



Self-initiated expatriation and older women: Composing a further life

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Abstract

Purpose

Research into self-initiated expatriation (SIE) has increased exponentially, although the focus of these investigations has been on professional workers, and little has been gender specific. The purpose of this research therefore is to explore the career and personal motivations for SIE through the novel lens of older women. In this exploratory study, SIE and socio-emotional selectivity motivation theories (SST) are used, in addition to the Kaleidoscope Career Model (KCM), to understand the reasons these women have taken this path.

Design/methodology/approach

The paper employs a qualitative methodology, drawing on in-depth life story interviews with 21 women aged 50 or more who had taken a SIE. A five-step narrative process using a story telling approach was the method of analysis.

Findings

The findings show important contradictions to the extant literature. Career dissatisfaction and escape are key motivations for these women. Further, contrary to SST, these women were seeking novelty - new places and new experiences. These women were also seeking authenticity as suggested by KCM, but also challenge was to the fore – not in the career domain, but in the personal domain. Their motivations for SIE extend beyond the current evidence base and understanding of the phenomena.

Originality/value

The contributions include new insights into the motivational drivers for SIE for these older women and the importance of timing as facilitators of SIE. The SIE nomenclature is broadened through the inclusion of older women and beyond professional spheres. An initial framework of a more integrated model is developed from this exploratory study and presented as a basis for beginning to understand the phenomenon of older women undertaking SIE.

Introduction

I like to think of men and women as artists of their own lives, working with what comes to hand through accident or talent to compose and re-compose a pattern in time that expresses who they are and what they believe in – making meaning even as they are studying and working and raising children, creating and recreating themselves. (Bateson, 2010: 24)

The 21st century has brought many changes to the world of work. The predominance of women in the workforce has been one of the biggest social changes of the last 50 or 60 years (Greenhaus and Kossek, 2014) alongside an increasingly age-diverse workforce (Tomlinson et al., 2018). The internationalisation of organisations has been another trend, resulting in increased global mobility, and the expectation that for many people, their jobs will involve relocations to other countries (Baruch et al., 2016).

Perhaps the one constant throughout this period of change has been the enduring relationship between individuals and organisations - a relationship that is encapsulated in the notion of a career (Inkson et al., 2012). The quote from Bateson touches on four features that are inherent in contemporary careers. First, she highlights the role of individual agency, reinforcing the career literature which contends that the individual should be the primary agent in the determination of their career (Jung and Takeuchi, 2018). Second, she emphasises the dynamic nature of careers – the recognition that careers need not be static or linear (Maher, 2013). Third, she suggests there is a desire for authenticity in careers, where an individual's internal and external values align with the values of the employing organisations (Sullivan et al., 2009). Finally, Bateson embraces a life course approach, acknowledging both the passing of time and the influence of interactions with others over this time (Tomlinson et al., 2018).

These trends and the features of contemporary careers are all pertinent for this research, which is situated at the intersection of global mobility, older women and careers. The focus here is on one form of global mobility, self-initiated expatriation (SIE), which has become an emergent topic within the international human resource management literature (Jannesari and Sullivan, 2019; McNulty and Vance, 2017). Interest in this research was piqued by anecdotal evidence in the media that pointed to the possibility of a new phenomenon involving older women (50 and over) who self-initiated their expatriation for a period of extended travel and work overseas. Shepherd's (2008) article on the experiences of some of these women who had returned to New Zealand raised many questions for us as researchers. The key question was why these older New Zealand women were taking a major career/work break and choosing not

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3 to work later and longer as expected in a time of demographic change and neoliberalism. Was
4 this an example of retirement in the traditional sense or was it a different strategy for
5 retirement? There was a need to understand if these women were opting out of busy careers
6 and personal/family lives temporarily (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005), or if they were
7 undertaking a more fundamental journey *as artists of their own lives*, recomposing their life
8 patterns and life path in a process of creation and recreation (Bateson, 2010). The purpose of
9 this paper, therefore, is to explore the career and personal motivations of older women
10 undertaking self-initiated expatriation. As this is an exploratory study with no theory that
11 relates specifically to the topic, the individual components of SIE and life course motivation
12 theories, and the kaleidoscope theory of women's careers are drawn on in an attempt to
13 understand the reasons behind the journeys of women who undertake SIE in later life.
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23 **Theoretical background**

24 ***SIE Motivation***

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27 SIE is one of a number of related terms that have been used in the literature when referring to
28 a period of autonomous work and travel in another country undertaken voluntarily. Doherty et
29 al. (2013) identify three key criteria defining SIE – the relocation across countries must be self-
30 initiated, employment must be regular and secure, and there must be the intention of a
31 temporary stay. The nomenclature of SIE now covers diverse populations but despite the
32 increasing numbers of published articles (Suutari et al., 2018b), the field remains under-
33 researched and under-theorised, (Doherty et al., 2013b), particularly from a gendered
34 perspective (Doherty and Thorn, 2014).
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42 The literature has reflected an increasing interest in what motivates individuals to undertake an
43 SIE (Cerdin, 2013; Doherty and Dickmann, 2013; Doherty et al., 2011), utilising a push (factors
44 pushing an individual away from the home country) and pull (factors drawing an individual to
45 a host country) framework (Cerdin, 2013). However, research tends to focus mainly on
46 professional and managerial samples to the detriment of non-professional occupational groups
47 (Doherty et al., 2013a). SIE are recognised as an heterogeneous group (Ballesteros-Leiva et al.,
48 2017) suggesting that there may be a range of factors contributing to the decision to undertake
49 an SIE. Certainly, the literature emphasises the importance of career development and better
50 remuneration as key drivers and pull factors for the SIE (Suutari et al., 2018a; Thorn, 2009).
51 Negative work situations such as a lack of appropriate work opportunities (Cerdin, 2013), and
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3 concern with an organisation's values and strategic direction (Hall and Mao, 2015) may also
4 drive an individual out of the workplace (push factors).
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7 However, research also suggests that employment or work factors alone cannot explain a
8 decision to leave employment and the home country to experience the SIE. Negative personal
9 reasons can be an important SIE motivation, with push factors such as boredom (Richardson
10 and Mallon, 2005), and escaping from personal/family circumstances (Myers and Pringle,
11 2005) cited in the broader expatriation literature. SIE is also undertaken for positive personal
12 reasons, such as the desire to travel, explore and search for excitement (Dickmann et al., 2018).
13 Relationships, friendships and other personal connections are also identified as factors pulling
14 an individual towards a new country to undertake an SIE (Doherty, 2013).
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21 Thorn's (2009) large study of New Zealanders of all ages living and working abroad has data
22 that allows a breakdown to get an indication of the factors that might be important to this
23 current group of older women. Thorn's group of older women (those aged 50 and above)
24 placed relationships as the foremost reason for their motivation to undertake a SIE, or in other
25 words, the main reason they were in another country was because their partner or family was
26 there. Cultural factors – the opportunity to travel and to experience new cultures was the
27 second most important motivation. Given that the sample is the same age and gender, there is
28 no reason to assume that the sample in this research would have different motivations.
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36 *Life course perspectives*

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38 A life course approach recognises that individuals exist in categories representing stages of life
39 (De Vos et al., 2018) and may, therefore, be appropriate for consideration of this sample of
40 older women. The life course literature stems from sociology and social psychology and was
41 developed to understand the impact major social events such as wars, financial hardship and
42 migration had on people's lives over time (Elder, 1998). One of the developments of life course
43 theory has been the departure from chronological age as the boulder of categories, to a
44 changing future time perspective (Akkermans, et al., 2016) - a concept encompassed in Socio-
45 emotional Selectivity Theory (SST, Carstensen, 2006). SST maintains that two broad
46 categories of goals shift in importance as a function of perceived time – those concerning
47 knowledge acquisition and those concerning emotional regulation. The selection of goals,
48 activities and preferences are linked to perceptions of the future being either limited or open.
49 The theory asserts that as this perception changes with aging, so too do priorities. For younger
50 adults who perceive time as open-ended, optimising the future is the focus, so they will be
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3 motivated by growth or knowledge related goals (e.g. gaining new information and having new
4 experiences) (Akkermans et al., 2016; Lazazzara and Za, 2019). For older adults who perceive
5 time as more limited, focus shifts to the maximisation of meaningful activities in the present,
6 to achieving short term emotionally-related goals (Charles and Carstensen, 2010), and
7 strengthening one's identity (De Vos et al., 2018). While SST has received strong empirical
8 support in terms of workplace motivation (see, for example, Kooij et al., 2017), it has not been
9 examined outside the organisation, nor from a gendered perspective. However, the tenets of
10 the theory would suggest that these older women would be less inclined to invest in new
11 resources (e.g. additional knowledge or novelty) and would seek emotionally meaningful goals,
12 focused on strengthening their identities and social embeddedness.
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20 21 ***Women's careers and the Kaleidoscope Career Model***

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23 Despite the parlance of gender equality, progress on understanding women's careers remains
24 under-theorised (Sullivan and Baruch, 2009). There is limited career theory which centrally
25 situates women's experiences (Mutter and Thorn, 2018) and a dearth of research on women's
26 experiences of SIE (Myers, 2016b). However, over the past two decades there has been an
27 emergent discussion around women's careers with the offering of alternative
28 reconceptualisations of individual career patterns over time (Cohen, 2014; O'Neil & Bilimoria,
29 2005; Pringle & McCulloch Dixon, 2003).
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36 The Kaleidoscope Career Model (KCM) is perhaps the most well-known theory relating to
37 womens' careers. KCM places gender at the forefront of an analytical framework that
38 accommodates "career interruptions, employment gaps, top-outs, opt outs, as well as the new
39 values of the current generation" (Mainiero and Sullivan, 2005: 108). The authors argue that
40 three threads of "authenticity, balance and challenge" shape and shift through a woman's
41 professional life-span recognising both the relational aspect of women's careers and the impact
42 of families. Authenticity is perceived by the authors to be the desire of individuals to honour
43 their unique values and attitudes in their work roles; balance is seen as the pursuit of high
44 calibre experiences in both a work and personal sense while challenge refers to the individual's
45 requirement to be motivated and extended in a career oriented work role (Mainiero and Gibson,
46 2018).
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56 The KCM suggests that as women age, authenticity moves to the fore, focusing on doing what
57 they believe in, and having meaning in what they do. While the model was initially developed
58 with a focus on women professionals, it has also been advanced and utilised more broadly to
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3 understand contemporary careers, generational perspectives (Sullivan, Forret, Carraher and
4 Mainiero, 2009) and non-traditional careers (Koekemaer and Crafford, 2019) and may also
5 offer an insight into the SIE motivations of these older women.
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10 11 **Research Approach and Sample** 12

13 The data drawn on for this paper is from a study that explores the experiences of 21 older
14 women undertaking SIE and their subsequent return to New Zealand (see Author, year for
15 details of the full study and methodology). This paper focuses on the first part of their journey,
16 and addresses the specific research question *what are the motivations for older women*
17 *undertaking SIE?* The criteria for inclusion in the study were fourfold - participants had to be
18 aged 50 years or more, to have been overseas for six months or longer, to be engaged in paid
19 or unpaid work and travel (that was not the result of an international transfer) and to have
20 returned to New Zealand for a minimum of three months and a maximum of five years. They
21 may or may not have undertaken an SIE when they were younger.
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29 There is considerable debate about conceptualisations of age (Shacklock, 2008). The literature
30 pertaining to issues relevant to older persons and older workers inevitably raises definitional
31 issues of who is an older worker because ageing and being older is not simply determined by
32 biological, chronological, social or physiological measures alone (Arber, 1995). While
33 cognisant of the complexities involved in the various conceptualisations of age and the
34 heterogeneity of the older person population (Myers, 2016b), for the purposes of this research,
35 'chronological' age has been drawn on as the benchmark for participation in the research study.
36 This decision was made as the literature on older workers as well as policy documents and
37 government regulations on work, retirement and pensions tend to use chronological age to a
38 greater extent than other conceptualisations. The age of 50 was chosen for two reasons. First,
39 there is a growing consensus that 50 plus represents the older worker (see for example,
40 Callister, 2014 and Loretto and Vickerstaff, 2013 in the NZ and UK contexts respectively).
41 Second, the 50 years benchmark is identified as a time when women are more likely to be
42 moving on from the primary care responsibilities of family and approaching personal and
43 professional transitions (Etaugh, 2018).
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55 Participants were identified initially through personal contacts and snowballing. Recognising
56 the limitations of a pool of participants with similar backgrounds and experiences, particular
57 care was taken to limit each contact to one or two participants and to ensure that the sample
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3 came from different regions in New Zealand, thereby drawing on diverse experiences and
4 backgrounds. Demographics of the participants are shown in Table 1.
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7 Table 1 about here
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9 The ontological premise underpinning this study is the belief that the world is constructed
10 through social practices and that the research experience is essentially an introspective and
11 personal process. In-depth life story interviews (Cole and Knowles, 2001) were undertaken,
12 allowing exploration of the participant's experiences, values, decisions and ideologies within
13 an interpretive framework. These interviews ranged from one to two hours each and were
14 recorded. In order to make certain that analysis of the life stories was robust, a five-step
15 narrative analysis process was constructed using a story telling approach (Myers, 2016a;
16 Polkinghorne, 1995).
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19 As with any qualitative research, it is important to substantiate the trustworthiness of the
20 research through an assessment of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability
21 (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). In this study, trustworthiness was developed utilising three key
22 strategies. First, the primary researcher undertook a range of pilot studies to develop a deep
23 understanding of the type of topics and issues that might arise. The pilot studies, along with
24 many years of researching in this field, represented a period of "prolonged engagement"
25 (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) with the research field. Second, the ontological view taken meant
26 that the researcher participated in the research process alongside the participant to ensure that
27 the knowledge produced reflects the participant's views of their reality. The process of
28 transcription (ie drawing out people's ideas in their own words) eliminates the androcentric
29 nature of bias within traditional social science research (Reinharz and Chase, 2002). Integral
30 to this process was a reflective journal, documenting thoughts and observations of the
31 participants. Third, after the primary author had developed motivational themes, all three
32 authors engaged with the data, discussing the salience and relevance of the material relating to
33 motivation. As experienced qualitative researchers, this interaction facilitated a deep and
34 shared understanding of the research material.
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51 Findings and insights gleaned from this research are the result of a qualitative, interpretive
52 research process, and are not intended to be generalizable (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011). They
53 can, however, contribute to theory building, and thus the method fits with the overall aim of
54 the exploration of a novel population, distinguished by gender, age and global mobility.
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Findings and Discussion

Drawing on Carr et al. (2005) and Cerdin (2013), this study utilises a push and pull framework to explore participants' personal and career motivations for undertaking SIE. In this framework, the negative career and personal push factors that motivated participants to leave their current employment and personal situations are considered, followed by the positive career and personal pull factors that encouraged them to relocate to other employment and another country. A summary of these factors is presented in Table 2.

Table 2 about here

Career: Negative career push factors

Disenchantment with work was a highly salient 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 key concern, pushing participants out of the workforce. The participants were not necessarily seeking career advancement. They wanted to make some career changes, but there was a lack of meaningful work options and they felt frustrated and stuck. Cassie's statement exemplifies all of these issues:

In that time, I had moved around doing contract work and was very confident in that particular area, but I was thinking – well, where do you go next? I actually don't want to go managing in a huge corporate...I had a reputation for being very good at my work and I would have no trouble doing it, but it was way outside my value systems.

This dissatisfaction is consistent with findings from a New Zealand Human Rights Commission Survey (2014) that identified flexible work arrangements, long-term leave, challenging work, being respected and valued, and experiencing reduced stress as important retention factors for older workers. 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. 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). Another participant felt a strong dissonance with their organisation, making 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).

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3 Career dissatisfaction has previously been identified as a negative push factor (Tharenou, 2010;
4 Thorn, 2009) for early and mid-career professionals, and a secondary driver for SIEs (Doherty
5 et al., 2011; Richardson and Mallon, 2005). This study shows that for older women, career
6 disenchantment was both important and negative, pushing the women to look for alternative
7 options.
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10 11 12 ***Career: Positive career pull factors***

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14 While career factors were a major source of dissatisfaction, for some participants, they were
15 also a lure to undertake an SIE. Some participants hoped to continue employment in their
16 profession, usually associated with strong career aspirations, yet their motivation was less
17 career-centric. One participant, Janet, went on a study SIE and although she knew that it would
18 benefit her career, it was more about the opportunity to do some challenging and interesting
19 work that would take her outside and beyond her career path to date.
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26 *I was going through this process and thinking that I would do it really for my own benefit
27 because I think you need to keep your brain cells moving and it was just the right time to
28 be doing some more studying. I'd done my Bachelor upgrade extramurally and finished
29 that when I was 40 and I just thought it was about time I did something else, so I thought
30 I'd just do it for my own sake really... (Janet).*
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33 Other participants merged the opportunity for new and challenging work with the opportunity to do
34 something for others -
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39 *I just happened to be looking in the newspaper one day and it said – Management
40 Advisor, Volunteer Service Abroad. I said – well, that sounds a darn sight more
41 exciting... (Cassie).*
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43 For other participants, altruism was the primary focus, and the opportunity to undertake altruistic work
44 within a cross-cultural environment was appealing. Penny was initially interested in working with
45 children. *I'd seen a programme on TV about orphanages in Bosnia and places like that I thought, oh,
46 I'd really like to do something like that. Jo was also philanthropic - it's something I believe in, doing
47 voluntary work, helping people who are not as well off and don't have the same opportunities...
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54 Although participants were seeking new international experiences, they were not consciously
55 aiming to forge career opportunities. Work was mostly a means to an end, a way to live a
56 different life in a different cultural context, to fund the travel and to extend and deepen the SIE
57 experience. The participants were motivated by a broad range of factors, operating with a high
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3 degree of personal agency as ‘career activists’. They embraced the SIE experience as a career
4 episode in its broadest sense of life journey -
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8 *If you want to be a tourist and walk along the streets and look at houses from the*
9 *outside, that’s fantastic. But if you want to look behind the doors and see people’s*
10 *lives...that’s what it was about. It was about wanting to be more than a tourist. (Cassie).*
11

12 The participants were generally dissatisfied and impeded in their work before undertaking
13 SIE..... *just the idea of going somewhere...doing something different, it was more I lacked a*
14 *drive to stay...was more looking for an opportunity to go (Gillian). While work concerns*
15 *pushed the participants out of their work, they were not consciously seeking international*
16 *career advancement. I wasn’t there really to sort of branch out of my comfort zone. I wasn’t*
17 *there to foster my career (Monica). Nevertheless, some participants were interested in a work*
18 *challenge, even though it was not their primary motivation.*
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25 *and more challenging than another stint in another government department or*
26 *corporate...(Cassie).*
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28 Thus, in the parlance of the Kaleidoscope Career Model, work challenge was important, but
29 was not to the fore (August, 2011). While career has previously been identified as a positive
30 SIE pull factor (Richardson and Mallon, 2005; Richardson and McKenna, 2006; Thorn, 2009),
31 it is not a dominant SIE driver in comparison to the motivations of the assigned expatriates
32 (AE) (Doherty et al., 2011). Our older participants were considerably more negative about
33 their pre-SIE work and less focused on SIE as a career-building strategy than witnessed with
34 younger SIEs or assigned expatriates (see, for example, Doherty et al., 2011). In contrast to
35 previous work, career push factors were more salient than career pull factors, suggesting a
36 growing disengagement and antipathy to work, regardless of the participants’ career
37 orientation.
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46 ***Personal – Negative personal push factors***

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48 Personal reasons are an important part of the SIE decision-making process. Negative personal
49 circumstances were powerful motivators for some participants, but difficult circumstances did
50 not precipitate an immediate departure and were not the only reason for SIE. Some of the
51 participants wanted to escape from personal relationships.
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57 *I got married at 19. My husband thought travel was a waste of money. After 30 years*
58 *of marriage and three children I finally left him. A prolonged legal tussle ensued and*
59 *so I devised the ‘reward’ of a working holiday as a way of keeping sane. (Jenny).*
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3 The majority of the participants talked about a lack of excitement and an overall sense of
4 malaise in their professional and personal lives. They were looking to break with the sameness
5 of their daily living and do something different. Several participants experienced a sense of
6 isolation and loneliness as their children grew up and lived independently of them. Gillian felt
7 as though she didn't belong anywhere. *I was living on my own so there was a bit of a gap in*
8 *my life. I found it's harder as a single woman in a new city making friends.*

13
14 Several participants wanted to escape from family roles. Thea wanted to relinquish her role as
15 a single mother, while Monica was anxious to leave the family nest, much to the consternation
16 of some friends and family. Susan wanted to leave home and spread her wings while Connie
17 wanted to escape traumatic family circumstances.

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22 Participants were at a crossroads, perturbed about their situations and poised to think about
23 how their life might be different, and it was into this space that the notion of SIE took hold.
24 SIE drew them in, enabling them to take action, to break with their past without having to
25 immediately determine their future. *I was quite excited, because it was on the edge and being*
26 *on the edge is always exciting, a bit scary...and I was ready for it (Thea).*

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31 The motive of escape for negative personal push factors has been documented in the SIE
32 literature, either escaping family (Thorn, 2009) or personal circumstances (Doherty, 2013;
33 Inkson and Myers, 2003). Factors relating to lifestyle and a need for independence were
34 identified by Tharenou (2010), while Andresen and Gustschin (2013) suggest that for some,
35 SIE is driven by the need to overcome personal problems.

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40 Research on negative personal push factors largely emanates from studies that compare the
41 motivations of AEs with those of SIEs (Dorsch et al., 2012). These studies confirm that
42 negative personal push factors are greater in the SIE experience than in the AE experience. The
43 personal push factors identified here appear to be more salient than those discussed more
44 generally in the SIE literature (see for example, Froese, 2013 and Thorn, 2009). The women,
45 during their narratives, mentioned these factors first and often, creating a clear sense that that
46 they wanted to leave their previous lives behind.

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52 This study is unique as it focuses on professional and non-professional women at a later career
53 stage. The extant SIE literature is based on studies in which research samples include male
54 and female early to mid-career professionals. With the exception of Doherty and Thorn (2014),
55 Tharenou (2010) and Myers and Pringle (2005), gender has not been considered in-depth.
56 Context is important (Al Ariss and Syed, 2011), and when considering SIE motivations, it is
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3 apparent that what may be a substantial personal push factor for an early career SIE, may be
4 relatively unimportant for a later career SIE.
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7 ***Personal – Positive personal pull factors***

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10 In contrast to the paucity of positive SIE career motivations, there were many positive personal
11 motivators pulling the participants towards an SIE. All participants identified the need for
12 personal challenge, wanting excitement, to push their boundaries and have an adventure. *I knew*
13 *I just wanted to take some risks...*(Lucy). The adventure was centred on the opportunity to
14 travel and have a more prolonged and deeper international experience. SIE in later life was
15 about unfinished business – to fulfil childhood dreams or extend adult dreams that were cut
16 short by work and family responsibilities. Research has consistently argued that the desire to
17 travel, to experience excitement and adventure are significant dimensions of the SIE decision-
18 making process (Tharenou, 2003). In this study, it was a highly conspicuous driver.
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26 Many of the participants had adult children who either encouraged them to go overseas or were
27 already overseas. Adult children made it less risky for participants, allowing them to ease into
28 their SIE. *I had one daughter here...she was going to live in Cairo so we were both going away*
29 *together...then I landed in London and stayed with my other daughter.* (Gillian).
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33 Mothers also played an unexpected role. They were mostly quietly supportive, encouraging
34 their daughters to do an SIE that they would love to have done.
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38 *She would talk about things...regrets. But she was also very accepting. She said – I was*
39 *born in the wrong era. She died two years ago but when I did do these things...I'm*
40 *going to cry...she sent me this email and she said – I'm so glad you're doing this*
41 *because it is something I would have wanted to do. I never knew that...for years.*
42 (Cassie).
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45 Extended family was an attraction, as a place to stay and adjust, and also to trace family roots
46 and renew family connections. Overseas friends were not instrumental in encouraging
47 participants who travelled with their partners, although those who travelled alone planned to
48 make some contact with friends. In a few cases, New Zealand-based friends who had already
49 done an SIE acted as role models. Family connections, more than personal friendships, were
50 an important attraction for participants, promising an initial buffer to any shocks and challenges
51 they might expect when effecting such radical life change.
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57 Familial relationships and friendships are identified in the literature as important to positive
58 SIE motivations (Inkson and Myers, 2003; Richardson and McKenna, 2006). Relationships are
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3 a key component of the decision-making process (Doherty, 2013; Myers and Pringle, 2005).
4 More specifically, Thorn (2009) found that women in the 50 plus age group were strongly
5 influenced by relationships and quality of life issues, but most of these women were partnered,
6 whereas in this study, only 10 out of 21 participants were partnered. Further, the rich in-depth
7 data collected through the narratives in this study, allowed for a more nuanced interpretation
8 of the women's motivations than Thorn's (2009) internet survey, and may explain some of the
9 differences identified here.

15 Family relationships have been posited as a barrier to SIE (Jackson et al., 2005; Tharenou,
16 2008). The findings of this study differ which may be explained by gender and age factors.
17 Some participants were concerned about leaving adult children and elderly parents, but these
18 were not generally barriers, just situations that needed to be worked through so that contingency
19 plans could be made.

25 Cultural experience has been identified as a strong motivator for SIE (Thorn, 2009) and these
26 participants were intent on participating and understanding local life in their cross-cultural
27 experience. Participants based in the UK planned sojourns within the UK, Europe and the
28 Middle East to learn more about local history, archaeology and society. There was a curiosity
29 about the world wars, the experiences of participants' fathers and extended family members,
30 and New Zealand's role in these wars. Other cultural interests, such as the theatre, concerts, art
31 galleries and museums, were important for a couple of participants but not a dominant
32 motivator overall.

39 Other research highlights the importance of culture as a motivating factor focusing on an
40 interest in people, their history and way of life (see, for example, Andresen and Gustschin,
41 2013; Jackson et al., 2005). Little mention is made in the literature of the opportunity to
42 experience the arts. This may be because these types of cultural activities are not explicitly
43 identified and are subsumed under other motivational categories. However, it is apparent in
44 this study that, although cultural interests are a general SIE motivation, they were a less
45 significant personal motivation compared with other personal pull factors.

51 Although the participants were unsure of exactly how the SIE might evolve, they were none-
52 the-less excited and relieved to be taking the step. There was a sense that life had to change,
53 that there may be a different way of being.

57 While participants had specific travel goals, these were usually short-term, as exemplified by
58 Monica who wanted to follow her father's wartime journey. For many participants however,
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3 hidden beneath these specific objectives was the reclaiming of past dreams. Often earlier plans
4 and hopes had been buried amidst work and family challenges that dominated their middle
5 years. As they reached their fifties and sixties, the participants began to think about how they
6 might reclaim these dreams. *Most of my friends were retiring and going on overseas trips and*
7 *I was very envious of what they were able to do...I hadn't heard of seniors doing SIE, but I*
8 *couldn't see why it wasn't possible (Kerry).*
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14 SST theory points to individuals' changing goals and priorities across their life and suggests a
15 reluctance to invest in new resources as one ages (De Vos et al., 2018). In total contrast, for
16 these women, the SIE signalled a closure of the participants' existing way of being and heralded
17 the start of a search for new meaning in life. Personal values that had been neglected or
18 subsumed were reviewed and revalidated as part of the SIE decision-making process. For
19 example, Jo was motivated by several factors, but it was her commitment to altruism that was
20 a key driver. *...but mainly, to make a contribution to the third world (Jo).* This is consistent
21 with Hudson and Inkson (2006), who argue that there are many motives for doing volunteer
22 work and that altruism is only part of this decision-making process (Fee and Gray, 2011).
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30 Some participants felt a sense of disconnection as they moved away from their old world. Many
31 envisaged a place where they could belong. For some participants, personal focus started
32 simply with a desire to unshackle themselves from routine and responsibility and live a more
33 autonomous life.
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38 *I was a real career party kind of person...you know put the suit on and go and do that*
39 *stuff...but I wanted to go and live my life in a sort of a more free way and shape it to*
40 *suit my own personal needs. (Diana).*
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42 In two cases, the SIE was a response to a calling, that is, being summoned by God to undertake
43 work that is spiritually driven and makes a difference to society (Keyes, 2011). A more secular
44 and career-oriented perspective (Duffy et al., 2012) suggests that a calling is work that one is
45 passionate about, is the most important work in one's whole life and contributes to the
46 wellbeing of society. *I had this idea in my head that I really wanted to go to some war-torn*
47 *country...and from then honestly, the universe just pointed me in the right direction (Penny).*
48 SIE as a calling has yet to be specifically discussed in the literature, but motivations such as
49 this go beyond the level of altruism.
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57 In summary, this study comprising older women, gives additional insights into the SIE
58 phenomenon. Positive personal pull factors played a greater part in the SIE decision-making
59 process than negative personal push factors, and conversely, negative career push factors
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3 played a much greater part in the decision-making process than positive career pull factors.
4 One theme that strongly emerged from the analysis, but that does not fit into the push/pull
5 motivation framework, was that of timing, of it being “the right time” to go abroad. This
6 temporal aspect is discussed now.
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10 11 *The Right Time* 12

13 Although personal motivations were dominant in SIE decision-making, one key factor that
14 facilitated SIE was timing. Work situations had generally been clarified and the decision to
15 move on had already been taken. In most cases, this gave participants the opportunity to reflect
16 on their personal situation.
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20 While timing was mostly centred on family issues, the ‘right time’ meant different things to
21 the participants. For some, it was about their children reaching adulthood and leaving home.
22 *My son had left home. While he was around and dependent, it was easier for me to stay*
23 *grounded, but that time had passed, and he’d sort of taken flight* (Connie). Four participants
24 had ended relationships with their partners/husbands and felt free to consider other pathways.
25 *The house had been sold and I had some money...initially, it was just going to be a month or*
26 *six weeks...then I started to think...maybe I should look into getting some work there* (Kathy).
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33 Parents’ wellbeing was also a concern for participants. Baby boomers have been referred to as
34 the sandwich generation (Grundy and Henretta, 2006) having dual responsibility for children
35 and elderly parents, and these roles usually fall on women to a greater extent than men. The
36 death of a parent sometimes freed participants up. *He and my mother had lived in Dunedin...I*
37 *was the only sibling here...I’d felt that I really couldn’t abandon them. I suppose in retrospect,*
38 *that was another reason that I felt tied* (Kerry).
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45 Being a grandparent also impacted on the timing of the SIE for several participants.

46 *One of my deepest values and probably my deepest value, is that parenting of children*
47 *needs to be done by grandparents as well as the parents but we do not have*
48 *grandchildren yet so we could work overseas... that’s good.* (Jo)
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51 *Well, we actually haven’t got grandchildren to hold us back.* (Patti)
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53 Preceding evidence suggests that the issue of timing is significant in the SIE decision-making
54 process, confirming earlier findings (Inkson and Myers, 2003; Tharenou, 2010), and clearly
55 demonstrating that an individual life is not lived in isolation, but is moderated by connections
56 with the actions of other individuals and groups (Keyes, 2011). In this study, it appears that the
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3 opportunity to go on an SIE was created by various circumstances that presented a timely space
4 for participants to move forward in their life.
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8 *There's always leading things that push you, nudge you, lead you on. I had to do a lot*
9 *of that internal processing stuff about 'well, is this really the right time, the right place,*
10 *the right thing to do'. So in the end when it happened it felt like a natural progression.*
11 (Susan.)
12

13 **Theorising**

14
15 Earlier, three theories were identified which might help explain why these older women left
16 their work and life in New Zealand to go on an extended SIE. Certainly, there was resonance
17 with previous push/pull motivation theory, but also contradiction. Career development was
18 not a strong pull factor, but negative career and personal push factors were more salient than
19 previously identified, acting as catalysts for change. The importance of timing, of it being the
20 'right time' for the SIE has also not been identified in the SIE motivation literature.
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24 Socio-emotional selectivity theory suggests these women, with a constrained time horizon,
25 would be on a quest for self, strengthening their identity. This also finds resonance with the
26 participants, although again there is an incongruity. According to the theory, older people are
27 less drawn to novelty (Carstensen, 2006), but these participants had actively sought novelty –
28 the excitement of new places, new ways of being, new cultures and people was a key part of
29 the SIE.
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33 Finally, the kaleidoscope career theory would suggest that for these women, authenticity
34 would be the foremost parameter. Again, this part of the theory holds true for the participants.
35 A search for authenticity is the push factor that drove them from their jobs, and, for some, the
36 pull factor that led them to undertake a SIE. The parameter of challenge, however, was also
37 clearly evident in these women's stories – not the challenge of the career, but the challenge of
38 placing themselves in the new environment. Hence, the challenge for these women was not
39 in the work domain, but in the personal domain and given the increasing focus and
40 privileging of their personal lives over their careers, the search for 'balance' was much less
41 evident as a driver for these older women to undertake SIE.
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45 This novel sample would, therefore, suggest an extension of all three theories. More
46 importantly however, it suggests that an integrated model or framework is needed to better
47 understand the phenomenon of older women undertaking SIE. Using the exploratory data
48 collected in this study, an initial attempt at developing such a framework is shown in Figure 1.
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Insert Figure 1 about here

On the left side is the expectation – what the theory indicated could be found. Colour is used to indicate the importance of the components on motivation, with green suggesting high importance, blue medium and grey least. On the right side is what the findings indicate were the important motivating factors, again using the same colour-coding. Red is added however to demonstrate those new insights identified above. The overlapping circles recognise the synergy of some of the factors of KCM and SST, with a desire for authenticity and a search for self-identity showing clear similarity. The framework indicates that for these SIE women, there is a clear shift from work being the focus and the driver of mobility, to the individual, with personal needs and desires driving mobility. Work, as a central premise around which people organise their lives does not adequately encompass these women’s experiences, and there is a need to give cognisance to matters of personal development and age. The incomplete nature of the framework also points to the need to examine broader fields such as geography and psychology to further understand this phenomenon.

Conclusion

Important demotivators for career continuance were disenchantment with current work situations, organisational politics, values and leadership direction, the lack of suitable work openings and the perceived dominance of work in their lives. Participants found an increasing disconnect between themselves and the organisations in which they were employed. Perceptions of escalating organisational inauthenticity contributed to their increasing levels of career dissatisfaction (Hall & Mao, 2015). Participants were interested in engaging in different work situations but were not primarily driven to develop an international career.

In a personal context, participants were keen to escape social and family roles and responsibilities that had shaped their identity for 30 years or more. However, more importantly, they wanted to challenge themselves and have an adventure. The SIE, with its promise of new-found freedom and venturing into the unknown, was a major facilitator, however, the actual SIE was not undertaken until the participants were free from various personal responsibilities. Thus, timing played an important part in the decision-making process.

SIE was not motivated by the need to just have ‘time out’. Nor did it represent a decision to retire. Rather, it was a fundamental break with an existing work–life configuration. Participants were no longer prepared to compromise. They were tired of fitting their lives around their work

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3 and frustrated with having to fit what they perceived to be increasingly meaningless work, into
4 their lives.
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7 This paper makes four key contributions. First it sheds light on older women undertaking SIE,
8 thus broadening the SIE nomenclature. This is particularly relevant given the dearth of research
9 on age and gender in SIE and careers literatures. It also extends the boundaries of the extant
10 knowledge base beyond the professions, to include non-professional work-roles.
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14 Second, through the study of the motivational drivers for SIE for a cohort of older women, we
15 highlight that SIE is motivated by personal factors to a greater extent than career development,
16 a finding which is counter to extant literature (see, for example, Thorn, 2009 and Froese, 2012).
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20 Third, through the application of a life course perspective, we gain a fuller understanding of
21 the motivations for SIE. This highlights the importance of timing as a key aspect within the life
22 course. The participants' search for a more meaningful and authentic way of being inspired
23 which, in turn, became an enabler for the exploration of possibilities.
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27 Finally, the findings also flag the need for further research which takes a broader perspective,
28 questioning whether work should remain at the epicentre of understanding careers. For this
29 group of older women, within their social context and life course, mobility is driven by a desire
30 to change aspects of their lives, rather than for work and career development. There is a need
31 for research that incorporates both further qualitative and quantitative studies, drawing on a
32 broader range of theories in an attempt to understand the complexities and dynamics of SIE
33 motivation.
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37 The implications of these contributions are important. Clearly this exploratory study indicates
38 a conundrum, in that only some of what was theorised and expected was found, while
39 unexpected insights emerged. Further, the findings suggest that these older women have much
40 to contribute, either in the home or host countries, and to de-value their skills and experience
41 would be a mistake. Until there is further understanding of the motivation and behaviour of
42 these older women, it is difficult to formulate policy and practice. What the findings clearly
43 indicate though, is that human resources policy and practice cannot be a "one-stop"
44 homogenous approach. HR policy developers and employers need to understand employees,
45 and this small group of older women indicate that a nuanced approach is needed.
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49 At an individual level, the implication is that there does not have to be one way of working and
50 living as you age. Reaching the age of 50 plus may present an opportunity to consider different
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3 ways of being from this point on, taking adventures, fulfilling lost dreams, developing along a
4 different path and indeed for these women, to *become artists of their own lives* (Bateson, 2010).
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6 The message these participants were sending to other older women was that it is never too late
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8 to try something new! Through the publication of these women's motivations for undertaking
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10 a SIE, it is possible that they may become role models to other women looking for change.
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12 We recognise that this sample was restricted to women from New Zealand – a country which
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14 has an established culture of mobility. This may have impacted the findings. Further research
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16 should investigate whether these insights hold true for other countries or for men. The
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18 participants in this research study have demonstrated that the motivation for their SIE was
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20 primarily personal and was enacted in a very different context from that of previous career and
21
22 life changes. Additionally, the participants' life stories had an artificial end point in this
23
24 research. Yet demographic trends and predictions of life expectancy suggest that participants
25
26 may live for many more years and will continue to experience change. Thus, research that
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28 adopts a life-stage, life-course or longitudinal approach will be well placed to capture the ebbs
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30 and flows of the complex pathways and contexts of individuals and groups as they age.
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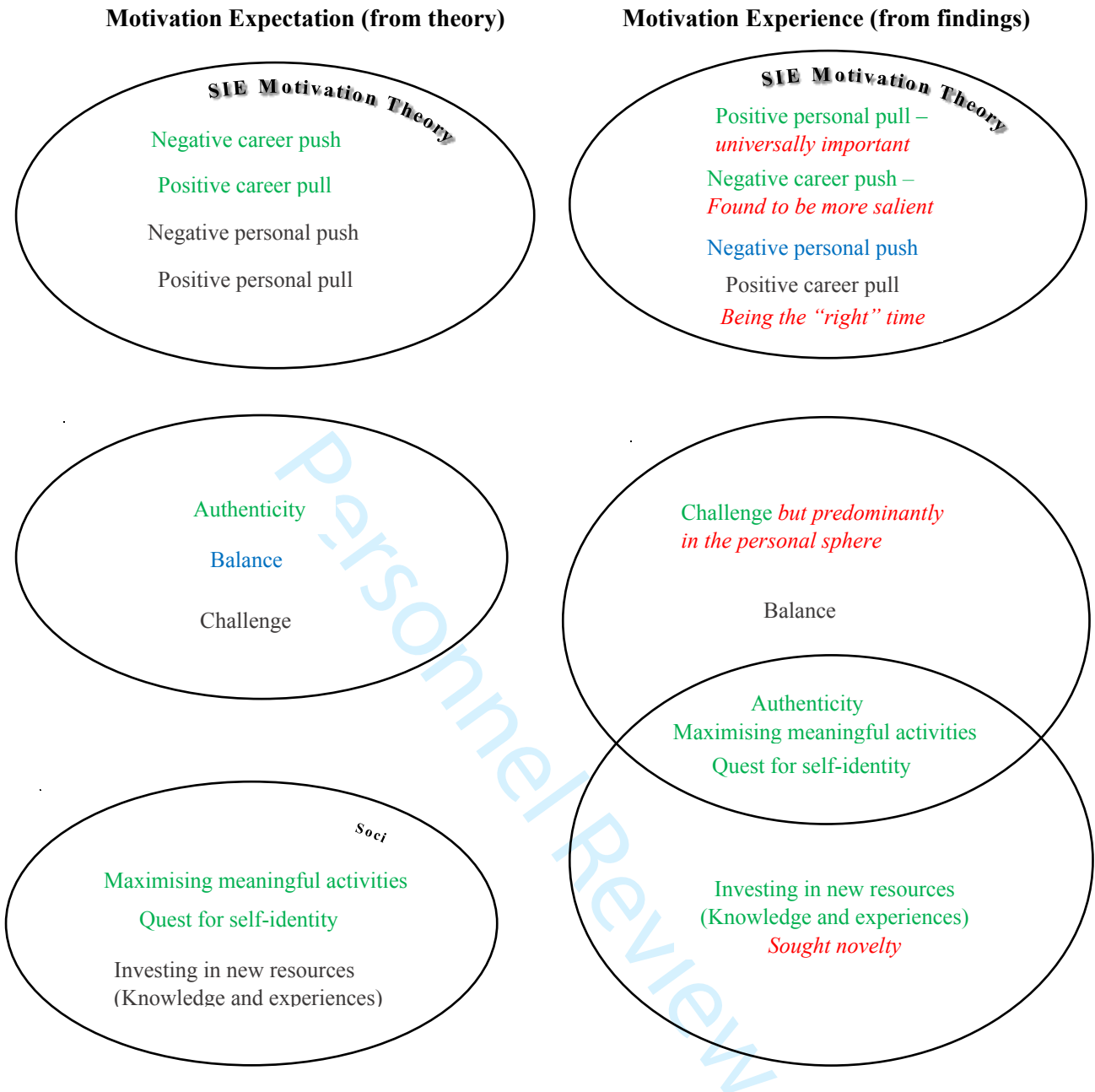


Figure 1 – Seeking to understand the motivations for self-initiated expatriation for older women
 Legend: High importance; medium importance; low importance; *New insights*

Table 1: SIE Sample

Name*	Date of birth	Age at departure	Country/area
Cheryl	1954	52	United Kingdom
Patti	1950	52	United Kingdom
Meg	1950	58	United Kingdom
Jo	1954	53	Pacific/Asia
Gillian	1955	52	Europe/Asia
Colleen	1955	50	United Kingdom
Connie	1948	50	Asia
Monica	1951	57	United Kingdom
Janet	1957	52	Europe
Kathy	1952	52	United Kingdom
Jocelyn	1947	59	United Kingdom
Kerry	1939	63	United Kingdom
Thea	1946	53	United Kingdom
Susan	1953	53	Africa/Pacific/Asia
Lucy	1950	55	Asia/Pacific
Jenny	1952	55	United Kingdom
Cassie	1948	55	Asia
Sharon	1955	55	UK and Europe
Diana	1955	52	Asia
Penny	1946	64	Nth America
Willa	1939	52	Sth America/Asia

*All names are pseudonyms

Table 2. Motivations for the self-initiated expatriation of older women

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