *a dear little old doll of a man, with a sing-song voice.* Grandfather Titus granted Willa a wish. Willa said, *I wish to know who I am?* The old man said, *You are the only one that knows who you are.* As it was her birthday, he granted her another wish. *If you had one wish in the world, what would it be?* Willa shocked herself, answering quickly, *I'd like to hear all the children of the world laughing.* Grandfather Titus said, *Go west, Grandmother, and begin your work.* Willa was unsure where he was pointing and inquired, *Peru?* Grandfather Titus nodded.

Willa returned to New Zealand and organised a tour to Peru. There, in Cusco, she found the thing that excited her, *three little boys...their faces white with cold, bare feet, clothes in rags, huddled in a doorway, asleep in each other's arms.* The image of the children haunted Willa on her return to New Zealand. She mortgaged her apartment and left for Cusco. She hired an interpreter, talked to authorities and visited orphanages *some of the saddest, baddest orphanages.* But it was the children on the streets who stole her heart, because they needed their own house. Willa formed a local committee and met a young Danish man who had a similar dream. They became each other's inspiration. Willa returned to New Zealand, sold her home, investing it in her *bank of dreams. I felt I had grown wings...to be free of all responsibilities.*

For the next few years, Willa worked in Cusco, setting up a charitable trust, the Inti Huahuacuna, (children of the sun). In association with her Danish friend, they started something that Willa was determined would be self-sustaining. *All the money in the world could not buy the degree of satisfaction and excitement that working in the humanitarian arena gave me.* After five years, the trust had developed several projects to support underprivileged children. At that point, Grandmother Willa felt it was time to move on.

Willa travelled to Thailand, where her son had married into a hill tribe and she had three grandchildren. There, Willa was a grandmother in every sense. *It started with an orphanage in Bangkok, they have nobody.* From here, a number of projects developed. Sometimes she brought young travellers with her, eager to engage in a humanitarian experience. Willa was *more of a shepherd than a leader*, and her philosophy was always to provide Jenny, love and support as well as setting up structures and systems that would live beyond her.

After many years, Willa realised she would have to return to New Zealand as she had used all her capital in her volunteer work. She arrived in New Zealand in 2004, and to her horror, WINZ advised her she was not eligible for a pension as she had been away too long. Devastated, Willa sought further advice from the international services of WINZ, and eventually her case was favourably reviewed. In recognition of her volunteer work, she was given a dispensation to work (unpaid) another two years overseas, receiving half of her New Zealand pension. After that Willa qualified for a full pension.

Now, Willa has been back in New Zealand for three years.

> *Oh, the age and stage I'm at for me is so satisfying. It's full of surprises. I didn't think I would feel this good…but not one of my friends would agree with me that growing old is exciting. This is the last stage of your life, you save the last for best, so I set out every day to make this the best day of my life.*

Willa leads a simple life, calling on the largesse of the universe when needed.

> *I need a winter coat. Today I was walking the neighbour's dog and saw something lying by a rubbish skip. It was a black coat! I can't stop grinning. I'm walking down the hill with the dog, carrying a coat and looking like a nutter!*

Initially, Willa found it difficult to find her place back in risk-averse New Zealand. Working with children requires specialist qualifications, so it is not an avenue she can explore. Now she mentors university students on 'not for profit' projects. Willa adores this work and has declined various part-time paid work offers as she finds the requirements too restrictive. She is no longer interested in reporting lines and regulations. Organisational and corporate roles *do not truly excite me.*

Tragically, after being back in New Zealand for two years, Willa's 'pirate' son died suddenly. *It's been the biggest single earth-shattering event in my life.* Willa travelled to Thailand for her son's funeral. Six months later, she returned to Thailand to visit her son's family and she came home a different woman. *Now I only remember him with delight. I set out to celebrate his life and not mourn it. I'd stopped feeling good about everything,*

but I've come to a lovely place where my son's death is concerned. I absolutely accept it. Just as the loss of her partner 25 years earlier changed her life direction, *I know that my son's going is doing exactly the same thing. I'm feeling, for the first time, that I can write and talk more freely.*

It is 20 years since Willa embarked on her spiritual quest. Ironically, she found her excitement and passion in the 'smelly' street kids of Cusco and the orphans in Thailand. Now Willa continues her voluntary work, her writing and her Buddhist studies. In following her passion and opening her heart, Willa has given and received much Jenny, love and laughter. She is an international grandmother, an elder, a keeper of the wisdom, par excellence. At 72, Willa strives still *to be all that I can be.*

The spiritual journey

Willa's and Penny's SIEs have been deeply spiritual journeys. While their stories resonate with aspects of the redemptive and integrationist journeys, it is the spiritual dimension of their unfolding lives that sets them apart from the SIE journeys of other participants.

Both participants had relatively happy childhoods. Penny had a much older sister and a brother 10 years younger so she felt like an only child. *I was also this little ballerina...I was also the rebellious one...but I consider I had a very good upbringing.* Willa also enjoyed a happy and stimulating childhood. Her father was active in Labour Party politics and was adamant that his children should understand his passion for social justice.

Their cosseted lives came to an end with marriage and the birth of their first children. Willa and Penny idolised their fathers and were ill prepared for their fathers' reactions when they struck out on their own. At 15, Penny's boyfriend was allowed to stay at her house, but when she became pregnant she was sent away from home. *My parents were strict on one hand and yet they let that sort of thing happen on the other.* Penny was despatched to another town, where she felt used and abused by the very people who were charged with her care. She refused to have her baby adopted and still feels angry at her father's reactions.

> *When I said I was getting married my father refused to come. Double standards there too...when my father found out I was pregnant he got so irate and treated me as if I was dirt on the floor...yet when he found my brother with his future wife in bed it was like...congratulations son, you're a man now.* (Penny)

Penny had four children. One of her children died at birth, and although Penny recovered, her marriage was never easy and she coped by keeping herself busy. Later, she trained as a preschool teacher, reconciled with her parents and worked in many different roles.

> *I've been in early childhood...real estate, we've owned businesses...restaurants...cafes and I've worked in retail. We've moved around, built our own houses...I enjoyed my working life and worked hard.* (Penny)

Willa left school without any qualifications, worked at the local radio station and married. After the birth of her son, Willa left her husband and moved to Auckland. Her father did not approve and she was forced to support herself (and her son) for the first time. Willa took cleaning jobs to survive and was unexpectedly offered a job in public relations. *My expectations were so bound up with money...I had everything...I had the good New Zealand art...I was this megawatt, candle bright, full on life sort of person.*

Willa met her best friend and great love, P, when she was in her forties. He was a designer, lived a bohemian life and presented a counterpoint to Willa. The relationship flourished and P's old-fashioned values unsettled Willa.

> *He was to me, completely unsuitable as anything other than a best friend. He certainly didn't dress right and he didn't live right! I was quite bold in my dress…I would wear my red outfit, striped socks, red ballet shoes…and he'd say…I hurt his eyes!* (Willa)

Penny and Willa had responsible and demanding working lives, but tragedy struck both when they were 49, sparking the beginning of their spiritual journeys. The death of Penny's soon to be daughter-in-law was a great shock.

> *My son lost his fiancé tragically…I went and studied at the parapsychology school…psychic studies…tarot readings…psychometry…numerology. So I began to turn my life around spiritually…I became more aware of the inner self.* (Penny)

Soon afterwards, Penny left her husband after 32 years of marriage. *I used some very powerful mental work to get what I wanted. I had to stand on my own two feet.* Initially, Penny felt she had made great progress, but eventually she returned to her husband. *I let him convince me into him coming back…maybe I just wasn't strong enough yet. I believed he would change.* Fifteen years later, Penny found the strength to finally leave her husband after 48 years of marriage. *Now that I am alone I'm comfortable. It's the strangest thing. I love being alone here…I like myself now…when I was with my husband I was more alone. I'd go to bed at night and cry.*

Looking back, Penny credits her study of parapsychology as a major influence in her recovery. *What I've learnt is that no one's alone…now when I call on the universe and thank them for supporting me…goodness follows. I do numerology charts for others so they can understand themselves…and move on too.*

When Willa's beloved P died suddenly, in the haze of grief, she began to question her lifestyle and her values and tentatively took the first steps on her spiritual journey.

> *I got the last of a dying man and I got the best of a man. He was a good man and he calmed me down. I had a very privileged life. I knew it…but it seemed over the top to P…and he challenged me. He honed me down, he got me real. He left me real, he left me wondering, he left me doubting my choices.* (Willa)

Willa pursued a number of spiritual avenues and finally, she could no longer countenance her corporate work and resigned. She organised some short tours to lesser-known destinations in the US and South America, and on one of these, she met Grandfather Titus, a respected Hopi elder who granted Willa a wish which was, *to hear all the children of*

the world laughing. On another tour to Peru, Willa came across the sad street children in Cusco. They stole her heart. At last, Willa found her new life's work, to bring laughter and Jenny into these children's lives.

SIE

Prior to her separation, Penny had already begun some voluntary work in a local hospital working with sick children. Now that she was free, she wanted to develop this interest further and also see more of the world despite her limited financial resources.

> *I liken these moments to the universe guiding me. I'd seen a programme about orphanages in Bosnia and I thought…I'd like to do something like that so I sat down at the computer and googled…and up came every country in the world…doing every sort of work…but into my head came…you should be in an English-speaking country…heaven knows how I found it but the Canada place was absolutely perfect. I went to a country where I'd never been before, I didn't know a soul and was going alone.* (Penny)

Penny's three months as a WWOOFer on Vancouver Island was a fantastic experience. She became part of the family, and living in such beautiful surroundings, she was able to nurture herself and make further progress towards independence.

> *I nearly said no to the tubing and the camping…but I don't want to be that sort of person…so I'm pushing myself to do things because it's getting rid of the fear…live in the now…live in the moment and trust the universe is going to look after you.* (Penny)

Penny travelled through Canada after her WWOOFing and then on to Europe. When she was in Banff, she watched members of the Buffalo Nation demonstrating. Penny was deeply moved and recalled an earlier meditation experience.

Having fallen in love with the street children of Cusco, Willa worked with a young Danish man to build a safe place for them.

> *Once you got in front of them you just knew this was worth coming for…it was like there was something bigger that brought them in front of me. I asked a street boy what his dreams were. He said – a place called Nostra Casa…our house…somewhere to come out of the cold.* (Willa)

Together, Willa and her Danish friend set up a charitable trust and Willa used her assets and savings to fund much of the process.

> *I didn't believe in staying there and creating a dependency. When I was a kid the Lone Ranger was my favourite hero. I now know why. He rode into town, he made a difference and then he rode out again. I knew I couldn't be there forever…I knew that my money would run out.* (Willa)

From Peru, Willa travelled to Thailand, where her son, his wife and grandchildren lived. In Thailand, Willa explored Buddhism and continued her work as an international grandmother. Willa knew that giving money was not the sole answer and that it was important to set up systems and delegate work to others.

Post-SIE

Penny's SIE was relatively short at five months. She did not have the financial resources to be away for long, and as it was her first SIE at the age of 64, she was unsure how she would cope. As it turned out, the SIE was a resounding success. *I was really proud of myself doing that trip alone…stepping outside my comfort zone. When I got home I thought…If I can do this, I can do anything! So that was the foundation for the rest of my life.*

Once she was back in New Zealand, Penny felt ready to be part of a community again, so she moved from her isolated country cottage to an apartment. Penny has continued with her grandmothering role at the hospital and has established a hobby business, selling spirituality-related resources. She has plans for further short-term travel and is confident that she will find a way to fund it.

Willa's return home was less straightforward. She was distraught to find out that she was not eligible for a pension. She had no home or savings. *I can remember tears rolling down my cheeks. I was frightened. She said…no…you've been away too long, there's absolutely nothing for you…I had no money for over there and I had no money to come home.* Willa appealed to the authorities, who eventually recognised her international volunteer activities and granted her a half pension for two years and then a full pension from then onwards. When Willa finally returned to New Zealand after a 15-year SIE, the adjustment was difficult. She was determined to continue her volunteer work with children but found the type of work she would like to do required qualifications. Eventually, a friend recognised her talents and asked her to mentor university students. Despite her concerns, Willa quickly re-established friendships, continued her Buddhist studies and started writing her memoirs.

Unexpectedly, tragedy struck again with the sudden death of her only son. Willa's world fell apart as she flew to Thailand for his funeral. Six months later she visited Thailand again and came to terms with the loss. *I absolutely accept it. I think living in a Buddhist country has helped me. Death is just woven into the fabric of life in the same way as it is in the Peruvian society.*

Penny and Willa have undertaken remarkable and transformative SIEs. However, the SIE did not start the process of change. It was the loss of significant people in their lives that prompted their individual searches for understanding. From the outset, their journeys have been inherently spiritual as they struggled with their grief. Penny and Willa were also looking for an adventure and they had a love of travel, but the desire to do an SIE was primarily driven by altruistic motives. Willa and Penny had a yearning to find a place in the world where they could make a difference, and through volunteering and working with others, like those on the redemptive journey, they grew stronger, more resilient and recovered.

> *I've been brought up to think you should always put everyone else first, and that's what I've done all my life…now that I'm alone I am making decisions for me, I'm doing it for me and it's quite liberating, I'm answerable to myself. I just feel a lot more relaxed…calmer…happier. Even though I'm alone, it's the least alone in my life I've felt. All those years I was happy outwardly, but I was crying inside…now I'm not. Now I'm living the life that my soul wants to live. This calm life where you trust in the universe, believe in yourself and are comfortable in your own skin.* (Penny)

> *I feel as though I've been totally blessed in spite of the fact that the two men I loved most in my life, P and my son, died young. I didn't expect that…but I can withstand it because Tibetan Buddhism was the only thing that was able to give me some relief from this relentless…what is death, where's P gone? With my son…I did cry at times…but I just felt what I call homesick…this terrible feeling of loss or something missing. For a long time…I kept turning round when I stood up, to see if I'd left something behind. I don't have that anymore. I have a true sense of celebration with my son's life…Buddhism has given me that…life is never-ending for me.* (Willa)

During their SIEs, Penny and Willa chose not to take on formal paid work. They felt that paid work would influence their priorities and behaviours. On their return home, they did not seek paid employment and were more determined than ever not to compromise their hard-won independence.

> *I could have had several part-time jobs but if it doesn't excite me I say no to a job…I don't want to be paid for what I do and that probably makes me odd.* (Willa)

During their SIEs, Penny and Willa wanted to follow their passions, and being a grandmother resonated with them. *I've always been interested in children…I was a playcentre teacher…I do hospital grandparenting…at this time in my life I want to be of service and children are the important thing for me* (Penny). During the SIE, Penny and Willa lived a more simple life. They lived frugally and still had fun, and on their return home, they wanted to continue this simple and unfettered existence.

I feel as though I've got much and I can see people's faces when I say…I live entirely on my pension. My whole house is returned or recycled. I live entirely within my income and I can't think of anything I need. (Willa)

When you're out in that real world…you're working flat out…you want another car, you want a bigger house, you want more TV…now I'm so grateful for what I have got and it doesn't matter how little or how much it is…I'm just so grateful for my children and my friends and my health. (Penny)

Post-SIE, volunteer work was chosen carefully so that activities were compatible with their personal values and beliefs, and despite their limited incomes, Penny and Willa were only prepared to do what they truly cared about and what excited them. As with the six participants on the integrationist journey, Penny's and Willa's personal and professional lives were increasingly interwoven and melded.

Penny and Willa have been on a profound spiritual journey. The SIE has been a significant catalyst in this process of later-life self-discovery. They have conquered personal trauma and loss, and they have developed holistic and authentic lives. However, it is the spiritual dimension that has guided them in their quest to explore a different way of being and release their later-life potential.

He said – have a wish and oh…I felt like a child. I said – I wish to know who I am…because I don't feel like a travel writer…or a columnist…or an ex-executive…I'm totally confused…I don't know what I'm doing…I don't know what I'm here for…and he went – Oh, I don't know who you are…you are the only one that knows who you are and you are the only one with your blueprint…you're the only one that knows your reason for being here. But because you asked me that, you can have a second wish, but answer very quickly. And he said – if you had one wish for the world, what would it be? I completely surprised myself and said – I'd like to hear all the children of the world laughing. And he said – Go west, Grandmother, and begin your work. (Willa)

Conclusion

This chapter considers the narratives at an individual and particular level via the 21 individual interpretive stories and also in a more holistic way through the five journeys. Implicit in the meanings derived from the word journey are notions of adventure, a quest, an experience that results in new knowledge and understanding that challenges and changes one's fundamental way of being.

The three participants in the 'tandem journey' went on SIE with their husbands, and the planning and decision-making was equally shared. While travelling and working as a couple shaped the SIE, it was a wonderful and life-enhancing experience. The SIE has opened up the participants' lives, broadened their perspectives and laid the foundations

for a more engaging and meaningful life. Their personal lives are now at the core of their being, and work is no longer the central driving force around which they organise their lives. Post-SIE, they 'work to live' and privilege relationships, family and friends above all else.

There were a range of motivations driving participants in the 'internationalist journey' and their experiences of work and travel while on their SIE were diverse. However, none of the participants went on the SIE to develop their careers. As a result of the work they engaged in during the SIE, the participants fortuitously amassed new skills, qualifications and experience, and acquired international professional profiles. Most participants have either returned overseas or plan to return overseas to continue their work because they are sought after, valued and respected to a greater extent than they are in the New Zealand employment context. These participants have also experienced significant personal development and change, and although they have unexpectedly developed an internationalist career profile, their personal wellbeing remains paramount, and any work undertaken must also be consistent with their values and beliefs.

The 'redemptive journey' participants experienced significant trauma and loss in their pre-SIE lives, requiring them to put aside their personal pain and needs, and focus on work to support their families. The SIE gave them an opportunity to step away from family responsibilities and to explore a different kind of life. Work was an integral part of this experience, not only to finance the travels but also as it gave the participants an opportunity to process their grief and move on. Surprisingly, they were also able to improve their financial situations to a greater extent than they would if they had they stayed in New Zealand. On their return to New Zealand, the participants' personal lives took precedence over their professional lives and they appeared to be more independent, resilient, aware and at peace with themselves.

Participants who experienced the 'integrationist journey' were involved in a volunteer SIE. The volunteer work gave the participants an opportunity to take on greater responsibility and risk, to work autonomously and to gain new knowledge and skills. They worked among diverse cultures and were confronted by a different kind of ethics, which caused them to rethink their own beliefs and values. On their return to New Zealand, the participants were unable to find satisfying organisational work. They looked to other unpaid activities as a way of establishing a more authentic way of being in which their values, beliefs and practices align and their professional and personal lives are integrated and fused.

Finally the two participants on an explicitly 'spiritual journey' reflected aspects of the redemptive and integrationist journeys; however, it was the spiritual dimension of their unfolding lives that made their journey distinctive. Both participants experienced personal loss in their late forties, which set them on a path of spiritual exploration. They engaged in a volunteer SIE and were prepared to work only if it truly excited them. On their return home, they shunned paid work, despite their reduced circumstances, so that they remained in control of their post-SIE life and continued to engage in activities about which they were passionate. As with the redemptive participants, they have processed their loss and grief, and like the integrationists, their personal and professional lives are now as 'one'. The SIE did not start this transformative path, but it has been a significant catalyst in an inherently spiritual process of later-life discovery.

All five of the SIE journeys summarised above suggest that significant transition and change has occurred as an outcome of the SIE. The individual interpretive stories and the five journeys presented in this chapter provide a rich body of findings from which general themes are further drawn out in the 'discussion and analysis' sections of Chapter 6 and the 'personal experience' story in the 'afterword'.

Chapter 6: The Motivations, Experiences and Impact of SIE on Participants

> "One may not reach the dawn save by the path of the night."
>
> Germaine Greer

Introduction

This chapter is divided into three sections to address the four overarching research questions. The first section examines the motivations, experiences and triggers for older women in the pre-SIE decision-making process. The second section addresses the work and non-work experiences of the SIE and explores the extent to which an SIE facilitates career and personal development. The third and final section in this chapter discusses whether SIE affords older women an opportunity to reflect on, clarify and enact longer term career and life-path goals.

Throughout this chapter the key themes that filter through the 21 life stories are analysed and reflected back to the careers, SIE, population ageing, older worker and other relevant literatures reviewed in Chapters 2 and 3. This discussion of these themes signals a move away from the focus on individuals and subgroups in the previous chapter.

Motivations, experiences and triggers for older women in the pre-SIE decision-making process

> "What we find exotic abroad may be what we hunger for in vain at home."

> De Botton

As the definition of SIE is still under discussion Cerdin (2013) suggests that it is important to explore the "diversity of strategies in going abroad, instead of treating people who undertake SIEs as one homogenous group" (p. 70). Although participants in my research are older and female, the previous chapter attests to significant variation in their background and SIE experiences. Given the variety of SIE subgroups (Doherty et al., 2013a), Cerdin (2013) argues that the real motivations for SIE are not fully understood and suggests a life story approach as a suitable way to explore the variation in SIE motivations and contexts.

Doherty et al. (2013a) depict a range of international experiences on a spectrum of global mobility. Andresen and Gustschin (2013) argue that the motivations of international volunteers are more aligned with SIE than with assigned expatriation (AE). This is salient for the five international volunteer participants in this study. Two started their SIE looking for paid work and fell into a volunteer SIE. All five of the volunteer SIEs were given a job description that changed significantly before and during their assignment. Given that the actual work undertaken in the five volunteer SIEs was often opportunistic and unstructured, I concur with Andresen and Gutschin (2013). In this chapter, I use the term SIE as inclusive of all participants as the five volunteers illustrate aspects of the organisational SIE, the SIE and the OE (Doherty et al., 2013a). I also include the other 16 participants who worked on a casual basis, including one who could not find work due to the GFC and another who studied full-time. Thus, the following discussion on SIE motivations includes volunteers and non-volunteers. At times, I refer to volunteer SIEs, but mostly I use the term SIE collectively.

Background

In his book *The Art of Travel*, De Botton (2002) suggests that people who journey abroad are searching for what is missing in their lives. Drawing on Baruch (1995), Jackson et al., Carr et al. (2005), Shultz et al. (1998) and Cerdin (2013), I have developed a push and pull framework that explores personal and career motivations. Firstly, I considered the negative career push factors and negative personal push factors that pushed participants to stay in or leave their current employment and personal situations. I also looked at the

positive career pull factors and positive personal pull factors that encouraged them to stay in or leave their employment and personal situations.

Table 2. Self-initiated expatriation motivations

Negative career push factors	Positive career pull factors
Bored with work Frustrated with work A lack of interesting and challenging work opportunities Senior management and CEO roles not of interest Continual cycles of restructuring Dissonance with organisational values Work lacks meaning Traumatic work situation forcing them out	Challenging and interesting work Cross-cultural work situations Altruism
Negative personal push factors	**Positive personal pull factors**
Escape from relationship Boredom, lack of excitement and challenge Escape from isolation and loneliness Escape from family trauma, pressure and roles	**Personal challenge** Excitement Adventure Unfinished business Love of travel **Relationships** Children Mothers Extended family **Cultural** Cross-cultural The arts **Personal Focus** Reclaim lost dreams Meaning and purpose Exercising values Autonomy and freedom Spiritual calling Belonging

This framework highlighted that significant negative work push factors were tipping the participants out of New Zealand employment. Participants did not identify any positive work pull factors that would keep them in New Zealand; however, there were a few positive work pull factors, attracting them to do an SIE. In contrast, personal push and pull factors were highly relevant, although positive personal pull factors were more dominant. In light of De Botton's (2002) suggestion, it seems that participants undertook

SIE for mostly personal reasons, perhaps seeking the challenge and adventure that had been missing in their lives.

Definitional issues

During the interviews, some participants referred to their career while other terms they used were job, work, professional life, voluntary work and employment. Keyes (2011) argues that people who work do so for material advantage whereas those who have a career seek excellent remuneration, prestige and career advancement. Given the diversity of the sample, I have not adopted Keyes's (2011) perspective. Rather, I have drawn on the language of participants, intent on giving credence to their different voices (Olesen, 2005), and considered all their terms valid and synonymous. Thus, I have used these terms interchangeably in the following discussion.

When discussing 'work' factors as opposed to 'non-work' or 'personal' factors, my understanding or interpretation of these terms for the purpose of this research are outlined as follows. Work refers to formal or structured paid or unpaid work. For example, I count the activities of a teacher, a carer, a WWOOFer and an international volunteer as work, because the roles have formal contracts or agreements and the individuals are subject to some accountabilities.

The terms 'personal' and 'non-work' are treated synonymously in this research. For example, they include activities done during participants' free time, that is, when they are not at work. Within this definition, I include travelling, attending concerts, art exhibitions and gardening for friends. Regarding the participant who was a full-time student, I counted study and university time as 'work', and with another participant who could not find work, I counted all her time on SIE as non-work or personal time. Finally, whenever I refer to participants in this chapter, I am referring to the participants in my PhD research study.

Career: Negative career push factors

Disenchantment with work was a significant issue for most participants. Some were in senior organisational roles and felt the challenge had gone from their work and they could not find a senior management, CEO or other career move that excited them. The lack of stimulating work roles and opportunities was a significant concern, pushing participants out of the workforce. Tharenou (2010a, 2010b) also identified career disadvantage as a negative push factor, although her findings focused on early and mid-career professionals. Thorn (2009) identifies career challenges as a submotive for SIE, although her findings

emphasise positive motivations to a greater extent than were evident in my study. Jackson et al. (2005) identified career as one of five SIE motivations; however, like Thorn's study (2009), career was identified mainly as a positive factor attracting the individuals abroad. Richardson and Mallon's (2005) study of British academics identified career as a secondary driver, as did Doherty et al.'s (2011) research comparing the motivations of traditional expatriates with self-initiated assignees.

The participants were not necessarily seeking career advancement. Nevertheless, they wanted to make some career changes, but there was a dearth of challenging work opportunities. They were stuck. This high-level of dissatisfaction is consistent with findings from a New Zealand EEO Trust Survey (2006) that identified flexible work arrangements, long-term leave, challenging work, being respected and valued, and experiencing reduced stress as important to retain older workers. Yet most of these factors were lacking in the participants' employment.

Continual organisational restructuring was a major demotivator, and each time it happened, the participants felt less engaged in the workplace and their work became increasingly meaningless. The participants had seen it all before and were increasingly aghast at the impact on employees' lives and their own part in this process. *I'd gone through three restructurings in four plus years...It was stressful* (Lucy). Others found their work situations untenable.

> *I thought that I could make a difference. I did stand up to a lot of it, the corruption. I wrote a report...and my CEO claimed he'd never seen it. I rang my lawyer and he told me – You move...you're out of there now.* (Name withheld)

Career: Positive career pull factors

While career factors were a major source of dissatisfaction, career was not a significant impetus pulling the participants towards an SIE. Participants on an internationalist or integrationist journey might be expected to have stronger career aspirations, yet they did not identify with these drivers. This was true even for Janet who went on a study SIE. *I was going through this process and thinking that I would do it really for my own personal benefit because I think you need to keep your brain cells moving* (Janet).

In Suutari and Taka's (2004) research on global managers, the authors explore Schein's (1996) eight career anchors, and identify a ninth career anchor, 'internationalism'. They conclude that this anchor plus two others – 'pure challenge' and 'managerial competence' – are the dominant career anchors of global managers. Cerdin and Pargneux's (2010) study on whether AEs and SIEs have different career anchors highlights the importance

of 'lifestyle', 'internationalism' and 'pure challenge' anchors for both groups. At a superficial level, it may seem that 'pure challenge' and 'internationalism' were relevant motivators for my participants; however, the explanation of the pure challenge career anchor as outlined by Suutari and Taka (2004) suggests otherwise:

> primarily motivated to overcome major obstacles, solve almost insoluble problems, or win out over extremely tough opponent; define their careers in terms of daily combat or competition in which winning is everything; very single minded and intolerant of those who without comparable aspirations. (p. 836)

Although my participants were seeking new international experiences, unlike Suutari and Taka's (2004) explanation of the nine career anchors, which suggest a masculine and competitive career focus, the participants were not consciously aiming to forge career opportunities or win at all costs. Work and career were not the key motivations. Work was mostly a means to an end, a way to live a different life in a different cultural context, to fund the travel and to extend and deepen the SIE.

> *If you want to be a tourist and walk along the streets and look at houses from the outside, that's fantastic. But if you want to look behind the doors and see people's lives...that's what it was about. It was about wanting to be more than a tourist.* (Cassie)

The literature on international volunteering also suggests that career is a less important SIE motivation. Andresen and Gustschin (2013) suggest six categories of motivation. These are values, understanding and enhancement, which are the more dominant motivators, followed by career, social and protective. This is consistent with the motivations of my participants, regardless of the nature of their SIE. Volunteer participants wanted challenging work, but they were also altruistic and wanted to make a contribution to the third world, and career development was not the primary driver.

The participants were generally dissatisfied and unchallenged in their work before doing their SIEs. Leaving their pre-SIE employment was *just the idea of going somewhere…doing something different, it was more I lacked a drive to stay…was more looking for an opportunity to go* (Gillian). While work concerns pushed the participants out of their work, they were not seeking international career advancement. *I wasn't there really to sort of branch out of my comfort zone. I wasn't there to foster my career* (Monica). Nevertheless, some participants were interested in a work challenge, even though it was not their primary motivation. *I remember seeing a picture of Shanghai...I thought – I can't stay here forever. I've got to do something challenging...with China* (Connie).

Richardson and Mallon (2005) identify career as a positive SIE pull factor. Richardson and McKenna (2006) and Thorn (2009) concur, although the authors also suggest that, overall, career was not a dominant SIE driver in comparison with AE motivations. As these SIE studies have drawn on a wider age range than my study, it is significant that participants presented with different levels of SIE motivations. My participants were significantly more negative about their pre-SIE work and noticeably less positive and less focused on SIE as a career-building strategy. In contrast to the aforementioned studies, in my study, career push factors were more significant than career pull factors and suggest a growing disengagement and antipathy to work, regardless of whether the participants had a professional or non-professional orientation to career.

Personal – Negative personal push factors

Personal reasons are an important part of the SIE decision-making process. Negative personal circumstances were powerful motivators for some participants, but difficult circumstances did not precipitate an immediate departure and were not the only reason for SIE.

Escape from relationships

Some of the participants wanted to escape from personal relationships.

> *I got married at 19. My husband thought travel was a waste of money. After 30 years of marriage and three children I finally left him. A prolonged legal tussle ensued and so I devised the 'reward' of a working holiday as a way of keeping sane.* (Jenny)

Lack of excitement and personal challenge

The majority of the participants talked about tiring routines, a lack of excitement and an overall sense of disquiet. Many of them felt dissatisfied and bored, not only in their professional lives, but also in their personal lives, which had followed a set pattern for many years. They were looking to break with the sameness of their daily living and do something different.

Escape from isolation and loneliness

Several participants experienced a sense of isolation and loneliness as their children grew up and moved on in their lives. Gillian felt like she didn't belong anywhere. *I was living on my own so there was a bit of a gap in my life. I found it's harder as a single woman in a new city making friends* (Gillian).

Escape from family trauma, pressure and roles

Several participants wanted to escape from family roles. Thea wanted to relinquish her role as a single mother, while Monica was anxious to leave the family nest, much to the consternation of some friends and family. Susan wanted to leave home and spread her wings. *I had to support them both financially…but we said – well if you girls are not going to leave home, then we will!* (Susan). Another participant (Connie) wanted to escape from traumatic family circumstances.

Participants were at a crossroads, perturbed about their situations and poised to think about how their life might be different, and it was into this space that the notion of SIE took hold. SIE drew them in, enabling them to take action, to break with their past without having to immediately determine their future. *I was quite excited, because it was on the edge and being on the edge is always exciting, a bit scary…and I was ready for it* (Thea).

The motive of escape for negative personal push factors has been documented in the SIE literature. Thorne (2009) identifies the need to be away from family. Inkson and Myers (2003) suggest personal escape as a driver for SIE. Richardson and Mallon (2005) also highlight escape from boredom as a factor, although they see this motivation embedded within the dimensions of life change and adventure. Factors relating to lifestyle, the right timing and a need for independence were also identified by Tharenou (2010a).

Other SIE studies cite escape from personal circumstances as a motivating factor (Doherty, 2013; Doherty et al., 2011). Cerdin (2013) summarises SIE motivations under 12 headings, only two of which are negative personal push factors. Andresen and Gustschin (2013) discuss six categories of motivation, including a lesser category of protection (meaning to assuage guilt or negative feelings or to address personal issues), suggesting that for some, a volunteer SIE is driven by the need to overcome personal problems.

Research on negative personal push factors largely emanates from studies that compare the motivations of AE with those of SIE (Andresen et al., 2013; Andresen & Gustschin, 2013; Cerdin, 2013; Doherty, 2013; Doherty et al., 2011; Dorsch et al., 2013). These studies confirm that negative personal push factors are greater in the SIE experience than in the AE experience. Negative personal push factors are important in this study, but they are not as significant as the negative career push factors. However, these negative personal push factors appear to be more significant in my sample than the negative personal push factors discussed more generally in the SIE literature.

Additionally, the SIE literature is based on studies in which research samples include male and female early to mid-career professionals. With the exception of Doherty and Thorn (2014), Tharenou (2010a, 2010b) and Myers and Pringle (2005), gender has not been considered in-depth. This study is unique as it focuses on professional and non-professional women at a later career stage. Context is important (Al Ariss & Jawad, 2011; Doherty, 2013), and when broadly considering SIE motivations, it is apparent that what may be a significant personal push factor for an early career SIE, may be relatively unimportant for a later career SIE.

Personal – Positive personal pull factors

In contrast to the paucity of positive SIE career motivations, there were many positive personal motivators pulling the participants towards an SIE.

Personal challenge

All participants identified the need for personal challenge, that is, wanting excitement, to push their boundaries and have an adventure. The adventure was centred on the opportunity to travel and have a more prolonged and deeper international experience. The majority of the participants had either done a young SIE or travelled as a tourist in their thirties or forties. Thus, SIE in later life was about unfinished business – to fulfil childhood dreams or extend adult dreams that were cut short by work and family responsibilities.

Research has consistently argued that the desire to travel, to experience excitement and adventures, is a significant dimension of the SIE decision-making process. Inkson et al. (1997) identified exploration as one of the main SIE drivers. Inkson and Myers (2003) suggested that young New Zealanders went on their OE to explore and seek excitement. Tharenou (2003) also identifies excitement as a driver and Richardson and McKenna (2002) confirm the desire to explore as one of two dominant motivations. Thorn (2009), Doherty et al. (2011) and Doherty (2013) suggest that as the individual initiates the travel, the search for adventure and exploration is an important motivator. In a recent study of international volunteers, Andresen and Gustschin (2013) listed six general categories of motivations, but in contrast to Hudson and Inkson's findings (2006), a search for excitement and adventure was not one. While there is good evidence that travel, adventure and excitement is an important aspect of the general SIE decision-making process, in this study it was a highly significant driver.

Relationships

Many of the participants had adult children who either encouraged them to go overseas or were already overseas. Adult children made it less risky for participants, allowing them to ease into their SIE. *I had one daughter here…she was going to live in Cairo so we were both going away together…then I landed in London and stayed with my other daughter until I flew to Spain for my course* (Gillian).

Mothers also played an unexpected role. The participants on the redemptive journey had problematical relationships with their mothers, but otherwise, mothers were mostly quietly supportive, encouraging their daughters to do an SIE that they would love to have done.

> *She would talk about things…regrets. But she was also very accepting. She said – I was born in the wrong era. She died two years ago but when I did do these things…I'm going to cry…she sent me this email and she said – I'm so glad you're doing this because it is something I would have wanted to do. I never knew that…for years. (Cassie)*

Extended family was also a drawcard, as a place to stay and adjust, and also to trace family roots and renew family connections. This was especially so for the 11 participants who went to the UK. These family relationships were not as relevant for the volunteer SIEs. Several of these volunteer SIEs were accompanied by a partner and the participants were also on the radar of volunteer organisations, thus ameliorating initial concerns associated with moving overseas.

Overseas friends were not as instrumental in encouraging participants who travelled with their partners, while those who travelled alone planned to make some contact with friends. In a few cases, New Zealand based friends who had already done an SIE acted as role models. Thus, family connections more than personal friendships were an important attraction for participants, promising an initial buffer to any shocks and challenges they might expect when effecting such radical life change.

Familial relationships and friendships are identified in the literature as important positive SIE motivations (Inkson et al., 1997; Inkson & Myers, 2003; Richardson & McKenna, 2006). Thorn (2009) found that women in the 50 plus age group were influenced by relationships and quality of life issues. In Thorn's study, most of the 50 plus participants were partnered, whereas in this study only 10 out of 21 participants were partnered. Doherty (2013) and Doherty et al. (2011) also identify relationships as an SIE influencer, while Myers and Pringle (2005) emphasise the importance of relational factors. These

findings are consistent with participants who moved to developed countries. However, it seems that married participants who planned to do an SIE with their partners were focused mainly on family relationships, whereas single participants were motivated by establishing connections with family as well as some friends.

Jackson et al. (2005) and Tharenou (2008) agree that family relationships are an influencer and a barrier to SIE. These findings differed from those of my study and may be explained by the differing gender and age factors of the other studies. Some participants were concerned about leaving adult children and elderly parents; however, these were not barriers, but rather situations that needed to be worked through so that contingency plans could be made.

Volunteer SIEs, in contrast, were not motivated by family in the host country as the nature of family and relationships was different for them. Four out of five of the volunteer SIEs were accompanied by partners, ensuring partner support during the move. The fifth volunteer travelled alone, but later she returned to the host country with her daughter as she thought it was important that her family understood what she was doing and where she had been. Thus, family relationships were important motivators for all the participants, but the nature and context of the SIE meant that the motivations relating to family connections varied.

Cultural experiences

Participants were less interested in touring and more intent on participating and understanding local life. The volunteer SIEs were especially interested in a cross-cultural experience. Participants based in the UK planned sojourns within the UK, Europe and the Middle East to learn more about local history, archaeology and society. There was a curiosity about the world wars, the experiences of participants' fathers and extended family members, and New Zealand's role in these wars. Other cultural interests, such as the theatre, concerts, art galleries and museums, were not conscious motivators. A couple of participants (Thea and Kerry) were excited by these cultural opportunities, but other personal motivations were more important.

Culture is generally discussed as an interest in other people, their history and way of life, but there is no clear definitional consensus. Inkson et al. (1997) list cultural experience as a key SIE motivation. Jackson (2005) highlights culture as one of five motivating factors, and Andresen and Gustschin (2013) identify six motivational factors, one of which is understanding, and refers to learning more about the world. Thorn (2009)

includes culture under the heading of adventure (p. 463). In contrast, Tharenou's study (2003) identifies cross-cultural experiences as a separate motivational category from excitement. Cerdin (2013) lists geographic location of the assignment as one of 12 motivations (p. 6), and Doherty et al. (2011) also suggest cultural experiences are a key motivator.

Little mention is made in the literature of the opportunity to experience the arts. This may be because these types of cultural activities are not explicitly identified and are subsumed under other motivational categories, as discussed above. However, it is apparent in this study that, although cultural interests are a general SIE motivation, they were a less significant personal motivation compared with other personal pull factors.

Personal focus

All of the participants were excited and somewhat fearful about doing an SIE. There was a sense that life had to change, that there may be a different way of being.

> *He took me to the edge of the Masa and I was gobstopped by the view…I said to him – That's the biggest piece of the world I've ever seen. And he said – Willa, if we got to the edge of the horizon there'd be another bit this big, and then another big bit…and I thought – This is like my potential, that I'd never gone beyond the edge. I've always stayed safe. (Willa)*

While participants had specific travel goals, these were usually short-term. For example, Kathy wanted to walk Hadrian's Wall and Monica wanted to follow her father's wartime journey. They did not have plans about what they hoped to achieve from the SIE. While the actual SIE allowed participants to explore possibilities, at the outset of the SIE, their motivations and expectations were more limited.

One aspect of this personal focus was the reclaiming of past dreams. Many participants thought that earlier plans and hopes had been lost in the plethora of work and family challenges that arose through their middle years. As they reached their fifties and sixties, the participants began to think about how they might resurrect these aspirations. *Most of my friends were retiring and going on overseas trips and I was very envious of what they were able to do…I hadn't heard of seniors doing SIE, but I couldn't see why it wasn't possible* (Kerry).

The life-span literature points to individuals' changing goals and priorities across their life (Ryff, 1998). The SIE signalled a closure of the participants' existing life and heralded the start of a search for new meaning in life. This contrasts somewhat with studies that indicate that an individual's search for meaning and purpose reduces as one ages (Keyes,

2011; Ryff & Keyes, 1995). In this study the participants' searches suggest that because individuals live longer, there have not been "changes in social norms and institutions to channel and employ aging adults' passions, talents, and interests" (Keyes, 2011, p. 289). This discussion provides some understanding of why the participants exited from mainstream employment to seek a more authentic purpose in their whole lives. Thus, it seems as if traditional notions of retirement no longer reflect the participants' extended life-paths (Keyes, 2011; Riley, Kahn, & Foner, 1994).

Personal values that had been neglected or subsumed were reviewed and revalidated as part of the SIE decision-making process. For example, Jo was motivated by several factors, but it was her commitment to altruism that was a key driver. *Deciding to do something different and live in another culture…but mainly, to make a contribution to the third world* (Jo). This is consistent with Hudson and Inkson (2006), who argue that there are many motives for doing volunteer work and that altruism is only part of this decision-making process. In contrast, Andresen and Gustschin (2013) suggest that altruism is the essence of volunteering, while Rehberg (2005) emphasises personal factors. While altruism was part of the five international volunteers' motivations, it was also evident in some of the other SIE experiences.

Some of the participants felt a sense of disconnection as they moved away from their old world. Many participants envisaged a place or a community where they belonged. *I found it difficult to readjust to life in New Zealand. I felt isolated here and it took me a while to calm down and then I started working on the idea of perhaps going back* (Kerry). For some participants, personal focus started simply with a desire to unshackle themselves from routine and responsibility and live a more autonomous life.

> *I was a real career party kind of person…you know put the suit on and go and do that stuff…but I wanted to go and live my life in a sort of a more free way and shape it to suit my own personal needs. (Diana)*

In two cases, the participants' SIEs were their response to a calling, that is, being summoned by God to undertake work that is spiritually driven and makes a difference to society (Coles, 1989; Keyes, 2011; Weber, 1958). A more secular and career oriented perspective (Hall & Chandler, 2005; Duffy et al., 2012; Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997) suggests that a calling is work that one is passionate about, is the most important work in one's whole life and contributes to the wellbeing of society. Penny's and Willa's SIEs were spiritually motivated, and they each received a calling to make the world a better place for children. *I had this idea in my head that I really wanted to go to*

some war-torn country…and from then honestly, the universe just pointed me in the right direction (Penny). Penny's and Willa's motivations went beyond the level of altruism. Their SIE was a calling, a vocation at a profoundly personal level, "where one's deepest 'gladness' meets the world's deepest 'hunger'" (Buechner, 1973, as cited in Keyes, 2011, p. 286).

SIE studies suggest that personal factors such as adventure, life change and family are as important as work motivations (Richardson & Mallon, 2005). These motivations resonate with career conceptions that accommodate lifestyle and home–work balance (Briscoe & Hall, 2006; Hall, 2004). This study suggests that personal motivations are important, but the sample, comprising older women, give additional insights into the SIE phenomenon. Positive personal pull factors played a greater part in the SIE decision-making process than negative personal push factors, and conversely, negative career push factors played a much greater part in the decision-making process than positive career pull factors (refer to Table 2).

One of the key features of SIE is the notion of planned happenstance or serendipity (Brewster & Harris, 1999; Inkson & Myers, 2003; Richardson, 2009). In this study, SIE was motivated by a range of work and personal factors. Serendipity was evident in these decision-making processes in a limited way. Although the participants were embarking on SIE, as with their younger female counterparts (Myers & Pringle, 2005), the initial stages were planned to reduce risk and facilitate adjustment. The motivations to do SIE were diverse, but happenstance and serendipity were evident across the sample in how the actual SIE evolved.

Timing

Although personal motivations were dominant in SIE decision-making, one of the final factors that facilitated SIE was timing. Work situations had generally been clarified and the decision to move on had already been taken. In most cases, this gave the participants the opportunity to reflect on their personal situation.

While timing was mostly centred on family issues, the 'right time' meant different things to the participants. For some, it was about their children reaching adulthood and leaving home. *My son had left home. While he was around and dependent, it was easier for me to stay grounded, but that time had passed and he'd sort of taken flight* (Connie). For other participants, it was about their decision to leave home.

Four participants had ended relationships with their partners/husbands and felt more free to consider other pathways. *The house had been sold and I had some money…initially, it was just going to be a month or six weeks…then I started to think…maybe I should look into getting some work there* (Kathy).

Parents' wellbeing was also a concern for participants. Baby boomers have been referred to as the sandwich generation (Grundy & Henretta, 2006) and the pivot generation (Attias-Donfut & Arber, 2000), having dual responsibility for children and elderly parents, and these roles usually fall on women to a greater extent than men. The death of a parent sometimes freed participants up. *He and my mother had lived in Dunedin…I was the only sibling here…I'd felt that I really couldn't abandon them. I suppose in retrospect, that was another reason that I felt tied* (Kerry).

Other participants were able go because their elderly parents were in good health, but plans were made in case parents became ill or died. *My mother said to us at the time – If anything happens to us, you're not to come back. And I said – No. We've decided that* (Patti).

In some cases, the participant negotiated with or handed over the care of an elderly parent to other family members.

> *My father had died – but the only other thing that was holding me back a little bit was that my mother had gone blind. I'd said to Mum – You need to go into a home…She shifted herself in after I left so that was a relief, because I felt guilty for my sisters' sakes that I wasn't going to be sharing the burden but I wasn't going to let it stop me. (Jenny)*

Being a grandparent also impacted on the timing of the SIE for several participants. *Well, we actually haven't got a heap of grandchildren to hold us back* (Patti) However, for Diana, the presence of grandchildren was not a barrier. *Dad was being looked after by my sister…we've got two daughters and they were into their having children…they were all set in their lives and okay.*

Thus, preceding evidence suggests that the issue of timing is significant in the SIE decision-making process. Tharenou (2010b) and Inkson and Myers (2003) also identify the significance of timing in the SIE decision-making process. Hudson and Inkson (2006) found that volunteers had always longed to do an SIE, while Keyes (2011) suggests that an individual life is not lived in isolation, thus individual agency is moderated by connections with the actions of other individuals and groups.

Current research suggests that parents are committed to supporting their children's longer transition into adulthood (Igarishi, Hooker, Coehlo, & Manoogian, 2013), but are ambivalent about supporting dependent parents. This was evident in the study, with participants providing support for adult children into their early twenties or until the completion of university studies. Igarishi et al. (2013) further argue that the pivot (Attias-Donfut, & Arber, 2000) or sandwich generation (Grundy & Henretta, 2006) are more likely to try to preserve their own independence and negotiate within the wider family to share elder care. The resolution of personal family situations was not always a passive process, and the right time for one participant within her unique life context was not necessarily the right time for another. *We have a barrier now in that H's mother is in that position…but he's in a different situation in that I could leave my mother, he cannot* (Cheryl).

In this study, it appears that the opportunity to go on an SIE was created by various circumstances that created a timely space for participants to move forward in their life.

> *There's always leading things that push you, nudge you, lead you on. I had to do a lot of that internal processing stuff about 'well, is this really the right time, the right place, the right thing to do'. So in the end when it happened it felt like a natural progression. (Susan)*

Turning points

While timing factors were directly related to the participants' decision to do an SIE, turning points, that is, significant moments and critical points in the story, were different in that they were times of significant insight and direction (Bruner, 1991; Savin-Baden & Van Niekerk, 2007; Starr, 1994; Wilson, 2007). The participants generally resolved timing issues over a period of 6 to 18 months preceding the SIE. However, turning points occurred earlier in their lives, as long as 20 years previously in some cases, and in other cases within five years preceding the SIE.

The death of a significant family member or the loss of a relationship was a turning point for several participants. For example, when Janet was 17, her mother died aged 41. When Janet turned 41, she decided to honour her mother's memory by celebrating every day she had left. Kathy's life story revealed two distinctive turning points. When she first moved to Auckland, Kathy enrolled in adult education classes and she tentatively took steps to explore life and work options. Later, the birth of her first grandchild sparked another period of reflection and change. Travel was also a significant turning point for

some. *In the 1990s I went to Laos. It was rainy season and all the sewers were up…but I vowed that I was going to come back* (Diana).

Although there is a growing body of literature on SIE motivations (Cerdin, 2013; Dickmann et al., 2008; Doherty, 2013; Doherty et al., 2011; Dorsch et al., 2013; Thorn, 2009), there is limited discussion on issues regarding timing and turning points. Thorn (2009) and Selmar and Lauring (2011) suggest that SIE motivations differ according to gender and age. This study appears to be the first that explores SIE and older women; consequently, the life story approach has been useful in identifying significant turning points and timing issues (Cerdin, 2013). The turning points did not put the participants on a direct route to doing an SIE, but it was a powerful moment from which the participants emerged with new insights. Invariably, these turning points were personal rather than work events.

Thus, turning points and timing are important factors to be considered when exploring SIE motivations. They are of themselves not an SIE motivation, but rather a vehicle or agentic circumstances (Hudson & Inkson, 2006) that release the SIE momentum. Once the final decision to do an SIE was taken, it seemed the right thing to do, but the decision to go was a challenging process in which unique turning points and timing were significant factors.

Transition

SIE marks a significant period of change and transition. All of the participants had experienced challenging work and personal situations to varying degrees throughout their pre-SIE life. Yet their responses were not negative; rather, they were a catalyst for longer term positive change (Kets de Vries, 1999; McAdams & Bowman, 2001). Thus, the actual SIE was a turn in the road (McAdams et al., 2001) and a distinctive generative-type "Gaugin" response (Kets de Vries 1999; Erickson, 1968).

Life design, a framework for understanding career transition in the postmodern economy, offers some understanding of SIE through turning points. Savickas (2007) suggests that life-span psychology and life-course sociology give insights into career from a longitudinal perspective. Savickas et al. (2009) argued that careers are "individual scripts", and in periods of transition, "life design career interventions" can resolve career dilemmas within a life-span/life-course perspective (p. 40). Yet life design theorising still emerges from a place where work is core to the transition process and change is facilitated

by a third party. In contrast, the decisions to do an SIE were self-driven, with participants shifting the personal rather than the professional to the epicentre of their lives.

SIE work and non-work experiences, affects on career and personal development

> "We shall not cease from exploration, and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time."

> T.S. Eliot

Introduction

This section addresses the work and personal experiences of the participants while on SIE and reflects on their consequent career and personal development. There is an emergent literature on SIE motivations (Doherty & Dickmann, 2013; Doherty et al., 2011; Richardson & Mallon, 2005; Thorn, 2009) and also on the consequent development of the individual's career capital (McCall & Hollenbeck, 2002; Osland et al., 2006; Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). However, there is less emphasis on documenting actual SIE career experiences and little discussion on the personal SIE experiences and developments that flow from this (Hudson & Inkson, 2006). The summarised personal SIE for each participant was discussed earlier as part of Chapter 5 i.e. the 21 individual interpretive stories and the re-storying of these into five SIE 'journey' themes. The following discussion specifically addresses research questions two and three, that is, to develop an understanding of the SIE experience and to explore the extent to which SIE affords older women an opportunity for career and personal development.

Firstly, I consider the broad range of SIE locations where participants were based. Secondly, I outline the diverse occupational groupings of the participants before their SIE and consider the significant occupational shifts for the majority of participants while on SIE. Thirdly, I discuss the various work experiences undertaken by the participants and consider the career competencies accrued as a result of these assignments and whether these findings are consistent with current literature on SIE and career development. On completion of this section, I consider the personal (non-work) experiences of the participants.

Participants' work and non-work (personal) plans were generally unformulated beyond the first few weeks of the SIE, although the participants who were engaged by volunteer aid agencies had some idea of their projects. Participants were looking for excitement, change and adventure, yet the SIE appeared to unfold in a relatively stable and secure process. It was important for most participants to start from a location or context where they could establish a presence, become familiar with their environment and, over a

period of time, establish a sense of belonging and acceptance. As with their younger counterparts in a study by Myers and Pringle (2005), the participants were more focused on being self-directed, autonomous and free. Their risk taking was never reckless; it was much more about being challenged, extended and moving beyond long-established comfort zones (Kohonen, 2008).

SIE locations

Participants based themselves in a variety of countries and cultures during their SIE (see Table 3). Just over half the participants were domiciled in English-speaking countries, while the others were based within the continents of Asia, South America, Africa and Europe – where English was not a first language and the cultural context was markedly different. Fee and Gray's (2011) sample of international volunteers also worked in different cultural contexts, whereas the younger women in an earlier SIE study (Myers & Pringle, 2005) appeared to take a more risk-averse approach and opted to live in countries that had similar cultural dimensions to their own (Hofstede, 2001). On balance, it may seem as if the participants are more adventurous in their geographical choices than their younger counterparts (Myers & Pringle, 2005), but some of this may be explained by visa regulations and processes. At the time of the 2005 study, the UK visa age eligibility for a two-year working visa was 27 years (currently, 31 years). Most of the participants in my study who were domiciled in the UK were eligible for an ancestry visa (i.e. they had a grandparent born in the UK), and other participants who undertook an official international volunteer placement or taught English overseas had visas organised by their employers. Nevertheless, some participants went to considerable lengths to find a way in which they might secure a visa and took calculated risks in looking for and finding work. They did not want to just travel and see the world; rather, they wanted the challenge of living and working alongside different people and cultures.

Table 3. SIE locations

Region	***n***
Asia-Pacific	8***
North America	1
Africa	1*
Europe	4***
UK-based	11**
South America	1*

*= Five participants experienced base locations in two different countries.

SIE work experiences and career development

Pre-SIE and SIE occupational groupings

Before SIE, participants were employed in a range of professional and non-professional occupations (see Table 4, which outlines the occupations as per the Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Occupations [ANZSCO]). The majority of the participants believed that SIE gave them the opportunity to do something 'outside the square'. They were not overly concerned if the new SIE work was not successful as they were amongst strangers whose judgements did not unduly concern them.

Table 4. ANZSCO classifications

	Before SIE*	During SIE**
Managers	4	3
Professionals	8	5
Technicians and trades workers	2	1 + ½ + ½
Community and personal service workers	2	7 + ½ + ½ + ½
Clerical and administration workers	3	½
Sales workers	2	–
Machine operators and drivers	–	–
Labourers	–	–
Residual workers	–	–
Other		2

*All participants worked full-time.

**Three participants worked across two occupational groups part-time.

**During SIE, most participants did not work a standard full-time workday (some days were longer than eight hours, e.g. those of carers). All participants worked on short-term contracts, allowing time to travel and visit friends and family.

**These numbers total 19 as one participant was a full-time student and another was unable to find work.

Eighteen out of 21 participants elected to work in a different role. Seven out of the 21 participants found employment during their SIE that was in the same classification as their pre-SIE ANZSCO category. Only three of these seven stayed within their existing occupations of teaching, nursing and legal services.

Most non-volunteer participants (excluding one who was in full-time study and another who could not find work) worked in gendered occupations in which *an ethic of care* was involved (Tharenou, 2010b, p. 49). Even the five international volunteers were engaged to some extent, in aspects of a caring role. This type of role seemed to resonate with their wish to be more connected, to develop meaningful relationships and to accommodate the fluidity of their SIE experience (Gallos, 1989; Pringle & Jones, 2010). In essence, the participants sought positions in which they were able to establish a sense of

interdependence, belonging and authenticity (Baugh & Sullivan, 2015; Marshall, 1989; Pringle & McCulloch Dixon, 2003) that had been missing in much of their pre-SIE employment.

SIE work roles

Volunteers

Participants worked in a variety of work roles (see Table 5). The first group were those working in the Asia, Pacific and African regions who mostly found volunteer contract work in international aid and educational organisations. These positions had some synergy with previous employment in New Zealand in that their skills were transferable to the SIE project, but they also gave them the opportunity to develop new skills and networks. At times, the volunteer participants felt daunted and overwhelmed by the project terms and the different cultural contexts. Four out of the five volunteer SIEs were accompanied by partners during some or all of the SIE. This source of support, as well as remote support from the volunteer agency and the networks the participants established with locals, gave a measure of stability in some very challenging situations.

Table 5. SIE work roles

SIE work roles	
Volunteers	International aid volunteer #
	Volunteer WWOOFer (willing worker on organic farms) ##
	Volunteer gardener ###
	Volunteer working with children (fully self-funded)
Teachers	Language teacher (paid)
	Primary teacher (paid)
Nurse	(paid)
Legal secretary	(paid)
Personal services	Carer for the elderly/disabled/sick (# and accommodation
	Pet and house-sitting (# and accommodation)
	Administration and household support (# and accommodation)
Student	(mostly self-funded)
Not working	Unable to find employment

#	some remuneration received
##	no remuneration, labour exchanged for food and accommodation
###	no remuneration, helping friends and donating time to local organisations

The second group were volunteers working on the land. While several UK-based participants engaged in some short-term volunteer gardening for friends and local projects

in between assignments, this group of volunteers (including one participant in North America) worked in rural locations and linked into established international volunteer networks to find work in exchange for food and accommodation. This group was the most itinerant. For example, one participant moved around to various UK counties during her carer assignments and then to various European regions for WWOOFer assignments.

These participants had few savings, so working in exchange for accommodation and food was ideal. They also linked into couch-surfing type communities (services that connect members to a global community of travellers), and in one case an international artist's network, to organise additional free accommodation. The only significant expense they planned for was the travel between various farm assignments. While surviving on minimal money was challenging, the participants planned ahead using technology to make their own travel arrangements. Thus, the organisation of the SIE and the actual work undertaken on the various farms was a huge learning experience, especially organic farming knowledge and practices.

Two other volunteer participants travelled alone and worked mostly with children in Asia, Pacific, and North and South American regions. Their work challenges were equally as daunting as those faced by the five international aid volunteers, but both participants established close work and personal connections with local networks and felt more at home there than in New Zealand.

The rest of the participants, discussed in the following two sections, were based mostly in the United Kingdom and Europe, with one in Asia, and were engaged in teaching, nursing, legal and personal services.

Teaching, nursing, legal services

Four participants continued to work in their established occupations, that is, nursing, primary teaching and legal services. Career development was not a significant driver for these four participants, and they assumed that working in similar roles would be easier than taking on a new role. However, this did not prove to be the case, and while all four participants coped with their various roles, at times they found the work systems complex because they were challenged to adjust and adapt to very different occupational contexts and cultures. A fifth participant had recently trained as a language teacher and likewise found the work complex and challenging, especially in a different cultural context. All five of these participants felt as though their work experiences developed their professional knowledge and practice.

Personal services

These participants were mostly located in the UK and perceived ageism as a major impediment to finding organisational work. They were also disillusioned with organisational life in New Zealand and opted for carer or personal service roles, for example, carers, pet and house-sitters, and personal service workers engaged in administration and household support duties. Participants who elected to be 'carers' had heard about these roles from other New Zealanders and were attracted by the security and flexibility that these jobs offered, and they often registered with more than one employer organisation. The provision of accommodation and food were part of the arrangement, the remuneration was very good and the contracts were as short or long as the participants wanted. It was an attractive proposition as the participants did not have to retain accommodation elsewhere in the UK and many were collecting rent from their New Zealand homes to help pay their mortgages or boost their savings. Thus, somewhat ironically, several participants returned to New Zealand at the end of their SIE in better financial circumstances than they could have achieved had they stayed in New Zealand.

Participants worked with clients and their families who inhabited a world that they never dreamed they would enter. Participants cared for eminent politicians, retired professionals and other wealthy clients. They lived in their clients' beautiful homes in chocolate box villages and whimsical market towns, and often chose assignments in order to live in a certain region. Nevertheless, the work was hard physically and mentally, the hours were very long and occasionally there was a client who was difficult and unmanageable. None of the participants had previously worked as a carer, and while they had to complete a short course before starting their assignments, the real learning took place on the job.

Two participants in this group worked as house/pet sitters and in personal service roles. House/pet sitting was a less popular SIE option, and the various positions were found by word of mouth and also through international websites such as Trusted House-sitters (http://www.trustedhousesitters.com). These were also live-in roles that required the participants to undertake pet care, administration and household duties. Both participants were living on country estates, worked hard and were greatly appreciated and generously supported by their employers. There was less pressure in these roles and consequently less learning in an occupational sense. The two participants revelled in the novelty of the experiences. They lived in a privileged situation and gained fascinating insights into the worlds of English aristocrats and celebrities, wryly suggesting that only a 'class neutral'

New Zealander, without any distinctive class artefacts and accents, would be afforded such an opportunity.

Career capital

When the participants in this study decided to do an SIE, their motivations were primarily personal rather than work and career oriented. However, in relating and reflecting on their SIE stories, it was evident that participants had accrued, somewhat unexpectedly, a high-level of career development as well as educational and professional qualifications in some cases (see Table 6).

Table 6. SIE career competency development

Qualifications
Educational qualifications (acquired during SIE)
Professional qualifications (acquired during SIE)
Certificate (acquired during SIE)
Management
Leadership
Organisation development/managing change
Capacity building
Decision-making
Governance
Project management
Human resources management
Risk management
Financial management
Coaching/mentoring
Consultancy
Communication
Technical/Professional
Publishing
Website design
Administration/organisational
Accounting
IT/technology
Research
Legal
Training/teaching
Personal Service (elder care)
Communication and relationship management*
Managing conflict
Health and safety

Qualifications	
	Manual handling, medication, recognising abuse and infection control
	Palliative care and end of life care
	Parkinson's disease management
	Nutrition for older people
	Resuscitation and first aid
	Mental health in older people
	Dementia management
	Diabetes management
Horticultural/agricultural	
	Gardening
	Organic farming
	Permaculture
	Cheesemaking
Construction	
Alternative health and healing	
Cross-cultural	
Problem solving	
Relationship management	
	Advocacy
	Negotiation
	Mediation
	Networking
Self-management	
	Confidence
	Resilience
	Risk taking
	Creativity
	Initiative
	Flexibility
	Adaptability
	Patience

Early definitions of career capital suggest that it is an outcome of career competencies that are accumulated through education and employment (Arthur et al., 1999). Yet international careers are becoming increasingly convoluted and diverse (Brewster et al., 2014; Inkson & Thorn, 2010) and SIE research needs to take into account the heterogeneity of the various SIE subgroups (Al Ariss, 2010; Andresen & Gustschin, 2013; Doherty, 2013).

The participants in this study constitute another SIE subgroup that has not been previously identified. While the participants are all older women, they are also diverse within this subgroup in that their SIE occupations range across and beyond the ANZSCO framework, and each SIE context is unique. The participants' motivations for undertaking an SIE were wide ranging and primarily driven by personal rather than work or career reasons. Much of the development literature on organisational expatriation and SIE suggests that the international careerist acts as a 'career capitalist' before, during and after the international experience (Dickmann & Doherty, 2010). In contrast, the participants did not undertake SIE for professional development and did not expect to accrue career competencies. The realisation that they had developed varying levels of career capital usually came during and towards the end of the SIE as they prepared to move on to the next stage of their lives. Participants did not embark on their SIE with the expectation of accruing career capital. The realisation that they had accrued career capital was more likely to be serendipitous.

The majority of the participants experienced a variety of work situations and employers. Unlike Dickmann and Doherty (2010), who suggest a dual dependency perspective (which takes into account the individual and organisational perspectives when exploring the development of career capital), I adopt a unitary approach and document competency development from the individuals' perspectives as their competencies are portable, are a source of personal capital (Thorn et al., 2013) and were developed independently of organisational commitment and input. Participants did not strive to develop competencies, and generally, they did not enact the behaviour of strategic career capitalists (Inkson & Arthur, 2001; Jokinen, 2010). The career capital they gained was surprising to them (although the volunteer participants were more aware of this possibility than the other participants).

I have presented the career and personal competencies in two separate tables so they are more explicit, and emphasise the non-strategic and adventitious nature of the participant's career development when compared with other SIE subgroups (Fee & Gray, 2011). I also have not identified the number of times participants mentioned new competencies, unlike Inkson and Myers (2003). In this normative study, telling one's life story was challenging as participants had to reflect on their lengthy SIE experiences (Kohonen, 2008) as well as identify career competencies and career capital (Doherty & Dickmann, 2009). In some instances, drawing on the spirit of narrative inquiry, I ascertained the development of specific competencies by more implicit means, for example, interpreting the following

statement by one participant as evidence of capacity building: *No one mentioned my name, but I had built an organisation* (Cassie).

The expatriate literature on career capital presents findings under generic categories such as general management (Brewster et al., 2014), global competencies (Dickmann & Harris, 2005), global leadership (Jokinen, 2005; Osland et al., 2006) and social skills (Jokinen, 2010). Some of the more specific career competencies developed and advanced by the participants in this study are consistent with findings in the expatriate literature, for example, management competencies. However, the participants also developed several other areas of competency as a result of their non-professional work activities that the expatriate literature does not directly address. For example, competencies attached to 'personal service', 'horticultural' and 'self-management' categories in Table 6 are generally outside the domain of the professional and managerial competencies documented in the extant international human resources management literature.

The accrual of career competencies culminating in career capital is also explored, albeit to a more limited extent, in the SIE literature (Jokinen et al., 2008; Myers & Pringle, 2005; Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014; Shaffer et al., 2012). SIE is an exemplar of 'new' careers that "do not conform to the expectations of traditional employment thinking" (Arthur et al., 1999, p. 23). Rodriguez and Scurry, (2014) point to the "multidimensionality and complexity" of global careers (p. 1046). Inkson et al., (1997) suggest that personal priorities and personal agendas are a feature of the SIE. Scholars have discussed the looseness of the term 'career' (Gunz & Peiperl, 2007); nevertheless, the concept remains rooted in the work paradigm, with any development of career capital, such as confidence and self-awareness, attributed to a work context where it accrues market value (Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014).

Participants in this study were motivated primarily by personal reasons to undertake SIE, and the fact that they have developed extensive internal and external career capital (Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014) is a significant factor for them in terms of their career development. Despite the presence of personal drivers acknowledged in the SIE literature to date and the suggested broadening of SIE occupational categories (Doherty et al., 2013a), studies on career capital are mostly focused on professional and managerial samples. The research field continues to privilege certain types of 'strategic' work over the more diverse SIE pathways forged by these participants and other SIE subgroups. In a context of increasing global mobility. Doherty, et al. (2013a) suggest:

The focus on professionals makes explicit an assumption that has dominated the literature – that most of these globally mobile people are highly educated professionals or engaged in managerial roles. This assumption is open to debate, since other occupational groups including skilled workers, for example electricians, construction workers, or hairdressers, choose to self-initiate their expatriation to another country. (pp. 99–100)

Research on expatriation and self-initiated expatriation is mostly focused on multinational corporations, yet there is also literature on international volunteers who work for organisations such as the United Nations (UN), non-governmental organisations (NGOs), charities and religious organisations (Andresen & Gustschin, 2013; Brewster, Dickman, & Sparrow, 2008). Organisations such as the Red Cross, Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), VSA NZ, Australian Aid and Caritas are just a few examples. International volunteers are another SIE subgroup in that their characteristics are more consistent with SIE indicators than AE indicators (Andresen & Gustschin, 2013; Hudson & Inkson, 2006; Inkson & Myers, 2003). Drawing on Doherty et al. (2013a), it seems that the five (participant) international volunteers, as well as all the other participants, fit the 'organisational SIE', OE and the 'SIE' type of subgroups under the 'spectrum of global mobility'. International volunteer literature is relevant to this study because, like the volunteers, participants in this research study came from diverse occupational backgrounds and undertook a broad range of tasks. Similarly, the development of career capital and the process of individual transformation and turning points experienced by the participants are more like those discussed in the international volunteer literature (Starr, 1994; Osland, 2001; Andresen & Gustschin, 2013).

Fee and Gray (2011) documented an extensive list of learning outcomes from the emergent literature on international volunteers. These were grouped into eight categories drawn from Eraut's (2004) typology of learning and development in the workplace: personal development, decision-making and problem solving, cultural skills and understanding, high-level communication skills, strategic understanding, self-awareness, role performance and management skills. All of these categories resonate with the participants' development of career capital. Of particular interest in this typology is the category of personal development, although it is attributed to the volunteer work experience rather than personal experiences. Participants also accrued high levels of personal development, to such an extent that I have categorised these areas in a separate table and attributed the personal development to the whole SIE, that is, the sum of all non-work and work experiences (please refer to the next section for the table and more detailed discussion).

In a longitudinal study of international development workers from New Zealand, Hudson and Inkson (2006) explored the "learning and transformation gained from their volunteer work" (p. 308). The authors highlighted many skills developed by their sample that are also consistent with competencies accrued by my participants. In addition to a range of softer and interpersonal skills, Hudson and Inkson (2006) noted the development of technical, practical and management skills that go beyond pre-SIE work experiences and parallel the career/work development experienced by my participants. Hudson and Inkson's (2006) study and this study share some key common features. Both studies come out of a New Zealand context and both samples were driven by a range of motivations that did not prioritise career development.

SIE non-work experiences and personal development

Introduction

In this section, I consider the non-work (personal) experiences of the participants. There is little research on the personal aspects of SIE except some exploratory research with younger and volunteer SIEs (Hudson & Inkson, 2006; Inkson & Myers, 2003). There is some discussion in the wider careers literature on aspects of personal growth (Lips-Wiersma, 2002), although this is often attributed solely to the work context. In this section, I also focus on personal development as an outcome of the participants' whole SIE lives, and explore their non-work experiences, cognisant that in the fuller SIE reality, non-work experiences are also a catalyst for personal growth, development and transformation (Jokinen et al., 2008; Mendenhall, 2001; Myers & Pringle, 2005).

Fourteen of the participants set out on their SIEs alone. Two participants were joined by their partners on subsequent SIEs, and another two met partners while on SIE. Seven of the participants were accompanied by partners at the outset of their SIEs. Regardless of whether the participants undertook SIE initially on their own or with partners, considerable personal development ensued.

Non-work/personal experiences

Travel was a significant non-work focus and the participants' travel experiences were varied. Often, the SIE began with a holiday in one place, where participants rested from the chaos and pressures of leaving their pre-SIE lives behind. Thereafter, travel tended to be in short bursts between employment and on long weekends. All participants spoke of the joy and delight of interacting with new cultures. The travels of some participants started out of curiosity but evolved into deeply personal and profoundly life-changing

ventures. For example, Monica was drawn to travel in the footsteps of her soldier father, visiting the fields where the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps (ANZAC) soldiers fought in World War II. She returned to Crete on more than one occasion with her sister and her son, reconciling childhood memories of her father, whose war experiences haunted him for many years after the war, affecting family life.

Several other participants based in the UK made a pilgrimage-like journey to the war fields of Europe, where many New Zealanders and family members fought, were wounded or died during the two world wars. These types of travel experiences profoundly impacted on the participants. At one level, there was a sense of connection and sadness for the young soldiers who lost their lives so far away from home. At another level, there was a greater understanding of their New Zealand heritage, linked inextricably to England through these wartime experiences. Yet at odds with these emotions was the participants' increasing sense of independence and separation from England, and the futility of fighting for a Commonwealth that seemed increasingly irrelevant and overshadowed by England's relationship with the EU.

As baby boomers, the participants were born into a Commonwealth nation, but as older women, the SIE enabled them to redefine what it meant to be a New Zealander and to reconfigure their perspective of New Zealand's place in the world. Colleen's experiences while on SIE (not just in the classroom but also at the war seminars she attended in her own time) enabled her to clarify her sense of difference from the English and her unique identity as a New Zealander. Other participants reframed New Zealand as a Pacific nation on their return home, and some enacted this new understanding through the development of a Pacific garden rather than their pre-SIE cottage-styled English gardens.

While many participants were able to rethink their identity as a New Zealander, they also developed a global mind-set that no longer placed New Zealand at the centre of their worlds. Generally, the participants continued to espouse their love of New Zealand, but they no longer saw it as unique and special. Most participants were keen to retain their international connections and would live overseas again if family, finances and international visitor and immigration policy permitted.

Travel during non-work times also brought about changes and reprioritisation in the participants' values and attitudes. Two extreme examples in the research study came from Willa and Penny. Willa (now 70 plus) began to travel at the age of 50 after the sudden death of her partner. She was inspired by Hopi wisdom, their spiritual life force and their philosophies on the concept of the grandmother. Willa settled in Peru and later Thailand,

where she became a volunteer grandmother. She sold her property and personal assets to sustain her role as an international grandmother working with disadvantaged children in Peru and Thailand. Likewise, Penny left on her SIE already committed to the idea of being an international grandmother. During her SIE, she explored this role further and embraced an increasingly spiritual way of being.

Other participants, such as Sharon, were also drawn into different worlds and began to live a more simple and frugal life, freed up from the trappings of a western consumer-oriented world. Participants developed a sense of belonging in these new places and a desire to be part of a more fair and equitable world. Outside of the bounds of their pre-SIE experiences, they became open to change and new ideas. Generativity and personal growth (Erickson, 1968; Kets de Vries, 1999; McAdams & Bowman, 2001) became important to the participants, and as they moved into older age, they sought to make their mark in some small way and to leave behind a better world.

For many participants, such as Susan and Jenny, the travel aspect of the SIE was the fulfilment of long-time dreams. Kerry, as a single woman, thought she would never travel again, unlike her married friends. Sharon thought she would never overcome her fear of flying, and if she did, she didn't think she could afford to travel. In many ways, the non-work aspects of the SIE, particularly the opportunity to travel, enabled participants to move beyond pre-SIE trauma and disappointment in their work and personal lives.

As participants travelled, several developed a deep connection with the land. Jo never felt so at peace than when she was out riding across the farm on which she was based. Jocelyn had always yearned to do an archaeological dig, and her experiences in Israel opened up a new world of history and archaeology, and sparked a desire to pursue academic study sometime after the SIE. In Malta, Jocelyn walked through the rural fields every day and worked alongside local farmers. Kathy not only worked as a gardener for a period of time, but also volunteered at a local botanical centre in between work assignments. Jenny became increasingly drawn to the land through her WWOOFing, as did Sharon. Thus, autonomous and serendipitous travel experiences opened up the opportunity for several participants to explore creative and land-based activities. It was as if their new-found connections were a way of harvesting from their past grief and moving forward to a new life, in which they were more resilient, independent and purposeful.

International travel also fostered the development of new relationships and the nurturing and re-establishing of older relationships. Most participants had family overseas, such as children with whom they now reconnected as adults or extended family connections. For

example, during her almost 10-year SIE, Thea spent some of her free time with her daughters, who were engaged in their own SIEs. This gave Thea an opportunity to redevelop her familial relationships in an adult-to-adult context, away from the emotionally charged home environment of earlier years. As a result of this, one of her daughters asked Thea to give her away at her UK wedding, a mark of her respect and gratitude for Thea's years of mothering. These family connections provided a significant and positive focus, with travel often centred around family relationships. Patti's son often joined her for weekends in the country, and Colleen and her husband flatted with their children in London and shared care of their newborn grandchild.

New and old friends were discovered, with friendships forged. In addition, relatives were visited and extended family connections were re-established. Cheryl and her husband visited relations in the UK and Europe, and in some cases, other participants stayed with their relatives for an extended period. Partner relationships were also strengthened. Two of the participants had married for the second time and saw the SIE as a time of consolidation and strengthening of their relationships. Two other participants developed relationships during the SIE. Although a source of great joy, the relationships also caused pain as the reality of maintaining a relationship across different cultures and national borders took its toll.

Personal development and transformation

Personal development and change experienced by participants was also facilitated by SIE non-work experiences. In the expatriate literature, there is some discussion on the development of cross-cultural skills (Brewster et al., 2014; Dickmann & Doherty, 2008), but this is linked to specific career/work experiences. Personal growth is invariably associated with career experiences, yet in this research study, it is apparent that participants' non-work experiences also led to extensive personal development. Jokinen et al. (2008) point to the international assignment literature, arguing that international work experiences influence the individual's development. They suggest this may also be the case for individuals who go on an SIE and identify this as an area for future research. However, their suggestion comes from a work-centric perspective and while the results of this research study confirm their speculation of significant individual development from SIE, this research also points to experiences outside the domain of work as an important stimulus for the development of identity and self-awareness. Thus, personal growth emanates from both career/work and personal non-work SIE experiences.

Significantly, the non-work experiences were more central in many participants' SIE lives and triggered significant individual growth and change.

SIE gifted these participants an opportunity to explore places and meet people that was not possible in their previous lives. Given that the participants' dominant SIE motivations were personal rather than career, it is understandable that they experienced significant development as a result of non-work activities and experiences. Without significant family, work and financial pressures, most participants began to flourish. In particular, participants discussed changes and reprioritising of their values; changes in their attitudes, identity and sense of self; and considerable development in their interpersonal, soft and social skills (see Table 7).

Table 7. Personal development

Personal development and change facilitated by SIE non-work experiences
Values (A judgement of what is important in life)
Authenticity
Autonomy
Belonging
Diversity
Family
Frugality
Generativity
Money no longer a key driver for actions
Relationships
Simplicity
Social justice
Sustainability (concern with climate change)
Attitudes (The way one thinks or feels about something)
Self-belief, to be true to oneself
A slower pace of life
Anti-organisational or structured paid work
Anti-consumerism and materialism
Intellectual curiosity and open-mindedness
Self (Who a person is or has become)
A world view, a broader global perspective and understanding
A New Zealand perspective that identifies with a Pacific viewpoint
Calm
Happy
Independent
Intentional
Living in the present and positive about the future

Personal development and change facilitated by SIE non-work experiences
Peaceful
Purposeful
Whole
Life skills (A broad range of skills including interpersonal, 'soft' and social skills)
Adaptable
Assertive
Compassionate
Confident
Considered
Courageous
Cross-cultural
Flexible
Greater initiative
Independent thinking
Listening
Managing ambiguity, uncertainty and complexity
Open-minded
Patient
Resilient
Self-reliant
Stress management
Tolerance

The expatriation literature - both organisational and self-initiated - touches on aspects of personal and individual development. Rodriguez and Scurry (2014) point to the new careers literature that includes notions of personal motivations and fulfilment. The development of a global mind-set is suggested by Brewster et al. (2014), and the development of personal skills is also identified by Al Ariss (2010). Kohonen (2005) refers to the international assignment experience as mind stretching and Jokinen, et al. (2008) argue that international work experiences impact on an individual's "identity, self awareness and growth" (p. 983).

Much of the discussion on personal and individual skills and development in the SIE literature is aligned with a broader discussion on career capital (Dickmann & Doherty, 2008; Dickmann & Harris, 2005; Inkson & Arthur, 2001; Jokinen, 2010; Jokinen et al., 2008; Rodriguez & Scurry, 2014), career outcomes (Brewster et al., 2014; Doherty et al., 2013a), global leadership competencies (Jokinen, 2005), career development (Al Ariss, 2010) or career success (Enache et al., 2011). While the development of some personal

skills are acknowledged in the broader expatriate literature, aspects of individual development are invariably linked to organisational and work contexts.

The international volunteer literature has documented individual changes and skills that volunteers developed during their overseas postings (Bell, 1994; Downes & Thomas, 1999; Hudson & Inkson, 2006). Fee and Gray (2011) summarise these international volunteer skills, which seem more wide ranging than the expatriate literature has recorded to date, and suggest that international volunteer placements are "rich learning environments" (p. 532). The international volunteer literature also captures the diverse range of motivations that drive these volunteers (Hudson & Inkson, 2006), and this is more consistent with the SIE literature than the expatriate literature. Yet there remains a dearth of research on individual and gender-related development that results from non-work personal experiences and activities. An earlier study (Myers & Pringle, 2005) suggests that non-work motivations and experiences have an impact on individual development, but since then, most studies have considered personal development as an outcome of career and work-centric experiences.

It has been suggested that women's careers are influenced and shaped by life stages, the life-course and contexts (Bailyn, 2004; Maniero & Sullivan, 2005; O'Neil et al., 2008; Tharenou, 2010b). In her study on women professionals who undertake SIE, Tharenou (2010b) suggests that early career is an optimal time to self-initiate, whereas in late early career and mid-career, women develop "an ethic of care", when responsibilities for family and children increase and impact on levels of career and work engagement (p. 79). Tharenou (2010b) further suggests that women may only be authentic or true to themselves in later career when family responsibilities are completed. While Tharenou's discussion arises from a career or work-centric focus, it is relevant to the participants in this study because, through their SIEs, they explored novel work and non-work experiences; and as the SIE unfolded, it seemed that the non-work experiences drove a significant part of the personal development and transformation. While the nature and extent of this personal change varied for each participant, it appeared that sense making and authenticity were established or reclaimed through non-work (Cohen, 2014) as well as work experiences (Leroy, Verbruggen, Forrier, & Sels, 2015).

The extent to which SIE affords older women an opportunity to reflect on, clarify and enact longer term career and life-path goals

"Aging is not lost youth but a new stage of opportunity and strength."

Betty Friedan

Introduction

In the final section of this chapter, I discuss the fourth research question, that is, to explore the extent to which an SIE affords older women an opportunity to reflect on, clarify and enact longer term career and life-path goals. As part of this discussion, I outline some relevant findings to illustrate key issues, and argue that, although SIE afforded participants the opportunity to explore longer term career goals, work was no longer a core aspect of participants' lives after SIE. All participants experienced significant change, suggesting that SIE facilitated the emergence of broader and more holistic life-path goals in which participants dared to live their lives differently.

> *SIE taught me how to live the rest of my life...* (Diana)
>
> *SIE gave me confidence to live my life differently...* (Jenny)
>
> *SIE made me realise how I want to live my life...* (Jo)
>
> *SIE helped me learn that I could choose what I wanted to do...for the first time.* (Lucy)

Readjustment

The return home to New Zealand (repatriation) was not an easy process for many of the participants. On a personal level, many participants struggled to adjust to life in New Zealand. Janet faced major readjustment issues and suffered severe depression for the first time in her life. It took a year for her to fully recover. Susan experienced reverse culture shock in the short-term, while Cheryl also felt disengaged and at odds with how to cope on her return. Both Janet and Cheryl were reluctant to return to New Zealand, and this also adversely impacted on their adjustment.

In contrast, some participants, such as Diana, had a relatively smooth readjustment period. Although SIE was life-changing for all participants, the repatriation process was problematic even for the international aid workers who had been briefed on reverse cultural shock issues (see Table 8). There is substantial literature on issues experienced by traditional expatriates returning home, but there is little research on the self-initiated expatriate's experiences of adjustment, especially the experiences of older women. In

addition, the limited SIE repatriation literature focuses predominantly on professionals and managers (Begley, Collings, & Scullion, 2008; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010).

It is thought that self-initiated expatriates adjust to the host country more readily than the organisational expatriate because they make an autonomous decision to go and are driven by a broader range of work and personal reasons than the organisational expatriate (Doherty et al., 2008; Jokinen et al., 2008; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009; Tharenou & Caulfield, 2010). Conversely, the limited research available suggests that the process of returning home is more difficult for self-initiated expatriates because the SIEs return from a host country where they reported themselves as generally well-adjusted to a home situation where work is not guaranteed and the process of moving is not organisationally managed (Begley et al., 2008). These findings resonate with the findings from this study. Although participants were determined to do what interested and excited them, and had clarified personal values and goals that were the nucleus of their new-found identities, the adjustments on returning home varied considerably. Table 8 outlines the level of difficulty in adjustment experienced by the participants. Assessment of the participants' readjustment difficulties was arrived at by listening to participants' stories, drawing on their discussion with me about the return to New Zealand and from my own observations as they recounted their stories.

Table 8. Difficulties in adjustment on the return home

Significant	Moderate	Limited
Janet	Jo	Diana
Cassie	Susan	Lucy
Gillian	Cheryl	Kerry
Jocelyn	Colleen	Patti
Kathy	Jenny	Penny
Meg	Monica	Sharon
Willa		
Connie		

Long-term career and life-path goals

Some participants such as Diana and Sharon knew what the next step was on returning home. Diana's passion was to live in Thailand and document Asian cuisine and culture. Sharon was committed to following her artistic interests and determined not to compromise the principles of her new life direction, so for the first time in her life she applied for an unemployment benefit, rather than return to her previous finance-related

employment. Neither of these participants were interested in paid work in an organisational context.

Other participants had a clear sense of the principles by which they wished to live but took longer to develop a way of being that was congruent with their values. For example, Cassie was keen to be involved in development activities that she had become committed to while on her SIE. On her return home, she was unable to find meaningful development work and eventually enrolled in a university development studies programme, did voluntary tutor work and embraced the principles of sustainable city living in her daily life. Susan's repatriation trajectory was similar. She had been a senior civil servant before her SIE but was unable to find work on her return. She eventually accepted a short-term PA and administration role, where she answered phones and looked after the stationery cupboard. Susan and her husband were committed to living a 'greener' life and became involved in the Transition Towns movement. Although Susan returned to work, it was undertaken as a short-term stepping stone towards establishing a sustainable lifestyle. Jocelyn's and Kathy's relationships had broken down on their return, and despite the grief surrounding their respective losses, they were very clear about the values that would guide them in shaping their new way of being, and confident that this would develop over time.

At the time of the life story interview, participants were at different stages of fashioning their post-SIE lives, and despite the contrasting patterns of their new lives, they were all committed to living their lives differently from how they had lived before their SIE. Additionally, the participants had constructed a personal framework of values and priorities that formed the core of their new life direction, and while several participants were well advanced in enacting this new way of being, others were in earlier stages of the process. Central to this new way of being was living a meaningful and authentic life, where participants were consciously engaged in "a growing and developing sense of self and awareness of priorities and values." (Cohen, 2014, p. 118) and involvement in paid organisational work was viewed as counter to this intention.

Before the SIE, several participants spoke of their disengagement working in large organisations. After the SIE, organisational work was undertaken by some participants for pragmatic reasons. Some participants completed more than one SIE in order to explore different opportunities and clarify their life direction over a more extended period. For example, on her first SIE, Jenny realised that she may be able to reclaim her dreams of living a sustainable and self-supporting life on the land. However, it took three SIEs for her to develop the confidence and skills to set up an organic lifestyle block of her own.

Gillian also searched for her place in the world through multiple SIEs. Some work undertaken in between SIEs was unfulfilling, but it was a means to an end, that is, to create a foundation to live a more holistic life in the longer term. In Gillian's case, it was also a timely reminder of her disillusionment with organisational practices experienced before SIE. Having tested the organisational waters again on their return, several participants were reminded that this was not how they wanted to live their lives. The culture of organisational downsizing was still active, and participants, such as Cassie, Patti, Connie, Diana and Gillian, felt that organisational roles were too narrow and outcome oriented.

Aligned to this frustration with organisational structures and practices was the participants' desire to work more autonomously and purposefully. Paid work, especially managerial roles in large organisations and corporations that demanded their full commitment, was no longer tenable for many participants. They did not want their lives dominated and controlled by work. Thus, within a neoliberal economic and social context, and at a time of life when participants were no longer responsible for dependents and others, they all overwhelmingly rejected their previous work-centric lives.

Many of the participants had travelled alone during their SIE and were careful in their planning. Roles such as carer, WWOOFer, international volunteer, student, teacher and nurse provided a level of structure and safety for these women to explore their brave new worlds, and in doing so, they became open to new cultures, ideas and experiences. A significant outcome of this was the participants' increasing disillusionment with consumerism, inequalities and climate change issues. As a consequence of this, they desired to live a more simple and sustainable life on their return home. The sense of duty and responsibility that drove these participants for most of their adult lives was replaced with a sense of passion and commitment to their values. When they returned, participants wanted to live their lives on their own terms.

Others, such as Kerry and Thea, returned to New Zealand without any career plans but were immensely enriched by their 10 years of SIE. Kerry wanted to focus on re-establishing herself in a new city community. At 72, she wanted to live a simple life and continue to engage in the cultural pursuits that she had discovered on her SIE. Thea also did not have any career or work plans and concentrated on settling in and supporting her elderly mother. Both Thea and Kerry returned from their SIEs in a much improved financial position compared with when they left. Sadly, Thea was diagnosed with a terminal illness that shaped her life on her return. However, her 10-year SIE working as

a carer for elderly patients and patients with dementia enabled Thea to manage her illness with gratitude, dignity and grace.

The exhilaration of travelling and living among new cultures and developing a greater world view were expected outcomes of SIE (Inkson & Myers, 2003). But participants did not expect the tension and emotional pull back to the foreign places of SIE. While most of the participants remained in New Zealand after their SIE, several participants worked towards dividing their time between New Zealand and overseas. As a result, they developed work projects to support this lifestyle. Some participants have done more than one SIE, while most are engaged in planning for further overseas travel to reconnect with family and friends. SIE had closed one chapter of unfinished business and opened another.

Career: A 'work-centric' construct?

Most career theorists continue to position paid work at the core of the 'career' concept. Arthur, Hall and Lawrence (1989) define career as "the evolving sequence of a person's work experience over time" (p. 8). Sullivan and Baruch (2009) refer to career as an "individual's work related and other relevant experiences…that form a unique pattern over the life-span" (p. 1543). There have been a number of suggestions to broaden this definition (Inkson, 2007; Mirvis & Hall, 1996). Arthur et al. (1999) draw on the concept of job cycles within a bigger career cycle, and Sabelis and Schilling (2013) describe a career as the cycles of a working life that occur as part of a longer term life-cycle. Savickas (2002) also refers to careers as "a mini-cycle of growth, exploration, establishment, management and disengagement" (p. 156), Arthur (2008) suggests a more interdisciplinary approach to understanding careers and Hall (1996) posits the protean career concept as a more holistic concept. He argues that for some career actors, personal values influence the choice of career or work so that individuals choose employment in order to follow a 'path with a heart'.

Savickas (2007) also considers a broader career context using a 'career constructivist' framework that takes account of personal factors and values during career transitions and also looks to Super's (1980) career theory to integrate a life-span perspective with career change. Schein's research (1996) considers the influence of career anchors and is of some relevance to the participants in that lifestyle became very important during the SIE experience. The career concepts of Savickas (2007, 2012), Cohen (2014), Hall (1996) and Schein (1996) resonate with different aspects of the participants' career development and change experiences, yet these concepts still place work at the centre of the definition and

implicitly privilege the more traditional notions of career advancement and success that the participants clearly rejected after their SIE.

The older worker literature is also linked to the retirement discourse and has until recent years, most commonly been presented as a dichotomy, that is, whether to continue or withdraw from paid work. These studies on retirement tend to focus on financial, superannuation, pension and income implications (Inkson et al., 2013b; Richardson, 1993). The retirement literature is also linked to the positive ageing agenda in which older workers are encouraged to return to employment in greater numbers and to stay longer in the workforce (Davey, 2006a, 2006b; Phillipson, 2013; Phillipson & Smith, 2005). This retirement discourse has limited relevance to many of the participants, who withdrew from work for reasons mostly unrelated to economic, pension or income implications and deliberately move to a more impoverished or financially insecure state.

Recently, there has been a developing interest in understanding the changing nature of retirement (Loretto, 2010; Phillipson, 2013; Sargent et al., 2012; Schultz &, 2011), its gendered context (Loretto & Vickerstaff, 2013) and changing identities that signify the transition (Sargent, Bataille, Vough, & Lee, 2011). This development has somewhat widened the discussion on the meaning of retirement, suggesting that gender is a relevant and determining factor, implying that it is time to consider the increasingly diverse pathways people follow in later life (van der Heijden et al., 2008). Despite these suggestions the literature remains centred on issues relating to careers and longer working lives, but this research signals a move towards recognising that for some older women, such as these participants, this later-life stage is not so much about traditional perceptions about career or work success, but more about reclaiming oneself and meaningful life direction.

Part of the extended careers discourse is the suggestion by Inkson et al. (2013b) of four new models of later-life employment: phased retirement, bridge employment, self-employment and encore careers. The first three are more reminiscent of traditional careers in that the models are embedded in the work literature. The fourth model, the 'encore career', has relevance to the participants' SIE development in that an encore career is about re-engagement and the desire to make a contribution to others. Inkson et al. (2013b) also include paid and unpaid work in their discussion; however, the notion of work remains central, with calls to organisations and government to formulate policies and practices to value and retain older workers. The pre-SIE organisational experience and reality for the women in this study was unsatisfactory. They did not feel nurtured, valued

or challenged in organisations that seemed to lack a soul (Rozul, 2014); rather, SIE was a search for something that seemed to be missing in their lives (De Botton, 2002).

Women's careers tend to follow a non-linear pattern metaphorically represented as patchwork (Collin, 2007), entangled strands (Lee et al., 2011), frayed (Sabelis & Schilling, 2013) and kaleidoscope (Maniero & Sullivan, 2005). Yet analyses of such non-traditional careers have tended to focus on positive outcomes (Sullivan & Baruch, 2009), which are then benchmarked to a more linear and male career pattern. Additionally, the narratives of those who withdraw from work such as these participants are often lost in the research process. These absences are framed as career gaps, that is, 'opting out' (Cabrera, 2007), in career models in which life appears to be centred in and legitimised by paid work. While career theory (including women's career theory) has recognised the importance of the individual's personal life and professional/work life within the life-course (Bailyn, 2004; Cohen, 2014), the 'personal' tends to operate as a default position whereby personal needs and actions circle around and accommodate the more dominant discourse of work. Within a neoliberal economic and organisational context, the precariousness of work exacerbates 'work' as the raison d'être of everyday life and a major source of individual identity and self-worth.

At this later-life stage, 'career' signified a narrow and dominating work construct that was increasingly irrelevant. Participants were far more engaged in enacting a 'coreer', a life-path of individual interest, excitement and passion centred around a core set of values and priorities, that informed and infused the participants' activities and commitments. The gendered nature of this SIE study suggests that for these older women, SIE is an unfolding process through time, a search for belonging, relationships, connections (Lips-Wiersma, 2002) and a new way of being in a different type of postwork society (Weeks, 2011).

Towards a holistic understanding of 'transition' and 'career'

This study of older New Zealand women on SIE draws primarily on the careers, self-initiated expatriation and older worker literatures to better understand the influences of SIE on individual women's lives. While the literatures provide a framework for understanding some aspects of these women's lives, the transitions sparked through SIE suggest other dimensions are also needed.

Within women's careers and older worker literature, SIE and, in particular, the SIEs of older women remain invisible and under-researched (Doherty et al., 2013b). A wider

range of literatures across and beyond older workers and careers is needed to explore this SIE phenomenon, as a transition in a context of life-span development, recognising the increasing diversity of experiences in older age (Myers, 2011; O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005; van der Heijden et al., 2008; Vickerstaff, 2010).

Career theorists Gunz, Peiperl and Tzabbar (2007) discuss the process and sense making of transitions and boundaries in that people may choose to make changes but they are not always aware of the boundaries they challenge and the changes they set in motion. In the book *Anam Cara* (O'Donohue, 1997), enacting change is described as a journey 'off the beaten path' that does not always seem rational. O'Donohue's reference to trusting this indirect, oblique side of the self resonates with the SIE stories in this research. These women are following a path that seems at odds with a mainstream employment work-centred discourse dominating much career theory and practice and supporting social and economic policies which take on a specific value set under conditions of intensifying neoliberal ideals.

Self-initiated expatriation for these older women was about freedom, escape and adventure on one level, but at a deeper and more introspective level, it was also about letting go and learning to take risks. Morris and O'Connor (2002) write that women move through the world differently than men, addressing different constraints, dangers and emotions. Gender differences in attitudes to risk appear early in life (Myers & Pringle, 2005). Women are socialised to be more risk-averse (Byrnes, Miller, & Schafer, 1999) in many situations, although they are more likely to take risks in relationships and social situations than their male counterparts (Weber, Blais, & Betz, 2002). To further understand the SIE journey of these participants, I also look to other literatures to better understand the nuances of this later-life transition. While gender is considered in the literature on women's careers, the gender literature also provides a rich body of knowledge to draw on when researching in a non-work paradigm.

From the field of health and nursing literature, the concept of humanbecoming (Parse, 2007) offers another lens to understand the SIE phenomenon. Humanbecoming, with its three main themes of meaning, rhythmicity and transcendence, builds on the work of van Gennep (1960) and places an individual's perception of a 'quality life' at the centre of the transition process. In the health context, health professionals facilitate a process of recovery and self-determination whereby patients constructs their own health pathway consistent with their individual concept of quality of life. In a similar fashion, the participants in my study engaged in a journey of self-expression and self-actualisation

(Fehr, 2012) as they started to clarify and live their values in a chosen way. While on SIE, the women moved through the ups and downs of a daily life that was very different from their pre-SIE lives. In the process, they started to self-manage a new way of being.

'Possible selves' – pictures of how one might be in the future (Frazier et al., 2000) – is another theory that may provide some insights into the participants' SIEs. The literature of possible selves has been drawn on to explore a range of transitional issues. For example, Frazier et al. (2000) and Ryff (1991) examine 'successful ageing' by linking ageing literature with the older person's sense of self. Muñoz Larroa (2013), in a study on juvenile offenders, looks to the possible selves literature as a framework for young offenders to visualise other ways of living. Identity work (Ibarra, 1999, 2002) is another point of entry for considering transition and change, and the use of self-narrative is particularly appropriate for individuals to make sense of transitional experiences and consider possibilities (Ibarra, 2002; McAdams & Logan, 2006). Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) emphasise the importance of re-storying one's work and life: "to reinvent oneself is to rework one's story" (p. 47). While their focus is on career change within a work context, the concept seems potentially useful to understand the participants' broader life transitions.

The literature on wellbeing is also of interest in understanding the process and outcomes of this older SIE. The concept of 'wellbeing' is underpinned by a general acceptance that achieving personal meaning is more than just striving to achieve contentment or happiness (Ryan & Deci, 2001). Understanding what is most meaningful is integral to the life-span literature and is particularly associated with life transitions. Older women have a strong need to establish psychological wellbeing (Alleyne, 2008), and along with the concepts of flourishing (Haybron, 2008) and eudaimonia (happiness and human flourishing) (Ryff & Singer, 2006), it is argued that wellbeing is achieved when individuals are able to live their lives in accordance with their true self. The stories of the older women in this research suggest that their search is to discover a more authentic self (Maniero & Sullivan, 2005) in the face of a dominant discourse that emphasises continued employment, economic rationality and economic wellbeing.

Narrative processing of challenging life experiences can also trigger personal growth and wellbeing (Frank, 1995; Mansfield, McLean, & Lilgendahl, 2010). McAdams and Logan (2006) argue that "people find meaning and purpose in their lives through the construction, internalization, and constant revision of life narratives" (p. 106). Tams and Marshall (2011, p. 122) suggest that 'biographical reflexivity' enables one to reflect on

and learn from past situations, while Langelier (2001) suggests that damaged and aggrieved individuals can actually "get a life by telling and writing their stories" (p. 700). Several participants experienced degrees of trauma, distress and depression in their lives. SIE created possibilities and facilitated significant individual change, and in recounting their stories, these participants were able to convey, that for them, SIE was a healing and redemptive process.

Spirituality or spirituality at work, living and working according to an individual's fundamental personal beliefs (Lips-Wiersma, 2002; Lips-Wiersma & Mills, 2002) is another reference point from which to consider the outcomes of SIE. In a global and mobile world, transience has disrupted enduring connections with churches, community organisations and personal networks so that individuals look to other ways to seek meaning and fulfilment. Conger (1994) and Ray (1986) suggest that organisations are increasingly looked at to address this issue and provide meaningful work. However, in the current neoliberal work context, commitment and trust between employer and employee is often undermined by ongoing restructuring and organisational change programmes. Thus, Lips-Wiersma (2002) suggests that negative organisational climates "create a hunger for a deeper meaning of life, a need for finding an anchor and a desire for greater integration of the spiritual and work identities" (p. 387). In her study of the career concerns of spiritually oriented people, Lips-Wiersma confirmed that spirituality influences an individual's work behaviour, and if the spiritual needs of an employee are not being met in organisations, they will often transition to another career. In my study, it could be argued that for a few participants, an extended period of working in organisations lacking acceptable values and a sense of soul (Rozul, 2014) contributed to their disengagement and their search for meaning outside the established world of work.

Spirituality at work is also linked to authentic purpose, "the quality of being determined to do or achieve an end" (Keyes, 2011, p. 281). The author suggests that the 21st century presents great challenges due to the 'unscripting' of traditional social patterns in the last years of the 20th century, thereby causing increasing uncertainty and anxiety. Keyes's suggestion that authentic purpose is strongest in the life stage of the young adult and declines thereafter is of interest because it reflects some of the earlier life-stage literature (Super, 1957, 1980) but is inconsistent with the findings in my study. Authentic purpose is an important element within the participants' SIE. As participants deconstructed and reconstructed their lives throughout the extended SIE process, the spirituality lens, which encompasses the inner life, meaningful work, authentic purpose and community (Hudson,

2014), offers yet another frame of reference to examine this multifaceted SIE phenomenon.

Chapter 7: Conclusions

"The privilege of a lifetime is to become who you truly are."

C.G. Jung.

Introduction

This final chapter contains an overview of the research study, including a review of significant research findings. It integrates relevant literature, in relation to the research objectives. It presents the contributions to theory and policy and the implications of the research study, the limitations of the research study and concludes with suggestions for future research.

Research summary

The aim of this research was to explore the experiences of 21 older New Zealand women who withdrew from their established personal and working lives to undertake SIE, a period of extended travel and work overseas (Suutari & Brewster, 2000). More specifically, this thesis seeks:

- to develop an understanding of the motivations, experiences, and triggers for older women in the pre-SIE decision-making process;

- to develop an understanding of the SIE experience;

- to explore the extent to which an SIE affords older women an opportunity for career and personal development;

- to explore the extent to which an SIE affords older women an opportunity to reflect on, clarify and enact longer term career and life-path goals.

The research methodology is underpinned by subjectivism which is consistent with my interpretivist and relativist world view (Lincoln et al., 2011). I identified narrative inquiry, and within this paradigm, the life story, as the appropriate methodological framework to explore the individuals' motivations. As a research methodology, the life story is respectful of the viewpoint of the participant and gives a voice to the unknown and unexamined, and space and credibility to stories, reflections and insights not previously documented or understood (Atkinson, 2007).

Pre-SIE motivations, experiences, and triggers

Participants were variously motivated to go on an SIE. Important demotivators for career continuance were disenchantment with current work situations, organisational politics, the lack of suitable work opportunities and the perceived dominance of work in their lives. Yet participants were not excited or attracted to do an SIE to further their career aspirations overseas, even though this was an unexpected career outcome for some, especially the 'internationalists'. In a personal context, participants were keen to escape social and family roles and responsibilities that had defined and tied them for 30 years or more (Sargent et al., 2012). However, more importantly, participants were at time in their life when they wanted to challenge themselves and have an adventure. In all cases, a significant life occurrence had moved the participant onto the SIE trajectory, but the actual SIE was not undertaken until they were free from various personal responsibilities. Thus, turning points and timing also played an important part in the SIE decision-making process.

SIE was not motivated by the need to just have 'time out' or a sabbatical (Maniero & Sullivan, 2005; O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005). Nor did it represent a decision to retire. Rather, it was a fundamental break with their existing work–life configuration. Participants were no longer prepared to compromise. They were tired of fitting their lives around their work and frustrated with having to fit increasingly meaningless work into their lives.

The majority of SIE studies cover a range of age cohorts, although older workers and particularly older women receive limited attention. The extant SIE literature suggests that understanding of SIE motivations is fragmented, with research indicating that SIEs are undertaken for both work and personal reasons (Doherty & Dickmann, 2013; Doherty et al., 2011). While work remains the central focus of the literature, it is acknowledged that numerous factors contribute to the participant's SIE decision and Thorn (2009, p. 454) argues that "the relative importance of motives will vary depending on age, gender and life stage".

This study gives a more in-depth understanding of the complex interplay of factors motivating older women to undertake SIE. The participants were motivated by significant negative career push factors that alienated them from their careers and some negative personal push factors representing life events that they wished to put behind them. However, they were motivated more substantially by positive personal pull factors that enticed them into a brave new world. They were at a unique time of life and were

brokering a different way of being in an age of new possibilities, and starting to privilege their personal lives over their working lives.

SIE experiences and development

In the SIE literature, there is limited discussion of actual career experiences during SIE and even less on personal experiences. Instead, the majority of studies focus on SIE motivations and career development. Individuals in these studies generally came from professional and managerial occupations (Al Ariss & Crowley-Henry, 2013; Tharenou, 2009) moving 'from' and 'to' first world countries (Doherty et al., 2013b). The participants in my research constitute an SIE subgroup that has not been identified and documented in SIE research to date. Only eight of the 21 participants in this study were in professional or managerial roles during SIE and just under half of the participants were based in non-English-speaking developing countries. Fewer participants worked in professional and managerial roles during their SIE than before their SIEs. This reduction in 'professional and managerial' numbers could be perceived as participants being underemployed during the SIE (Doherty, 2013; Inkson et al., 1997). Additionally, the return of participants in this study to more gender-stereotyped roles such as caring reflected the need for a more relational way of being and a greater level of personal autonomy in work situations.

The personal experiences of participants were dominated by diverse national and international travel experiences, which were undertaken for a variety of reasons. When participants were asked about individual SIE highlights, their first responses typically identified travel experiences that gave insight into history and cultures. Especially important for some participants was the opportunity to go to the theatre, art galleries, museums and concerts. However, in their comments they invariably returned to the people they met or the relationships they forged and continued to nurture from halfway around the world several years later. The quality and depth of the connections made across national boundaries and cultures remained an enduring and distinctive feature of the participants' SIEs.

Although all participants were motivated to undertake SIE for overwhelmingly personal reasons, as a result of the SIE they accrued major career capital inadvertently and fortuitously. This phenomenon was in contrast to the development literature on assigned expatriation and SIE that suggests that individuals act as career capitalists throughout the expatriation process (Dickmann & Doherty, 2010). Thus, it would seem that when individuals such as the participants in this research study undertake an SIE triggered by

major career and life disjuncture, and characterised by working and living in very different and challenging cultural contexts (Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985, 1986), the experiential learning and career success they experience, although unexpected, is significant.

Participants also experienced considerable personal development outside of their SIE work roles; thus relevant SIE literature which focusses on the work context, cannot fully account for the level of change that occurred in the participants' whole lives during SIE. Work and personal SIE experiences triggered extensive and largely unexpected career and personal development, and while separate tables in the previous chapter document this career and personal development, both work and personal experiences created cross-contextual opportunities to develop participants' various life skills. Most of the participants moved away from a traditional and work-centric notion of career, and as their values and attitudes changed, so too did their 'career imaginings' (Cohen, 2014) and their sense of self and identity. As the SIE came to a close, the participants were more focused on 'how best to live their life' than on 'how to develop their career'.

Longer term career and life-path goals

Despite the many challenges encountered by participants on their meandering paths they were overwhelmingly positive about the impact of SIE on their later life direction. Following SIE their lives are not perfect but they experienced less angst, less looking back, and an acceptance of living in the present while welcoming the future. There is a stronger sense of self, of belonging, of knowing one's place in the wider world; and a desire to live a more simple, uncluttered and sustainable life. Participants are generally more confident, resilient and at peace with themselves. They are not always content but believe that they are more energised and engaged with life than before their SIE.

In this study, the participants' act of working was the central core around which their lives revolved pre-SIE. During and after their SIE, participants began to construct and shape a life-path that was based on a core of evolving individual values. Although participants experienced career development, longer term career and work-related goals were a low priority for the participants on their return home. It was as if their notion of career as a way of defining themselves was no longer relevant, and the need to become connected, to belong and to engage in a broader and more integrated life was more important.

Conclusion

SIE has undoubtedly facilitated the participants' career development and growth. However the work-centric focus of the literatures on 'careers, SIE and older workers' does not fully account for the radical changes in participants' attitudes to work, and to paid work in particular. Women's career theory addresses aspects of the participants' career development, but it does not account for the major changes in life direction enacted as a result of SIE.

At the outset of this SIE study, the literatures on careers, SIE and older workers marked my research boundaries. As the research unfolded, the boundaries became like a prism that separates white light into a spectrum of colours. From monochromatic pre-SIE lives, participants undertook an SIE that released a new world of iridescent colours. Thus, a stream of literatures across diverse disciplines, including (but not exclusive to) qualitative methodologies, sociology, psychology, spirituality at work, organisational studies, health, gender, adult development, feminist politics and economics, are potentially relevant to examine the complexity and context of the SIE phenomenon. SIE was a transformative process, and as participants moved into the uncharted territories of later life, their experience was one of holistic development and generativity.

Contributions to theory and implications of this thesis

An interdisciplinary and holistic approach to understanding SIE, careers and the older worker

Within a range of alternatives, some older women are choosing to abandon a normative and continuous masculine career trajectory. I argue that no one literature is likely to provide an adequate framework for understanding this SIE phenomenon. While the SIE, careers and older worker literatures offer considerable insights into this issue, it is also important not to lose sight of the 21 individuals in this study who undertook a unique journey literally and metaphorically within their own historical, demographic, social and economic context. The mapping out of individual SIE experiences makes it clear that participants crossed boundaries that went beyond the physical and psychological. Thus the experiences recounted by the women in this research study highlight the limited work-centric nature of existing SIE, careers and older worker theory.

Although there is increasing diversity and heterogeneity within the SIE nomenclature (Brewster et al., 2014; Shaffer et al., 2012), research studies continue to focus in the main on professionals and their careers (Doherty et al., 2013a) and give limited cognisance to

matters of personal development and age. I concur with Doherty, Richardson, and Thorn's (2013a) call for "greater empirical diversity" in SIE research (p. 6). This study responds to this call by using a narrative inquiry approach to explore SIE experiences. This study also contributes to the SIE literature by suggesting that older, female and non-professional SIEs are a valid SIE subgroup, and in order to understand the motivations, experiences and outcomes of this subgroup, I argue that researchers connect not only with "the study of SIE to contemporary career theory" (Doherty et al., 2013a, p. 7) but also with a broader range of theories that take the discussion beyond a work-centric focus.

Similarly, in the older worker literature, the dominant discourse is that employers will increasingly need to seek to employ older workers to address labour and skill shortages in a period of extended careers (Davy, 2006b; Inkson et al., 2013; Post et al., 2013) though this notion is contradicted by those who believe there to be a dearth of jobs – and that as many jobs as possible, need to go to youth. Current studies on extended careers continue to emphasise the centrality of work in the decision-making process. I contend that researchers should consider drawing from other literatures that enable an exploration of the more complex individual paths that people follow as they age (Han & Moen, 1999; O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005).

Women's careers are depicted as following a non-linear pattern, metaphorically described as patchwork (Collin, 2007), entangled strands (Lee et al., 2011), frayed (Sabelis & Schilling, 2013) and kaleidoscope (Maniero & Sullivan, 2005). I agree with Collin's (2007) call for a broader conceptualisation of career theory that recognises that careers have a tapestry of meanings that interweave and overlap. I argue that in order to make sense of SIE, researchers need to draw on multiple disciplines. I argue for an interdisciplinary approach to provide a more holistic framework to study these older women who appear to be out of 'sync' with traditional life and work expectations (Arthur, 2008; 2014; Collin, 2007; Kharpova & Arthur, 2011; Myers, 2011).

While age and gender remain under-researched (Irni, 2009; Sullivan & Baruch, 2009; van der Heijden et al., 2008), there is a particularly limited understanding of older women's careers, the significance of the turning points and timing of their life transitions (Bailyn, 2004; Sabelis & Schilling, 2010) and their search for identity (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010), meaning and wellbeing (Ryan & Deci, 2001). This research, by studying women's experiences outside the usual structures of work and life, contributes to understanding of the intersections of age and gender.

A postwork way of being

In her book *The Problem with Work*, Weeks (2011) suggests that not enough attention is being given to society's acceptance of paid work as the main source of revenue and individual identity. She discusses how Marxism and feminism, by advocating equal pay and improved working environments, have also contributed to society's acceptance of paid work as the central premise of human endeavour and questions why work is privileged over other "pastimes and practices" (Weeks, 2011, p. 2). The life transitions of participants in this study appear to resonate with Weeks's (2011) vision of a postwork society, that is, one where individuals continue to be engaged but are no longer tethered to traditional employment relationships. In his review of Week's book, Antonio Negri (as cited in Weeks, 2011) endorses the emerging critique of work as the dominant life force and suggests that "the project to build a postwork society is a feminist project, one that understands that the real liberation of labour must be the liberation from labour" (Weeks, 2011, back cover).

A postwork way of being also offers a more holistic counter to the positive ageing strategies of the New Zealand government, with its emphasis on "valuing self-reliance independence, individual responsibility" (Davey & Glasgow, 2006, p. 25). While the rhetoric of positive ageing argues that older people may choose the way in which they contribute, the strategy overemphasises work, extended careers and economic growth at the expense of a more holistic lifestyle. The strategy also assumes that individuals are responsible for their health and wellbeing and does not accommodate the range of economic and health contexts that individuals may experience in later life. For example, in this research study, one participant was diagnosed with a terminal illness and another two faced serious health issues on their return to New Zealand. Yet the participants faced these issues with remarkable resilience and equanimity. Although their health was poor, they remained positive and engaged, and lived a constructive and meaningful life outside the structures of work.

While Weeks (2011) raises the notion of a postwork society, she also highlights the difficulties of presenting an alternative way of being. This research contributes to the emerging discussion on a postwork society. The participants in this study have deconstructed and reconstructed their lives and, in doing so, have released themselves from the centrality of work in their lives. While they have enacted this period of transition and change on an individual basis, at a collective level they present a valid postwork way

of being as courageous pioneers acting against the dominant discourse that privileges work and extended careers.

Women's space in the adult development literature

The life-span literature encompasses life-stage and life-course theory. Whereas the former suggests that individuals pass through specific life stages, the latter suggests that individual development is shaped by social contexts (Bailyn, 2004; Cohen, 2014). This study draws on both life-stage and life-course theory, including the work of Gassett (as cited in Levinson & Levinson, 1996) and suggests that, given the unique historical and social context of these baby boomer participants, their "broad life context" (Lee et al., 2011, p. 4) will be different from those of other generations. Gilligan (1982), Levinson and Levinson (1996), and Lee et al. (2011) suggested that life-span, life-course and adult development literature has neglected the voice of women, although, as discussed earlier, women's careers literature has addressed aspects of this. Although the findings from this research reflect the reality of 21 diverse individuals and are not generalisable across the population, this research contributes to the adult development literature at two levels.

Firstly, demographic changes have resulted in longer lives. Significant growth and development underpinned the participants' activity of living and working overseas. I contend that by looking at the life-courses of these participants (Loretto & Vickerstaff, 2015; Parker, Kharpova, & Arthur, 2009), this research illuminates a new stage for these older persons and confirms that development and change can continue in later life (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010; McAdams, Josselson, & Lieblich, 2006), beyond Super's (1957, 1980) suggested age of disengagement at 64 years. For the participants, this new stage has not been one of reclaiming lost youth, nor is it about acting younger, looking younger, or the populist discourse of 60 as the new 50. Rather, it is a stage about engagement, generativity and authenticity in which age as a traditional chronological benchmark has been discarded. It is not a pursuit of permanent personhood, but more about establishing a meaningful life-path, recognising that eventually there will be a meaningful decline (Lamb, 2014).

Secondly, this research contributes to the adult development literature by giving voice to a 'unique' yet 'diverse' women's way of being in this new stage of life. The participants in this research found that by leaving established work and domestic situations, they were free to enact significant change. In particular, their need to belong, to redefine their family relationships, to reprioritise their values and to live their life differently was facilitated by the SIE. During this process of transition and change, the participants began to interact in

a more relational, connected and empathetic way of being (Gallos, 1989; Pringle & McCulloch Dixon, 2003; Umberson et al., 1996).

Methodological contribution. Narrative analysis: Achieving narrative integrity through a 'cycle of storying'

It is well-documented that there are a diversity and complexity of approaches in the field of narrative inquiry (Clandinin, 2007; Pinnegar & Daynes, 2007; Spector-Mersel, 2010) and in the process of narrative analysis (Mishler, 1995). Without any clear models of narrative analysis (Bold, 2012), I read widely and became increasingly aware of my wish to preserve the integrity of 'narrative' throughout the whole research process.

I also rejected the development of general themes as the sole means of presenting and discussing data, as it seemed more appropriate in a post-positivist paradigm than in an interpretive paradigm. At the same time, I became aware of the power of the life story. In order to privilege the individual voice as well as examine the more collective processes of the participants' transition and change as per the research questions, I developed a five-step framework for the analysis, presentation and discussion of data in a cycle of storying and re-storying. Please refer to Chapter 5 for a more detailed account of this framework.

This research contributes to the field of narrative inquiry theory through the development of a cycle of storying not only to analyse qualitative data but also for the purposes of presentation and discussion. The process starts with the presentation of individual interpretive stories and concludes with the personal experience story, thus establishing narrative integrity in a cycle of storying and re-storying.

Contributions to policy and implications of this thesis

Employers: Engaging older workers

The dominant discourse in the literature on the older worker is that of managing and retaining older workers in a context of demographic change and extended careers (Callister, 2014; Conen, Henkens, & Schippers, 2011, 2012). The older worker literature has problematised the issue (Tikkanen, 2011) or aggregated it as a management issue or challenge that appears to take limited cognisance of the fact that as individuals age, their pathways are more diverse (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005) and "may mean very different things for women and for men" (Loretto & Vickerstaff, 2013, p. 65).

New Zealand workforce participation rates for older workers are at the upper levels of the OECD countries (Jackson, Cochrane, & McMillan, 2013). In particular, there has been

steady growth in employment rates for older women, resulting in New Zealand ranking high in women's participation rates compared with other OECD countries. The emphasis on New Zealand's successful retention of older workers, especially older women, has embedded a positive discourse into older worker discussions, with debate mostly focused at the macro level, that is, on government and/or employer perspectives (EEO Trust, 2006, 2012a) and employment trends (Callister, 2014; MSD, 2011, 2013). For example, there is discussion on New Zealand's positive ageing strategy (Davey & Glasgow, 2006), employment versus retirement (Hurnard, 2005; McGregor & Gray, 2003), the economic rationale of retraining or upskilling older workers (Thomson, 1999), age management (McDermott, Kazi, Munir, & Haslam, 2010; Walker, 2005) and organisational practices (Tikkanen, 2011). Although there is some discussion of older workers from the employee perspective (Davey, 2006b; EEO Trust, 2006), this literature is limited.

This research study makes a unique contribution to the older worker discourse by developing a holistic framework that integrates personal and work contexts to identify factors that were most influential in participants' decision to leave the organisation and undertake an SIE. It is also relevant to employers that participants were motivated by significant negative career push factors that alienated them from their work and careers. Although there were some negative personal push factors that participants wished to put behind them, work factors and work environments were key negative influences. These findings are especially important as they capture the previously 'silenced' voice of those who have already exited from formal work structures.

The individual stories of these older workers are a timely reminder to employers that beneath the veneer of 'collective, older worker HR and management practices', all is not well. The return to work after SIE was extremely difficult for those participants who sought paid work, suggesting that employer initiatives for older workers are limited to retention rather than recruitment strategies (Conen et al., 2012), thus disadvantaging those that choose to take a work break. Unlike younger persons whose SIEs are now generally accepted and encouraged by many employers, the experiences of these older participants seeking re-employment were mostly negative, reflecting unsupportive work processes and environments (Mountford, 2013), and a "declining organizational commitment" towards older workers (White, 2012, p. 447).

Cognisant of earlier discussion that posited a new stage in adult development theory for these participants, this research study also contributes to the older worker discourse by drawing employers' attention to this new stage. The participants' transition from one

stage to the next has been transformative. Most participants chose not to return to formal organisational work for a variety of reasons, including the organisation's or employer's lack of attention to participants' individual needs. In particular, the participants who had previously worked in, or reapplied to, publicly funded organisations (public service, health, education), were dismayed by the level of monitoring and assessment they were subjected to in the workplace. All participants returned to New Zealand intent on pursuing a holistic life-path, and for many, this appeared to be at odds with neoliberal, work-centric organisations and the government's positive ageing strategy that privileges the role of paid work (Davy & Glasgow, 2006) and overemphasises the role of individual agency in an economic context in later life.

This research confirms that the participants want to live their lives differently and contributes to the older worker discourse by encouraging organisations to embrace a myriad of individual 'older' employee pathways, in a spirit of employer–employee reciprocity. These participants wish to be valued and respected in any potential work context; they seek flexibility and autonomy and have variable individual work goals. They will not return to the workplace to be measured and managed, but they are more likely to participate if they are respected and engaged (Vasconcelos, 2015).

Limitations of the research

Findings and insights gleaned from this exploratory research are the result of an interpretive research process and as such contribute to theory building but are not intended to be generalisable across the SIE population (Crotty, 1998; Denzin & Lincoln, 2011a).

Life story interviews are a rich source of data, but it is important to note that these interviews were carried out at a fixed point in time, and this point was different for every participant. Thus, some participants were recently returned and in the early stages of shaping their lives, whereas others had been back for a longer period and were generally more established. Readers of this research must be cautious not to attribute individual experiences across the all the narratives.

This SIE research is also located in a unique social and economic context, with participants who lived in New Zealand before the SIE. Participants were also from professional and non-professional backgrounds. These factors alone distinguish the research from other SIE, careers and older worker research studies, and care must be taken when applying these insights to research from other countries. It is also noteworthy that this study was on older women, so insights can also not be applied to older men who may

undertake a SIE. Additionally it is acknowledged that the participants, by withdrawing voluntarily from the workplace before their SIE, are a biased sample.

While the sampling process drew on selection and snowballing, there were some limitations in these processes. Firstly, the sample draws on women who have returned to New Zealand. It does not draw on those who have not returned. Earlier research on younger people going on an SIE suggests that there may be others who have not returned, but have instead remained overseas for an extended period: this may also apply to the older age group. Secondly, a snowball sample is potentially limited to established groups and networks of friends and colleagues, with the likely result of a pool of participants with similar backgrounds and experiences (Inkson & Myers, 2003). Despite my efforts to network across several communities with the intention of establishing a more diverse sample, the sample comprised of white, heterosexual women. As the sample size was up to 21 women, I took particular care to limit each contact to one or two participants. One way to do this was to draw on contacts from different regions in New Zealand in an effort to widen the sample pool in terms of participants' background and experience. Thirdly the sample comprised of older women who were overall extremely positive about their SIE despite some challenges and difficulties faced during the SIE. The sample did not contain any participants who may have had a negative SIE, thus it is possible that only those with a positive experience volunteered to be part of this research study.

Future research

Towards a more interdisciplinary and holistic approach to understanding SIE, careers and the older worker

This research studied the SIE, careers, work and non-work experiences of older women outside the usual structures of work and life. During this process, I concluded that the work-centric nature of the literature provided a limited framework to understand the experiences and impact of the participants' SIE. In order to develop a better understanding of the career/work and personal nexus of older persons and the tensions and contradictions that they experience, I recommend that future research on older people draws on a wider range of literatures that open up discussions of a more holistic nature. This is especially important when researching the older population, given the diversity of their individual pathways (O'Neil & Bilimoria, 2005).

In addition, I recommend that research on SIE, careers and the older worker requires not only more empirical diversity (Doherty et al., 2013a) but also for researchers to embrace

research strategies outside of their comfort zones (Sargent et al., 2013) in order to develop a range of approaches to identify, explore and address the complex and critical issues facing 'older' people.

A life-stage, life-course and longitudinal approach to 'older' research

In recent years, the older worker literature has increasingly adopted a life-course and life-stage perspective in research studies (Lewis & Ryan, 2014; Loretto & Vickerstaff, 2015; White, 2012). However, this is less evident in the SIE and careers literature (Lee et al., 2011) although some stage frameworks denoting 'cycles of change' have been considered within the protean and boundaryless career models (Reitmann & Schneer, 2008; Sullivan, 1999).

The participants in this research study have demonstrated that the transition and change resulting from their SIE was an evolving process and was enacted in a very different context from that of previous career and life changes. Additionally, the participants' life stories had an artificial end point in this research. Yet demographic trends and predictions of life expectancy at 82.4 years for women (MSD, 2010) suggest that participants may live for many more years and will continue to experience change. Thus, research that adopts a life-stage, life-course or longitudinal approach will be well placed to capture the ebbs and flows of the complex pathways and contexts of individuals and groups as they age (Han & Moen, 1999; Walker, 2006).

Towards a postwork society

Much research on ageing, work and careers centres on the term retirement. Positive ageing (Davy & Glasgow, 2006) and successful ageing (Robson, Hansson, Abalos, & Booth, 2006) are also government and organisational strategies aimed at facilitating productive ageing in the workplace and society. The terms 'positive ageing' and 'successful ageing' are dichotomous in that they imply either positive or negative ageing, and successful or unsuccessful ageing. Retirement, positive ageing and successful ageing also reflect the prevailing neoliberal context of individual responsibility, economic growth and rationality.

While Sargent et al. (2013) argue that there is a lack of understanding of retirement pathways, I would argue more broadly that there is a lack of understanding of the differences and nature of present and potential later life pathways. The participants in this research reflect a different way of being that is no longer tied to or centred around an economic model. There needs to be further research on how later life pathways and

identities of individuals and cohorts evolve and change. Research also needs to be inclusive of diverse cultures, those who engage in unpaid work, those who do not work, and those who are ill or marginalised in some way. A postwork society is by implication inclusive of all older people who no longer hold paid work as a central point in their lives and no longer define themselves by work roles and responsibilities (Weeks, 2011).

Older worker, careers and SIE research

This research study identified a number of tipping points that resulted in the participants leaving formal paid work positions. Cognisant of suggestions for future research stated above, I also suggest further research into the factors that push older people out of work or encourage them to stay. While the older worker literature covers professional and non-professional workers, I suggest that SIE research, which until now has focused mainly on professionals, also consider non-professionals and older SIE cohorts. Similarly I recommend that careers research broaden its research focus to include more non-professional and older cohorts (Pringle & Mallon, 2003).

The incidence of older people undertaking unpaid work in New Zealand is acknowledged in the literature (Callister, 2014), but there is a more limited understanding of the relationships between participation in paid work vis-à-vis unpaid work (Davy, 2006b). Given the large amount of unpaid work that participants in this research study engaged in, further research into the role, reasons and nature of unpaid work in older age is suggested.

Age and gender

The women in this research study were born in the 1940s and 1950s. Their lives have been impacted and shaped by a gendered life-course (Loretto & Vickerstaff, 2013, 2015). With longer life expectancy and a prevailing discourse of extended working lives, it is reasonable to expect that women's later life experiences will continue to be impacted by gendered experiences. I suggest further research in SIE and careers, both inside and outside the bounded structures of work and life, incorporating intersections of age and gender, to better understand older women's later life pathways.

Conclusion

In the introductory section I asked the questions: What is the impetus for SIE? What SIE experiences do these older women have and how does SIE contribute to personal and career development and later life direction? This research study provides evidence that

for older women SIE signals stepping outside of the rational and linear in a search for personal meaning. The process need not be conscious. It may be manifest as an itch to follow, an unsettling of certainty or a shaking up of an ordered life. I argue that for the older women in this study, SIE is a catalyst for meaningful life transitions and the enactment of a more authentic lifestyle, however defined. It is a time for refocus, renewal and rejuvenation, symbolising a significant shift in 'ways of being' where the new 'retirement' has become 'rewirement'.

Afterword

The personal experience story

I chose the name 'Mary' for the central character of the personal experience story. Mary was one of the most popular girls' names in New Zealand in the 1950s. Mary is not one single participant from the SIE sample. She is part of every participant's story. She is also part of me. She is my mother, she is my friend, she is my sister, my colleague and my professor. She is a girl born in New Zealand in the 1950s, and when Mary was in her fifties, she chose to undertake an SIE, a period of travel and work overseas, which resulted in a significant and positive change in her later-life direction.

Mary

Mary was the youngest of three children. Looking back, she might have expected to be cosseted and cherished – it was the 1950s, after all – but it was not quite like that. She was happy enough. Mary had two older brothers; the eldest was a beacon of light to his parents, and the second was a quieter boy. Sometimes Mary stayed with her grandparents, usually when her father was 'poorly'. Mary adored her Nana Kate and loved helping her in the garden.

When she was 10, Nana Kate died and Mary was heartbroken. Her brothers filled the house up with their gear and their noise, and when they were at Saturday sport, Mary helped her mother. Mary wasn't interested in sport, but her friend was in a marching team and Mary desperately wanted to join. However, her father was adamant that no daughter of his was going to be a marching girl!

Life improved for Mary at secondary school. When she took her first report home, her mother said, "I am very proud of you". Even her father huffed and puffed approvingly. But when she was in the sixth form, her father suggested she apply for a bank job. Mary was distraught, so to keep him quiet, she applied for teachers college and nursing. When she was accepted for both she was confused and decided it was easier to return to school.

That Christmas her father's sister, Aunt Marge, visited. Marge was a fashion journalist with Vogue and Mary thought she was seriously fab! But all hell broke loose when Aunt Marge asked Mary about her career plans. Her father was furious when he heard what Mary had done…or failed to do. Surprisingly, Aunt Marge took charge and Mary could hardly believe the haughty tirade that followed. "Don't be ridiculous, Maurice…you've given one boy to the church and another to the insurance industry…why not be a bit more

imaginative this time? Let Mary do what she wants." So Mary returned to school and then applied for university. She really wanted to study law, but opted to study French and art history instead and applied for a studentship. That way she knew she could support herself.

Away from home, Mary blossomed! She loved her studies, fell 'in love' and married at 21. Mary was keen to do an SIE, but H wanted to establish his career and buy a house. Mary went teaching and was happy enough, but she longed to travel like her friends. When her husband purchased an investment property, Mary was furious! Having extracted a promise from H that they would travel soon, Mary forgot about it when she became pregnant. Tragically, her first child – a daughter, Kate – died at birth, and then her mother died three weeks later. It was a grief that Mary could hardly bear.

Time passed and Mary became pregnant again. This time a son was born, followed by another son two years later. Mary was a devoted mother, she returned to teaching, and with H, she seemed 'happy enough', her grief having acquiesced to a quietness that sat doggedly within her.

Three weeks before her 30th wedding anniversary, H announced he had met someone else. Mary's world fell apart. Her sons returned home briefly to support her and summoned the indomitable Aunt Marge, who talked and walked Mary through her pain. After 18 months of turmoil, Mary accepted a matrimonial settlement that was not equal, was not fair, but was 'good enough'.

Mary resigned her job and visited her boys, and with their blessing, she left for her SIE, 32 years later than planned.

SIE

On her way to London, Mary stopped off in Paris, where she stayed with her old university friend, Janet. After a frenetic week of tourist activities, Janet took her to stay at a friend's cottage near Provins. In the countryside, Mary began to slow down. She had budgeted to be without work for four months but couldn't face returning to the classroom. Initially, she thought she would work as a carer in the UK, but now she wanted to stay longer in France. Janet negotiated with the cottage owner so that Mary could stay in exchange for doing the garden and paying basic utilities.

Mary felt like all her Christmases had come at once. Her sons kept in touch and she was amused to be on the receiving end of their well-meaning counsel. After several weeks,

she felt ready to move on and secured some WWOOFing work on the outskirts of Uzès. After this she travelled around France, and while it was challenging, Mary emerged from her French sojourn more confident and independent.

The French interlude awakened Mary to a number of possibilities. She took the Eurostar to London and registered with a caring organisation based in York, near where Aunt Marge's dear friends Hylda and Noreena lived in Harrogate. Mary stayed with them and found them delightfully eccentric and warmly welcoming.

Mary's first assignment was in Pickering, near the North Yorkshire Moors. She was there for several months, caring for an elderly woman and taking short breaks to travel. In Pickering, Mary attended a presentation given by a local historian on World War II. Afterwards, she spoke to him about her father, who had served in Egypt and Italy, and he in turn told her about a history group that was visiting Egypt. Without hesitation, Mary reserved a place.

From Pickering, Mary moved to Whitby. Her client lived in an apartment looking over the town and the river mouth. Mary felt she was living inside a giant digital photo frame, with the colours and moods of the town constantly changing before her. Mary preferred these longer assignments as she enjoyed the rhythms of daily life. Again, there were excursions, and after three months, Mary joined the Egypt tour group.

It was an astonishing tour, and to Mary's surprise, one of the leaders was Brian, the local historian from Pickering. Next, Mary returned to York to do one more assignment and began to spend time with Brian. She also wanted to do more work on the land and travel further afield.

Mary completed several WWOOFing assignments and often thought back to the wonderful childhood times she shared with Nana Kate in her garden. Mary's younger son arrived in the UK, and in between assignments, Mary and Brian travelled, occasionally with their sons. There were many travel highlights, but the most memorable was Italy. For the first time, Mary got a sense of how life had been for her father during the war years.

After three and a half years, Mary decided to return to New Zealand. Her other son was getting married and her father was elderly. It was a difficult decision, but she was also starting to miss the pohutukawa trees and the mountains. Brian decided to come with her, and while Mary was pleased, she was also anxious about how their relationship would fare.

As Mary flew over the western coastline into Auckland, she became very emotional, and tears flowed as she met her father and sons in the arrivals lounge! Brian adjusted quite well, but it was more challenging for Mary. With the exception of a couple of close female friends, Mary struggled to reconnect with old friends. Some maintained their allegiance to her former husband, and others lived in a whirl of frenetic socialising that Mary no longer identified with. She signed up for some relief teaching and was dismayed to observe that individual students seemed to be less important than educational managerialism. The final straw came when she attended a compulsory staff meeting facilitated by educational consultants.

There was an article in the local rag advertising for a community gardens co-ordinator and Mary applied successfully. First, she oversaw the redevelopment of the gardens, and later, she investigated the possibility of setting up a branch of the 'Garden to Table' Charitable Trust, which helped to educate young schoolchildren on growing vegetables.

Thus, life was starting to take shape, and Mary embraced a sustainable lifestyle. The community gardens and charitable trust were flourishing, and Mary felt as though she belonged. Brian, however, was now missing the UK and his son, so they decided to return there for several months. Before they could book the tickets, Mary's father was diagnosed with cancer. Mary wanted to stay and support him so Brian, meanwhile, returned to the UK.

As Mary's father became weaker, he liked to sit in his lounge, look out to the courtyard and talk about his life. Mary decided to build her father a garden, and together they designed it with his favourite plantings to encourage bird life, and a gentle cascading waterfall to create an atmosphere of peace and tranquillity. Her father loved it!

Mary missed Brian, but she did not dwell on the possibility he might not return. Mary skyped Brian and her son regularly and discussed her idea of setting up a restorative and wellness garden business. While the people she had cared for in England had been wealthy and lived in sumptuous homes with beautiful gardens, Mary did not see why women and men living in smaller homes, apartments and institutions could not have their own miniature paradise.

One evening there was a knock at Mary's front door. There on the front step was her son and his girlfriend, Brian's son…and Brian. Three weeks later, at her father's funeral,

surrounded by her family and friends, it was Mary who gave the eulogy…and it was a good funeral, for a good man.

After a period of rest and reflection, Mary, aged 59, enrolled in a horticultural diploma programme. There was some travel planned with Brian, but mostly it was about living a simple and frugal life in the present, and being open to 'come what may'. Mary is now independent, comfortable and confident, and lives her life with enthusiasm and purpose. There will be challenges ahead, but Mary knows she can deal with most things. For the first 50 something years, life for Mary had been 'happy enough'. Now…Mary is content…and life is good.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: SIE sample

Name	Date of birth	Type of SIE	Age at departure	Total time away	Country/area
Tandem journey					
Cheryl	1954	SIE	52	2 years	United Kingdom
Patti	1950	SIE	52	4 years 6 months	United Kingdom
Meg	1950	SIE	58	1 year	United Kingdom
Internationalist journey					
Jo	1954	SIE (volunteer)	53	2 years	Pacific/Asia
Gillian	1955	SIE	52	1 year	Europe/Asia
Colleen	1955	SIE	48	5 years	United Kingdom
Connie	1948	SIE	50	10 years	Asia
Monica	1951	SIE	57	2 years	United Kingdom
Janet	1957	SIE	52	1 year 3 months	Europe
Redemptive journey					
Kathy	1952	SIE	52	6 years	United Kingdom
Jocelyn	1947	SIE	59	18 months	United Kingdom
Kerry	1939	SIE	63	7 years	United Kingdom
Thea	1946	SIE	53	10 years	United Kingdom
Integrationist journey					
Susan	1953	SIE (volunteer)	53	2 years	Africa/Pacific/Asia
Lucy	1950	SIE (volunteer)	55	2 years	Asia/Pacific
Jenny	1952	SIE	55	5 years	United Kingdom
Cassie	1948	SIE (volunteer)	55	4 years	Asia
Sharon	1955	SIE	55	3 months	UK and Europe
Diana	955	SIE (volunteer)	52	4 years	Asia
Spiritual journey					
Penny	1946	SIE	64	6 months	Nth America
Willa	1939	SIE	52	15 years	Sth America/Asia

Appendix 2: Ethics application

M E M O R A N D U M
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC)

To:	Judith Pringle
From:	**Madeline Banda** Executive Secretary, AUTEC
Date:	27 April 2010
Subject:	Ethics Application Number 10/53 **Self initiated foreign experiences of older women: Career and personal development.**

Dear Judith

I am pleased to advise that the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (AUTEC) approved your ethics application at their meeting on 12 April 2010, subject to the following conditions:

1. Provision of the applicant's qualifications in the response to section A.2 of the application;

2. Clarification of where the interviews will be held;

3. Provision of the standard memo of support from AUT Counselling and inclusion of advice about their availability in the Information Sheet.

I request that you provide the Ethics Coordinator with a written response to the points raised in these conditions at your earliest convenience, indicating either how you have satisfied these points or proposing an alternative approach. AUTEC also requires written evidence of any altered documents, such as Information Sheets, surveys etc. Once this response and its supporting written evidence has been received and confirmed as satisfying the Committee's points, you will be notified of the full approval of your ethics application.

When approval has been given subject to conditions, full approval is not effective until *all* the concerns expressed in the conditions have been met to the satisfaction of the Committee. Data collection may not commence until full approval has been confirmed. Should these conditions not be satisfactorily met within six months, your application may be closed and you will need to submit a new application should you wish to continue with this research project.

When communicating with us about this application, we ask that you use the application number and study title to enable us to provide you with prompt service. Should you have any further enquiries regarding this matter, you are welcome to contact Charles Grinter, Ethics Coordinator, by email at ethics@aut.ac.nz or by telephone on 921 9999 at extension 8860.

Yours sincerely

Madeline Banda
Executive Secretary
Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee

Cc: Barbara Myers barbara.myers@aut.ac.nz

Participant Information Sheet

Date Information Sheet Produced:

3 March 2010

Project Title

Self Initiated Foreign Experiences of Older Women: Career and personal development.

An Invitation

My name is Barbara Myers and I am a PhD student and academic staff member at AUT University. You are invited to participate in the above research project which on successful completion will result in the completion of my PhD. Your participation in this research project is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time without any adverse consequences.

What is the purpose of this research?

The purpose of this research is to explore the experiences of older women workers who withdraw from employment for an extended period of time (6 months or more) to undertake a gap year activity referred to in the New Zealand context as O.E and in the international literature as SFE (self-initiated foreign experience).

On the successful completion of this research project I will be awarded a PhD. Please note that this research will be used in publications such as conference presentations and academic journal articles

How was I chosen for this invitation?

The study will consists of people who have contacted me as a result of a newspaper article in the NZ Herald in June 2008. The journalist interviewed me on previous research on younger New Zealanders undertaking a SFE and the possibility of this study on older women workers was mentioned at the time.

In addition you may have been suggested by participants in the preliminary (pilot) study, or by participants already interviewed in this full study drawing from their own personal and professional networks as have other personal and professional contacts.

What will happen in this research?

The study involves individual in-depth interviews of up to 20 older women workers. The interview will take up to one to two hours of your time and will be taped by myself (researcher), Barbara Myers and transcribed by a transcriber.

What are the discomforts and risks?

It is possible that you may experience some discomfort when recalling an experience that may have been upsetting.

How will these discomforts and risks be alleviated?

In the event that you may become concerned or upset when recalling an experience, please be reassured that you are not required to talk about anything that may cause you disquiet, concern or upset.

In the unlikely case you experience considerable discomfort during the interview I will refer you to appropriate counselling and support services. Please note AUT is able to offer you free professional counselling.*

However a decision on what is the appropriate support mechanism will be made at the time and will be dependent on the nature of your concerns.

What are the benefits?

It is anticipated that the successful completion of this research project will benefit individual older women and employers in that there will be an enhanced understanding of individual career patterns and life choices.

How will my privacy be protected?

Your privacy will be protected at all times throughout the research project. Real names, specific job titles and names of employers will not be used in any summary of findings and publications including the PhD thesis document. Confidentiality will be assured through the use of written consent forms and the storage of written data and consent forms in separate and secure locations.

What are the costs of participating in this research?

You will not be faced with any direct financial costs to participate in this research study however it is expected that the interview will take between one and two hours of your time.

What opportunity do I have to consider this invitation?

You will have at least two weeks to consider this invitation.

How do I agree to participate in this research?

A written consent form signals your agreement to participate in this research project. However please note that you may withdraw from the research project at any time despite the fact you have signed a written consent form.

Will I receive feedback on the results of this research?

Yes you will receive a written summary of findings from the researcher.

What do I do if I have concerns about this research?

Any concerns regarding the nature of this project should be notified in the first instance to the Project Supervisor, Dr Judith Pringle, Judith.pringle@aut.ac.nz, 09 921 9999 ext 5420

Concerns regarding the conduct of the research should be notified to the Executive Secretary, AUTEC, Madeline Banda, madeline.banda@aut.ac.nz , 921 9999 ext 8044.

Whom do I contact for further information about this research?

Researcher Contact Details:

Barbara Myers. Barbara.myers@aut.ac.nz 09 921 9999 ext 5366 or 021 781868

Project Supervisor Contact Details:

Dr Judith Pringle. Judith.pringle@aut.ac.nz 09 921 9999 ext 5420

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on *14 June 2010* **AUTEC Reference number** 10/53

*AUT counselling.

AUT is able to provide up to three counselling sessions to participants who experience disquiet, concern or upset as a result of their participation in the study.

In order to access these counselling services Auckland based participants will need to contact the AUT centre for Health, Counselling and Wellbeing on **09 921 9992 City Campus** or **09 921 9998 North Shore campus** to make an appointment. The centre facilities are located at WB219 (City Campus) or AS104 (North Shore Campus). When making a call please let the receptionist know you are a research participant. You will need to provide my contact details to confirm this.

Alternatively participants from Auckland and other cities and regions in New Zealand can find out more information about AUT counselling services and the option of online counselling on our website:
http://www.aut.ac.nz/students/student_services/health_counselling_and_wellbeing

Out of town participants may also consider contacting Lifeline telephone counselling service 0800 543 354.

Appendix 4: Statement of psychological support for research participants

AUT UNIVERSITY **STUDENT SERVICES**

MEMORANDUM

TO	Barbara Myers
FROM	Kevin Baker
SUBJECT	Psychological support for research participants
DATE	19 May 2010

Dear Barbara

I would like to confirm that Health, Counselling and Wellbeing are able to offer confidential counselling support for the participants in your AUT research project entitled:

Self initiated Foreign Experiences of Older Women: Career and personal development

The free counselling will be provided by our professional counsellors for a maximum of **three** sessions and must be in relation to issues arising from their participation in your research project.

Please inform your participants:
- They will need to contact our centres at WB219 or AS104 or phone **09 921 9992 City Campus** or **09 921 9998 North Shore campus** to make an appointment
- They will need to let the receptionist know that they are a research participant
- They will need to provide your contact details to confirm this
- They can find out more information about our counsellors and the option of online counselling on our website: http://www.aut.ac.nz/students/student_services/health_counselling_and_wellbeing
- For out of town participants please contact Lifeline telephone counselling service 0800 543 354

Yours sincerely

Kevin Baker
Head of Counselling
Health, Counselling and Wellbeing

Consent Form

AUT
UNIVERSITY
TE WĀNANGA ARONUI O TAMAKI MAKAU RAU

Project title: **Self Initiated Foreign Experiences of Older Women: Career and personal development.**

Project Supervisor: **Dr Judith Pringle**

Researcher: **Barbara Myers**

○ I have read and understood the information provided about this research project in the Information Sheet.

○ 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 I may withdraw myself or any information that I have provided for this project at any time prior to completion of data collection, without being disadvantaged in any way.

○ If I withdraw, I understand that all relevant information including tapes and transcripts, or parts thereof, will be destroyed.

○ I agree to take part in this research.

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

Participant 'signature:..……………………………………………

Participant's name:...………………………………… …………

Participant's Contact Details (if appropriate):

……………………………………………………………………………………..

……………………………………………………………………………………..

……………………………………………………………………………………..

……………………………………………………………………………………..

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on 14 June 2010 Reference number 10/53

Appendix 6: Transcriber confidentiality agreement

Confidentiality Agreement

AUT
UNIVERSITY
TE WĀNANGA ARONUI O TAMAKI MAKAU RAU

Project title: **Self Initiated Foreign Experiences of Older Women: Career and personal development.**

Project Supervisor: **Professor Judith Pringle**

Researcher: **Barbara Myers**

○   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):

……………………………………………………………………………………..

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……………………………………………………………………………………..

Date:

Project Supervisor's Contact Details (if appropriate):

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***Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee on** type the date on which the final approval was granted **AUTEC Reference number** type the AUTEC reference number*

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

Appendix 7: Interview schedule

Self Initiated Foreign Experiences of Older Women: career and personal development.

Discussion Guide.

Introduction.

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this pilot study. Please be reassured that your contribution is confidential.

The interview comprises four parts. The first will explore your time in New Zealand before you went overseas. Secondly we will discuss several aspects of your actual time overseas covering any work, travel and other activities and experiences you were involved in. The third part covers your life activities since you returned to New Zealand. The fourth and final section asks you to reflect on your time away and consider any subsequent impact or influence on personal and professional aspects of your life.

Part A. Before Departure.

1. Tell me about your life situation before you left New Zealand.

2. Tell me about your work/employment/unpaid work situation before you left New Zealand.

3. What prompted your overseas travel/work plans?

4. Were there any people who have influenced your decision to go overseas?

5. Was there any barriers to going ie anything holding you back or concerning you?

6. Did you have a plan before setting out?

    Yes. Probe expected outcomes in terms of work (paid or unpaid), cultural activities, travel, sequence, timing.

    No. Probe expected outcomes in terms of work (paid or unpaid), cultural activities, travel, sequence, timing.

7. How long did you expect or think you might be away from New Zealand?

    Probe definite and open ended plans

Part B. Time away.

Now please tell me in your own words and in your own way about your time overseas. I am interested in any work (paid or unpaid), places you visited, cultural experiences and anything else that was of significance or interest to you.

8. Did you travel alone, with partner, friend or group?

9. Work.

Probe sequence, types of work (including paid/unpaid), reasons for doing it, time spent.

10. Which job(s) (or aspects of a job) were most significant and why?

11. Travel. Probe sequence, geography, types of work reasons for doing it, time spent.

(Questions 10 -12 to give chronological/sequential linformation also)

12. What other experiences did you have? (Probe significance).

Part C. Returning to New Zealand.

Now let's talk about your life since you have returned to NZ.

13. When did you return to NZ?

14. How long had you been away?

15. Was this longer or shorter than planned? (Probe)

16. Why did you return? Probe.

17. Tell me about your life subsequent to this?

Probe ie work/non work actions.

Part D. Reflecting on the SFE

This final section asks you to reflect on your time away and consider how this SFE has impacted/influenced you life since your return.

18. Has your life pattern changed since you returned from SFE?

Probe aspects of difference and aspects of sameness?

Aspects of work difference/sameness

Aspects of non work difference/sameness

19. Has the SFE enriched/added value to your professional life?

Probe

20. Has the SFE enriched/added value to your professional life?

Probe

21. Has the SFE given you an opportunity to discover or develop any abilities, skills, capabilities, strengths, weaknesses?

    Probe significance?

22. In what way(s) has this SFE been a positive experience?

    Probe key benefits, learnings, changes and significance?

23. Where there been any negative exeriences/outcomes?

    Probe

24. Anything you would do differently?

    Probe

25. Any other comments, concerns, issues re your SFE that you would like to raise?

    Probe

Thank you for your time. Please be reassured that all aspects of this interview are confidential.

Researcher Safety Protocol

Project title: Self Initiated Foreign Experiences of Older Women: Career a personal development. (A pilot study)

Project Supervisor: Dr Judith Pringle

Researcher: Barbara Myers

At times research requires that researchers undertake interviews or other activity in situations that put them at risk, e.g. interviewing participants at the home of the participant.

In these cases, the researcher (Barbara Myers) will make suitable arrangements for her safety as per the AUT guidelines. When conducting research in participants home the researcher (Barbara Myers) undertakes to:

- arrange for colleagues to be aware of travel plans and/or interviewing schedules

- have suitable contact networks in the field and ensure that there is some sort of confirmation process before and after an appointment. This may include actions such as the researcher ensuring that she is accompanied by a colleague, or reporting to a colleague when entering and leaving a participant's home, or ensuring that a colleague has a schedule of her visits for a particular morning or afternoon

- act in a culturally and socially sensitive way, remembering that she is a guest and that it is the participants who are doing the researchers the favour by agreeing to participate and share their homes

- not interview participants in her own home.

Researcher's signature:.....................................

Researcher's name:..

Date:

Approved by the Auckland University of Technology Ethics Committee (on type the date on which the final approval was granted) **AUTEC Reference number** *(type the AUTEC reference number)*