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**Conceptualising the Solitude Experience of Solo
Female Travellers: Exploring the Interplay of
Aloneness, Social Presence, and Interactions**

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ABSTRACT

Recent statistics in the travel and tourism industry show that the majority of the solo travel market is made up of solo female travellers (SFTs), the numbers of which are steadily increasing over time. Consequently, destination management organisations (DMOs) find SFTs as a flourishing market that creates many opportunities. In response, DMOs offer certain customised service amenities targeting SFTs, such as women-only hotels or floors. However, this research offers a deeper understanding of the multifaceted needs and experiences of SFTs in their travel discourse. Therefore, this study provides knowledge for DMOs to design more inclusive and diverse offerings when catering to this distinctive traveller segment.

The existing literature is well-established in terms of the underlying needs of SFTs. Solitude is identified as one of the prime needs of SFTs and a key feature that defines present and future SFTs. Further, the various benefits of solo female travelling (for example, independence, relaxation, and self-learning) can be broadly linked with the benefits of solitude as a restorative experience.

Even though existing literature identifies solitude as a need of SFTs, it is not informed about how solitude is experienced in the solo travel context. In their solo travel, SFTs encounter both solo and non-solo episodes that may shape one's solitude experience in a consumption context. Hence, the investigation of how solitude experiences of women in their solo travel discourse are shaped by their context, and the presence of and interaction with others, makes an original contribution to the literature. Focusing on the importance of solitude, this study argues that solitude as a travel need of SFTs may be influenced by the social presence of others and entail certain interpersonal dynamics (tourist-to-tourist interactions, tourist-to-service person interactions, and tourist-to-local interactions). Therefore, this research aimed to investigate how women experience and fulfil their need for solitude in their solo travel pursuits.

To this end, a qualitative study was conducted. Thirty-four in-depth interviews were completed with SFTs who had travelled solo internationally. The narratives were analysed using reflexive thematic analysis.

The findings emphasised the multiplicity of solitude as a travel need. Solitude was not a stand-alone experience. Instead, SFTs' solitude experiences were multilayered, entailing differing levels of aloneness and interactions that were situational and context-bounded. SFTs found the presence of non-interactive others as a means of experiencing safe solitude. Further, the interactions within their desired levels and comfortable zones enhanced their solitude experience highlighting the possibilities of acceptable interactions within one's solitude experience. Therefore, solitude in a bounded interactive sense can be understood in a way which is distinctive from the conventional solitude experience.

On the other hand, the findings revealed certain interactive social presences of locals, other travellers, and service persons were beyond SFTs' desires and were intrusive towards experiencing solitude. These intrusions contribute to the literature on the effects of social presence and territorial intrusions in distinctive consumption contexts. In responding towards intrusive experiences, SFTs used certain response strategies depending on the intruder. In the event of intrusions caused by locals and other travellers, SFTs mostly handled the incidents on their own. This study found complaining to be a novel response strategy of SFTs in the event of intrusive service persons, highlighting the non-complaining behaviour of SFTs with certain unique underlying reasons for suppressing complaints. Besides complaining as a novel response strategy in consumer territorial intrusion, reasons for non-complaining, also contribute to the wider literature on the complaining behaviour of solo female consumers, which could be applied in various other consumption contexts. These findings and the associated interpretations have implications for DMOs in designing solo female travelling-friendly servicescapes and offerings for women who travel with distinctive travel needs.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

DMOs – Destination Management Organisations

FB - Facebook

SFTs – Solo Female Travellers

T2T –Tourist-to-tourist

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CHAPTER ONE – INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of the study

Gender equality has paved the way for working women and expanded the horizons of economic independence. With increased female participation in the workforce and the consequential independence gained in terms of finance and spending, the growing female travel market in the world is undeniable (Bond, 2019). Embracing autonomy and independent travel has become popular among women, where travelling is considered as a means of freedom, independence, and empowerment (Jordan & Gibson, 2005). Given that travelling takes many forms, solo travelling (i.e., travelling alone) has become a growing trend in travel and tourism (Nath, 2023). Solo travellers are defined as tourists who travel “mostly abroad but also within their own country, without any companionship from partners, parents, children or friends/relatives, or in groups of solo travellers from the tourist-generating country” (Abbasian, 2019, p. 36). However, Abbasian (2019) also claims that solo travellers may join other tourists and strangers in escorted tours at the destinations.

Solo travellers make up 11% of the global travel market, out of which 84% are SFTs (Condor Ferries, 2023b). Unaccompanied travelling of women is a recent trend in both the Western and Asian contexts. According to the solo travel statistics of Condor Ferries (2023b), 72% of US women have taken a solo vacation, while 48% of Southeast Asian women have also taken a solo holiday (Elliott, 2015). The steady growth in SFTs is reflected in Google search statistics, showing an increase in searches for “solo women travel” by 230% in 2019 from 2018 (Solo Traveler, 2021). Even though SFTs are deemed to be an attractive traveller segment, they are considered under-researched in the scholarly literature (Yang et al., 2018b). In this regard, studying the emergent phenomenon of solo female travelling is important to the tourism industry and for destination management organisations (DMOs) in developing and shaping

their marketing initiatives targeting SFTs as a distinctive consumer segment. This study, therefore, explicitly focuses on solo female travellers (SFTs) as a distinctive tourist market segment driven by unique travel needs in their solitary consumption contexts.

Several research initiatives have been launched covering various aspects relating to SFTs including the meaning of solo travelling (Jordan & Gibson, 2005; Wilson & Harris, 2006), motivations (Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2016; Jordan & Gibson, 2005; Seow & Brown, 2018), travel experience (Jordan & Gibson, 2005; Seow & Brown, 2018; Wilson & Little, 2008), travel constraints (Neluhena et al., 2023; Obenour, 2005; Seow & Brown, 2018) and risk and risk negotiation (Khan et al., 2019; Schwab, 2019; Wantono & McKercher, 2019; Yang et al., 2018a, 2018b). These studies have provided insights to DMOs in terms of identifying distinctive motives of women behind solo travelling, the challenges they encounter (mainly the risks), and overcoming the challenges. Thereby, these studies have facilitated DMOs to identify effective and feasible marketing initiatives to cater to SFTs.

Amongst various aspects of traveller behaviours, travel needs are deemed important to study. Travel needs serve as a means of determining tourist behaviour and their relevance in different consumer groups deserves more scholarly focus (Tasci & Ko, 2017). Several key theories such as Motivational Tourist Typology (Cohen, 1972), Push-pull Theory (Dann, 1977, 1981), Wanderlust/Sunlust (Gray, 1970), and Theory of Seeking and Escaping (Iso-Ahola, 1982) explain a range of needs and motives in the travel and leisure context.

Previous studies have identified various needs and motives of SFTs¹. Mehmetoglu et al. (2001) identify a comprehensive list of motives behind an individual's decision to travel solo. The list includes: ease, experience, flexibility, freedom, exploration, absence of a travel companion, prestige, sex, spontaneity, temporal considerations, guilt avoidance, solitude, and selective contact. Subsequent studies on SFTs have also identified motives that are similar to

¹The terms needs and motives are used interchangeably in tourism literature. A detailed review of this will be presented in section 2.2.

those identified above (see for example, Abbasian, 2019; Durko & Stone, 2017; Zhang & Hitchcock, 2014).

Even though the existing studies have identified various solo travel needs of women, what is not clear in the current literature is whether and how SFTs can satisfy those travel needs in their solo travel discourse. Hence, to bridge this gap, the current study intends to explore a unique travel need of SFTs and how this need can be satisfied. Accordingly, this study will primarily focus on the need for ‘solitude’ which encapsulates most of the other solo travel needs of women (for example, freedom, independence, relaxation, etc.), identified in the current literature (Osman et al., 2020; Seow & Brown, 2018). In the travel context, solitude has been explicitly identified as a motivation of solo travellers in general (Goodwin & Lockshin, 1992; Yang, 2021) and specifically with regard to SFTs (Yang et al., 2019). Further, the level of solitude and companionship could be key elements that characterise present and future solo tourists (Leith, 2020). Overall, therefore, this study identifies solitude as a distinctive travel need of women who travel solo and as an integral aspect of women’s solo travel experience.

Solitude as a psychological construct has been conceptualised in the literature and is identified as a complex phenomenon. Accordingly, solitude as a travel need of SFTs may entail certain dynamics that have not been captured so far. This becomes even more challenging given the challenges in women’s solo travel experience. Solitude in solo travelling does not necessarily mean being completely solo throughout one’s solo travel. For example, a SFT may decide to go on short group trips and build friendships with others they meet along their solo trips. According to a recent survey, SFTs’ interest in group travel remains high at over 50% (Solo Female Traveller, 2022). In the same survey, it was found that 96% of women who have never travelled solo will likely go solo on a group tour (consisting of unknown members) (Solo Female Traveller, 2022). Therefore, previous definitions of solo female travelling as a pursuit where women may travel independently outside of a packaged tour and a companion (Prideaux

& Glover, 2016), seem out-of-date and may not accurately conceptualise the present SFT. The complexity of solo travelling is emphasised by Yang (2021) who states that solo travel spans from being solo throughout the trip at one end and being part of a travel group alone at the other end. Hence, the current study's stance on SFTs aligns with Yang (2021) and Terziyska (2021), admitting the possibility of women having alone time and interaction episodes in solo travelling as well as solitude within the presence of others. The presence of others seems to be an important aspect of women's solitude travel experience. Consequently, SFTs will often find themselves sharing the tourism space while trying to realise their solitude needs.

Given the multi-dimensionality of solo travelling and its relevance to SFTs, how these various solo and non-solo episodes will influence women's solo travel experience is deemed important to study. Association with others during travel is important in the process of assigning meaning to one's travel experience (White & White, 2008). Tourists' interactions with others they meet along the way and the places they visit construct the tourist experience (Sharpley, 2014). Similarly, Pons (2003) and Wearing and Wearing (1996) find that inter-tourist interactions and interactions with the host population constitute one's travel experience. Studies into SFTs' risk perceptions (Yang et al., 2018a, 2018b) and experiences of harassment (Su & Wu, 2020) reflect women's encounters with various others during their solo travel discourse. However, these studies are predominantly risk-focused and do not provide a clear explanation as to how the presence of others may influence women's solitude experience in their solo travel discourse.

The present study aims to investigate the solitude experience of SFTs. Thereby, the current study will explore the various solo and non-solo episodes that women come across in their solo travel pursuits and how various interactions may shape SFTs' solitude experience.

1.2 Research aim and research questions

The key research aim driving the present study can be summarised thus:

To explore how solo female travellers perceive solitude as a travel need and to understand how interactions with others will influence their solitude experience.

In pursuing the above aim, the research questions of the current study follow:

RQ1: How do SFTs perceive solitude as a solo travel need?

RQ2: How do various interactions influence the solitude experience of SFTs?

RQ3: How do SFTs respond to intrusive episodes during their solo travels?

1.3 Proposed contribution to knowledge

The findings of this study will contribute to knowledge in the area of experiencing solitude as a travel need in solo travel settings. Further, the findings will highlight how solo travelling as a context may influence SFTs' solitude experience in the presence of others. The study expects to add new knowledge to the tourism literature on solo travel in the areas of (1) the perception of solitude as a travel need of SFTs, (2) the influence of various interactions on experiencing solitude as a travel need, and (3) various strategies used by SFTs in the events that detract them from experiencing solitude as a travel need.

By studying solitude as a travel need of SFTs, this study will add more nuanced knowledge to the current understanding of solitude as a psychological construct. Further, the inclusion of social presence and its influence on the solitude experience will enhance the existing conceptualisation of solitude which is largely restricted to complete seclusion. It is expected that the various social interactions in the current study will bring important insights towards the current literature on customer-to-customer interactions (other travellers as in this study's context) and customer-to-service person interactions that take place in social presence and influence one's fulfilment of needs in a given consumption context (i.e., solitude in solo travelling).

1.4 Proposed contribution to practice

Firstly, findings related to SFTs' preference for solitude will provide competitive insights for DMOs targeting solo consumers (Goodwin & Lockshin, 1992). In doing so, DMOs could look into ways and means of designing solitude servicescapes in catering to consumer segments with distinctive solitude needs (for example, SFTs). The findings of the study could be utilised for institutionalising solitude in solo accommodation providers. For instance, solo female-friendly accommodation providers such as; hostels, homestays, and river cruising (Nesbitt, 2020) may look into ways and means of catering to the distinctive solitude needs of SFTs while they are staying.

Secondly, the findings will suggest the influence of interactions that take place during the non-solo episodes in women's solo travel experiences. DMOs can utilise these findings to design their service offerings by considering how to promote best practices within the interactions that take place between SFTs and service persons. Further, DMOs can also design certain codes of conduct and protocols to enhance the interactions between SFTs and other travellers in a way that will ensure the distinctive travel needs of different traveller segments are fulfilled during their travel pursuits. Thereby, the findings can be utilised in visitor behaviour management and site management for the betterment of SFTs.

Finally, it is expected that the findings will highlight SFTs' attempts to nurture their solitude experience and show any subsequent behaviours they may engage in if they are unable to fulfil their travel needs. As such, DMOs can utilise these insights to become a facilitator and aid SFTs in satisfying their travel needs. In doing so, it will help DMOs to develop better efficiencies in the functioning of their offering and design a conducive environment that facilitates solitary consumption.

1.5 Outline of the thesis

The thesis is structured in ten chapters. Below is a brief outline of each chapter.

Chapter Two: Solo Female Travellers

Chapter two provides an overview of SFTs based on the existing literature. The review will cover the existing research and knowledge relating to SFTs and identify certain gaps in terms of the travel needs of SFTs. The chapter describes SFTs, focusing on their motivations and constraints, and will highlight the importance of studying solitude in women's solo travel experience.

Chapter Three: Solitude

Chapter three provides a comprehensive review of the concept of 'solitude' and its associated benefits. This chapter will identify the current conceptualisation of solitude in the literature. Apart from theorising solitude, the chapter also reviews the solitude experience in the travel context. Further, this chapter also highlights the solitary experience of women in their daily lives.

Chapter Four: Social Presence Effects in Consumption

This chapter reviews the influence of social presence effects on one's consumption experience. In doing so, it enables an understanding of the possible influences of various others in one's travel experience. This chapter provides a conceptual understanding of the dynamics in one's consumption experience in public spaces which can be broadly applied to the solo female travelling context of the current study.

Chapter Five: Methodology and Method

Chapter five provides the methodological approach adopted in the current study. It will first describe the interpretivism paradigm on which the current study is based. Then, it will provide a comprehensive understanding of the research design, by referring to the choice of method,

data collection methods and procedures, and information relating to the analysis. Finally, the chapter will describe how the methodological approach ensured the quality and trustworthiness of the study.

Chapter Six: Findings I: Dynamics of Solo Travelling and Solitude as a Travel Need

This chapter reports the findings relating to the first research question. The chapter will first report findings relating to solo travel and the need for solitude of women in their solo travel discourse. Then, it moves on to explain different levels of solitude experience and space for interactions within the solitude experienced by SFTs.

Chapter Seven: Findings II: External Intrusions Towards the Solitude Experience of SFTs

This chapter reports the findings of the second research question. In doing so, it shows how interactions with locals, other travellers, and service persons were intrusive towards the solitude experience of SFTs. The chapter shows various intrusive episodes that women encountered due to the unwanted presence of others in their solo travel pursuit.

Chapter Eight: Findings III: Responses towards Intrusive Solo Travel Episodes

This chapter addresses the third research question, describing various response strategies that SFTs use in responding towards intrusive experiences with locals, other travellers, and service persons. This chapter will also report the findings relating to SFTs' non-complaining behaviour in the event of service intrusions.

Chapter Nine: Discussion

Chapter nine will discuss the key findings of the study with respect to the current body of knowledge. Thereby, it will delve into the key findings presented in the chapter, interpreting their significance within the context of existing literature and research questions.

Chapter Ten: Conclusion

This chapter will delineate the key implications of the study in the realm of theory and practice.

Next, it will acknowledge the limitations of the current study and will propose recommendations for future research areas. Finally, the chapter presents the overall conclusion of the study relating to the research aim and questions.

CHAPTER TWO - SOLO FEMALE TRAVELLERS

This chapter reviews and analyses the literature on solo female travelling as a trend in travel and tourism. The chapter consists of four sections. Section one provides a comprehensive account of solo female travelling, reviewing definitions, terms, and existing scholarly work related to the concept. In section two, a detailed account of the underlying needs and motivations of solo travelling is presented. Section three reviews the existing body of knowledge relating to the constraints of solo female travellers (SFTs) followed by how travel constraints may influence the travel needs of SFTs. Having synthesised the literature above, the chapter then highlights the need for investigating SFTs' solitude experience in the presence of others in women's solo travel discourse. Therefore, section four of the chapter concludes by highlighting the need for exploring solitude as a travel need of SFTs.

2.1 Solo female travellers

Solo travelling is a concept that has evolved over time due to its perceived meaning depending on travel experience perceptions and individual circumstances (Yang, 2021). Several approaches exist in conceptualising solo travel. Past studies have narrowly identified solo travellers based on their arrival status (at the visiting country) and as one who is travelling alone and not a member of another traveller group (Bianchi, 2022; Chai, 1996; Foo, 1999; McNamara & Prideaux, 2010). According to Yang and Tung (2018), 'solo travellers' are the ones who arrive alone at the destination. Hence, 'solo' refers to the arrival status of a person and not the status of travelling (Laesser et al., 2009). However, even though a person may arrive at a destination alone, it is not expected that the person would stay alone during the whole trip as they may interact with locals, service persons, and other tourists (Wilson, 2004; Yang & Tung, 2018). Usual definitions included that solo travellers usually left home alone, they may have met people along the way, or they may have used tours from time to time, travelled by

themselves, or were primarily responsible for their travel-related activities (Wilson, 2004). Mehmetoglu (2003) recognised solo travellers (in general) as non-institutionalised, who were characterised by organising trips themselves, moving away from other travellers, and moving away from their ordinary life in their home countries. Another option is defining solo travelling as along a continuum, ranging from ‘being solo throughout the trip’ at one end to ‘being a part of a travel group alone’ at the other (Yang, 2021). Further, a solo traveller may not be completely independent but may opt for freedom and flexibility through a minimally organised package (Laesser et al., 2009).

Existing literature provides several terms to identify travellers who travel alone. The most commonly used terms include ‘solo travellers’ (Abbasian, 2019; Campbell, 2009; Osman et al., 2020; Radojevic et al., 2015; Yang, 2021), ‘solo tourist’ (Bianchi, 2022; Heimtun, 2012; Jordan & Aitchison, 2008; Leith, 2020), or ‘solitary traveller’ (Mehmetoglu, 2003, 2004; Mehmetoglu et al., 2001). Other terms include ‘independent traveller’ (McNamara & Prideaux, 2010) and ‘single traveller’ (Navare & Zagade, 2015). Specifying gender, the majority of the studies refer to the term ‘solo female traveller’ (Kour & Gupta, 2019; Schwab, 2019; Su & Wu, 2020; Terziyska, 2021; Thomas & Mura, 2019; Yang, 2017; Yang et al., 2018a, 2018b). Hence, to be consistent the term ‘solo female traveller’ (SFT) will be used for the current study encapsulating all the synonymous terms.

According to Prideaux and Glover (2016, p. 1), solo female independent travellers are defined as “women who choose to travel independently without a packaged tour and without a companion.” L. Silva et al. (2020), studying SFTs’ experiences, found that while some of the SFTs planned their trips in advance, a minority of women did not organise the trip and instead did so along the way of their journeys. Joining with other tourists and strangers in tour packages at the destinations visited did not change the definition of a solo traveller (Abbasian, 2019). In line with this, several scholars identified various encounters with others and interactions in solo

female travelling. For example, Terziyska (2021) views the possibility of SFTs interacting with others or making new friendships as conducive with solo travel, while some may go on shorter trips with others as a part of their solo travels. Similarly, Yang (2021) and Yang et al. (2022) consider a solo traveller as one who may travel alone or be a part of another travelling group. In consensus with these notions, the current study acknowledges that travelling without a companion does not necessarily mean a complete lack of companionship. Hence, a SFT may travel on her own but may also interact with other strangers met in her solo travel discourse.

By now, solo female travel is recognised as one of the prominent tourism trends (Terziyska, 2021). With the growing trend of solo female travel in tourism, scholarly attention has been given to various aspects relating to SFTs. These aspects mainly include the meaning and perception of solo travelling (Benjamin & Schwab, 2021; Jordan & Gibson, 2005; Wilson & Harris, 2006; Ying et al., 2017), motivations (Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2016; Jordan & Gibson, 2005; Seow & Brown, 2018; Terziyska, 2021), travel experience (Jordan & Gibson, 2005; Seow & Brown, 2018; Wilson & Little, 2008), travel constraints (Brugulat & Coromina, 2021; Ngwira et al., 2020; Obenour, 2005; Seow & Brown, 2018; Yang & Tung, 2018), and risk and risk negotiation (Su & Wu, 2020; Thomas & Mura, 2019; Wantono & McKercher, 2019; Yang et al., 2018a, 2018b). Further, several studies have investigated how risk negotiation leads to the identity reconstruction of SFTs (Thomas & Mura, 2019; Yang et al., 2018a, 2018b; Yang et al., 2019).

While these various studies have contributed immensely in expanding the current understanding of SFTs and their travel behaviour, needs and motivations underlying solo travelling provide useful insights towards tourism marketers in understanding travel needs and ensuring their fulfilment. Therefore, the next section will review travel needs and motivations followed by a review of SFTs' needs and motivations to travel alone.

2.2 Tourist needs and motivations

Due to the existential relationship, need and motivation are used interchangeably in the related travel and tourism literature (Tasci & Ko, 2017). In early definitions, travel need/motivation is defined as “a state of tension or disequilibrium” (Crompton & McKay, 1997, p. 427). Further, Pearce and Lee (2005, p. 228) define travel needs/motives as “the biological and sociocultural forces that drive travel behaviour.” Some definitions of travel motivations refer to motivations as needs. For example, Yoon and Uysal (2005) describe motivation as psychological/biological needs that awake, direct, and integrate a person’s behaviour and activity. Tasci and Ko (2017, p. 21) provide a very comprehensive definition of travel needs as “physical, social, and psychological deprivation that may intensify into a noticeable disequilibrium for the individual, who engages in actions with utilitarian and hedonic end benefits that may be voluntarily sought in order to reach desired physical, social, and psychological states.” Further, they also state that need is the underlying factor that results in motivation and action (i.e., travel).

Consumer motivations are of prime concern to tourism scholars, as they bring implications for theory and practice by explaining and anticipating motivations behind pleasure travel (Snepenger et al., 2006). From a theoretical perspective, motivations are the fundamental reasons for behaviour (Battour et al., 2017; Correia et al., 2013; Juvan et al., 2017), important to understand travel decision-making and revisit intentions (Correia & Pimpão, 2008; Kim et al., 2015), and also to help in assessing satisfaction from the travel experience (Correia et al., 2013; O. Silva et al., 2020). From a practitioner perspective, motivation research provides insights for marketing tourism experiences (Ateljevic, 1999), designing and planning tourism attractions, and assessing service delivery for holiday experiences (Snepenger et al., 2006).

Murray (1964, p. 7) provided an early definition of motivation, in general. According to this source, a motive is “an internal factor that arouses, directs, and integrates a person’s

behaviour.” He further described a motive as not observable but inferred from a person’s behaviour or assumed to exist to explain one’s behaviour. Particular to travel and tourism, certain scholars have defined motivations for vacations. Tourism motivation is “a meaningful state of mind which adequately disposes an actor or group of actors to travel, and which is subsequently interpretable by others as a valid explanation for such a decision” (Dann, 1981, p. 211). According to Crompton and McKay (1997, p. 427), tourism motivation is conceptualised as “a dynamic process of internal psychological factors (needs and wants) that generate a state of tension or disequilibrium within individuals.” Hence, the inner needs and resulting tension lead to certain behaviours in resolving the tension through need satisfaction (Crompton, 1979). Further, a traveller who is motivated via certain internal or external stimuli may act upon these impulses and, in realising those motives, ultimately influence the overall travel experience.

A long stream of theories has been posited to explain why people travel. One of the earliest theories is Aristotle’s (384-322BC) three-layered theory of leisure which explains what people do in their free time. This postulates that people tend to be amused, recreate, and contemplate in their free time. This is known to be one of the foundational theories that explain human desires during free time that seem to intuitively include travel (Tasci & Ko, 2017). Several motivational theories have been used to understand the role of motivations in travel decision-making. Most attempts have taken a content theory approach (You et al., 2000). Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs is one of the early theories used in exploring tourist motivations (Jang & Cai, 2002; Yousaf et al., 2018). Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs, a widely recognised needs theory, is applicable in the context of leisure and travel domains, yet the theory does not focus if the needs are fulfilled or not in this context (Tasci & Ko, 2017).

According to Gray (1970), travel motivations are categorised into two concepts called ‘wanderlust’ and ‘sunlust’. ‘Wanderlust’ includes the desire to explore the unknown including

visiting different places, people, and cultures. 'Sunlust' is the desire of a person to travel for better destination attributes or amenities that usually do not exist in one's place of residence (for example, sports). Also applicable to leisure, recreation, and tourism, is the Four Dimension Motivation Theory proposed by Iso-Ahola in 1980. This theory includes personal escape, personal seeking, interpersonal escape, and interpersonal seeking. The interplay between escape and seeking personal and interpersonal opportunities in recreational travel results in psychological benefits (Dunn Ross & Iso-Ahola, 1991). In tourism, recreational travel results in psychological benefits as it enables a person to escape from routine and stressful environments and seek opportunities for self-learning (Falk et al., 2012).

Also, in the context of tourism, the Push and Pull Theory is prevalent in understanding motivations (Crompton, 1979; Dann, 1981). Push motives are the underlying internal factors (social-psychological motives) of a person that drive the desire to travel (Brown, 2005). Many studies report reasons or motives such as escape, relaxation, social interaction, exploration, relationship enhancement, and prestige as the most common push factors for travel (Jensen, 2011). Some of the other push factors include appreciating nature and famous sites (Jensen, 2011), experiencing something different (Gilbert & Terrata, 2001), and evaluating of self (Crompton, 1979).

Apart from the psychological push factors described above, certain factors pull a person to a specific destination. While push motivations are fulfilled by a variety of different activities and are general in nature, pull motivations offered by a destination are highly specific to the particular place (Iso-Ahola, 1989). Pull factors refer to 'place' as a product in tourism that defines a destination (Yiamjanya & Wongleedee, 2014). Pull factors are the destination attributes and are identified as secondary motives (Jamrozy & Uysal, 1994). Pull factors include physical and other characteristics including culture, nation, and climate (Abbasian, 2019).

Investigating pull factors is important as it helps sustainably attract new tourists and motivate repeat visits (Yiamjanya & Wongleedee, 2014).

Similar to the push factors of Push and Pull Theory, Jamal and Lee (2003) focused deeper and considered the micro and macro factors influencing tourist motivations. They identified macro factors as the broad social forces that induce people to travel, while micro factors are the internal psychological needs that motivate travel. Jamal and Lee (2003) further explained how certain societal changes induce certain inner psychological needs compelling someone to travel. For example, the idea of a 'search for authenticity' is a result of people being disconnected in the modern world due to technological advancements. Hence, travel provides a means to enhance relationships and to find authentic places in the world. Drawing from this, women's' decision to travel solo can also be linked with various internal and external reasons indicating the complexity and multifacetedness of SFTs' travel motives.

Besides the theories that identify travel needs and motivations, several studies have focused on various types of travellers in terms of their underlying travel needs/motives. To name a few these included: casino travellers (Lee et al., 2006), fishing travellers (Chi, 2006), golf travellers (Petrick, 2002; Petrick et al., 2001), and wine travellers (Yuan et al., 2005). Some of the travel needs of specific traveller groups seem very similar to those of general travellers, for example, the travel needs of golf travellers: status, novelty factors of thrill, change from routine, boredom alleviation, and surprise (Petrick, 2002). These needs align with the travel motives of usual travellers, even though they may not represent a specific type or group as indicated above. However, this is not true with all types of travellers and their needs and certain uniqueness could be seen relating to specific types of travellers (Tasci & Ko, 2017).

Amongst various types of travellers and their underlying needs and motivations for travel, the travel need requirements of solo travellers are of particular importance. Compared to families and couples, solo travellers' motivations differ, as they have more freedom in

decision-making, travel at their own pace, and also they do not need to collaborate with others in making travel-related decisions (Bianchi, 2016). Mehmetoglu et al. (2001), conducting a study that included male and female solo travellers, found individuals reported a comprehensive set of psychological motivations behind travelling alone, which they emphasised none should be seen as a sole determinant, as one may have a combination of motives in play. These motives included ease (convenience in travelling alone), experience, flexibility, freedom, exploration, absence of a travel companion (no one to travel with), prestige (positive impression created due to travelling alone), sex, spontaneity, temporal considerations (time to contemplate own desires), guilt avoidance (not having to compromise someone else's time to meet own desires in travelling), solitude, and selective contact. In studying solo travellers visiting city destinations, Abbasian (2019) found freedom of choice as the primary reason to travel solo and participants were also motivated to engage in certain activities such as visiting attractions and friends, shopping, walking, eating in restaurants, and learning the language. Bianchi (2022) empirically investigated the factors affecting repeat solo travel intentions and found that the favourable attitude towards solo travel and perceived behavioural control of travel decision-making positively influenced the decision to continue solo trips. While Abbasian (2019) and Bianchi (2022) included both male and female genders in their studies, most of these motivations are common to SFTs as revealed by many studies, reviewed below.

2.2.1 Why do women travel solo?

The existing literature mainly revolved around reasons (societal and individual), motivations, needs, and benefits in explaining why women tend to travel solo. While certain studies identify these aspects distinctively, most studies seem to capture these aspects without much distinction. For example, reasons are also interpreted as motivations, needs, and benefits (i.e., independence is identified as a reason, a need, a motivation, and a benefit of solo travelling). Therefore, making a conceptual distinction among these aspects seems somewhat

difficult due to the current shared understanding of these in relation to literature. However, for review and analysis purposes this section will report the reasons, motivations, needs, and benefits of solo female travelling while emphasising the importance of understanding them in bringing out implications for DMOs.

Reasons for solo female travelling can be understood in terms of certain societal and economic changes and individual factors. Resulting from changing family structures and individualised lifestyles, in the past ten years, the living lone population has increased by 33% (Klinenberg, 2013). Euromonitor has identified ‘spending singles’, (individuals who spend for their own consumption), as one of the top ten trends in consumer behaviour in the year 2016 (*The Top 10 Global Consumer Trends for 2016*, 2016). According to O’Neill (2015), certain cinematic experiences (for example, the movie, ‘Eat Pray Love’ which followed a SFT on a round-the-world journey) have moved people to try solo travel. Similarly, certain societal changes could be identified to help explain solo female travelling. Due to advances in gender equality, women’s employment in both developed and developing countries has greatly improved, resulting in more opportunities and choices about travel (Yang et al., 2018b). Further, inspirational stories shared by SFTs on social media have also motivated other women to travel solo (Hostelworld Blog).

Apart from broader social changes, certain individual drivers further explain why solo travelling is becoming popular among women. As mentioned earlier, some of these individual reasons reflect benefits and some indicate an explanation for travelling solo. For example, Terziyska (2021) found that certain women travel alone as they “hate people” (p. 122) reflecting a more introverted character of some SFTs. Another reason for women to travel alone is the absence of a travel partner, resulting from not having friends and/or a spouse/partner, or the inability to coordinate trips with friends or family (Terziyska, 2021; Wilson & Little, 2005; Yang & Tung, 2018). Travelling solo, due to the absence of a travel partner, is considered a

reason rather than a motivation for travelling solo (Terziyska, 2021). Therefore, some of the justifications for solo travelling could be purely identified as underlying reasons (without confusing them as needs, motivations, or benefits) for someone to travel on their own rather than with someone else.

Another stream of research identifies the motivations of SFTs with an inclination towards studying participants from particular country backgrounds. This motivations-based research mainly stems from Western and Eastern countries. However, it should be noted that motivations are often reported together with reasons, needs, and benefits making it difficult to conceptually differentiate. This re-emphasises the often interchangeable nature of the terms ‘needs and motivations’ in the travel and tourism literature (Tasci & Ko, 2017). For example, Breda et al. (2020) identified the lack of travel companions, the freedom of choice, the experience and adventure, and the escape from the daily routine as motivations of Portuguese women to travel solo. However, in other studies, some of these motivations have also been identified as either benefits or reasons of solo female travelling. Using the terms ‘reasons’ and ‘motivations’ interchangeably, El Gamil (2018) identified five main reasons for Egyptian SFTs to travel alone. This included leisure, studying, business, visiting friends and relatives, and shopping. However, these motivations (or reasons) were deemed to be vaguely cluttered around travel purposes rather than solo travel motivations. For instance, travelling alone for study, leisure, business purposes, and visiting friends and relatives implied totally different categories of tourism which needed to be studied independently, as motivations within those categories may differ considerably depending on the purpose. Hosseini et al. (2021) found freedom and flexibility, self-empowerment, independence, and exploration as motivations of Iranian SFTs. As previously noted, some of these motivations reflect certain benefits or outcomes of solo travelling (for example, self-empowerment). Women who chose to travel independently were

motivated by a preference for self-discovery, enlightenment, adventure, and education (Cockburn-Wootten et al., 2006).

Representing the Asian context, some studies focus on the travel motivations of SFTs. Mani and Jose (2020) found the restrictiveness of organised travel and the unavailability of a travel partner as the reasons for women in Kerala (India) to travel solo within the country for leisure purposes. A qualitative study by Osman et al. (2020) found that Vietnamese SFTs are motivated by personal factors (freedom and flexibility, self-empowerment, independence, and exploration) and social interaction factors (lack of companions and meeting new people). The personal factors identified in this study were replicated in Hosseini et al. (2021), as indicated above, which was also a qualitative study. Focusing on SFTs from several Asian countries, Seow and Brown (2018) discovered that women were travelling alone due to various motivations ranging from the desire to be alone, to reflect on life, or to escape from their mundane responsibilities. Zhang and Hitchcock (2014), studying the Chinese SFT experience, discovered that for some women, travelling allowed an 'indulgent' chance to take pleasure in private leisure time without work and familial responsibilities.

As reviewed above, while most of the studies researched a particular cohort of SFTs from a given country, some studies either did not specify the country or took a broader perspective without restricting their focus towards the country of origin. Among other motives (i.e., escape, relaxation, socialisation, and self-esteem building) experience was the most prominent reason for women to travel alone which included cultural, knowledge, and travelling oriented aspects (Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2016). In emphasising tourist motivation as having a global character, Terziyska (2021) adopted the netnographic method and analysed posts and comments in a solo female travelling Facebook group of 400,000 members. In doing so, Terziyska (2021) identified nine motivational factors out of which two of the factors (hatred of people and absence of a travel partner) were described as reasons. The other seven motivations

were change/breakdown, discovering new cultures, freedom and independence, meeting new people, having fun, peace and relaxation, and self-discovery and actualisation. By looking at the different motivations (or needs/reasons) as reported in the studies relating to SFTs from various country backgrounds (as reviewed above), they reflect a more global characterisation despite the diversity of country backgrounds of women, which is in line with Terziyska (2021) who also disregarded the cultural diversity of SFTs in studying their underlying motives to travel alone. Therefore, the underlying reasons (including motivations, needs, and benefits) for women to travel solo are deemed to be universal regardless of the country of origin of SFTs.

Benefits or outcomes of solo female travelling is another area of investigation that explains why women travel solo. Wilson and Harris (2006) claim travelling independently alone is both a psychological and social growth journey for women. According to Durko and Stone (2017), women who were in relationships were travelling without their partners, as they did not want to consider their partner's constraints, they wished to escape from their routinised tasks, and they found great female bonding when travelling with their female friends. Travelling alone allowed women to move away from their normal environments and to be in a space where they could focus on themselves or reevaluate their life perspectives (Wilson & Harris, 2006). Thus 'escape' is identified as a benefit and a motivation (mentioned above) of solo female travelling. Wilson and Harris (2006), in analysing women's travel stories, revealed the search for self and identity, self-empowerment, and connectedness with others constituted 'meaningful travel' for independent solo travellers (p. 161). They also found that self-empowerment resulting from solo travelling occurred as an interlinked process of negotiating constraints, facing challenges, and resisting societal expectations. According to Bianchi (2016), travelling alone facilitates a person to engage in self-reflection and personal development, with greater impulsiveness. For some women, empowerment, a boost in self-confidence, and self-belief were experienced after completing certain extreme activities (Myers, 2017). Apart from the

aforementioned inward psychological-focused benefits of travelling alone, solo travelling enabled women to develop new social contacts with other people (including other travellers and locals) (Terziyska, 2021; Wilson & Harris, 2006; Ying et al., 2017).

Regardless of the confusion around the terminology of motivations, needs, benefits, and reasons, the above review emphasises the existing literature is quite well-informed in terms of capturing why women travel solo. However, none of these studies have sufficiently considered the nature of the solo travel context, i.e., even though solo travellers travel on their own, as mentioned earlier, they may often encounter others. Further, as stated earlier, even though the current definitions of solo travelling encapsulate the chances of encountering others while travelling solo (see for example, Terziyska, 2021; Yang, 2021), this has not been adequately explored relating to one's solo travel experience. Therefore, since non-solo episodes in one's solo travel experience may influence the solitude needs of a solo traveller, experiencing solitude may become challenging in the presence of others. As a result, women may need to reconcile the tension between being alone vs being alone among others. Hence, the present study highlights the importance of studying a distinctive need of SFTs (i.e., solitude) encompassing various other associated motivations, benefits, and reasons, while focusing on how such a need is met in a solo and sometimes non-solo travel context.

According to Tasci and Ko (2017), researching travel needs is important for several reasons. Firstly, the psychological and social needs of travelling make travel needs complex as they are not quite as obvious as physiological needs. Secondly, studying the dominant need for travelling is important since it is an outcome of multiple simultaneous needs. Hence, the activities involved, and the choices made will reveal more robust insights. Thirdly, research on travel needs will bring important insights into other related constructs such as travel type, destination choices, expectations, and activities. Finally, the travel needs of different consumer typologies deserve more scholarly attention to identify the distinctiveness of such travel needs.

Hence, investigating 'solitude' as a dominant travel need of SFTs (a distinct consumer typology) is likely to bring important insights for both theory and practice in travel and tourism.

Even though the existing literature has not identified or studied 'solitude' as a travel need, solo travelling studies have captured solitude as a motivation together with its many other associated benefits. Yang et al. (2019) have explicitly mentioned solitude as a motivation of SFTs, and solitude is also mentioned as a key motivator for solo travellers in general (Goodwin & Lockshin, 1992; Laing & Crouch, 2009; Leith, 2020; Yang, 2021). However, most of the other psychologically-focused motives and benefits such as self-discovery, self-actualisation, enlightenment, and life reflection can also be realised from being in a state of solitude during specific travel settings such as the wilderness (Daniel, 2005; Hammitt et al., 2001; Kalisch et al., 2011; Nicholls, 2008). Seeking solitude shows a desire to escape from stressful life situations, and in tourist motivational factors, it is categorised under the competencies of avoiding stimuli (Beard & Ragheb, 1983). Hence, uncovering the solitude experience of SFTs will help capture several other associated motives and benefits of solo travelling. Further, solitary consumption in travel and leisure may entail special concerns, for example, safety or lack of distractions, as compared to group consumption in families or groups (Goodwin & Lockshin, 1992). Therefore, investigating the solitary experience of SFTs will provide useful insights for tourism and hospitality marketers who target SFTs as a growing consumer segment.

As discussed throughout this chapter, solo female travelling is motivated by various factors, and it brings many benefits as well. However, women's leisure travel is more intensely constrained than men's (Wilson & Little, 2005). Therefore, this study argues that travel constraints might inhibit SFTs from fulfilling their various travel needs (including solitude) in their solo travel pursuits. As a result, SFTs may not be able to perceive the benefits of solo travel as they expect which, in turn, might influence their post-solo travel behaviours. The next

section will draw upon how women are more restricted in the tourism space than their male counterparts.

2.3 Gender as a travel constraint

According to Eagly (1987), a social theory interpretation postulates the division of social roles of men and women, resulting in gender differences in how they behave in society. These different social role expectations produce cultural beliefs about gender roles in terms of what males and females are expected to do (Wood & Eagly, 2012). Accordingly, men and women are stereotyped for certain characteristics such as sympathy, kindness, and helpfulness being female attributes, while ambition, aggression, and independence are male attributes (Eagly et al., 2000). Due to these typical gender-associated characteristics, women may feel compelled to take care of their family, hindering their ability to engage in leisure as per their will (Khan, 2011). As a result, it is argued, that men and women feel a need to behave in gender-typed ways to meet society's expectations and to meet the needs of their gender roles (Huang et al., 2017).

The term 'tourist' was developed during the mid-eighteenth century (Graburn & Jafari, 1991), and was mainly a role undertaken by Western men involving adventurous exploration in the less developed world, and often implied sexual encounters with foreign women (Chambers, 2009; Pritchard & Morgan, 2000a). Historically, travel was often pursued as a men's activity (Rojek & Urry, 1997). Conceptualising the tourism space from a critical or feminist framework, certain scholars claim, the tourism space and landscape are racialised, gendered, and sexualised, favouring the heterosexual Western man's travel experiences (Jordan & Aitchison, 2008; Pritchard & Morgan, 2000a, 2000b). Physical spaces in tourism are constructed based on social meanings, that are gendered, making men more privileged over women in tourism spaces (Yang et al., 2018a). Hence, women might find it somewhat challenging to navigate tourism spaces on their own.

Identifying as female is a disadvantageous factor for participating in solo leisure travel and this is reinforced by family responsibilities women hold compared to men (Khan, 2011). As Heimtun (2010) put forward, gender intensifies the negative meaning associated with aloneness. Accordingly, alone women were negatively labelled as ‘left on the shelf’ while alone men were glorified with their bachelor status (Heimtun, 2010). Traditionally, in most cultures, women are meant to marry men and are assumed to engage in conventional feminine roles in relation to domestic life, caring, and child-rearing (Oswald et al., 2005). In many male-dominant cultures, women are assumed to engage in caring for others due to their nurturing abilities (Khoo-Lattimore & Wilson, 2017). Consequently, women travelling alone are often criticised as stepping outside their proper sphere (which is restricted to domestic and private spaces) (Jones, 1997). Single women travelling alone can be considered immodest and not conforming to existing norms and beliefs (Khan, 2011). In the 1800s, women travelling alone, without family or a husband was not considered socially acceptable (Khoo-Lattimore & Wilson, 2017). Still, nowadays, when women travel alone in the tourism space, they can encounter certain challenges, such as others’ concerns about their solo presence and feelings of vulnerability (Wilson & Little, 2008). Various travel constraints encountered by females in travelling alone will be discussed in more detail later in this chapter (section 2.3.1).

With the progress of time, gendered roles are changing and blurring, creating greater freedom for women travellers to explore the world (Myers, 2017). Tourism destinations are identified as liminal spaces where tourists can express their authentic selves suspending existing social norms and beliefs (Wang, 1999). Liminality allows a traveller to pass from one’s traditional roles (i.e., parent, worker, or community member) and enter a new physical, social, and cultural world in the host country (Krippendorf, 1988). The liminal world may create tension in travel to transform one’s self (Fullagar, 2002). Movement into a liminal space

becomes an aspect in creating a personal narrative that shapes the travel experience (Meethan, 2005). Gendered liminal space contains a variety of social views on women (Gibson, 2001).

Travel creates a liminal space for women to explore their identity (Elsrud, 2001; Obenour, 2005). Further, travel is a tool for women to construct their identities beyond the traditional family roles they are assigned (Desforges, 2000). For women, independent solo travel may provide “a space which permitted the rewriting of the script of what it was to be a woman” (Warner-Smith, 2000, p. 44). Travelling provides women with an opportunity to challenge gender roles and thereby create a sense of self, and practice self-determination and empowerment (Freysinger & Flannery, 1992; Yonemaru, 2004). Many Western women have started travelling solo, challenging the notions and traditional beliefs of ‘woman’ and ‘woman at home’ (Wilson & Little, 2005). Further, women who travel solo are identified as breaking social gender systems that exist in certain distinctive regional cohorts such as Asia (Xu & Liu, 2018). Ying et al. (2017), studying Generation Y Malaysian women’s perceptions towards solo travel, found that differences in West and Asian values were not a constraint and did not inhibit them from travelling solo. However, despite tourism spaces allowing women to escape from the daily routines assigned to them by their communities (Bui et al., 2014; Heimtun, 2012), women travelling alone was still subject to the risk of not being socially accepted (Karagöz et al., 2020). The next section reviews particular constraints that women encounter in their solo travel pursuits.

2.3.1 Travel constraints of solo female travellers

In the context of leisure travel, constraints are defined as “the factors that inhibit people’s ability to participate in leisure activities, to spend more time doing so, to take advantage of leisure services, or to achieve a desired level of satisfaction” (Jackson, 1988, p. 203). A popular conceptualisation used in identifying travel constraints is the classification proposed by Crawford and Godbey (1987). This model identifies the constraints as dynamic

and intervening factors influencing an individual's participation and preference for travel (Yang & Tung, 2018). In this model, constraints are classified into three categories: intrapersonal, interpersonal, and structural. Intrapersonal constraints inhibit individual psychological states and attributes; interpersonal constraints include interactions with other people; structural constraints represent physical and other demographic factors that influence preference and participation (Crawford & Godbey, 1987).

Existing tourism and leisure literature has identified various elements under each constraint in Crawford and Godbey's model. Intrapersonal constraints include risk and fear (Chung et al., 2017; Nyaupane & Andereck, 2008; Pennington-Gray & Kerstetter, 2002), perceived self-skills (Gilbert & Hudson, 2000; Godbey et al., 2010; Walker et al., 2007), and self-consciousness and stress (Gilbert & Hudson, 2000; Hubbard & Mannell, 2001; Walker et al., 2007). Elements under interpersonal constraints include family and social commitment (Chung et al., 2017; Gilbert & Hudson, 2000), a lack of travel companions (Gilbert & Hudson, 2000), and obligation towards various others (Raymore et al., 1993). Finally, structural constraints include lack of money (Chung et al., 2017; Nyaupane & Andereck, 2008), lack of information (Nyaupane & Andereck, 2008; Raymore et al., 1993), and overcrowding (Gilbert & Hudson, 2000; Nyaupane & Andereck, 2008).

The gendered nature of the tourism space has resulted in various constraints that prevent women from travelling alone. Women travelling alone has been viewed as taboo for a long time, as solo travel augments a man's prestige, but diminishes a woman's reputation (Khan, 2011). Women are constrained in travel due to various social and cultural norms (Brown & Osman, 2017). Since tourism is a sociocultural phenomenon, travellers' experiences are influenced by culture including gender (Gibson et al., 2013). Constraints in travel decisions are usually associated with gender, life cycle, and cultural factors (Shaw, 1994). Many gendered differences in travel constraints represent the unequal power distribution that exists in a

patriarchal society (Wilson & Little, 2008). Factors such as work, family, and household obligations influence the quality of time available for leisure and many females are more constrained by these factors compared to men (Khan, 2011). As put forward by Douglas and Barrett (2020), SFTs are framed as “bounded explorers” (p. 765), due to the emotional, social, and behavioural constraints encountered in their solo travels.

While some scholars have used the above-discussed categorisation (structural, interpersonal, and intrapersonal) (Bernard et al., 2022; Kour & Gupta, 2019) some studies have identified a different categorisation including sociocultural, personal, practical, and spatial constraints as barriers for SFTs (Brugulat & Coromina, 2021; El Gamil, 2018; Wilson & Little, 2005). Ngwira et al. (2020), using a content analysis of solo female travelling travel blogs, discovered interpersonal, external, and intrapersonal constraints of SFTs visiting Africa.

Wilson and Little (2005) defined four categories of constraints. Firstly, sociocultural constraints are the aspects related to the social and cultural context that women live in and come across while travelling solo. Such constraints stem from the social expectations, roles, and responsibilities of women, how others perceive them travelling solo, and unwanted attention while travelling solo. Secondly, personal constraints are internally sourced and are closely linked to sociocultural aspects. Examples include self-doubt, fear, vulnerability, and loneliness. Similar constraints are reported in other studies as well (Breda et al., 2020; Douglas & Barrett, 2020; El Gamil, 2018; Osman et al., 2020). Thirdly, practical constraints are the difficulties and challenges encountered while travelling solo. For example, a lack of time, money, knowledge, stress, and fatigue. Fourthly, spatial constraints are the factors that inhibit the movement of women within tourist destinations, spaces, and places. This includes travelling in countries perceived to be unsafe (for example, Africa or the Middle East) and travelling during night hours (Michele, 2023).

Researchers note that different constraints are encountered and negotiated in different travel stages including pre-travel and during travel (Wilson & Little, 2005), and within different travel types, for example, SFTs backpacking in Southeast Asia (Brugulat & Coromina, 2021). Family, friends, and media played an important role under socio-cultural constraints, suggesting an impact in the decision-making phase (Wilson & Little, 2005). Concerning personal constraints, the majority of fears were related to activities such as eating food and using transport (a during travel concern) (Wilson & Little, 2005). Practical constraints were found to be uncommon among solo female backpackers, as the trips were taken spontaneously, and a high level of flexibility existed in travel decision-making (Brugulat & Coromina, 2021). Further, Brugulat and Coromina (2021) revealed that spatial constraints were subjected to different perceptions, with some perceiving destinations as risky and some considering the same countries as safe to travel. Different perceptions of spatial restrictions may be caused due to the travel stories that SFTs heard from other women (Wilson & Little, 2005) or one's own past travel experience.

In a study conducted by Ngwira et al. (2020) on SFTs visiting Africa, the pre-travel constraints were categorised as intrapersonal, interpersonal, and external. Accordingly, fear and doubt were the most felt intrapersonal constraints at the pre-travel stage. During the pre-travel stage, interpersonal constraints stem from spouses, relatives, and close friends due to their concerns, arguments, and objections on travelling solo to Africa. Ngwira et al. (2020) further explained the intensity of gender-induced constraints in the forms of sexual violence against women. This was a commonly cited experience in many studies relating to SFTs (see for example, Breda et al., 2020; Karagöz et al., 2020; Su & Wu, 2020; Thomas & Mura, 2019; Wantono & McKercher, 2019; Yang et al., 2018a, 2018b). In solo female travelling, avoiding sexual harassment and the risk of being objectified has become difficult (Jordan & Aitchison, 2008). The media often reports sexual assaults and murder cases of SFTs (Ngwira et al., 2020;

Yang et al., 2017b). As a result, women tend to move away from public view, thus limiting opportunities to walk around streets alone in meeting locals and other travellers (Seow & Brown, 2018).

Apart from the general constraints that women usually encounter in solo travelling, certain distinctive SFT groups were constrained due to their unique cultural systems. For example, Bernard et al. (2022) found that Bangladeshi SFTs are challenged due to their inability to communicate in a foreign language. Further, their study showed how Bangladeshi SFTs had to encounter constraints stemming from Bangladeshi social values with conservative views on women travelling solo. Bernard et al. (2022) concluded that travel constraints influenced the present solo travel intention but not future solo travel intentions, indicating that Bangladeshi SFTs learnt from their current experiences and were likely to increase their travel in the future. Similarly, Hosseini et al. (2021), discovered how Iranian SFTs were curtailed in their solo travelling experiences due to Iran's religious-patriarchal society. Hence, SFTs may encounter various constraints due to their multiple projected identities stemming from gender (female), and culture (live-in and hosting destination), influencing their overall solo travel experience.

2.3.2 Travel constraints and travel needs

Tourism and travel-related studies provide evidence on how meeting various travel needs and motives informs travellers' future travel intentions and recommendations. For example, the ability to realise festival needs and motivations (i.e., cultural exploration, family togetherness, novelty, escape, event attractions, and socialisation) influences overall satisfaction (Lee et al., 2004). Ability to realise motives in social interaction with like-minded people in religious travels to Islamic destinations, induce positive recommendations and revisit intentions (Granger et al., 2014; Jafari & Scott, 2014). Further, being able to realise pull motivations (i.e., destination factors) also positively influences the revisit intentions and recommendations (Gannon et al., 2017). Realising motivations in a temple stay (i.e.,

comprehensive learning, self-growth, harmonising with nature, and spirituality), showed a significant impact on life satisfaction and revisit intentions of Millennial tourists (Jasrotia et al., 2021). Therefore, while identifying motivations seems important in tourism studies to identify why people travel, it is also important to know how such motivations are realised during travelling, as it considerably influences post-travel behaviours.

By now, it is understood that while motivations drive SFTs to travel solo, constraints act as barriers in making the solo travel decision and inhibit them from experiencing the solo travel experience as they wish (for example, avoiding certain places, interacting with locals, and other travellers, etc.). One stream of studies has explicitly focused on identifying the needs and motivations of SFTs (see for example, Abbasian, 2019; Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2016; Cockburn-Wootten et al., 2006; Terziyska, 2021). On the other hand, another set of studies has explicitly focused on the constraints encountered by SFTs (see for example, Bernard et al., 2022; Brugulat & Coromina, 2021; Douglas & Barrett, 2020; Khan, 2011; Ngwira et al., 2020; Wilson & Little, 2005). Studying the overall solo travel experience, several studies have explored the motivations and constraints of SFTs (see for example, Breda et al., 2020; Hosseini et al., 2021; Osman et al., 2020; Seow & Brown, 2018). All of these studies have comprehensively identified various needs, motivations, and constraints as reviewed above. However, none of these studies has focused on how SFTs satisfy those travel needs and how various constraints influence their travel needs satisfaction while travelling solo.

One notable gap in the existing literature is that even though the prevailing studies attempt to identify travel needs comprehensively (as reviewed in sections 2.2 and 2.2.1), the need for solitude and its fulfilment within the presence of others has not been sufficiently addressed. Even though need and need satisfaction are not much distinguished in the current literature, Ryan and Deci (2000) posit that psychological needs (autonomy, relatedness, and competence) are innate and their satisfaction is essential for one's well-being. Hence, feeling

and experiencing a particular need ensures a person's needs satisfaction (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Therefore, the current study argues that mere identification of travel needs is not sufficient as it does not capture if those needs are met or not.

One major reason for such a gap may be the use of terms motivations, needs, reasons, and benefits of solo female travelling making it difficult to understand the importance of their satisfaction and fulfilment. Further, the general focus on identifying motivations, needs, reasons, benefits, and constraints in absolute terms has also resulted in difficulties in linking them with each other. Given the literature is well established in terms of the needs and motives of SFTs, understanding how SFTs experience and fulfil their travel needs will bring important implications for DMOs. Investigating the entirety of customers' experiences, in general, may not be feasible in a diverse array of environments (Wu et al., 2018). Thus, the current study identifies the need for investigating a distinctive type of a SFT need in understanding the dynamics and complexities of its experience in the realm of solo travelling. Therefore, as mentioned in section 2.2.1 this study will focus on solitude as a specific solo female travel need and will attempt to discover how it is experienced in solo female travelling. In doing so, it is intended to focus upon how various solo and non-solo encounters influence SFTs' solitude experience as a travel need.

2.4 Chapter summary

To provide a contextual understanding of the area of focus for the current study, this chapter has reviewed the literature on how women started to navigate the tourism space on their own and the underlying reasons for women to travel solo. In doing so, this chapter identified the existing literature is well-informed in terms of motivations, needs, reasons, and benefits of solo female travelling. Further, it was also reviewed that certain factors inhibit and restrict women in their solo travel pursuits compared to men. These inhibiting factors also signal certain implications in fulfilling SFTs' travel needs during the presence of others, which is currently

under-researched. Therefore, the importance of delving into a specific solo female traveller need that could widely capture the underlying motives and benefits of solo female travelling was highlighted. Therefore, 'solitude' was identified as a distinctive travel need of SFTs that requires further investigation. In doing so, the importance of investigating solitude was highlighted as a distinctive SFT need in women's solo travel pursuits. The next chapter will conceptualise 'solitude', drawing from the relevant literature, and then will discuss its relevance in travel and tourism as an important travel need.

CHAPTER THREE – SOLITUDE

This chapter reviews and analyses the concept of ‘solitude’ drawing from the psychology literature and its presence in travel as a need. Accordingly, this chapter defines solitude and reviews the various types of solitude, the outcomes of the solitude experience, the solitude experience of women, and the conditions that facilitate solitude experiences. In doing so, this chapter will provide a detailed account of the current understanding of ‘solitude’ as a psychological state. Having synthesised the literature on solitude and its presence in the travel experience of solo female travellers (SFTs), the chapter concludes by highlighting the need to investigate solitude as a travel need of SFTs in the context of solo travelling. In doing so, it is likely to provide an alternative explanation to the existing understanding of solitude as a travel need with a specific focus on a distinctive traveller segment.

3.1 Definitions of solitude

To explore SFTs’ solitude experience during their solo travels, it is important to gain clarity on the term ‘solitude’. Solitude is often discussed from a psychological perspective and has been explored in relation to various cohorts in numerous contexts. The prevailing literature on solitude is multifaceted and holds different views on this phenomenon. This review mainly identifies two stances that define solitude. First, it is the classical notion of solitude that is interpreted purely as an individual experience vs a social state of solitude where the experience takes place with known others. Second, the majority of scholars attempt to define solitude based on the classical notion (i.e., as an individual experience) and therefore consider physical isolation and level of disengagement in understanding the solitude experience. The following subsections elaborate on these two main stances in defining solitude.

3.1.1 Classical and social states of solitude

As stated above, definitions of solitude could be identified mainly in the realms of the classical notion, where an individual person experiences solitude. Hollenhorst and Jones (2001, p. 56) narrowly defined the classical state of solitude as:

... psychological detachment from society for the purpose of cultivating the inner world of the self. It is the act of emotionally isolating oneself for self-discovery, self-realisation, meaning, wholeness, and heightened awareness of one's deepest feelings and impulses. It implies a morality that values the self, at least on occasion, as above the common good.

The above state of solitude is drawn from historical frameworks of scholars like Thoreau (1983) who narrowly defined solitude as a state of an individual person's profound aloneness in the universe. However, Long et al. (2007) argue that the social dimension of solitude is clearly different from classical solitude as defined above. They claim the detachment, isolation, and emphasis on self that was present in the classical state of solitude does not reconcile with the social solitude experienced by wilderness travellers who were in small groups. Long et al. (2007) further argue that solitude is a subjective mental state achievable in a range of activities and environments.

The social state of solitude emphasises the solitude experience together with known others. For example, of 117 groups of hikers, 89% were in groups (with known others) and 78% of them experienced solitude (Hall, 2001). A similar state is identified by Weinstein et al. (2022, p. 11) as "companionate solitude", defined as "an internal, private, mental focus in the company of a close other." They describe this experience as having a sense of comfort from partners (often, but not only from romantic partners), sharing their private time with one another and an opportunity to connect with each other. In making a distinction between companionate solitude and public solitude (which will be discussed in section 3.1.2),

Weinstein et al. (2022) clearly differentiate companionate solitude as an experience encountered with known or close others, while public solitude is experienced in the presence of strangers. Companionate solitude is quite a new type of solitude identified in the literature and it is deemed to challenge the classical interpretation of solitude as an experience enjoyed only by oneself. The definitions of solitude mainly evolve around the classical state of solitude. Thus, it is identified as an individual experience rather than a group experience as in social or companionate solitude. The definitions of classical solitude are mainly evolved around either physical isolation or disengaging from the external environment. The next section will review how physical isolation and level of disengagement are considered in defining the classical state of solitude (i.e., solitude experienced by oneself).

3.1.2 Physical isolation and social disengagement

Classical definitions of solitude are associated with three features: physical isolation, social disengagement, and reflectiveness (Koch, 1994). However, Koch (1994) argues that all these three conditions may not be present at once and/or be needed for a person to experience solitude. Complete physical isolation is emphasised by Larson (1990), conceptualising solitude as a state characterised via the absence of all aspects of being reliant on others including social demands, constraints, scrutiny, and the chances of relating. A similar perspective is presented by Nguyen et al. (2018) and Nguyen et al. (2021) distinguishing solitude from other possible occurrences such as interaction and engaging in solo activities, and thereby have attempted to identify solitude as a distinctive concept, likening to complete aloneness. Nguyen et al. (2018) define solitude as “an experience of being alone without any communication with others, without any other activities, and without other types of active stimuli present” (pp. 92-93). The state of a person’s complete physical aloneness and having no interactions with any external objects or activities (for example, reading or browsing social media) is identified as “true solitude” by Nguyen et al. (2021, p. 229), a condition that will allow more self-reflection than

when a person engages in an activity while alone. Individuals experiencing solitude may also be physically alone as in loneliness, (see section 3.2.3 for more detail regarding solitude and loneliness), but would expect to engage in a more ‘healthy’ affective experience than in loneliness (Cleveland, 2020). Nguyen et al. (2021) also clearly differentiate solitude from being alone among others. According to Nguyen et al. (2021, p. 225), “Thus, for our purposes, we distinguish being alone but around others from solitude per se”. In line with Nguyen et al. (2021), Weinstein et al. (2022, p. 11) identified the same state of complete aloneness as “total solitude”. However, rather than identifying solitude as an absolute condition, their study identified a taxonomy of solitude that described different states of solitude experiences (total solitude, public solitude, and companionate solitude).

The studies that examined the solitude experience as absolute physical aloneness have mainly adopted experimental designs, and therefore the situations are highly controlled for social interaction (see for example, Nguyen et al., 2021). However, experiencing solitude in absolute physical aloneness has been questioned and identified as unlikely in early studies. Physical isolation is not a prerequisite for solitude, as a person may experience solitude even in the presence of others (Long & Averill, 2003). Physical isolation is not obvious in realising the solitude experience and, therefore, a person may still experience solitude by deciding not to engage with other persons present (Burger, 1995; Koch, 1994; Long & Averill, 2003). Koch (1994) notes that a person’s social disengagement does not prevent all other types of engagements. He explains that apart from one’s self-focused consciousness in solitude, the presence of outer-directed solitude experiences involves “indirect or substitutive engagement” with others (p. 57), which is reflectiveness. For instance, certain outer-directed solitude experiences may project a person’s attention onto objects in the environment (for example, an architecture student sketching for hours), when a certain sight, smell, or sound reminds the individual of an older friend or lover. Modell (1993) claims that an individual’s solitude state

is realised when they introject the presence of a real or an imaginary person or a task that they are passionate about. Hence, a solitary person can avoid negative feelings of loneliness, anxiety, and boredom by relying upon his or her own relationship with self or immersing in the work that he or she loves that allows an individual to deeply reflect either on self or an external object (Long & Averill, 2003). Finally, a person may not be reflecting, but still experiencing solitude through monotonous work done with a specific focus in everyday life (Koch, 1994). For example, solitude can be experienced in mundane activities such as taking a late bus ride home in the evening, reading a book in bed on a lazy evening, quietly writing a to-do list, or spending a few extra minutes in the shower (Manalastas, 2010). These activities will allow a person to disengage from others including people and objects and allow simply ‘being’ in the moment which will also be a solitude experience. Therefore, Koch (1994) concludes, social disengagement is the core of solitude.

In line with Koch (1994), several authors have considered a person’s relative social disengagement while experiencing solitude in subsequent definitions. These definitions attempt to identify a person’s solitude experience either in absolute aloneness and/or in the presence of others. Hence, they seem to provide a more rational approach to identifying the solitude experience in real-life contexts. For example, Long et al. (2003) define solitude as “a state of being alone – either by oneself or, if in the presence of others, without any social interaction” (p. 579). Burger (1995) describes solitude as the absence of social interaction or physical isolation from others. The status of being alone by moving away from others physically and psychologically, either willingly, or due to an undesired circumstance, is known as solitude (Knafo, 2012a). Solitude is a state, voluntarily activated, with the intention of improving the quality of self-reflection and mental experience that has an inner and/or an outer-directed focus (Akrivou et al., 2011). Thus, most of the definitions of solitude are deemed to be based upon the level of engagement and disengagement with external others and activities, allowing

individuals to be either inner- or outer-focused, and being able to enjoy the benefits of experiencing solitude.

The level of social disengagement in solitude varies and is a subjective experience for different individuals. Long and Averill (2003) describe solitude as communicative separation from others and as a person's choice for a mental state of freedom for the self. A person may choose to disengage physically, socially, emotionally, and/or cognitively (Stern, 2015). When an individual decides to disengage from others it may result in engagement with non-present others (Stern, 2015). For instance, reading a novel alone may facilitate the reader to connect with a fictional character in the book (Cleveland, 2020). Solitude is a core element of the human condition and it cannot be separated from relatedness (Knafo, 2012a). Solitude and relationship should not be considered totally contradictory states and solitude and encounter often work with each other (Knafo, 2012b). The dynamic behaviour of solitude and relatedness is clearly seen in artists' solitude which usually entails relations with objects in the creative process (Knafo, 2012b). Even mystics and yogis who are alone with themselves are already in company to a great extent (Knafo, 2012b). Thus, solitude reflects a subjective experience that can be realised through various means and settings.

In the real world, since solitude can be experienced in both isolation and in the presence of others, interacting with others and the influence of such interactions may be unavoidable due to practical constraints. Therefore, this study intends to adopt a broader, perhaps more genuine, conceptualisation of solitude that will allow the researcher to encapsulate the meaning of solitude in practice rather than in controlled artificial environments. Having reflected on the above, the current study broadly adopts the definition of solitude by Long and Averill (2003, p. 37):

a state of relative social disengagement, usually characterised by decreased social inhibitions and increased freedom to choose one's mental and physical activities.

This definition will help describe how SFTs may experience solitude in various circumstances and encounters in their solo travels. Thereby, this study will draw attention on how the solitude experience is influenced by others and various stimuli present in the external environment.

3.2 Types of solitude

The lack of clarity in definitions that do not distinguish between the positive and negative aspects of solitude has led to the term solitude being used interchangeably with aloneness and loneliness (Palgi et al., 2021). Thomas and Azmitia (2019) argue that the lack of distinction made (in psychometric questionnaires) in the constructive experience of solitude from its associated potentially destructive concepts such as loneliness, shyness, and social anxiety, could be a justifiable explanation for this paradoxical nature of the usage of terms interchangeably. However, the existing literature provides distinctive meanings for these concepts as reviewed below.

Isolation is described as enforced solitude which is not a constructive experience of being alone (Galanaki, 2005). Loneliness is subjective isolation which denotes the gap between a person's desired versus actual emotional or social relationships (Perlman & Peplau, 1982). The absence of desired social relationships due to a lack of closeness, sincerity, and emotionality results in loneliness which is a painful, sometimes transient experience (Ben-Ze'ev & Ben-Ze'ev, 2000; Masi et al., 2011; Qualter et al., 2015). Loneliness results in negative feelings like depression, pessimism, self-blame, and unhappiness (Cacioppo & Hawkley, 2005). In most of the definitions, loneliness is manifested via an emotional dimension and is always negatively permeated (Clare & Ortony, 2013). Loneliness reflects a negative emotional state that most people want to avoid, while solitude is a state that people would seek (Marcoen & Goossens, 1993). In general, the psychological literature identifies loneliness as a negative condition for the self (Akrivou et al., 2011). In contrast to loneliness, solitude is identified as

positive aloneness (Rubenstein & Shaver, 1982) and productively using time alone (Galanaki, 2013). The phenomenon of being alone is not necessarily feeling lonely and has been termed ‘solitude’ (Burger, 1995). However, the majority of the existing studies that conceptualise the solitude experience theorise positive and negative aspects of solitude together (Goossens & Marcoen, 1999; Larson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1980; Lay et al., 2019; Long & Averill, 2003; Nance & Mays, 2013).

Human beings are social creatures, however, time alone is required as a stress releaser, an opportunity to reflect, and a means for personal, spiritual, and creative development (Koch, 1994). Solitude, however, is not just a beneficial exercise. Existing empirical studies reveal contradicting findings where solitude is both advantageous and detrimental to well-being (Thomas & Azmitia, 2019). For instance, adolescents in the United States reported an increased positive mood regulation as a result of solitude (Larson, 1997). In another study, it was found that solitude resulted in feelings of loneliness and hostility (Larson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1980). Similarly, Goossens and Marcoen (1999) found that a preference for aloneness resulted in positive identity development and introspectiveness, while also correlating with symptoms such as depression and social anxiety. Spending too much time alone and an imbalance of solitude and socialisation was perceived as detrimental to health leading to depression, addiction to being alone, and avoiding the presence of others (Nance & Mays, 2013). Hence, solitude is identified as a paradoxical experience where aloneness is like “a medicine which tastes bad, but leaves one more healthy in the long run” (Larson & Csikszentmihalyi, 1978, p.691). Hence, despite solitude being experienced as a painful state by some, a person may actively search for solitude due to its “self-enhancing” functions (Galanaki, 2013, p. 83).

Individuals may experience distinctive outcomes based on their motivation for solitude (i.e., they may autonomously move towards solitude for certain intrinsic purposes such as creativity and self-reflection or withdraw from society as a reactionary move in response to

peer exclusion or social anxiety) (Thomas & Azmitia, 2019). Knafo (2012a) identifies two states of solitude as enforced solitude and voluntary solitude. Enforced solitude reflects a state of confinement imposed by oneself or another, whereas voluntary solitude entails a deliberate and happy withdrawal from others for some own purpose (Knafo, 2012a). According to Cacioppo and Patrick (2008), enforced or voluntary solitude may result in the inability to connect with others, feeling miserable in relationships, extreme loneliness, bad health outcomes, and loss of self-care.

Non-self-determined solitude was found to positively correlate with loneliness and social anxiety, while self-determined solitude had no relationship with negative outcomes by (Thomas & Azmitia, 2019). Larson and Csikszentmihalyi (1978) found two differing views of solitude or spending time alone. They found solitude was positively viewed due to the rewarding benefits of relaxation, creativity, and spirituality. And, in contrast, solitude could be negative, as the time alone could lead to poor psychological adaptation, like loneliness. This contention was supported by Long (2000) who identified both positive and negative aspects of solitude.

Long (2000) identified nine types of solitude, out of which seven were positive. The seven positive types of solitude included anonymity, creativity, inner peace, intimacy, problem-solving, self-discovery, and spirituality. The negative type was loneliness while solitude as a diversion was identified as neutral. Through factor analysis, these nine types were clustered into three dimensions of inner-directed solitude (self-discovery, inner-peace, anonymity, creativity, and problem-solving), outer-directed solitude (intimacy and spirituality), and loneliness (loneliness and diversion) (Long et al., 2003). Accordingly, while the positive experiences of solitude might result in the enhancement of human life, the negative experiences of solitude might generate certain detrimental effects in an individual. The following section

describes the nine types of solitude in detail under the three dimensions as identified by Long et al. (2003).

3.2.1 Inner-directed Solitude

3.2.1.1 Solitude as anonymity

“Because you are alone, you may act in whatever ways you feel like at the moment, without concern for social niceties or what others might think” (Long et al., 2003 p.579). As per the quote, solitude provides one with the opportunity to be anonymous (Long & Averill, 2003). Anonymity is considered as one kind of privacy, and other kinds include solitude, intimacy, reserve, intimacy with friends, and intimacy with family (Pedersen, 1997; Westin, 1967). Anonymity is where a person is among others but without being observed by them (Pedersen, 1997). Recovery is identified as the most common function of anonymity, which suggests people use anonymity to move away from social pressures and recover from social injuries (Pedersen, 1997). Anonymity is identified as a key determinant for privacy for psychological well-being (Christopherson, 2007). It also results in an increased appreciation of time spent alone (Manalastas, 2010). For women and others whose bodies are marked in terms of difference, anonymity, and the ability to go unnoticed in the streets of the city, have particular resonance (Tonkiss, 2003).

3.2.1.2 Solitude as creativity

“Being alone stimulates novel ideas or innovative ways of expressing yourself, whether actually in art, poetry, or intellectual pursuits, or whimsically in daydreaming with a purpose” (Long et al., 2003 p.579). Solitude induces creativity mainly in two ways. First, it stimulates imaginative involvement in several realities and, second, solitude facilitates a person to try on other identities that may perhaps result in self-transformation (Long & Averill, 2003). Storr (2012) identifies solitude as a context for self-renewal and a means for enhancing creativity and

insight, since, as Manalastas (2010) notes, an individual can relax in the tranquillity it offers. Creativity is most often identified as a by-product of solitude (Burger, 1995; Galanaki, 2005; Long & Averill, 2003; Long et al., 2003). Generative solitude facilitates women to convey their aesthetic aspects of daily life (Knafo, 2012b). Similarly, writers like Thoreau, Dickinson, Kipling, and Kafka, are known for how solitude inspired them in their creativity (Long & Averill, 2003). Creativity is also a result of solitude, itself an intrinsic purpose of a person who is motivated to engage in solitude (Thomas & Azmitia, 2019). In the state of solitude, a person's thoughts are scattered and aimlessly wandering, which is essential for creativity to occur (Bhattacharjee, 2013). In the long term, not engaging in solitude may result in less creativity and self-reflection (Diefenbach & Borrmann, 2019).

3.2.1.3 Solitude as inner-peace

“While alone, you feel calm and relaxed, free from the pressures of everyday life” (Long et al., 2003 p.579). Voluntary solitude creates a pathway for an individual to feel the inner peace and serenity that leads to happiness and contemplation (Baloyannis, 2015). Solitude is considered vital for finding one's inner peace (Cheng et al., 2011). Voluntary engagement in solitude leads to relaxation and reduced stress in a person (Nguyen et al., 2018). A person who is willing for solitude might have inner peace and therefore may not actively seek relationships with others (McCutcheon et al., 2004). Inner-directed solitude leads to a difficult process of reflecting on the self that results in inner peace (Long et al., 2003). The inner peace of a person creates a sense of self-soothing together with contentment and safeness (Mok et al., 2020). Derived from the interdisciplinary literature, serenity and inner peace contain four interrelated components namely: high power, harmony, positivity, and lifestyle (Floody, 2014). In the long run, individual inner peace contributes to global harmony (Jacobs, 2014). Hence, inner peace is a vital phenomenon in individual well-being as well as global well-being.

3.2.1.4 Solitude as problem-solving

“Aloneness provides the opportunity to think about specific problems or decisions you are facing, and you attempt to come to some resolution” (Long et al., 2003 p.579). As per the findings of Long et al. (2003), problem-solving comes under the inner-directed focus of attention which is the most important and frequently experienced type of solitude. Fredrickson and Anderson (1999), studying the wilderness experience of women, found that women were able to reflect upon life’s deepest questions in this type of solitude experience, which they did not have time to think about in their daily life.

3.2.1.5 Solitude as Self-discovery

“By focusing attention on yourself, you gain insight into your fundamental values and goals and you come to realize your unique strengths and weaknesses” (Long et al., 2003 p.579). Since solitude allows a person to extract themselves from their usual social and physical environments, it facilitates the reconceptualisation of the self (Storr, 2012). Many empirical studies show that solitude has a strong association with the self-concept of a person (Koch, 1994; Pedersen, 1997, 1999). Many philosophical and spiritual studies have found the benefits of solitude in self-attunement and growth (Burger, 1995; Long et al., 2003) and in finding one’s authentic self (Camarillo, 2018). A person’s ability to be alone is linked with self-discovery and self-realisation that facilitate being aware of deep needs, feelings, and impulses (Storr, 2012). In a study conducted by Cole and Hall (2010), voluntary solitude in the wilderness led to promotion of a sense of self-discovery. The quietness and solitude of a beautiful outdoor environment setting can induce one’s awareness of self (Caulkins et al., 2006; Edensor, 2000). Solitude can also play a vital role in the self-regulation of affective experiences (Nguyen et al., 2018). Solitude can have disparate results on self-reflection, however. On one hand, individuals with high self-reflection traits may actively seek solitude as they may enjoy having space for observations (Burger, 1995). In contrast to the findings of Burger (1995), Lay et al. (2019)

found that for those who engage in self-reflection, it was often negatively associated with a willingness to experience solitude. This may be because their self-critical thinking may backfire and result in loneliness (Cacioppo et al., 2014). Therefore, engaging in deep self-reflection for self-growth may be a challenging and unpleasant experience in moments of solitude (Lay et al., 2019).

3.2.2 *Outer-directed Solitude*

3.2.2.1 *Solitude as intimacy*

“Although alone, you feel especially close to someone you care about, for example, an absent friend or lover, or perhaps a deceased relative” (Long et al., 2003 p.579). Even though a person is disengaged from others in search of solitude, it could facilitate an individual to be with a favourite character in a novel or to converse with a deceased loved one (Cleveland, 2020). In early studies, solitude and intimacy have been considered as two types of privacy experience where the former allows a person to evaluate self, plan future goals, and assess accomplishments, whereas the latter provides one an opportunity to foster a relationship with another (Taylor & Ferguson, 1980).

3.2.2.2 *Solitude as spirituality*

“While alone, you have a mystic-like experience, for example, a sense of transcending everyday concerns, of being a part of something grander than yourself; such experiences are sometimes interpreted within a religious context (for example, as being close to God) but they also can be entirely secular (for example, as being in harmony with a social or natural order)” (Long et al., 2003 p.579). Human solitude is necessary for getting closer to God and communicating more intimately with God (Durà-Vilà & Leavey, 2017). Many spiritual leaders including Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, and the Buddha have experienced solitude and shared their discoveries with others (Long & Averill, 2003). A person in solitude often engages in an

intimate conversation with the self which receives no response or feedback from others and therefore, it eventually ends up in a spiritual experience (Hills et al., 2019). Long et al. (2003) studying solitude experiences found that, unlike other types of solitude, a person is more likely to experience spirituality when alone with nature while it is the least frequent type of solitude. Studying solo hiking experiences, Coble et al. (2003) discovered that solitude facilitated certain hikers to become spiritually rejuvenated by getting closer to nature, relaxing, and calming themselves. This is further supported by White and Hendee (2000) who discovered that more time spent interacting with others (in contrast to solitude), is negatively associated with the opportunity to experience spiritual benefits.

3.2.3 *Loneliness*

3.2.3.1 *Loneliness*

“You feel self-conscious, anxious, or depressed; you long for interpersonal contact” (Long et al., 2003 p.579). Even though the experiences gained in positive solitude episodes are varied, the experiences in negative solitude episodes can be broadly identified under loneliness (Long et al., 2003). The consistent nature of the negative experiences in solitude align with some theorists who have attempted to identify loneliness as an emotion similar to other transient motivational states such as hunger, thirst, or pain (Cacioppo & Patrick, 2008). Researchers have made a conceptual distinction between solitude and loneliness where the former is more positive, while the latter is related to more negative aspects (Hipson et al., 2021). However, a lack of clarity in definitions that do not properly distinguish the positive and negative aspects of solitude has confused the literature as the terms ‘solitude’, ‘aleness’, and ‘loneliness’, are often used interchangeably (Palgi et al., 2021). According to Marcoen and Goossens (1993), loneliness reflects a negative emotional state that most people want to avoid, while solitude is a state that people would seek. While loneliness is a complex problem that requires

psychological analysis and involvement, solitude is a more positive experience that is worth researching, savouring, and promoting (Manalastas, 2010).

3.2.3.2 Diversity

“You fill the time alone by watching television, reading a book, surfing the Internet, or engaging in other distracting activities” (Long et al., 2003 p.579). In a study on solitude experience, Long et al. (2003) found that diversion was the most frequently experienced type of solitude despite its lower importance for the participants. Further, even though diversity is identified under loneliness, it is more of a defence used against loneliness (Long et al., 2003). People from many cultures prefer to do something over nothing when alone (Buttrick et al., 2019). The tendency of engaging in different media is relatively high when a person is feeling lonely (Perse & Rubin, 1990). Greenwood and Long (2009) have argued that passive media engagement like watching television while alone enables a person to connect with characters on TV shows or movies, creating a sense of social belongingness. Accordingly, media engagement while alone is another way of getting a social experience (Nguyen et al., 2021). Leung (2015) found that individuals who prefer to be alone actively use tablets in solitude for utility, information, social, and fun-seeking activities which helps in reducing stress and changing unpleasant moods.

While Long et al. (2003), outline nine types of solitude, another stream of literature identifies outcomes of solitude which also seem to replicate some of the types discussed above. However, they are interpreted as positive or negative outcomes of solitude rather than types as indicated above.

3.3 Outcomes of solitude

Beyond types, solitude can also be expressed in layered outcome states including various dimensions: creativity levels, self-discovery, flight, return, fear, longing, fantasy, introspection, communion, and silence (Knafo, 2012a). While these dimensions are not

explicitly elaborated by Knafo (2012a), certain other works on solitude have slightly captured some of these dimensions. These layered states represent both positive and negative aspects of solitude. As discussed earlier, solitude fosters creativity (Galanaki, 2005; Long & Averill, 2003; Long et al., 2003; Thomas & Azmitia, 2019) and self-discovery (Camarillo, 2018; Long et al., 2003; Storr, 2012). Yet, people fear their own solitude (Jackson, 2016). While some of the fears arise from real dangers such as a stranger assaulting an alone woman (Japenga, 1999), some reasons imply certain judgements, overthinking, and misconceptions related to aspects of solitude. Since solitude can be associated with isolation, abandonment, and death, certain people including artists can fear entering solitary spaces (Knafo, 2012a). Further, the emotions arising when alone can result in fear of entering solitude (Knafo, 2012b). Regardless of the feelings brought by being and doing things alone, people fear as they do not want to be perceived by others as dateless (Japenga, 1999). Fear of introspection is another reason that people fear entering solitude (Japenga, 1999). Introspection is talking to yourself (Deresiewicz, 2010) and solitude is important in enhancing the capacity for introspection (Salmon & Matarese, 2013; Taylor, 2009). Further, people fear being in solitude as it allows them to have a self-dialogue with their inner struggles or demons (Japenga, 1999).

Longing for human contact reflects isolation (Greenwood & Long, 2009) and therefore could be identified as a negative state of solitude. While Knafo (2012a) identifies longing as a dimension or another layer of solitude, Galanaki (2004) claims longing for human contact differentiates involuntary aloneness (loneliness) from voluntary aloneness (solitude).

In contrast to the studies that discuss the positive and negative aspects of solitude together, several studies have considered 'positive solitude' as a stand-alone concept that focuses mainly on the benefits of solitude (Ost-Mor et al., 2020; Palgi et al., 2021). Positive psychology assumes positive states are not determined by traits, individual differences are subject to changes (Ilies et al., 2017), and can be modified with proper interventions (Bolier et

al., 2013). Accordingly, Palgi et al. (2021) consider positive solitude as a capability/ability or a skill that can be changed (either increased or decreased) over time. Palgi et al. (2021, para 3) define positive solitude as a “volitional positive experience that people may seek or enjoy”. Positive solitude is manifested when an individual willingly dedicates time to a meaningful and enjoyable activity or experience that could be conducted by oneself (Ost-Mor et al., 2020). This activity or experience may take any form and may happen in the presence of others (or not), but without interacting with them (Ost-Mor et al., 2020). Positive solitude is experienced volitionally and does not depend on the number or the quality of interactions with others (Palgi et al., 2021). In a recent study by Mok et al. (2020), solitude was identified as a condition that creates a feeling of soothing. However, the role of solitude in creating psychological well-being remains a largely under-explored area and warrants further investigation (Mok et al., 2020). Provided the existing literature on outcomes of solitude is largely scattered around both positives and negatives, this study will also consider solitude as a state which will entail both positive and negative outcomes for the solitude seeker, i.e., SFTs.

Having reflected on the positive and negative aspects of solitude, the next section will describe the existing literature relating to women and solitude, since the focus of this study is aimed at women’s solitude experience during solo travels.

3.4 Women and solitude

The idea of classical solitude raises gender considerations (Long et al., 2007), where solitude is proposed to be different for women than it is for men (Knafo, 2012a). In a hermeneutic study on female solitude by Arndt (2013), she claimed that female solitude can be considered as more threatening than male solitude, given stereotypes of a woman alone holding a negative image, with the same generalisation not held of the image of a man alone. ‘Women alone’ can be stereotyped as “spinsters, losers, barren, lacking, and sexually and socially undesirable” (Arndt, 2013, p.21). On the other hand, in certain gendered settings such as the

tourism landscape, a woman's aloneness status could be misinterpreted as she was sexually available (Yang et al., 2019). Solitude has always been a "male prerogative, a male rite of passage, and a male quest for self-knowledge" (Koch, 1994, p. 249). In contrast, a 'man alone' can be viewed as a "creative genius, the rebel, the hero, or the eccentric but loveable hermit" (Arndt, 2013, p.22).

Koch (1994) states social norms and violence against lone women are two barriers that prevent women from solitude. Conventionally, women are expected to play the caretaker role and be social. Koch argues that focusing on others' needs prevents the ability to attain fruitful solitude. The risk of getting physically harassed compromises a woman's ability to be imaginative and direct their focus to the immediate environment (Arndt, 2013). Women tend to experience solitude at home or in their own rooms which reflects women's safety concerns, whereas men prefer the outdoors as a solitude setting (Long et al., 2007).

Women in solitude required some level of psychological and physiological vigilance, even when a physical attack was unlikely (Arndt, 2013). A strategy used by women in experiencing classical solitude in the outside environment was with the company of a dog (Long et al., 2007). Apart from being vigilant of physical attacks, a woman should also be concerned about being sexually objectified, while experiencing outdoor solitude (Arndt, 2013). Women may like to seek solitude in public spaces, where they can be alone, but still be visible to others (Long et al., 2007).

In a patriarchal society, the woman who focuses on solitude is considered selfish and in violation of gendered norms (Arndt, 2013). Hence, women who did not adhere to traditional gender roles denoted irresponsibility and therefore, may not be accepted by others (Knafo, 2012a). Burke (1997) used psychoanalytic theories to study the psychological dimensions of female solitude. Burke argued that differential treatment of mothers towards their sons and daughters resulted in greater difficulties for girls in separating themselves from others, making

them more uncomfortable to be alone. This discomfort was reinforced by the cultural expectations that women should be more social than men (Burke, 1997). However, when women needed to find themselves by themselves, women still could challenge these stereotypes and cultural expectations of women to be familial and relational (Knafo, 2012a).

Research into the relationship between women and solitude, in general, is rather limited (Arndt, 2013). However, female artists and solitude is a widely studied area in the literature (see for example, Knafo, 2012a; Koch, 1994; Koller, 1991). Certain women artists who have written of their experiences in solitude have used various words to describe female solitude including: 'loning', 'singling', and 'instasis' (Koller, 1991). Further, artistic spaces can have their own gendered meanings where women's imagination carries a spatial particularity (Knafo, 2012a). Koch (1994) argued that some women who are confined to the home and their family circle devise means of experiencing solitude, by selecting places and works, that facilitate them to be in solitude (for example, resting in the afternoons, engaging in creative writing).

Referring to Spacks (1998)'s argument on women's demands for physical privacy in facilitating mental privacy, Gan (2009) claims women may need physical solitude to make privacy complete. However, as noted above, solitude can be experienced in both physical isolation and with the presence of others (Detrixhe et al., 2014; Long & Averill, 2003). Arndt (2013), reading first-person accounts of the lived solitude experience of American women, found that women developed a greater closeness with things, non-human beings, and the Divine. She further claimed most of the women enjoyed the psychological and spiritual health benefits of solitude. However, women encountered many struggles in the forms of loneliness, sadness, guilt, shame, and fear, which were an integral part of the solitude experience of women. This denotes that women's solitude experience is rather diverse and complex due to the existing gender stereotypes and cultural beliefs against women. Gender differences in solitude experiences warrant further research (Long et al., 2007). Further, in the tourism space,

women's status of aloneness can be misconstrued as sexually available, which in turn results in the risk of sexualised gaze and vulnerability compared to their gender counterparts (Jordan & Aitchison, 2008; Yang et al., 2018a). Hence, SFTs' experience in solitude needs further investigation to identify the dynamics and complexities of solitude as a travel need. Therefore, it will help to identify distinctive characteristics to commodify solitude in certain consumption contexts such as solo travelling motivated by solitary needs.

In acknowledging the complexity and subjectivity of experiencing solitude, the following section will further elaborate on conditions that facilitate positive solitude including settings, personal characteristics, and demographics.

3.5 Conditions for solitude: Individual characteristics and settings

3.5.1 Individual characteristics conducive to solitude

When comparing the positive and negative episodes, a major discerning factor between the two is whether the person actually wants to be alone at the time or not (Long & Averill, 2003). A high 'solitropic orientation', which is described as one's preference to spend time in solitude, predicted the frequency and enjoyment of solitude in college students (Leary et al., 2003). The voluntary nature of solitude and the high degree of control a person has over a situation are identified as important requirements for a person to experience positive solitude episodes (Long & Averill, 2003). Several studies have discovered the presence of volition (i.e., willingly choosing to be alone) considerably increases the opportunities to experience solitude positively (Larson, 1990; Thomas & Azmitia, 2019). People who prefer solitude perceived the experience as more positive and felt less bored and lonely compared to those who did not prefer solitude (Burger, 1995). Nguyen et al. (2018) found that college students who were voluntarily seeking solitude showed lower stress levels and higher levels of well-being compared to students who were forced to be alone. Accordingly, 'self-determination' is a key predictor that determines the psychosocial outcomes of solitude (Jang et al., 2021; Thomas & Azmitia, 2019).

Having resources or the capacity to use solitude constructively is also a requirement to enjoy the benefits of solitude (Long & Averill, 2003). According to Larson et al. (1982), to enjoy solitude, a person should have the ability to convert a terrifying state of being into a productive one. This is also known as ‘solitary skills’, which help a person to handle isolation and enjoy solitude (Csikszentmihalyi, 2013). In terms of personality traits, it has been found that a preference for solitude is strongly correlated with introversion and modestly correlated with neuroticism (Burger, 1995). Several other studies also support that introverts spend more time in solitude (Argyle & Lu, 1990; Leary et al., 2003; Lucas et al., 2008; Srivastava et al., 2008). Long and Averill (2003) put forward three age-related capabilities of a person that foster the best use of solitude. They are: (a) the successful negotiation of attachment processes in infancy, (b) the development of advanced reasoning skills, and (c) the development of the tendency for reflexive thought.

Even though a person may begin to experience solitude at a very young age, the preference and capacity for solitude may differ across the life span (Long & Averill, 2003). Compared to older, middle-aged, or young adults, older adults experience solitude more positively (Chui et al., 2014; Larson, 1990; Pauly et al., 2017). Older adults may have increased emotion-regulation abilities, and as a result, they may actively seek solitude to move away from social situations that are meaningless or unpleasant to them (Lay et al., 2020). Adolescents are more likely to experience positive solitude than preadolescents due to advanced reasoning skills, self-consciousness, conformity pressure, and solitude’s ability in self-transformation (Larson, 1997). However, despite their preference for solitude, adolescents find solitude more lonely compared to adults (Larson, 1990) due to their age group’s beliefs in going out with friends and spending time with friends (Larson et al., 1982).

Apart from age, certain other demographics such as marital status, household size, and occupational level are also associated with the amount of time adults spend in solitude (Larson

et al., 1982). Larson et al. (1985) found even though unmarried adults spent more time alone compared to married others, they experienced low affect (i.e., were sad, irritable, angry, and lonely) and low arousal (i.e., were drowsy, passive, tired, and bored). In contrast, for married adults, time alone resulted in low affect but high arousal including alertness, activeness, energy, and excitability. Married younger adults who preferred solitude experienced positive affect compared to those who were unmarried (Toyoshima & Sato, 2019). Adults who were in the semi-skilled job category experienced more time alone than adults in skilled jobs, as skilled workers' life structure enabled them to engage in social contact (Larson, 1990). Long et al. (2007) suggested a link between social class and solitude in the wider population. They argue that affluent people may have larger private spaces in their homes to experience solitude, while less affluent people are underprivileged in terms of the same.

It is evident that solitude is a subjective experience that depends on several individual characteristics. Consequently, the outcomes of solitude depend upon how solitude is perceived and experienced by an individual. Hence, in the commodification of solitude to cater to distinctive consumer groups such as SFTs, who may have certain unique motivations, hospitality and tourism marketers should identify those specifications in creating a conducive atmosphere that facilitates solitary consumption.

3.5.2 Environmental settings conducive for solitude

Having discussed the characteristics of the individual, this section now outlines the environmental settings conducive for solitude and later will move on to travel, travel settings, and traveller groups in experiencing solitude. Natural environments or the wilderness have been widely reported as settings that promote positive solitude (Larson, 1990; Long, 2000; Naor & Mayseless, 2020). Public parks and recreation areas also provide opportunities to experience solitude, in the form of positive aloneness (Long et al., 2007). Similarly, home is also a setting where many solitude episodes occur, indicating a link between local environments and solitude

experience (Long et al., 2007). However, most of the solitude episodes that occur at home are identified to be negative rather than positive (Long, 2000).

Many scholars have recognised that tourism experiences entail more than simple physical movement to a destination, as they can also incorporate spirituality, physical and psychological benefits, altruism, self-development, and life changes (Wilson & Harris, 2006). Travel provides a person with an opportunity to experience solitude and may allow the option of observing a novel surrounding environment (Prater et al., 2016). Solitude has been studied in various tourism and leisure settings, experiences, and with regard to various traveller groups. These have included 'new' frontiers (Laing & Crouch, 2009), the wilderness (Dawson, 2004; Hollenhorst & Jones, 2001; Kalisch et al., 2011; Naor & Mayseless, 2020; Rolston, 1975), rural tourists (Jepson & Sharpley, 2015), and motor tourists (Jacobsen, 2004). The wilderness allows a person to move away from social, cultural, and mental stimuli creating a setting for reflecting an authentic self, self-discovery, and inspection of a person's own story (Naor & Mayseless, 2020). Solitude is identified as a psychological benefit for those who visit natural environments and it is an expectation of travellers who visit the wilderness (Borrie & Roggenbuck, 2001).

Hammit and Brown Jr (1984) identified the wilderness setting facilitated emotional release, personal autonomy, reflective thought, personal distance, and intimacy. An extended study conducted by Hammit and Madden (1989) identified the tranquil and natural environment, individual cognitive freedom, social cognitive freedom, intimacy, and individualism as important factors for wilderness solitude. Further, wilderness recreationists who preferred solitude liked to be involved in privacy-enhancing behaviours including camping hidden from the sight of other people and using less travelled trails (Hammit & Patterson, 1991). However, recent studies have focused on 'solitude' more explicitly and have discovered that the solitude experience in the wilderness resulted in introspection, spiritual connection,

focused attention, reflection on life, intimacy, empowerment, and autonomy (Daniel, 2005; Hammitt et al., 2001; Kalisch et al., 2011; Nicholls, 2008).

Frontier travellers experienced spirituality, reflection, and opportunities for self-actualisation while they were in remoteness, isolation, and solitude (Laing & Crouch, 2009). Similarly, for travellers who visited Antarctica, solitude and remoteness influenced making their experience more impactful (Powell et al., 2016). The theme of solitude is also associated with desert tourism and is considered one of the most significant attractions for travellers visiting deserts (Atkinson, 2016). Woyo and Slabbert (2020) studying travel motivations in travelling to politically and economically unstable destinations (in Zimbabwe) found that solitude experiences strongly influence overall positive travel satisfaction, intention to recommend the destination to others, and repeat visit intentions. In a cruise travel context, solitude experiences were more appealing to the mature generation and baby boomers (Elliot & Choi, 2011)

Similar to the wilderness setting, solitude is identified as a critical motivation to visit rural areas (Jepson, 2015; Santana-Jiménez et al., 2015). Rural tourists considered the rural settings allowed them to enjoy solitude as a group (referred to as communal solitude), as well as alone since they were not disturbed by others and this helped them to move away from their routines (Jepson & Sharpley, 2015). In rural tourism, while most Western studies have reported that rural tourists experienced the benefits of solitude as a result of visiting rurality, several studies in the Eastern culture have discovered contrary findings. For Korean rural tourists, solitude was not an important factor when they spent time in the countryside (Park & Yoon, 2009). Similarly, Taiwanese eco-tourists reported experiencing solitude and tranquillity (which is a benefit of solitude), to a level only of medium significance (Kerstetter et al., 2004; Tao et al., 2004). It appears that the preference for solitude in rural tourism is perceived and valued differently based on one's cultural setting (Santana-Jiménez et al., 2015).

As discussed throughout, conditions that facilitate solitude include a diverse range of individual and situational factors. In terms of travel settings and traveller types, the existing literature is prominently informed via how travellers experience solitude in certain extreme settings, which enable the travellers to be in absolute silence and/or physically isolated (for example, frontiers, deserts, and the wilderness). However, solitude can be experienced in states of physical isolation and even in the presence of others (Detrixhe et al., 2014; Long & Averill, 2003). According to Averill and Sundararajan (2014), solitude is not a stand-alone experience. Solitude is combined with other psychological experiences that occur with the act of being alone including: social rejection, social withdrawal, social isolation, shyness, or loneliness (Coplan & Bowker, 2013).

SFTs may come across various settings including cities and other crowded places. Hence, for SFTs, solitude episodes are most likely to occur in the presence of others. Women travelling alone are often subjected to social stigma (Khoo-Lattimore & Wilson, 2017; Yang, 2021) and solo travellers are one of the marginalised groups that contradict the norms resulting in social exclusion (Yang et al., 2019). Accordingly, the solitude experience of SFTs may take a distinctive form compared to travellers who experience solitude in certain extreme environments as discussed above.

From a marketing perspective, experiencing solitude is a hedonic consumption goal (Budruk & Lee, 2016). In consumption, customers rarely find isolation and are most of the time surrounded by others (Argo, 2020). Therefore, experiencing solitude in travel is likely to be influenced via the interactions that take place in different travel settings and destinations. As noted above, solitude is experienced in both physical isolation and the presence of others through deciding not to interact with others. Accordingly, solitude is a subjective experience for different individuals and is determined by relative levels of engagement and disengagement with 'self' and 'others'. Solitude can be an eudaimonic experience as well. Eudaimonia entails

psychological well-being that results in the actualisation of the true self, human development, competence, and meaningfulness (Ryan & Deci, 2001). In line with this, Fu (2023), studying wilderness tourists, found that one's intrapersonal authenticity (i.e., self-making and self-realisation) and self-development are positively shaped by physical and personal freedom, and intellectual and spiritual elements in solitude. Travellers in pilgrimage tours also report how the solitude experience leads towards eudaimonic well-being as a result of being alone (Husemann & Eckhardt, 2018).

Further, solitude results in both positive and negative outcomes depending on a person's willingness to be alone. However, existing literature relating to solitude in general, and particularly in travel, has not sufficiently addressed how solitude is experienced in settings with the presence of others. Further, even though the prevailing understanding of solitude experiences emphasises the level of engagement from the solitude seekers' perspective, this study argues that the level of engagement of the 'others' who are present also may influence the solitude experience of a person. The level of engagement of others could be an important consideration, particularly in SFTs' solitude experience, since past studies widely report how SFTs encounter certain travel risks and experiences due to people they meet along their solo travels. Therefore, it is suggested that despite SFTs' intentionality in seeking solitude, the interactions they come across may influence their solitude experience in solo travel pursuits. Hence, the solitude experience in solo female travelling warrants further investigation to understand the dynamics and complexities of solitude as a travel need and its fulfilment in the absence and presence of others.

3.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has reviewed the literature on solitude. The chapter has provided an overview of definitions of solitude based on various perspectives and viewpoints. Different types of solitude have been identified and reviewed, referring to positive and negative outcomes

of solitude, and comparing and contrasting the current literature on solitude as a psychological construct. The solitude experience of women was then reviewed, and it was identified how solitude becomes a different experience for women due to various individual and social factors, and a subjective experience depending on individual characteristics and various conditions and settings. In reviewing the literature related to solitude as a travel need and a psychological benefit of travelling, it has highlighted how solitude is realised in extreme environmental settings or with absolute physical isolation. Further, it was noted that the extant studies have given little attention to how solitude is experienced by specific segments of travellers such as SFTs who do not travel to extreme places all the time. Thus, it was concluded that the existing understanding of the solitude experience has mainly evolved around physical isolation and the level of engagement of the solitude seeker. However, it is argued that, in certain consumption settings such as solo female travelling, the conventional meaning of solitude as a travel need might be different than as traditionally proposed. The next chapter will review the concept of social presence and its effects during consumption by highlighting how the presence of others may influence and shape consumer experiences.

CHAPTER FOUR – SOCIAL PRESENCE EFFECTS IN CONSUMPTION CONTEXTS

Solo female travellers (SFTs) have various underlying needs in travelling alone. Among them, solitude is argued to be a key travel need that can be linked to various other benefits of solo travelling. For SFTs, the solitude experience in travelling is more likely to occur in settings with the presence of others i.e., social presence. Therefore, an understanding towards social presence effects on consumption (see for example, Argo et al., 2005; Dahl et al., 2001; He et al., 2012) is deemed important to comprehend the solitude experience of SFTs. SFTs are seeking solitude experiences while simultaneously, perhaps paradoxically, remaining in the presence of locals, service persons, or other tourists. Hence, for SFTs, their need to experience solitude may impose a challenge as their solitude experience is most likely to take place in the presence of others. This chapter reviews the literature relating to social presence in the consumption context by emphasising customer-to-customer interactions and customer-to-service person interactions that take place in one's consumption experience. Therefore, this review will help the reader to understand the possible dynamics in a consumption experience where solitude travel needs require a more personalised space in the public domain.

4.1 Social presence in consumption

Consumers seldom function on their own in a physical consumption setting and are often surrounded by others including other buyers and salespeople (Argo, 2020). Amongst various other consumption contexts, hospitality consumption often involves sharing public space (for example, dining in a restaurant or taking a cruise) (Kim KaWon & Baker, 2017; Miao, 2014). Social presence of others in travel and tourism is often characterised by three main types of contacts involving how tourists interact with other tourists, service personnel, and local communities (Pearce, 2005). Therefore, social presence and its influence on tourists are deemed to have important implications given the dynamics of various travel needs and their fulfilment.

Social presence is defined as “a social entity which includes another person, or group of people who are physically present and influence a consumer, intentionally or not” (Argo, 2020, p. 126). Accordingly, social presence can be either interactive (i.e., interacting with the focal customer and influencing) or non-interactive (i.e., a social entity is physically present but not involved or not attempting to engage with the focal customer, for example, other shoppers in a grocery aisle) (Argo et al., 2005). However, both types of social presence may influence one’s consumption experience (Argo et al., 2005). In an experimental study, He et al. (2012) found social presence enhanced satisfaction during a positive service experience, even though the focal customer was not interacting with the other customers present. In emphasising the influence of mere presence of others, Dahl et al. (2001) found consumers feel embarrassed due to the presence of others when purchasing an embarrassing product (condoms as in their study). These studies show that even the mere presence of others (without any interaction) influences one’s consumption experience.

In the hospitality industry, services are often delivered in the presence of others and therefore, other customers naturally influence each other directly and indirectly during the service experience (Kim KaWon & Baker, 2017). In a service context, other customers simply being a part of the environment can influence one’s consumption experience (Martin, 1996). Social interactions are considered an integral part of the tourist experience (White & White, 2008) since the travel experience is formed and shaped through tourists’ interactions with other people (Sharpley, 2014).

As reviewed earlier, the focus of this study is to investigate the solitude needs of women in the realm of solo travelling where SFTs will experience solitude in the presence of others. It was highlighted prior how solo travelling is a context that often involves the presence and interactions of others regardless of the traveller being on their own. This is a common phenomenon for women who travel alone and might encounter strangers and make friends with

them (Nikjoo et al., 2021; Terziyska, 2021). Therefore, experiencing and fulfilling solitude as a travel need will entail certain dynamics that are worthy of investigation as it will provide insights for destination management organisations (DMOs) since managing interactions with others is deemed important in managing services (Nicholls, 2011).

Presence of others is a social factor that can significantly influence one's consumer experiences (Dahl et al., 2001). This could be prominent during a service consumption experience such as dining in a restaurant or travelling by plane (Grove & Fisk, 1997). Previous studies emphasise the centrality of social presence on consumer attitudes and behaviours, including both positives and negatives. Social presence positively influences the way a person processes and remembers advertising cues (Puntoni & Tavassoli, 2007). A series of studies have documented that consumers' felt emotions (for example, pride and embarrassment) may become more intense in the presence of others (Dahl et al., 2001; Sarkar & Sarkar, 2017; Wang et al., 2017). Social presence in the consumption context is mainly informed by customer-to-customer interactions. However, to cognise the influence of the presence of others in one's consumption experience, it is important to distinguish between interactions that take place with other customers and service persons.

4.1.1 Customer-to-customer interactions

Customer-to-customer interactions are a widely researched phenomenon in the marketing literature. The presence and behaviour of other customers have a stronger influence on one's consumption experience compared to the influence caused by interactions with service personnel (Lehtinen & Lehtinen, 1991). Further, customer-to-customer interactions often outnumber customer-to-service person interactions (Martin, 1996). In hospitality services, interactions between customers are highly important as other customers are an inevitable part of the service experience (Sarkar Sengupta & Pillai, 2017). Past studies show that positive interactions with other customers lead to positive service experiences, whereas negative

interactions result in poor service experiences (Zhang et al., 2010). Therefore, managing positive customer-to-customer interactions is deemed important to enhance the consumption experience.

Studies relating to customer-to-customer interactions in the tourism context are worthy of consideration to understand how such interactions shape one's traveller experience. These interactions are widely known as tourist-to-tourist (T2T) interactions in the context of travel and tourism. Interaction between tourists is an integral element in the tourism experience as the contacts are prolonged compared to the interactions in other service consumption contexts (Lin et al., 2019). Co-sharing of the tourism space compels tourists to interact with other tourists (Adam et al., 2020). On a cruise, for example, the quality of interactions that a traveller has with another traveller positively affects one's cruise experience and indirectly affects vacation satisfaction (Huang & Hsu, 2010). In an experimental group travel context, Lin et al. (2019) found self-disclosure as a significant component in T2T interactions that positively shapes one's overall travel experience. Interactions with other tourists enabled travellers to be comfortable and form companionship in the unfamiliar touristscape (White & White, 2008). By emphasising the centrality of inter-tourist functions in backpackers, studies have shown that spontaneous interactions with other backpackers influence one's decision to choose backpacking as a means of travel and facilitate backpacker travel culture (Murphy, 2001; Sørensen, 2003). Verbal T2T interactions (information sharing, self-disclosure), together with nonverbal T2T interactions (for example, eye contact, facial expressions, and proximity), positively influence one's sense of closeness and control in the travel experience (Lin, Zhang, et al., 2022). Focusing on certain prosocial tourist behaviours, Lin, Gao, et al. (2022) found T2T interactions as a significant antecedent of responsible tourist behaviour. At a broader level, in a post-pandemic context, positive interactions with other tourists favourably affect one's feelings of social connectedness and life satisfaction (Liu et al., 2022).

In contrast to the positive influences, negative T2T interactions also take place as a result of the social presence of others in tourism consumption contexts. An interaction is considered positive if it enhances a tourist's experience and conceived as negative if it damages one's travel experience (Adam, 2021). Referring to value co-creation in one's consumption, Adam et al. (2020, p. 287) define negative T2T interactions as "any form of physical, non-physical, verbal, or non-verbal encounters between two or more tourists who find themselves in a co-shared space which is detrimental to at least one of the actors." According to Dolan et al. (2019), negative T2T interactions result when tourists intentionally or unintentionally misuse others or their resources to behave in a way that unfavourably affects other tourists' experiences. These interactions may involve verbal arguments, physical contact, or indirect contact (Prebensen et al., 2016). Certain behaviours of other tourists that may not take place during direct interactions may still influence another tourist's travel experience. For example, smoking in public, spitting and littering, and improper use of toilets (Loi & Pearce, 2012).

While positive T2T interactions are straightforward, broadly encapsulating the direct interactions between or among tourists, in their pioneering study Adam et al. (2020) identified negative T2T interactions under four broad categories. These included interpersonal directed (e.g., individuals bumping into each other), interpersonal non-directed (e.g., visitors asking too many questions from the tour guide), intrapersonal (e.g., focusing more on other visitors), and site-directed negative interaction (e.g., visitors disobeying the code of conducts). These dimensions negatively affected one's value perceptions and memorability of the trip (Adam et al., 2020). Adam (2021) highlighted the nuances of the impact of the different dimensions of the negative T2T interactions on value destruction, visitor satisfaction, and post-consumption behavioural intention. Another study by Koç et al. (2022) found that negative T2T interactions adversely affect travellers, generating emotions of unpleasantness such as disappointment, displeasure, regret, sadness, and unhappiness.

Given the influence of T2T interactions that take place as part of social presence, women who travel on their own will also be influenced as a result of the interactions they come across in their solo travel discourse. Past studies on travel risks and constraints of SFTs signal certain influences of others on women's solo travel experiences. For example, Schwab (2019) reports various behaviours of men including persistent flirting, talking too much, cat-calling, and hitting on women influencing the travel experience of SFTs. Women felt nervous, scared, and stressed due to stranger harassment in their solo travel pursuits (Su & Wu, 2020). However, Schwab (2019) was mainly focused on the behaviour of males whereas this study argues that tourist-to-tourist interactions can be explored beyond focusing on gender. Even though SFTs can join in group trips and encounter interactions with other travellers during their solo trips, the various interactions they may come across with other travellers have not been investigated. Further, the existing literature on T2T interactions has focused on the influence of T2T interactions broadly on the tourism experience, making it difficult to understand the specific aspect of the tourism experience that is influenced. However, the current study intends to explore these interactions and its influence on solitude as a travel need. Accordingly, these interactions may entail certain dynamics and complexities more so than reported in the other studies. Investigating T2T interactions in one's travel need fulfilment (solitude as in this study) will add more refined and novel insights to the current literature on T2T interactions and travel experiences. Given the importance of interactions with service persons and local communities in forming travel experiences, the next sections will review these two aspects in relation to the literature.

4.1.2 Customer-to-service person interactions

Tourists' relationships with service providers are an important element of the social contacts of a traveller (Pearce, 2005). As suggested by Hansen (2014), social interactions with local service people is one factor that affects the tourist experience. Holiday experiences are

shaped by interactions with people who work in tourism (Jordan, 2008). Hosts' sincerity in delivering services that go beyond profit motives positively affects tourist immersion and forming memorable tourism experiences for clients (Jiang & Tu, 2023; Taheri et al., 2020). The co-creation experience of travellers with service providers enhances tourists' memorability through increased attention given in the process (Campos et al., 2016). Going beyond the conventional hospitality service deliveries, Aslan (2016) differentiates non-playful (efficient, predictable, calculable, and controlled) and playful (transcending commercial transaction boundaries) service interactions and reveals how playful service interactions enable workers and female tourists to build sexual intimacy as a part of their positive travel experience. In support of this view, natural and non-harmful flirtatious encounters between staff and customers are found to impose a positive influence on the co-creation of hospitable experiences for clients (Gibbs et al., 2021). Interactions between travellers and service persons are deemed to provide mutual benefits to both parties. For example, Farmaki (2019) studying host-guest interactions in Airbnb, found that cohabitation provided opportunities for hosts to overcome their feelings of loneliness and social isolation by associating with guests. Emphasising certain features of service persons, Wu et al. (2018) suggest interpersonal and professional competencies are important means to promote beneficial client experiences during travel agent-customer interactions. Similarly, effective communication skills of tourism service providers aid in better interactions with travellers leading to positive tourism experiences (Che Hassan et al., 2022).

While most studies report positive interactions between travellers and service persons/firms, a few studies identified certain negative service encounters that adversely shape tourists' experiences. Inhospitable, unfriendly, and downright rude service providers will damage the traveller experience despite the attractiveness of the destination (Kivela & Bralić, 2007). Unfriendly and rude service providers were one of the main reasons for traveller dissatisfaction as they felt embarrassed and uncomfortable with the interactions they had with

the service providers (Bianchi, 2016). Such rude service encounters were remembered as extremely dissatisfying (Butcher et al., 2003). From a broader territorial perspective, hosts' certain behaviours during interactions resulted in certain discomfort in Airbnb guests (Wang & Li, 2020). These behaviours included rental personalisation, house rules, accessibility, intrusions, hands-on-hosting, and service failures (Wang & Li, 2020). These different dimensions in client and service provider interactions demonstrate the complex nature of interactions and their influence on one's overall travel experience.

Certain negative interactions are essentially part of the service delivery that are deemed to provide unfavourable experiences towards consumers. The marketing literature generally supports that friendly and attentive service will enhance overall consumer satisfaction (Price et al., 1995). In line with this, restaurants and general hospitality staff are trained to get to know their customers, frequently dropping by them to inquire and confirm if everything is going well (Belding, 2013). However, regardless of the intention behind such service delivery practices, customers may perceive these practices to be overly attentive creating a paradox that extra care may not always lead to customer satisfaction (Liu et al., 2019). Extremely over-attentiveness perceived in customer-to-service provider interactions lowered diners' satisfaction and this effect was intense for individuals whose propensity to suspicion was high (Ku et al., 2013). This could be due to that, in the food service industry, customers find over-attentiveness as more annoying than being neglected, as it disturbs their relaxation and enjoyment of meals (Cliff, 2014). Similar to the complex nature of overly attentive services as noted above, negative customer-to-service person interactions, also constitute multiple dimensions including offering overly caring services, providing excess information and reminders, delivering undesirable services, making presumptuous decisions, and being overly polite (Sun et al., 2022). As found by Liu et al. (2019), these behaviours were manifested via frequent contact, intensive warmth, and unsolicited information and care. Even though interactions with service persons play a

prominent role in shaping one's travel experience (Pearce, 2005), studies investigating interactions between SFTs and service persons in the tourism industry are surprisingly lacking in the existing literature. Similar to the centrality of interactions between tourists and service persons, tourist-to-local interactions are also deemed to play an important role in one's travel experience. The next section will review tourist-to-local interactions as the third integral part of social presence in tourism consumption.

4.1.3 Tourist-to-local interactions

Tourist-to-local interactions are often referred to as host-guest or host-tourist interactions in the tourism literature. Interactions aid in building relationships between tourists and their local hosts which is also a process through which individuals exchange information, feelings, and communication experiences to facilitate relationship development (Lin et al., 2020). Host-tourist interactions are defined as the personal encounters between tourists and hosts in specific places (Reisinger & Turner, 2012). This definition emphasises three types of encounters in host-guest interactions: guests purchasing products, hosts and guests sharing the same place, attraction, or facility, and when two parties exchange information and ideas (Kastenholz et al., 2013). Accordingly, certain interactions that take place within the realm of host-guest interactions (for example, local tour guide services) may also be categorised under tourist-to-service person interactions as well. However, these host-guest interactions represent the relationships with the wider local community (for example, residents), which tourists generally expect to be positive (Armenski et al., 2011).

Interactions with residents are a central element of the tourism experience (Luo et al., 2015) and a widely studied phenomenon influencing positively or negatively both guests' and residents' satisfaction (Andereck & Nyaupane, 2011; Eusébio & Carneiro, 2012b). Host-guest interactions facilitate inter-group relations, and during these encounters, the courtesy and politeness of residents will strengthen relationships with the tourists (Nadeau et al., 2008).

Residents serve as ambassadors who can communicate the values and meanings of a destination and positively influence post-travel evaluations of guests (Tung et al., 2021). Certain studies highlight the mutual benefits of host-guest interactions and reveal that intimate and close relationships with the guests lead to hosts' (local communities) increased quality of life (Carneiro & Eusébio, 2015). In certain distinctive tourism types such as rural tourism, social contact between guests and hosts is considered to be crucial in forming the rural tourism experience which influences guest satisfaction and their revisit intentions (Eusébio & Carneiro, 2012a).

The centrality of positive host-guest interactions has been identified in promoting sustainable tourism practices. For example, sincere social interactions with hosts also positively influence tourists' subsequent reports of environmentally responsible behaviours (Li et al., 2021). Tour guides in Tibet practice sustainable tourism practices that help build sincere mutual relationships with guests going beyond the instrumental transactions between hosts and guests and enhancing value co-creation for guests (Pu et al., 2023). Considering tourist-host interactions as a multi-dimensional construct, Tabaeian et al. (2023) identify hedonic and functional host-guest interactions positively influence relationship quality and perceived service quality in ecotourism in forming memorable tourism experiences.

While most of the studies document positive outcomes of guest-host interactions, recent research initiatives have found that host-guest interactions in the post-pandemic era are turning negative imposing serious concerns on the parties involved. Kour et al. (2021) have found hosts displaying panic, mistrust, and irresponsible behaviour toward guests in India who visited in the post-pandemic. However, Tung et al. (2021) found that tourists may offset perceived negative guest-host interactions by providing more favourable evaluations on other destination elements such as culture and environment.

Solo travellers tend to engage in more contact with locals compared to other travellers (Murphy, 2001). Travelling without companions enables SFTs to engage with many interested locals during their solo trips (Osman et al., 2020). Apart from identifying SFTs' tendency to meet locals, the dynamics and how these interactions may influence and shape women's solo travel experience have not been sufficiently studied in the existing literature. Su and Wu (2021) found most of the encounters that SFTs came across were with the locals and those interactions mainly included acts of assistance, including: providing information/direction, helping with luggage, offering rides, providing financial support, and being bodyguards. However, since interacting with locals represents one part of the social dimension of one's travel experience (Kastenholz et al., 2013), the current study argues that SFTs' interactions with locals may go well beyond the mere function of assistance in shaping their travel experience. Hence investigating SFTs' interactions with locals and its influence on solitude as a travel need of SFTs will enhance the current understanding of tourist-to-local interactions.

As reviewed so far, it is understood that a traveller's experience in tourism could be shaped via various social contacts and interactions. The centrality of these various interactions with other tourists, service persons, and local communities becomes prominent due to the co-sharing of space by those parties. As reviewed in section 3.5.2 the environmental setting plays a prominent role in one's solitude experience. SFTs may come across various settings in their solo travel pursuits. While these settings will often involve public spaces, experiencing solitude in such places may entail different dynamics that are not usually seen in conventional solitude experience (i.e., absolute aloneness). Positive solitude is experienced with minimum social distractions (Nguyen & Taylor-Bower, 2023), which seems somewhat difficult to experience in public spaces encountered while travelling. While travellers tend to experience traditionally-conceptualised solitude mostly in seclusion as in the wilderness (Naor & Mayseless, 2020), experiencing solitude in public spaces may provide insights as to how such places could be

designed to cater to distinctive travel needs. Previous research into solitude reports that conducive spaces for solitude are usually characterised by the beauty of nature (for example, the wilderness) and the minimum presence of people or places where an individual can carve out a space for themselves (for example, a bench in a public park) (Larson, 1990; Long et al., 2007). Thus, similar to the human interactions reviewed above, the availability and use of space may also play a prominent role in shaping women's solitude experience in the context of solo travelling.

Having discussed differing types of social presence interactions, the next section will review personal space and its relevance in the solitude and SFT consumption context. Thereby, it will show the importance of having a designated area or environment that is under one's control. Personal space ties in with the concept of human territories and the section subsequently describes consumer territorial behaviours.

4.2 Personal space and human territories

Personal space is defined as “an area with an invisible boundary surrounding the person's body into which intruders may not come” (Sommer, 1969, p. 26). Personal space entails a boundary surrounding one's body and is one of the mechanisms people use in regulating privacy and accessibility to others (Altman & Chemers, 1984). Further, personal space is an invisible boundary surrounding oneself and is moveable (Griffiths & Gilly, 2012b). Therefore, personal space will travel with each individual and will act as a shield that may protect oneself from unwanted intrusion which may threaten a person's emotional well-being (Dosey & Meisels, 1969).

Aligned to personal space, is the concept of human territories. Based on two dimensions, centrality (the extent to which the place is central to a person's life) and temporal duration (how much time a person spends in a particular place), Altman (1975) classified human territories into three categories; as primary territories, secondary territories, and public territories. Each

territory differs based on the level of importance, the extent to which the territory can be personalised, and the ability to defend if invaded by others (Kaya & Weber, 2003). Private places that are essential to a person's daily life and entirely owned and used by a person or a family are known as primary territories (for example, homes), while secondary territories are the places where the usage is shared with a particular group regularly (for example, designated office space) (Altman, 1975). Finally, spaces where almost anyone is given temporary access, are known as public territories (for example, parks or recreation settings) (Andereck, 1997). Most tourism settings are considered to be public territories that are open to all, provided visitors adhere to the regulations and social norms (Andereck, 1997).

Public territories are also known as 'third places' (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982), which mainly include hospitality establishments like coffee shops, taverns, and restaurants (Wu et al., 2014). Personal space boundaries in public spaces are difficult to control and therefore likely to be intruded upon by others (Griffiths & Gilly, 2012b). Since the service settings of these types of places are not designed for personal space acquisition, spatial ownership of such places is relatively ambiguous (Griffiths & Gilly, 2012a). Despite this ambiguity, territorial behaviours are widely seen in third places (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982), where people attempt to create their private space in a public setting. In a setting with the presence of other customers, consumers behave territorially, in order to ensure aloneness and to avoid uninvited interaction with others (Griffiths & Gilly, 2012b). The following section discusses the literature relating to human territoriality leading to consumer territorial behaviours in various everyday and consumption settings.

4.3 Human territoriality

Human territoriality is a vast aspect of human behaviour that is manifested via the "attempt by an individual or a group to influence, affect or control objects, people, and relationships by delimiting and asserting control over a geographical area" (Sack, 1983, p. 56).

With regard to humans, territoriality comprises a set of behaviours displayed in securing a set of spaces in order to perform various activities (Rivano-Fischer, 1987). Once people perceive and establish a territory, it creates a sense of security and satisfaction in a shared space (Sack, 1983). Territoriality involves three behavioural dimensions (Griffiths & Gilly, 2009): Marking, Encroachment, and Defense. Marking helps a person to claim a space and avoid others invading the claimed space. Marking can be in the form of clearly defining ownership through marked boundaries and/or psychological emotions such as feeling confident in controlling the things in the space (Sack, 1983). Different forms of territorial marking by consumers in various consumption settings will be discussed later in this chapter. Encroachment takes three forms of violation, invasion, and/or contamination (Lyman & Scott, 1967). The term intrusion encapsulates both violation and invasion, which refers to someone who uses and claims the space of another group or person (Goffman, 1971). Contamination is a situation in which the territory is misused relating to its definition and usage (Lyman & Scott, 1967). For example, in a racial caste society, low-caste people walking on the sidewalks may contaminate the sidewalks (Lyman & Scott, 1967). Defense includes behavioural responses whereupon there is an intrusion of one's personal space and the most common defensive behaviours include verbal responses (arguments and discussions) (Griffiths & Gilly, 2009). Gestures, facial expressions, and changes in body postures are some other defensive behaviours (Altman, 1975).

Another classification of territorial behaviours has been identified that includes four types: control-oriented marking, identity-oriented marking, anticipatory defending, and reactionary defending (Brown et al., 2005). Control-oriented marking is used to communicate to others that the space or use of the object is restricted, has controlled access, and the use of the space or object is questioned (Brown & Altman, 1983). Identity-oriented marking involves marking an object or a place with symbols reflecting one's identity and enabling the person to construct and express their identity to both themselves and others (Brown et al., 2005). Control-

oriented marking reflects a form of overt communication to reflect a territory that has been already claimed, while anticipatory defense includes actions that are not communicative, but prevent intrusion when it is attempted (for example, locking a door) (Brown et al., 2005). Reactionary defenses involve the actions of people when their territories are intruded on by others (Wollman et al., 1994). Reactionary defenses usually are expressions of negative emotions to others, thus attempting to prevent intrusions or reclaim the space (Brown & Robinson, 2011). While the first three behavioural types are used to signal to others about the ownership of a territory, the latter occurs as a reaction to an intrusion on one's territory (Micu & Ashley, 2021).

As noted above, spaces and territories that play an important role in one's life are deemed to have important implications on an individual's consumption experiences as well. The next section will review consumer territorial behaviours that are displayed in sharing space and the social presence of others during consumption.

4.3.1 *Consumer territorial behaviours*

Consumer territoriality is informed via research from human geographers and environmental psychologists (Griffiths & Gilly, 2012a). Territorial behaviours are a result of consumers creating their own self-territories (Roux, 2010). Territorial behaviour is “a self/other boundary-regulation mechanism that involves personalization of or marking of a place or object and communication that it is ‘owned’ by a person or group” (Griffiths & Gilly, 2012a, p. 131). In organisational life, territoriality is defined as “an individual's behavioural expression of his or her feelings of ownership toward a physical or social object” (Brown et al., 2005, p. 578). People may engage in various territorial behaviours to secure or mark their personal space that exists in both high and low-density conditions (Griffiths & Gilly, 2012b). Such behaviours are more relevant in third places (Oldenburg & Brissett, 1982).

Existing studies have investigated different marking behaviours displaying territoriality in various institutional settings including residence halls (Kaya & Weber, 2003), workplaces (Brown et al., 2005; Brown & Robinson, 2011), libraries (Shoham & Shemer-Shalman, 2003), and public spaces such as beaches (Edney & Jordan-Edney, 1974; Smith, 1981). However, scholarly work into territorial behaviours in commercial settings remains rather limited (Wu et al., 2014).

Consumer territorial behaviours are displayed in everyday settings including cafes, bookstores, fitness centres, cruise ship lounges, lobbies, libraries, and polls (Griffiths & Gilly, 2012a; İmamoğlu & Gürel, 2016). In commercial settings like cafes, customers use certain objects such as computers, cell phones, bags, purses, and wallets to mark space (also known as territorial markers) (Griffiths & Gilly, 2012a). Customers use separators at the supermarket checkout counters to convey the ownership of goods to the next customer in the queue (Argo, 2020). In countries like China, where the population density is comparatively high, people avoid eye contact as a means of securing personal space, which indicates a more cognitive sense making and sense preserving of space (Griffiths & Gilly, 2012b). While using separators denotes overt attempts to enforce control over a geographic area (café table) (Sack, 1983), wearing sunglasses shows more covert attempts in terms of the intention of engaging in such behaviours. To be alone among people, customers create both a physical barrier via marking space with various possessions and a psychological fence by tuning out and ignoring others, which helps the customers to control others' access (Griffiths & Gilly, 2012a). Hence, consumers may engage in territorial behaviours explicitly or implicitly to secure their personal spaces which can be either geographical (physical) spaces or psychological spaces (mental states).

The impact of territorial behaviour is found to be context-specific. Personalising of space creates a sense of security, aesthetisation, and adaptation of the physical environment

(Lang, 1987). Territorial behaviours in primary territories (i.e., homes) helps ensure privacy for adults, escape from neighbours, or create a setting for formal, controlled interaction with friends (Taylor & Stough, 1978). Territorial behaviours in secondary territories (work settings) lead to task completion and social cohesion (Brown & Werner, 1985), enhance group identity (Brown et al., 2005), and facilitate smooth functioning in social units (Brown et al., 2005; Rosenblatt & Budd, 1975). In public territories where spatial ownership is not clear, territorial behaviours may bring different consequences for various parties (Wu et al., 2014). Consumer territorial behaviours in cafes creates a sense of privacy that helps customers to be alone among people and at the same time creates conflicts among customers (due to unwanted intrusions) (Griffiths & Gilly, 2012a). In tourism settings, perceived territoriality affects the experiences and satisfaction of visitors in boating tours (Andereck, 1997) and fishing (Wickham, 2000). Kumar and Nayak (2019) exploring the role of the destination as an object of individual possession, discovered that tourists' sense of psychological ownership towards the destination favourably influences the revisit intentions and recommendation of the place to others. Consumer territorial behaviours in cafes and restaurants resulted in negative consequences for service organisations such as decreasing turnover and profits due to not being able to accommodate new customers (Griffiths & Gilly, 2012a).

4.3.1.1 Intrusions upon consumer territories

Intrusion happens when a person claims the space of another group or a person (Goffman, 1971), which may result in threatening the emotional well-being of the person who is intruded upon (Dosey & Meisels, 1969). In the consumer context, intrusion happens when a “consumer is unable to control the physical presence of unwanted participants during a commercial interaction or consumption behaviour (Goodwin, 1991, p.151). Physical presence can take various forms including a personal visit, phone calls, or other means affecting the

senses of a person (Goodwin, 1991). The perception of someone being hassled by an unwelcome infringement resulted in intrusion pressure (Ashley & Noble, 2014).

In the context of consumer research, marketers intruding into consumer privacy has been widely studied in past research. Consumer privacy is concerned with two main dimensions: controlling the presence of others and controlling the dissemination of information in the consumer's environment during commercial transactions (Goodwin, 1991). Many empirical studies have focused on the invasion of consumer privacy, regarding the use of consumer information (Horne & Horne, 2002; Schwaig et al., 2013) and the intrusiveness of promotional initiatives of marketers (Belanche, 2019; Madhavan et al., 2019; Morimoto & Chang, 2006; Riedel et al., 2018). Further, an intrusion is also identified as a concern in relationship marketing where some consumers perceive 'intimacy' (which is an aspect of relationship marketing) as 'intrusion' (O'Malley et al., 1997).

Under the consumer territorial behaviour perspective, another stream of research has explored the intrusive behaviours of service persons at various service encounters and of other consumers in various consumption contexts. In a retail context, employees' closing time cues (productive cues, withdrawal cues, personal cues, audio/visual cues, hostility cues, and blocking cues) created an intrusion pressure on consumers (Ashley & Noble, 2014). Also, in Airbnb's, guests perceived hosts entering guests' rooms to check up on guests as an intrusion during their stay in accommodation (Wang & Li, 2020). Apart from intrusions from service providers at various service encounters, certain behaviours of other customers are also perceived as an intrusion. In café and restaurant environments, some customers who were already occupying a table, perceived table-sharing requests from other unknown customers as an intrusion (Griffiths & Gilly, 2012a). Further, in the context of solo dining, when the spatial proximity with others was high, solo diners perceived a high level of crowding negatively influencing their solo dining experience (Her & Seo, 2018; Hwang et al., 2018). Tang et al.

(2022) found consumers perceived restaurants' unsolicited food recommendations as intrusions on their ordering process when they used their smartphones to order food.

Intrusion may result in certain self-conscious emotions like fear, anger, shame, embarrassment, and pride (Kirk et al., 2018). The guests in Airbnb accommodation felt threatened and uncomfortable with the perceived intrusiveness of hosts' territorial behaviours (Wang & Li, 2020). In marketing communications research, it is found that the intrusiveness of promotional initiatives resulted in annoyance and frustration in receivers (Riedel et al., 2018). As a result of various intrusions, people tended to respond to those territorial intrusions, which will be discussed next.

4.3.1.2 Consumer responses towards territorial intrusion

Customers expected to regain control or relinquish control via responding to territory intrusions (Kirk et al., 2018). Under territorial intrusion by front-line employees, Ashley and Noble (2014) found customers' responses towards such intrusions included retaliation, accession, abandonment, and negative word of mouth. Retaliation included actions to punish employees and demonstrate to employees they had the right to be in the store, accession was customers trying to speed up their shopping or consumption process, and abandonment was a customer discontinuing to shop or consume from the store. Negative word of mouth included either complaining about the employee or talking negatively about the shopping experience with others.

Another study by Ashley et al. (2020) found deferential verbalisation as another response towards employees' intrusive behaviours. For example, after hearing the closing time, customers, while still pursuing their shopping goals, acknowledged the closing time, which might have positive implications for sales and employee morale. Further, Ashley et al. (2020) also differentiated retaliatory verbalisations from retaliatory actions, with the former using words to express dissatisfaction and the latter including customers engaging in

counterproductive behaviours such as deliberately slowing down shopping or making a mess. Wang and Li (2020) found four types of guests' responses toward Airbnb hosts' intrusive behaviours including: adaptation, assertive defense, appeal, and avoidance. Adaptation referred to the responses of guests accepting and accommodating hosts' territorial behaviours including intrusions. Assertive defense was when guests' defensive responses were directed toward hosts' different service failures and when their territories were threatened during their stay. Appeal referred to situations where guests contacted hosts upon service failures and territorial intrusions, and where they reported the incident to Airbnb and requested a refund as compensation for the negative experience. Avoidance was where guests intentionally avoided hosts' certain territorial behaviours such as not interacting with the host, not using items or space, or moving away from the experience completely.

Similar to defensive behaviours against intrusion from service persons, customers engage in defensive behaviours against intrusion from other customers as well. According to Griffiths and Gilly (2012a), consumers respond in two ways when their territories are intruded on by other customers in a café environment. These include accommodation and defense of space. Accommodation refers to the occupant customer's willingness to share the space upon the request of another customer. Accommodative responses generally result due to the density factor, where if occupants perceive high density over the area, the likelihood of willingness to share the space would also be high. Defense of space includes actions such as the occupant lying to the intruder about the availability of physical space.

While most of the studies relating to consumer territoriality focus upon physical space marking and the defensive behaviours over physical space intrusion, Kirk (2017) emphasises instead the possibility of invading a consumer's psychological ownership towards an object, which is distinct from legal ownership (for example, a consumer in a clothing store may hold psychological ownership of a piece of cloth while browsing through). Psychological ownership

is defined as “the state in which individuals feel as though the target of ownership or a piece of that target is theirs (i.e., ‘It is mine!’)” (Pierce et al., 2003, p. 56). Accordingly, a threat (or a possible intrusion) towards a psychologically owned target may lead to territorial responses (Kirk, 2017). Depending on emotions like fear and anger (caused due to intrusions), people may engage in anticipatory and reactionary defenses against intrusions (Kirk et al., 2018). Anticipatory defensive behaviours are displayed to prevent future intrusions and these include temporary abandonment behaviours such as leaving an area (Ashley & Noble, 2014) or using separator bars to claim ownership (Kirk et al., 2018). Reactionary defenses are similar to retaliatory behaviours such as negative facial expressions or verbal displays towards the intruding customer (Kirk et al., 2018). In a social media environment, social media users left the page temporarily or permanently, when other co-users intrude via posting or commenting, threatening their psychological ownership over the brand (Micu & Ashley, 2021). These different dimensions signal the dynamics of territorial responses that may exist in the event of perceived intrusions towards their consumption experiences.

As reviewed so far, social presence and sharing public space are deemed to have key relevance in one’s tourism experience, since the two elements are quite prominent in the travel and tourism context. The next section will elaborate on the importance of considering social presence effects in SFTs’ experiences.

4.4 Social presence effects on solo female travellers and their travel experience

SFTs who may travel alone throughout or join another traveller group are likely to be in settings in which others (other travellers, service personnel, and general society) may be present. Previous studies have found that SFTs often encounter undesired attention from their counterparts that results in gendered risk in their solo travels (Yang et al., 2018a, 2018b; Zhang & Hitchcock, 2014) particularly as solo female travelling is one example of resisting gender stereotypes (Yang et al., 2017a) and not fitting in socially is a concern of SFTs (Wantono &

McKercher, 2019). However, apart from the risk and constraint perspectives, studies have not investigated how social presence during solo travels may influence women's solo travel experience.

SFTs' solitude travel needs, which are often associated with physical isolation or disengagement from others, will mostly take place in the presence of others and may also be influenced by others during their solo travel pursuits. Therefore, it is argued that SFTs' solitude needs may be more complex than in conventional solitude settings and contexts (for example, the wilderness or a private room, etc.). However, the existing literature does not sufficiently address these complexities or dynamics since most of the studies have considered solitude in absolute terms without investigating the possible influences of external others on one's solitude experience.

According to Prosser (1960), intrusion upon solitude can be identified as one way of invading a person's privacy. However, this has not been studied explicitly and surprisingly the literature remains quite reticent regardless of the possibility of the influence of others on one's solitude experience. One reason for this could be that most studies investigate solitude in absolute aloneness hence, interactions may seem not relevant. A recent study by Gordon (2022) highlights certain external factors that help in shaping one's solitude experience including technological, societal, commercial, and government factors and identifies technology as one of the main distractions towards a person being in solitude. Further, a few studies explain that solitude can be influenced by certain internal intrusions such as introjects, ruminations, and insecurities, which lead people to feel inauthentic in their solitude experience (Nguyen et al., 2021). Introjects are considered as the "core of inauthentic aloneness" (Nguyen et al., 2021, p. 231), as they are the ideas or attitudes of others that result in 'should' and 'have-to' messages people hold (Ryan & Deci, 2017). Accordingly, people may feel the pressure to catch up on work while they are alone, despite their need to relax (Nguyen et al., 2021). Thus, understanding

solitude as free from social pressures poses a problem as people may internalise others' expectations and pressures even when alone (Assor et al., 2004). Rumination is another source of inauthentic aloneness where people dwell on a failure in the past or experience self-doubt when alone (Nguyen et al., 2021). Accordingly, even though a few studies identify possible influences on one's solitude experience, the present study argues that these influences are situational and therefore, it is important to consider the context in which the solitude is experienced. By doing so, we can comprehensively capture the dynamics of the solitude experience relating to particular contexts of interest, such as solo travelling.

4.5 Theoretical gaps addressed in the current study

This section intends to synthesise the theoretical gaps identified in Chapters Two, Three, and Four. The gaps in this study result from two main areas including solitude as a solo female traveller need and social presence influences in travel-related consumption contexts. These gaps are further elaborated below.

As reviewed in Chapter Two, SFTs are motivated to travel solo to fulfil various travel needs, with the need for solitude identified as prominent as it was deemed to result in various other associated benefits in travelling alone (for example, independence, empowerment, spirituality, self-discovery, etc.). Even though past studies have identified the needs of SFTs, how women experience solitude during their solo travels remains largely overlooked. One major reason for this could be the lack of focus on the centrality of others in one's tourism experience. Hence, this study identifies the importance of the presence of others in women's solo travel discourse and its influence on the SFTs' solitude experience.

Even though certain travel constraints and gendered risks encountered by the SFTs denote the possible influences of others, the focus of these studies is very limited and has not been linked with the solitude experience of SFTs. As a result, the existing understanding of solitude as a travel need and as an experience in the context of solo female travelling has not

been sufficiently investigated. To bridge this gap, the current study intends to investigate SFTs' solitude experience in their solo travel discourse by focusing on the different dynamics in solo travelling due to the presence of and interactions with others.

As discussed in Chapter Three, the solitude experience in travel is mainly contemplated in extreme settings and the wilderness remains the most common environmental setting (Dawson, 2004; Naor & Mayseless, 2020; Watson, 1995). The key limitation of this focus is that it does not provide a clear picture of how solitude is realised in settings with the presence of others. Understanding how solitude is experienced in the presence of others will bring important insights to tourism and hospitality marketers in understanding distinctive solitary consumption contexts like solo travelling that may be driven by an underlying need for solitude. Since solo consumers are a growing segment, marketers should understand their unique needs to avoid possible misinterpretations that may stigmatise them in their solitary consumption activities (Goodwin & Lockshin, 1992). In a solo female travelling context, while solitude is likely to be experienced in various settings, it is important to unearth how SFTs will deliberately seek ways and means to fulfil their solitude needs.

By synthesising the gaps identified in the literature review (Chapters 2, 3, and 4), the overarching research aim that drives the current study is as follows:

To explore how solo female travellers perceive solitude as a travel need and to understand how social presence and interactions with others will influence their solitude experience.

In pursuing the above aim, the following research questions drive the current study:

RQ1: How do SFTs perceive solitude as a solo travel need?

RQ2: How do various interactions influence the solitude experience of SFTs?

RQ3: How do SFTs respond to intrusive episodes during their solo travels?

4.6 Chapter summary

This chapter has presented a review of the literature relating to the effects of social presence interactions on consumption experiences. This chapter identified the importance of interactions with other travellers, service persons, and local communities in forming tourism experiences. This chapter also reviewed space as an integral component in tourism due to often co-sharing. In doing so, it highlighted territoriality in consumption as an important behaviour of customers which could also be applied to travellers who encounter similar situations in tourism settings. The review argues that interactions, personal space, and territoriality are relevant in the solo female travelling context and important to SFTs' solitude experience. The gaps synthesised in the literature highlighted the importance of studying solitude as a travel need and its enaction in the presence of others in women's solo travel discourse.

CHAPTER FIVE – METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the methodological approach adopted in this study including the epistemological and ontological assumptions made. It provides a detailed view of the methods and techniques that were used for data collection and the ethical considerations. Next, it describes the process, in which the data were analysed. Finally, the chapter explains how the quality and trustworthiness of the analysis process and study were assured.

5.1 Research paradigm

The research paradigm can be defined as “the basic belief system or worldview that guides the investigator” (Guba & Lincoln, 1994, p. 105). Each paradigm has its assumptions about ontology, epistemology, methodology, and methods (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). According to Richards (2003, p. 33), ontology is defined as “the nature of our beliefs about reality.” The ontological question leads a researcher to inquire about the nature of existing reality. Accordingly, the reality could be a singular, verifiable reality and truth or socially constructed multiple realities (Patton, 2002). Epistemology is “the branch of philosophy that studies the nature of knowledge and the process by which knowledge is acquired and validated” (Gall et al., 1996, p. 13). Once the researcher adheres to a certain ontological belief system, it guides the researcher to a set of epistemological assumptions. Methodology refers to “the theoretical, political, and philosophical backgrounds to social research and their implications for research practice and for the use of particular research methods” (Robson, 2011, p. 528). Methodology informs what type of data is needed for the study and the appropriate data collection tools for the study purpose (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Methods are “specific means of collecting and analysing data, such as questionnaires and open-ended interviews” (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016, p. 52).

According to Denzin and Lincoln (2005), there are five main competing interpretive paradigms: positivism, post-positivism, critical theory, constructivism, and participatory theory. The current study is positioned in the constructivism paradigm in qualitative research. The qualitative research approach is deemed useful for studying the solitude experience of SFTs as it allows for exploring the richness, complexity, and subjective nature of women's solo travel experiences. Constructivism assumes a 'relativist ontology' and 'subjectivist' epistemology and follows a naturalistic set of methodological procedures. While a relativist ontology believes in multiple realities, a subjectivist epistemology means the researcher and respondent together co-create the knowledge relating to the phenomenon under study (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Constructivism is antifoundational, which denotes "a refusal to adopt any permanent, unvarying (or foundational) standards by which truth can be universally known" (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005, p. 204). Accordingly, it is believed that reality is created and it is always mediated by people's senses (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). In co-creating the meanings, the researcher becomes a part of the social reality being researched, and therefore, the researcher is not detached from the subject being studied (Grix, 2004). Hence, the goal is not to explore universal knowledge and truth but to understand the subjective interpretations of people about the social phenomena they interact with (Rehman & Alharthi, 2016). Since individuals make subjective meanings based on their views, constructivism enables the researcher to understand the complexity of data (Creswell, 2018).

Constructivism is also known as 'interpretivism' (Creswell, 2018; Crotty, 1998; Grix, 2004). According to the interpretivist viewpoint, in the natural sciences, differences exist between people and things and these can be studied to help social scientists to better comprehend the subjective meanings of items (Bryman, 2016). Under this paradigm, the analysis of data takes the inductive approach (Patton, 2002).

5.2 Data Collection Methods and Procedure

Since the current study intends to explore how participants make meaning of and from a given phenomenon (Merriam, 2002), this study adopted an interpretive qualitative research design. In line with this approach, data was gathered via semi-structured in-depth interviews. The research questions raised in the study were predominantly exploratory in nature and therefore, an interpretive qualitative research approach seemed most appropriate. In the semi-structured interview, even though the researcher had a set of questions, the participants had the opportunity to raise issues that the researcher had not anticipated (Braun & Clarke, 2013). The in-depth interviews provided the opportunity to raise open-ended questions and the researcher probed into areas whenever it was necessary. The participant was able to clarify any concerns that arose during the interview as well (Saunders et al., 2009). In-depth interviews provide a useful platform for participants to share their experiences which they might not feel free to share in a group setting (Pollack, 2003). In-depth interviews provide detailed information and create an environment that facilitates a comfortable conversation with the participants (Boyce & Neale, 2006). Further, in-depth interviews allow the interviewer to deeply investigate the respondent's feelings and views on a given subject (Guion et al., 2011). Since in-depth interviews enable the researcher to gather rich information, through enhanced interaction between the researcher and the participants of the study (Howe, 2004), the researcher can interact with the participants more closely to co-create and understand meaning. Therefore, in-depth interviews served as a useful data collection method for the current study.

The data collection method should be chosen by consideration of the goal of the study rather than selecting a conventional method, used by many researchers (Jordan & Gibson, 2004). The goal of the current study was to explore the solitude experience of SFTs. Hence, it was decided in-depth interviews containing open-ended questions would give more space for the participants to elaborate on their experiences, rather than answering quantitative scale

questions or dichotomous questions. In-depth interviews are appreciated as a useful data collection method in tourism studies in general (Jordan & Gibson, 2004) and many solo female tourism studies have used this method in exploring the solo travel experience of women (see for example, Su & Wu, 2020, 2021; Wantono & McKercher, 2019; Yang et al., 2018a, 2018b; Yang et al., 2019).

5.2.1 Sampling strategy

In selecting suitable respondents for the study, initially, a purposive sampling strategy was applied as it helped in recruiting participants with varying characteristics, enabling data richness. Purposive or criterion-based sampling is a widely used strategy in qualitative research (Kathryn & Briana, 2016) and it helps a researcher to access diverse information-rich cases which will best provide relevant data (Dilshad & Latif, 2013; Rossman & Rallis, 2016). To begin purposive sampling the researcher first determines the important criteria in choosing the participants (Merriam, 2002). In this case, this was decided based on the overall aim of the study and specific research questions. Accordingly, the researcher established a specific set of characteristics of the participants to be interviewed (this will be discussed in detail under section 5.2.2). Information richness of the participants was ensured via the screening questions and specifically based on their travel history details (Appendix A). As the initial step, the researcher approached thirty-five SFTs' Facebook (FB) groups requesting to post an advertisement (Appendix B). While certain FB groups allowed the posting of advertisements with no restrictions, some required that approval be obtained from the administrators of the respective FB group. Accordingly, the advertisement was posted only in nineteen groups as the other requests were either declined or pending approval. When selecting the FB groups the main considerations were the number of members, diversity of the members (SFTs from different nationalities), and the level of activeness of the groups (recency of the posts shared by the group).

On social media, online communities of SFTs have increased by 35% over the last few years (Bond, 2019), while certain groups (e.g., the Solo Female Traveler Network) have a membership of more than 100,000 members. According to a study conducted by Booking.com (2014), 62% of British female travellers use social media to keep in touch with their friends and family when they are away and nearly 33% use social media as an information source for their solo travelling. Hence, it was expected that the message on recruiting participants would have a wide reach. However, the response rate was very low on the FB advertisement. Accordingly, four initial interviews were organised with participants who responded to the FB post. Apart from the advertisement posted on FB, the researcher also personally wrote to five solo travel bloggers on the internet. Similar to the low response of the FB advertisement, only one solo female traveller blog responded. However, the researcher could not schedule an interview with her due to the busy schedule the SFT had.

As the study progressed, it became apparent a snowballing sampling technique would be more appropriate, as the initial respondents recommended their friends (SFTs) to the study. Further, the snowball technique enabled the researcher to overcome the challenge (very low response rate) of recruiting participants via FB advertisements and writing to travel bloggers. Snowballing is a strategy of recruiting participants by initially making contact with a small group of respondents who match the sample criteria and establishing contacts with potential respondents through their referrals (Bryman, 2016). The researcher also used her personal network to obtain recommendations for potential participants. This method enabled easier recruitment as they were initially approached by someone who was well known to them. Further, the participants did not feel any pressure to be a part of the study as they had the freedom to reject the invitation if they did not wish. All the recruitment strategies helped the researcher to access information-rich participants in terms of a diversified range of nationalities, countries visited, and solo travel experiences.

5.2.2 Characteristics of the sample

The main criteria to be eligible for the interview was that the participant should self-identify as a female and a solo international traveller. The age consideration for the study was 18 years and above to comply with university ethical requirements. International solo travel was required as domestic travelling may imply greater familiarity to the destination. Travel purpose was another consideration of this study. Since nowadays women travel solo for various purposes (i.e., business, leisure), this study was interested only in women who were travelling solo for leisure purposes, as the study was focused upon solitude as a distinctive travel need. This study was interested in collecting data from participants from various nationalities to enrich the diversity as the study had no specific focus towards the influence of cultural differences on women's travel experiences. Finally, it was ensured that the participants were comfortable speaking in English to ensure no language barriers between the researcher and the participants.

In total 34 women, who self-identified as SFTs and met the above criteria participated in this study. The diverse sample ranged in age from 25 to 58 years old and offered a comprehensive understanding of women's solitude experience in their solo travel discourse. These women were from various countries and professional backgrounds and had travelled solo to various countries endowing them with a diverse range of solo travel experiences. The detailed profile of the sample is shown in Table 5.1 appearing with their pseudonyms.

Table 5.1*Sample Characteristics*

Pseudonym	Country of origin	Age	Occupation	Countries travelled solo
Adriana	Brazil	27	Conservation project officer	Portugal, Spain, Hungry, France England, Czech Republic
Amali	Sri Lanka	26	Lecturer	Japan, Czech Republic, Turkey, New Zealand
Ashley	Sri Lanka	29	NGO officer	UK
Ava	USA	33	Critical case manager	Australia, Guyana
Britney	New Zealand	33	NGO officer	Fiji, Australia, England, Ireland, Scotland, Wales lots of Europe, France, Germany, Spain, Austria Slovakia, Italy, Denmark, Canada, USA, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Laos
Darin	Luxemburg	33	Student	Hongkong, Europe
Dayani	Sri Lanka	36	Lecturer	India, Vietnam, Japan, Malaysia
Dorah	New Zealand	44	Academic manager	Thailand, Vietnam, Laos, Bali
Ellie	New Zealand	50	Lecturer	India, Malaysia
Farah	Malaysia	35	Account manager	USA, Japan, Netherlands, Denmark
Gloria	New Zealand	52	Business Consultant	Spain (Camino), UK, Scotland
Hoa	Vietnam	30	Administrator – Travel agency	Cambodia, Laos, Thailand, India
Irene	Sweden	35	Administrator	Qatar, Columbia, UK, Albania, USA
Julia	New Zealand	38	Student	UK, Australia
Kaala	Australia	26	Doctoral student	UK
Kathy	USA	30	Administrator	Guatemala, Iceland, Germany, Australia, Indonesia, and New Zealand.
Kethmini	Sri Lanka	25	Architect	Vietnam, Cambodia Japan
Leah	Uzbekistan	35	Manager	USA, Australia, New Zealand, Italy, Netherlands, Iceland, UK
Lily	New Zealand	58	Midwife	England, France, Belgium, Spain, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, Scotland, Norway, USA, Canada, Peru, Florida, Mexico, Columbia, Bolivia
Lucy	New Zealand	55	Financial journalist	Dubai, Sri Lanka, Middle East, India, Vietnam, Egypt, Yemen, Tahiti, Fiji
Madusha	Sri Lanka	35	Lawyer	Singapore, Indonesia (Bali), USA
Mila	Netherlands	34	Lecturer	India, Sri Lanka

Table 5.1 Continued

Pseudonym	Country of origin	Age	Occupation	Countries travelled solo
Moana	New Zealand	27	Doctoral student	Italy, Spain, Peru, England,
Nadia	Barbados	38	Executive director	Dubai, Europe, Germany
Nathalie	Belgium	30	Doctoral student	Portugal, England, Brazil
Olivia	New Zealand	55	Quality assurance manager	England, USA, Hong Kong, Singapore
Parami	Sri Lanka	26	Master's student	Hungary, Austria, Italy, Slovakia Czech public, UK
Priya	India	27	Beauty blogger	UK
Ritt	New Zealand	29	Youth development and sustainability	Vietnam, Cambodia, Thailand, Indonesia (Bali and Lombok)
Roma	USA	35	Project supervisor	Mexico, Kuwait, Qatar, England, Ireland, Turkey, Italy, Spain, Japan
Romena	Mexico	24	Administrator	USA, Canada, Czech Republic
Samanta	Malaysia	33	Brand manager	Austria, Netherlands
Tracey	New Zealand	30	Doctoral student	Australia, Japan, USA, Ireland, UK
Yara	Netherlands	29	Language coach	USA

5.2.3 *Sample size*

Qualitative research methods usually have a smaller sample size compared to quantitative research methods (Dworkin, 2012; Mason, 2010). Qualitative research is mainly focused on gaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon under investigation or is mainly concerned on meanings and heterogeneities in the meanings of a given concept (Dworkin, 2012). The sample size is concerned with the extent to which the findings could be applied in similar contexts, which is known as the generalisation or external validity of the study (Sekaran & Bougie, 2016). While generalisation takes two forms as empirical or theoretical (conceptual), qualitative research is focused on theoretical generalisation (Draper,

2004). In-depth interviews are not concerned with generalising the findings to a larger population and will not attempt to test hypotheses, but rather are inductive and explain the contextual understanding (Dworkin, 2012).

Empirical generalisability is associated with quantitative studies, which attempts to draw inferences about the population drawn from the sample being studied (Draper, 2004). However, findings from a qualitative study are used in developing concepts and understanding of phenomena and conceptual propositions (theoretical generalisations) which can be extended to other similar settings and groups of individuals (Draper, 2004). Accordingly, a theoretically meaningful sample with diverse characteristics that will capture the meaning of the phenomenon being studied will establish the theoretical generalisability of the findings.

As in quantitative studies, there is no consensus on the sample size in qualitative research (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Patton, 2002), and it is determined based on several factors including the conceptual framework, research questions, genre (method), data collection methods, and the availability of time and resources (Rossman & Rallis, 2016). Certain authors have proposed guidelines for determining the sample size for different qualitative research methods (see for example, Creswell, 2018; Dworkin, 2012). Given the nature of the current study, it was decided the sample size (number of interviews) was to be determined at the point when no new information was to be derived from the interviews. This approach is called the ‘saturation theory’ and is widely accepted in determining the sample size in qualitative research (Constantinou et al., 2017; Mason, 2010; Morrow, 2005; Vasileiou et al., 2018). Under saturation, the researcher collects data until it is discovered that no new or relevant data is being generated (Dilshad & Latif, 2013). Accordingly, in the current study, after conducting the 30th interview, it was evident that no new information was being derived from the interviews. In confirming, the researcher carried out four more interviews and the themes were cross checked

to verify the point of saturation had been reached. Accordingly, 34 interviews were conducted in total with SFTs who shared their experiences of solitude while travelling alone.

5.2.4 Ethical considerations

Ethical aspects in relation to data collection were considered with regard to various phases of the study including collecting data and storing of data. As per the formalities of Massey University, prior to conducting the pilot study, ethics approval was obtained from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (Ethics Notification Number - 4000023018). Once the interview guide was amended after the pilot interviews, ethics approval (Ethics Notification Number - 4000025040 – Appendix C) was reobtained before conducting the main study. The study (pilot study and main study) was deemed to be low risk. In recruiting participants, a detailed information sheet (Appendix D) was emailed to potential participants to disclose the purpose of the project, participant rights, and contact information of the researcher. Once the potential participants expressed their willingness to participate, a consent form (Appendix E) was sent. The participants were asked to read, sign, and return the form before participating in the interview. Even after expressing willingness to participate, it was ensured that signing the form was entirely voluntary and they had the opportunity to decide whether to participate or not.

Once the interview began, the researcher again reminded them about the purpose of the study and the participants' rights and encouraged them to raise any concerns they may have before carrying out the interview. Recording the interview was only begun after obtaining permission to record the interview. Answering questions was entirely voluntary and participants were allowed to refuse to answer if they were uncomfortable in sharing experiences related to the questions raised. The researcher carefully observed the facial expressions and other non-verbal cues of the respondents to ensure the participants were comfortable during the interview.

After the interview concluded, the researcher expressed her gratitude for the respondent's time and emphasised the interview's importance to the study.

The recorded Zoom interviews were stored in password-protected computers at Massey University (Manawatu Campus) which could be only accessed by the researcher. Any paperwork (hard copies of the transcripts, notes taken, observations made) was kept in lockable cabinets. Participants who wished to have their recordings back were sent their respective Zoom recordings which could only be accessed by the respondent or researcher. In reporting the findings, pseudonyms were used to protect the respondents' identity (as shown in Table 5.1). Throughout the different phases of data collection, no conflict of interest was identified.

5.2.5 Data collection instrument and pilot testing

An interview guide was developed to cover the focused areas of the study in relation to the overall solitude experience of SFTs with a specific focus on the research questions. The preliminary interview guide was checked by conducting a pilot round of interviews, after obtaining ethics approval from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee (ethical consideration of the study was discussed in detail in section 5.2.4). Pilot interviews were carried out with six SFTs who met the participant criteria (discussed in section 5.2.2). Some of the participants were recruited from the responses received to the FB advertisement, and the others were reached via personal contacts. Pilot tests were carried out on Zoom since it was the platform intended to be used for the main study. During this period, the researcher went through a rigorous phase by undertaking pilot interviews, analysis of the transcripts, refining the interview guide, and seeking out potential participants for the main study. Pilot interviews helped make informed changes to the interview questions resulting in improved quality of data collection (Chenail, 2011). Further, piloting enables the researcher to get a realistic sense of the duration of the interviews and whether the participants can understand and answer the questions

properly (Castillo-Montoya, 2016). Pilot interviews are conducted with a small number of participants who are similar to the actual participants of the study (Maxwell, 2012).

Based on the pilot interviews conducted, the interview guide was refined. The final interview guide consisted of five sections covering areas such as personal information, experiencing solitude as a travel need, behaviours involved in securing the state of solitude, interactions with others, and influences upon the solitude experience. Before conducting the main study, ethics approval was re-obtained from the Massey University Human Ethics Committee. The final approved version of the interview guide is provided in Appendix A.

5.2.6 Data collection platform

This study intended to collect data from SFTs representing different nationalities to generate rich insights into the phenomenon being studied. Data from multiple tourist nationalities represent global characteristics and allow a deeper understanding of their lived experiences (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As the participants were from different nationalities and time zones (please refer to Table 5.1 for participants' nationalities), conducting offline face-to-face interviews was deemed less practical. Therefore, it was decided the interviews be held online. Similar studies have also utilised various online data collection strategies when participants were geographically dispersed (see, for example, Yang et al., 2018a, 2018b).

In selecting an appropriate online platform, the current study used Zoom to conduct the interviews. Zoom is a collaborative, cloud-based videoconferencing tool that facilitates online meetings, group messaging services, and recording of sessions (Zoom Video Communications Inc, 2016). Similar to other platforms such as Skype, Zoom enables communication in real-time with geographically dispersed people via computer, tablet, or mobile device (Archibald et al., 2019). Hence, Zoom served as a non-standardised one-to-one synchronous electronic interview platform (Saunders et al., 2009).

Zoom as a research tool provides many benefits to both the researcher and the participant. Zoom conferencing is identified as a convenient alternative to in-person interviews with geographically dispersed populations (Gray et al., 2020). Further, Zoom video conferencing has certain unique strengths such as convenience, ease of use, an enhanced personal interface to discuss personal topics, accessibility, and it is time-saving (Gray et al., 2020). Both the researcher and participants found Zoom an effective method for qualitative interviews as it facilitated in building and maintaining rapport, it was convenient (in terms of access, time effectiveness, and cost), and it was user-friendly (Archibald et al., 2019). It is reported that, compared to face-to-face interviews, data generated from Skype interviews (which is a similar technology to Zoom), has no difference in terms of quality (Deakin & Wakefield, 2013). In addition to the inherited benefits of Zoom as a software and a research tool, it was one of the tools commonly used during the COVID-19 pandemic (Evans, 2020), in which the data collection of the study was undertaken. Even though there were some participants from New Zealand where the researcher was based at the time of data collection, it was difficult to conduct face-to-face interviews due to government Covid-19 restrictions and safety concerns. Therefore, the Zoom software enabled the study to continue and conduct interviews as planned without any delays inhibiting the progress of the study.

5.2.7 Interview procedure

After identifying the potential participants as discussed in section 5.2 and fulfilling the ethical considerations before beginning the interview (as discussed in 5.2.4), participants were contacted via email to schedule an interview. At the scheduled interview time, once both the researcher and the respondent logged on to Zoom, it was made sure both parties could hear and see each other properly. While conducting the interviews, it was ensured both the audio and video modes were on, so that the researcher and participant could effectively communicate face-to-face on the online platform. The ability to see each other helped in responding to non-

verbal cues such as facial expressions and gestures. This helps in building a good rapport and interpersonal connection, promoting natural, relaxed conversation (Archibald et al., 2019). Once the participant was ready, the researcher started to record the interview after re-confirming their consent (as discussed in 5.2.4). All the participants had no issues in recording the interview on Zoom.

The interview began with a brief project description given by the researcher. Even though the information sheet was sent earlier to the respondent, due to the time lag between the initial contact date and the interview date, reminding the respondent of the project aim was deemed important before the interview began. After the project description and explanation of the interview aim, respondents were again asked to raise any concerns regarding the project or the interview. At this point, some of the respondents asked what constituted a solo trip. Once the initial concerns were addressed, the respondents were asked to give a brief self-introduction and some background information about their solo trips (for example, countries they had visited, duration of the stay, etc.). Most of the respondents were able to set the background through their self-introduction. It was interesting to observe that the women were very enthusiastic to talk about their solo travels as, for many of them, it was a part of their lives that they were willing to share with others.

Respondents were asked to relate their solo travel experiences to the destinations whenever it was necessary. Hence, some of the respondents were narrating their experiences in a 'story' format (departing from their home country, travelling and experiences in the host country, and returning home). In such circumstances, the interview protocol served as a guide and a checklist to ensure the relevant aspects were covered in the story. Therefore, in line with Saunders et al. (2009), the order of the questions raised varied depending on the flow of the conversation. Keeping with the flow of the story enabled the researcher to effectively probe into salient areas of narrative.

Participants joined Zoom through either their phone or their personal computers. In terms of the setting, all the participants joined from a setting that had no external disturbances. Due to the flexibility offered in the online platform, participants joined from any location that was convenient for them by the time of the interview. Some joined from their workplaces (if the interview was held during the lunch hour), homes, or apartments. Some participants joined the interview whilst enjoying their leisure time outdoors (for example, from beaches, parks, etc.). In certain situations, some participants had a virtual background appearing on the Zoom screen. Hence, the participants had the opportunity to select the location of their interest.

While the interview was going on, it was interesting to observe that the participants were very relaxed in sharing their travel experiences related to the questions asked. Some respondents were enjoying a cup of coffee while the interview was going on. In certain situations, some respondents eagerly shared their experiences and stopped for a while to confirm whether they were answering the question and encouraged the researcher to keep them on track. Interviews ran for approximately 30 minutes to 75 minutes, depending on the respondents' ability to share information and the extent to which they could recall certain incidents.

Once the interview was complete, the recording was stopped. At the end of the interview, some respondents requested for the researcher to let them know the findings as they found the study scope interesting. While the researcher asked for any referrals for potential participants that could be interviewed, some of the participants voluntarily asked to introduce their friends to the study.

5.3 Analysis

The current study used 'thematic analysis' recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006) to analyse the data from the interviews. The analytic process involved six steps: (a) familiarisation with the data, (b) generation of initial codes, (c) searching for themes, (d)

reviewing themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) producing the report. These six steps will be discussed in detail under section 5.3.2.

5.3.1 Transcribing, preparation, and data management

Since the interviews were recorded on Zoom, the transcripts were auto-generated. The total recording hours were approximately 27 which produced 405 pages of script. The automated transcripts were checked to correct any mistyped statements. Transcribing involves decisions about data interpretation and data representation (Bailey, 2008). Accordingly, while the researcher carefully went through the transcripts, it was ensured that the auto-generated transcript was checked against the audio recording to verify the meanings were not distorted. Initially, the researcher manually started to code the transcripts (the steps will be discussed in 5.3.2). The first five transcripts were coded manually, and the researcher was able to grasp a good sense of the transcript data. Once the researcher became familiar with the process, the transcripts were uploaded to NVivo. NVivo is a qualitative data analysis software package that offers many advantages and improves the quality of the research (Hilal & Alabri, 2013). This software enables the researcher to explore tendencies, identify themes, and derive conclusions (Wong, 2008). As put forward by Jackson and Bazeley (2019), NVivo served in four main ways to ease the analysis of data in the current study. First, NVivo made it easier to manage data by organising 34 transcripts of the study, which were otherwise difficult to manage if kept in hardcopy formats. Second, NVivo helped in identifying and organising the many codes at the initial stage of the analysis which helped in understanding the conceptual and theoretical ideas generated. Third, it was possible to generate mind maps at the initial stage of the analysis process. Finally, NVivo enabled the researcher to be able to produce reports whenever it was necessary (for example, the coding book). The researcher also participated in a series of workshops to obtain knowledge in the application and techniques of NVivo software.

5.3.2 *Thematic Analysis*

Thematic analysis is “a method for developing, analysing, and interpreting patterns across a qualitative dataset, which involves a systematic process of data coding to develop themes” (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 4). Thematic analysis will identify the “patterned response or meanings” across the data set (Braun & Clarke, 2006. p.82). While thematic analysis helps describe data, it also involves interpretation in the process of selecting codes and constructing themes (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The thematic analysis recommended by Braun and Clarke (2006) used in this study is deemed appropriate as this method is theoretically flexible and could be used across different epistemological approaches. Since the current study intends to explore the subjective solitude experiences of SFTs, thematic analysis is deemed suitable since it is recommended as the most appropriate method for any study that seeks to discover using interpretations (Alhojailan, 2012). Further, previous solo female travelling studies have also used thematic analysis in analysing qualitative data (Osman et al., 2020; Seow & Brown, 2018; Thomas & Mura, 2019).

Braun et al. (2019) revised the term ‘thematic analysis’ as ‘reflexive thematic analysis’, considering the centrality of the researcher’s subjectivity and reflexivity in their articulation of thematic analysis. While Braun and Clarke (2022) provide an extensive list of assumptions that distinguish reflexive thematic analysis from other approaches, reflexive thematic analysis varies based on certain dimensions including orientation to data (inductive vs deductive), focus of meaning (semantic vs latent), qualitative framework (experiential vs critical), and theoretical framework (realist essentialist vs relativist constructionist). Accordingly, these dimensions act as a continuum rather than a dichotomy. Depending on the orientation towards data, thematic analysis could be either inductive or deductive. The current study adopted an inductive thematic analysis, whereby the researcher did not begin with theoretical constructs or frameworks. In this sense, the form of analysis in the current study is ‘data-driven’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.

83) and did not fit into any preexisting coding framework or the researcher's 'analytic preconceptions' (Nowell et al., 2017, p. 8). Accordingly, the researcher progressively developed themes from the coded data by closely linking to the original data and diving deeper into the responses of the study participants.

In terms of the identification of themes and assigning meaning, the current study adopted a latent level, trying to understand the deeper meanings of the experiences shared relating to the focus of the study. The qualitative framework was experiential in nature, as the researcher did not attempt to critically question the perspectives but rather attempted to capture their own viewpoints. Finally, the theoretical framework was relativist and constructionist as discussed in section 5.1.

5.3.2.1 Phases in reflexive thematic analysis

Phase 1: Familiarising with the dataset

In order to become familiar with the dataset, the researcher needs to be deeply and intimately familiar with its content (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Accordingly, the researcher engages in repeated and active reading through the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Getting familiar with the dataset provides a valuable orientation to proceed with the next phases of the analysis (Kiger & Varpio, 2020). In doing so, the transcripts were read and the researcher immersed herself in them until she was able to capture the overall story behind the experiences shared by the respondents of the study. Since it was the researcher herself who conducted the interviews and took notes wherever it was necessary, and data were gathered through interaction, the researcher was able to read data critically and analytically.

Phase 2: Coding

Coding is a process, which entails identifying similar pieces of data, relevant to the research question and assigning them meaningful labels at a surface (semantic) or an implicit (latent) level (Braun & Clarke, 2022). As mentioned earlier, the researcher attempted to identify

codes at a latent level to understand the implicit meanings underlying the data. A code is an output of the coding process; an analytically interesting idea, concept, or meaning associated with particular segments of data; often refined during the coding process (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 53). A code should be well-defined and should not overlap with other codes (Attride-Stirling, 2001; Nowell et al., 2017). During the initial stage of the analysis, the researcher coded the transcripts manually to become familiar with the coding process. Once familiarised, coding was done through NVivo. Accordingly, a codebook (Appendix F) was developed (using NVivo) to ensure the coding process was consistent. From time to time, the researcher referred to the codebook to recall the meanings of the codes. In line with Braun and Clarke (2006), in certain instances, the same data were labelled with multiple codes as information deemed relevant to several codes was identified.

In terms of the orientation towards coding, the researcher took the dataset as the starting point for engaging with meaning. However, while analysing the data, the researcher engaged in a back-and-forth review of the literature to understand how these identified meanings could be presented in a theoretically meaningful way. Hence, as commented by Braun and Clarke (2022), in qualitative research, “an inductive orientation is never ‘pure’ because of what we bring to the data analytic process, as theoretically embedded and socially positioned researchers” (p. 56). Similar to all other forms of qualitative analysis, the reflexive thematic analysis also gets its analytical power from theory (Braun & Clarke, 2022). NVivo made it easier to manage an extensive list of codes during the initial phase of the analysis. Hence, the researcher was able to identify and create as many codes as possible, which enabled the researcher to proceed with the next steps more conveniently.

Phase 3: Generating initial themes

At this phase, the aim was to start identifying shared patterned meaning across the dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 35). A theme was defined as an abstract entity that brought

meaning and identity (DeSantis & Ugarriza, 2000, p. 362). A theme has a greater level of interpretation and integration of data that is abstract in nature (Nowell et al., 2017). While the rate of recurrence of a theme in the dataset does not determine its importance (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Nowell et al., 2017), the researcher can identify the themes that have important implications for the research question(s) at hand. Theme development requires the researcher to be actively involved in clustering codes together, that share a core idea (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Themes do not emerge from the data (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Instead, themes are “constructed by the researcher through analysing, combining, comparing, and even graphically mapping how codes relate to one another” (Kiger & Varpio, 2020, p. 850). The researcher, in the current study, mapped the different themes identified by clustering different codes. Themes should be meaningful when taken independently while they should also be able to present a coherent analytic story (Clarke & Braun, 2014). However, the researcher was able to identify certain themes which were not directly linked with the research questions and seemed to lack connection (or fit) with the existing themes. In line with Braun and Clarke (2006), at this stage, the themes were not discarded and were carried forward until the next step of reviewing the themes to figure out the links and modifications. Constructing themes was not a straightforward process. The researcher had to re-visit the transcripts and it was a reiterative process that identified sensemaking themes and answering the research questions at hand.

Phase 4: Developing and reviewing themes

In developing and reviewing themes, the researcher needed to refine the themes by making sure they make sense in relation to the coded extracts and the full data set (Braun & Clarke, 2022). According to Braun and Clarke (2006), reviewing themes takes place at two levels. At the first level, the researcher must ensure whether codes and data under each theme fit well with the relevant theme constructed. In doing so, the researcher in the current study reviewed each theme separately to ensure that the codes and data extracted under each theme

provided a coherent picture in supporting the theme. Some of the themes were renamed, combined, and discarded to develop a meaningful understanding. At level two, the themes are reviewed in relation to the entire data set. Accordingly, the researcher should decide whether individual themes fit within the dataset and whether the thematic map sufficiently and accurately represents the entire dataset (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

Phase 5: Refining, defining, and naming themes

This phase requires fine-tuning the analysis by ensuring each theme is clearly defined and is built around a strong core concept (Braun & Clarke, 2022). As proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006), the researcher attempted to keep the final themes included in the report brief yet descriptive in terms of what the theme explained. The researcher was involved in several rounds of discussions with the supervisory panel to ensure the themes broadly encapsulated the intended meanings and to reflect possible linkages among the themes developed. In case of disagreement with the themes, the researcher discussed further, regarding alternative terms to be used in naming themes and the themes were changed to ensure a common understanding. Thematic table (Appendix G) shows a detailed description of how the researcher moved from initial codes towards themes.

Phase 6: Writing up

The final step was writing which usually started from phase 3 (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The researcher tried to build a complete picture from the dataset and convince the reader of how all the themes together addressed the research questions at hand. The final report needed to go beyond simply describing the codes and themes (King, 2004). The researcher should elaborate on how and why the themes were selected and interpreted in a certain way (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Accordingly, the findings of this study were interpreted and discussed with relevant literature in identifying the consensus, contradictions and extensions relating to the

existing body of knowledge in the relevant areas. The reviewed themes were elaborated on and discussed in Chapters Six, Seven, Eight, and Nine.

5.4 Quality and trustworthiness of the study

According to Braun and Clarke (2022, p. 268), “quality depends not on notions of consensus, accuracy, or reliability, but on immersion, creativity, thoughtfulness and insight.” Therefore, they proposed a 15-item quality checklist for good reflexive thematic analysis, that included five main areas (transcription, coding and theme development, analysis and interpretation, overall, and written report) which was referred to in the current study, to ensure minimising the possible problems that may occur in qualitative data analysis.

Apart from ensuring the quality of the analysis, the rigour of the current study was ensured via the four- trustworthiness indicators as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985): credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Moreover, Wallendorf and Belk (1989) recognised integrity as another concern that researchers may look into in ensuring trustworthiness. The criteria for answering these questions differ between quantitative and qualitative approaches as each of them has different ontological and epistemological assumptions (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Wallendorf & Belk, 1989). The following sub-sections will discuss how each of these trustworthiness concerns was addressed in the current study and the criteria used.

5.4.1 Credibility

Credibility is the extent to which the data is believable and the confidence that could be placed in the truth of the findings (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Credibility ensures whether research findings are drawn from the original data and are correctly interpreted (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). There are several credibility strategies a qualitative researcher may adopt including prolonged and varied field experience, time sampling, reflexivity (field journal),

triangulation, member checking, peer examination, interview technique, establishing the authority of the researcher, and structural coherence (Anney, 2014).

The researcher joined several FB groups of SFTs on social media to gain an understanding of certain behaviours and concerns of SFTs. Further, the researcher also followed certain solo female travel blogs to gain some understanding of the travel behaviour of the targetted segment. In terms of prolonged field experiences, though the interviews were conducted online, as discussed in section 5.2.7 the interviews were conducted for a period of 30 minutes to 75 minutes, allowing the researcher and participant to build a good rapport and trust in exchanging experiences. Supported by the naturalistic inquiry that seeks to understand human behaviour and social phenomena within their natural context, emphasising the subjective experiences and meanings attributed by individuals to their lived experiences (Lincoln & Guba, 1985), the interviews provided a vivid picture of the phenomenon being studied. Interviews were conducted for nearly four months which enabled the researcher to be involved in the process more deeply ensuring a genuine and prolonged commitment. This helped the researcher to gain a good contextual understanding that minimises the misinterpretation of information.

According to Guba (1981), peer debriefing allows the researcher to check the insights and expose themselves to the research question. In doing so, the researcher may seek support from other professionals in obtaining scholarly guidance. In the present study, the researcher talked to her supervisory panel whenever it was necessary and reassured that a sufficient level of credibility was established.

5.4.2 *Transferability*

Transferability is the extent to which the results of qualitative studies could be applied to other contexts with different kinds of respondents (Anney, 2014). This is known as the interpretive equivalent of generalisability (Bitsch, 2005; Tobin & Begley, 2004).

Transferability can be established via data collection from multiple sites (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989), providing a thick description and engaging in purposeful sampling (Bitsch, 2005). The current study collected data from SFTs representing multiple countries covering both Asian and Western regions. Further, the study also recruited participants from a range of ages spanning from 25 to 58 years, to achieve diversity among the respondents. In providing a thick description, as put forward by Li (2004), the final report provides an extensive account of methodology and context, elaborating the research process, and enabling other researchers to understand how well these findings will fit in similar contexts. In selecting the sample, participants were selected based on certain criteria as explained in section 5.2.2 in answering the questions of the study. In doing so, it enabled the researcher to focus on knowledgeable respondents regarding the phenomenon being studied.

5.4.3 Dependability

According to Bitsch (2005, p. 86), dependability is “the stability of findings over time.” This is similar to the concept of ‘test re-test’ in positivistic research (Guba & Lincoln, 1989). In qualitative research, dependability is ensured when the findings are repeated after replicating the study with similar respondents in a similar context (Guba, 1981). However, this seems difficult to establish due to practical concerns. Instead, several authors have proposed measures such as observations over a period (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989), an audit trail, a code-recode strategy, stepwise replication, triangulation, peer examination, and iterator comparisons (Chilisa & Preece, 2005; Donald et al., 2010; Krefting, 1991; Schwandt et al., 2007). Considering the practicalities, the dependability of the current study was established mainly through peer examination, the code-recode strategy, and iterator comparison. Accordingly, from the inception of the current study, the supervisory panel closely observed the project. In the analysis phase, ongoing discussions were held with the supervisory panel to arrive at a consensus in terms of the theoretical alignment of the study findings. Further, certain aspects

of the findings were presented at conferences and published in a peer-reviewed journal (please refer to page vii for a list of conference and publication details). In doing so, the researcher was able to obtain valuable comments from reviewers and interested audiences ensuring the research findings provided consistent understandings to different audiences. This study also used a code-recode strategy. Once the researcher completed the initial coding, a selection of transcripts was recoded by the researcher, leaving a time gap between initial coding and recoding. Thereafter, the researcher compared the two sets of coded materials and ensured the codes and the themes derived were similar. In addition, the principal supervisor also recoded four transcripts in-depth ensuring the similarities and shared understandings of data interpretations. If any differences among the codes and themes were identified, they were further discussed and addressed accordingly. Any newly identified codes and themes were reconsidered and appropriately incorporated to enhance the depth and rigour of the findings.

5.4.4 Confirmability

Confirmability of a study is established via the findings of a study being confirmed or corroborated by other researchers (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). In doing so, it confirms that the findings of the study are not mere imaginations of the researcher, but derived from data (Tobin & Begley, 2004). However, absolute objectivity cannot be achieved due to the ontological and epistemological positions of naturalistic inquiry. Confirmability of qualitative inquiry is established through an audit trail, reflexive journal, and triangulation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In an audit trail, the auditor ensures the researcher sufficiently immersed him/herself into the data in encapsulating the meanings presented (Brown et al., 2015). In doing so, as discussed earlier, the supervisory panel of the current study constantly engaged with the researcher during the data analysis stage to verify the codes and themes developed by the researcher are theoretically meaningful and address the research questions at hand.

5.4.5 Integrity

Integrity concerns are related to the authenticity and accuracy of the data provided by the informants, and ensuring the data is not fabricated by the respondents (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989). Since qualitative inquiry studies the world view of the research participants, they may tend to provide false information under circumstances where they are not comfortable revealing certain information (Wallendorf & Belk, 1989). As put forward by Wallendorf and Belk (1989), several strategies could be adopted to mitigate such fabrications. These include prolonged engagement and building good rapport and trust with the participants, triangulation, protecting informants' identity, researcher's self-analysis, and introspection.

Prolonged engagement of the researcher and how the researcher was able to build a good rapport and trust with the participants were elucidated in sections 5.2.7 and 5.4.1 respectively. In protecting the identity of the respondents, informants were clearly instructed about safeguarding their identity through the information sheet (Appendix D). Pseudonyms were used in reporting the findings (Table 5.1). Further, the voluntary nature of answering the interview questions created a comfortable environment for the participants to express their true feelings regarding the questions raised. The researcher attempted to gain a contextual understanding as discussed in section 5.4.1, which enabled the researcher to understand certain behaviours of SFTs and their interests in travelling alone. Continuous guidance and supervision from the supervisory panel enabled the researcher to minimise any possible biases that may arise during the course of the study.

5.5 Chapter summary

This chapter discussed the methodological approach adopted by the current study. Accordingly, the relevant ontological and epistemological positions of the study were elaborated aligning with the constructivist paradigm, in which the study was broadly placed. Thirty-four in-depth interviews were conducted with SFTs representing different countries

from diverse regions enabling the researcher to gain a vivid understanding of the phenomenon being studied. While the researcher engaged in manual coding at the initial phase of the study, subsequently, data were coded using the NVivo software. Thematic analysis containing six steps, proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used in analysing the data. In ensuring the quality of the analysis, the process was checked against the 15-item quality checklist proposed by Braun and Clarke (2022). The rigour of the study was ensured via credibility, transferability, dependability, confirmability, and integrity.

CHAPTER SIX - FINDINGS I: DYNAMICS OF SOLO TRAVELLING AND SOLITUDE AS A TRAVEL NEED

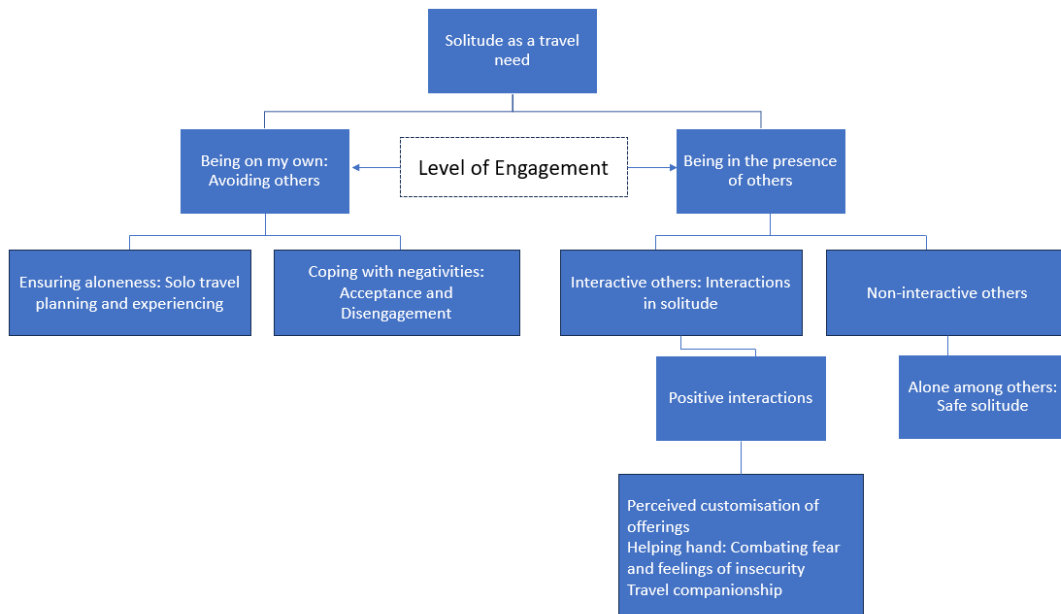
This chapter reports the findings of the current study addressing the first research question:

RQ1: How do SFTs perceive solitude as a solo travel need?

The results of the thematic analysis related to solitude as a travel need are visually presented in figure 6.1 and reported in this chapter. Firstly, this chapter describes SFTs' narratives regarding the need for solitude in solo travelling. Secondly, it will report the situational and context-bounded nature of the solitude and interaction experiences of women. Finally, the chapter will focus on different levels of aloneness in women's solitude experience. In doing so, the findings will highlight how women experience solitude at different levels of aloneness while perceiving the benefits embedded in the interaction episodes.

Figure 6.1

Solitude as a Travel Need



6.1 Solo travel and need for solitude

Women's need for solitude emphasised a distinctive type of travel need highlighting its dynamics and complexities in the context of solo travelling. Women expressed their perspectives on solitude as a solo travel need and their willingness to enjoy the aloneness experienced while travelling on their own. SFTs described their emotions in terms of taking pleasure in solitude during their solo trips: "I love travelling alone" (Kaala), an overt tolerance for solitude: "Never fed up being alone" (Nathalie), and a sense of enjoying the solitude experience: "I enjoy my alone time when travelling" (Madusha).

Women shared their thoughts on the importance of enjoying solitude in their daily life and when travelling. They perceived being alone as an important aspect of one's life: "I think as a person, you also need to enjoy being alone" (Ashley); "Alone time is very important for me" (Nathalie). For some women being alone was their general nature. As Madusha said:

In general, I'm someone who never feels lonely. I'm very comfortable by myself, even as a university student, I always like to go out for lunch by myself, and just you know sit by myself. Even as a very young kid I would never ever get bored by myself.

Women considered travelling alone as a context and an opportunity to personalise the solitude experience which made the aloneness experience quite unique: "I feel as I'm making that choice [travelling solo] for me. I'm not making a choice for anybody else" (Lucy). Personalisation of the experience began even before women started to travel: "Making my own [travel] decisions" (Britney); "Without having to ask other people for help, or permission, just doing the [travel] planning on my own" (Darin); "Freedom, simple as that" (Ellie); "I just plan on my own because I know myself very well than anybody else does" (Farah); "I can independently decide my [travel] schedule" (Hoa); "I suppose, making my own way and plans" (Ritt). Apart from personalisation, women shared how they prioritised their needs in

travelling solo: “It was that personal freedom to come and go, as I wanted” (Gloria); “I can do the things that I want to do in my pace, I don't need to compromise with someone else” (Irene); “I don't have to consider anyone else but myself [when travelling alone]” (Kathy).

Women tried to find solitude while travelling in various circumstances regardless of the context in which they were travelling (for example, being with a group or partner). Women reported the importance of solitude as a travel need for them even when they were travelling with others or had a partner. Ashley elaborated on creating alone time even when travelling with someone: “Even if you are travelling with another friend or your partner, I think you need to have your own time and you need to enjoy it.” Similarly, Yara mentioned: “I enjoy travelling alone, even though I have a partner.” Women described how they took the opportunity to incorporate solo travel in various instances, including when travelling for other purposes and in the absence of a travel partner. Ashley shared, “I am really glad I took the chances [to travel alone], even though the purpose of travelling was different.... if my family can't come and I am given the chance to travel alone, I would definitely take that chance.” Accordingly, solitude played a vital role as a travel need of women in the tourism discourse.

Women who were driven by the need for solitude intentionally sought it out and prioritised being by themselves when determining their overall solo travel experience. Gloria said: “As a traveller, essentially it's where I set off, with the intention of either being alone or travelling alone to a particular destination.” Women commented on their instinctual thinking of making travel decisions that are comfortable to them to ensure aloneness: “I use intuition when I want to be alone. I try to pick something that makes me feel gratified and comfortable, for the experience I want, because I'm paying for an experience” (Tracey). Some SFTs revealed their dislike of attracting others' interest in them while they travel solo: “I don't want to be like you know centre of attraction” (Ashley); “I don't want any sort of interaction. It's time all for myself” (Parami).

Women expressed their preference for being alone: “I’m actually quite comfortable being alone when I am travelling” (Roma); “Being alone, no problem” (Ellie). SFTs were quite self-confident in travelling alone, and they believed they could travel alone anywhere as per their wish. As Kathy explained: “I do feel that voice in my head that says you can be alone anywhere in the world, you can be alone back in America.” Women seemed to be confident and comfortable being on their own and enjoying the solitude while travelling solo. Further, SFTs attempted to set their own expectations for aloneness in travel by reframing it positively to overcome any negativities embedded in solo travelling. The comment below illustrates how SFTs tried to set and reform their solo travel and aloneness expectations. As Tracey said:

I set my own expectations of my isolation and I tried to reframe it in a positive empowering way. So, I’m not viewing it negatively and thinking of it in terms of, ‘I’m alone, therefore, it's lonely’. ‘I’m alone, there experiencing something I can't share’. I try to reframe that ‘I am alone so I am free to explore’, ‘I’m alone, so I can choose what I share with people’.

The motivation for solo travel and the need for solitude arose from various reasons. These underlying motives highlight the complexity and multidimensionality of solo travel and solitude needs. The thought of travelling alone conjured in women a sense of excitement enabling them to push the boundaries. Adriana said: “Whenever I think about travelling solo, I used to get butterflies inside my stomach. For me, it is a super positive aspect.” Interestingly, the sense of excitement embedded in solo travelling was widely shared by the women. Gloria mentioned that “I guess part of it [solo travelling] is the challenge and excitement.” Similarly, Dayani expressed, “It is fun to explore places outside my country.” Some women commented on the extreme fascination associated with the solo travelling experience: “...amazingly extreme positive experience” (Yara). These underlying reasons emphasise the distinctiveness

of solitude as a solo travel need rather than the usual need of being alone of a person in an everyday setting.

Solitude as a travel need allowed women to carve out some space in their busy lives. Gloria explained that travelling on her own and being in solitude was important as she considered it as compensation for her busy life. She further elaborated on the value she placed on it and considered a solo trip as something that she did for 'herself'.

I set out with the intent to spend some alone time; get in touch with my inner nature, and just have quiet time reflecting...and also like I was coming off the back of working long hours, long days, for many, many years, and this was my first like, just craving alone time, so this was the first time that I actually was doing something like, that scale, for solely, for myself, so I really placed a lot of value on that.

Women considered solo travel as a way to unwind from their hectic and busy lifestyles.

Leah said:

I need to recharge, so I get tired of people, and when there is too much happening and too many people, I get overwhelmed, so I need time to recharge, just meditate, and be by myself and just enjoy myself, so, as I think travelling alone is the best way to do it.

Similar comments were shared by several other SFTs: "I was really adamant on going for a holiday because I was really tired from work, and I really needed a break" (Samanta); "Travelling actually helps me ease my stress" (Ashley). Women expressed how they were able to revitalise their mental status while being on their own in travelling solo: "I think I come away feeling more rejuvenated" (Lucy); "It [positive aloneness] enriches me and gave some

sort of an energy” (Samanta); “...enjoying a little bit of solitude, helps your mental wellbeing (Ashley).

Certain life circumstances influenced women’s decision to travel alone. Women commented on how their age influenced them to travel alone and experience solitude: “When I got older, I went [to] place[s] where I was staying completely by myself” (Moana). Lily, a 58-year-old SFT, mentioned how moving away from her responsibilities as a woman liberated her to engage in solo travels. She said: “I was free again without children.” Travelling alone following major life events such as separation, divorce, and freedom from parental responsibilities enabled women to explore the world freely and restore their minds after traumatic events. Madusha shared her experience of travelling alone after getting divorced. She explained how she expected to travel alone as a means of escaping from “everything” and “everybody” around her:

...soon after I had separated from my husband, I wanted to get away from everything as well, like, I just wanted to get away from Sri Lanka, get away from my parents, [and] get away from everybody...that's why I went to Singapore, and I stayed an entire week there. Although it's a small country [I] felt very liberating...just be by myself and go everywhere by myself and you know not to be answerable to anybody else.

Similar to Madusha, Lily also travelled solo following her divorce. She recognised a second phase of solo travelling after separating from her husband. She said: “...my second period of travelling alone was when I separated from my husband.” While different life circumstances were inducing some women’s decision to travel alone, they shared their decisions to pay a high price for fulfilling their solitude need in solo travel. Madusha revealed how she decided to spend remorselessly on her solo trip to indulge herself in overcoming the negative phase (a divorce) she was passing through in her life:

It [the hotel she was staying in] was kind of expensive, but I thought, I don't care, this is a trip I'm going to enjoy myself and pamper myself and I'm going to do whatever I want on this trip, so I'm not going to restrict myself.

While women demonstrated an overt need for solo travel and solitude, interestingly, their preference for solitude was situational and context-bounded. Therefore, there were different wanted levels of aloneness. Solo travel as a means of fulfilling solitude as a travel need enabled women to experience the dynamics of solitude by experiencing the interplay between contexts, people, and interactions during their various encounters. The next section will report the findings related to the subjective experience of solitude followed by the various episodes of solitude that women encountered in their solo journeys.

6.2 Different levels of aloneness: Situational aloneness and interactions

Women's decision to be alone, be in groups, and/or interact was premeditated, situational, and context-specific. In other words, women had a varying level of preference for solitude and interaction with others they met depending on the circumstances at the time and their and others' motivations. Women also had concerns in terms of whom to connect or interact with depending on the situation. Given that solitude and interactions were situational and subjective, women revealed different levels of wanted aloneness in solo travel ranging from preference for absolute aloneness to entailing various non-solo episodes at different levels across various situations. The next sections will report the findings related to women's varying degrees of aloneness experience categorised into three central themes: being on my own, alone among others, and space for interaction.

6.2.1 *Being on my own: Avoiding others*

SFTs reported varying levels of aloneness depending on situations and motivations in travelling solo. Accordingly, in one extreme, women showcased an extremely overt need for solitude and made deliberate attempts to be on their own. Some women revealed that interacting with others while travelling solo was annoying to them. As Ellie stated: “I just like being with myself throughout the journey. I like to book it. I like to get to the airport by myself. I really hate goodbyes at the airport.” She further expressed her extreme hostility towards various points of interactions at different travel stages: “I hate them [interactions with others]. I’ll do anything to avoid it [interactions].” For some women, having had to interact with total strangers was tiring: “...that [interacting with strangers] is more exhausting than hanging out with people that you already know” (Parami).

Women emphasised how their needs were different from other travellers: “I want to see and learn, and they want to interact, and the needs are quite different” (Dayani). SFTs’ perception of group travelling emphasised some women’s low tolerance of travelling with others and emphasised their covert need for solitude in solo travelling. Ellie expressed her extremely negative viewpoints on travelling with others and she mentioned it was something that she would never do for any reason: “There are a few things I would never do, I would never travel with a group. To me, that is just awful.” She further explained certain types of trips that she would specifically avoid as it did not allow her to experience solitude: “I would never go on a cruise. To me that's a nightmare being trapped on a boat with other people. I am known to go on like a seven-day hike by myself and I much prefer that.” Some women perceived group travelling as a disturbance: “...there are so many distractions, because there are so many people in the group” (Parami). She further commented on the possibility of her own experience getting flustered by others when travelling as a group and how that might influence her mental tranquillity: “I feel my experience is influenced or clouded by what the

group is saying...peace of mind does not come with the group as there are different people.” Some of the women perceived group travelling as exhausting: “It [travelling with others] kind of puts the pressure on me because I would then have the obligation to follow, and I get extremely exhausted and that's not the point of being on a vacation” (Farah).

Several women considered pursuing happiness and self-fulfilment on their own after travelling to a certain place was important for them, rather than the group excitement or distractions: “People's exclamation of things saying, ‘oh my god, we are finally in Venice, let's take a photo!’... I sometimes tend to be a bit annoyed by that” (Parami); “It's nice when I'm on my own because I don't get distracted by somebody else going ‘hey! Look at this flower”” (Lily). Women further commented that discovering the experience by themselves is important: “I would rather have that realisation for myself” (Parami); “It would give me an experience on my own, not with others” (Lily). For some women, individual realisation was deemed important for themselves and as a means of inspiring others. Roma spoke about travelling alone despite her physically diminutive structure. She found engaging in offbeat activities to be an empowering experience for her and others. She said: “I am only fifty-nine inches tall. So, I am little. I am travelling alone...is an inspiration to others as well as an exhilarating experience for me.”

Depending on the women's travel motives and the activities they intended to do during their solo trips, there were certain circumstances in which women preferred to be on their own. When women were connected with certain artefacts of a destination or a country, women preferred to experience it on their own. This was well captured from Leah's sentiments on travelling alone in Europe:

I am really connected to Europe, and whenever I'm in Europe, I'm happy to be by myself. Because there are a lot of things happening, the cultural experience, the architecture, just the ability to go to museums, and

everything. I want to be by myself there. I don't want to travel with a partner. I'm comfortable experiencing everything by myself, it's a very strong cultural connection probably.

Women found deep and intimate experiences in historical sites when they were on their own. The state of being alone amplified the experience in such sites. Moana elaborated on one of her remarkable solo travel experiences in Spain:

There is a wall around the city, which is 1000 years old, and I was completely alone. I could climb onto the wall, and I sat on the wall. I watched the sunset go down over the city and I could see some people from a gypsy community, they were playing music, and they were like lying under the stars and I was just on this wall, and no one knew I was there, and I was like completely alone. But also, I could observe so much, I could see this thousand-year-old palace, and I can see people playing music under the stars. I remember feeling super moved at that moment and I guess that was the amazing part of being alone. The power to just observe and be a part of something without having to talk about it or share it. It was magical and hard to explain.

Lily shared a similar experience she had in one of the ancient places she visited on her own. She said:

I just looked over the Machu Picchu citadel below me, and it was just like this whole moment, 'oh my god, this is incredible'. I am in this ancient place where people have been for hundreds of years, coming and going civilizations have lived here. I never thought that I would sit here one day

on my own. As I said, I was going through a big life crisis, and I've been feeling quite empty as a human being.

Several other women commented on being alone in historical and cultural sites: "You can soak more into the environment and focus on little intricacies around" (Julia); "Close my eyes and put myself back 2000 years" (Lily).

Women mentioned how they sought solitude depending on the activities they decided to do in their solo trips: "If I wanted to go somewhere on my birthday, or to celebrate a holiday of some sort, I would prefer it with a friend, or more than one friend" (Roma); "I like to write and sometimes I rented a house in the middle of a mountain for a few weeks to just be alone and to write" (Irene); "September was my birthday, so I wanted to spend my birthday by myself" (Madusha); "If it's just chilling and not much about exploring, I don't feel the need to interact, I really want to be on my own" (Farah). Given the SFTs' preference to be on their own, women demonstrated certain deliberate and intentional travel planning behaviours as reported in the next section.

6.2.1.1 Ensuring aloneness: Solo travel planning and experiencing

Women tended to engage in travel-related decision-making, to experience solitude while travelling solo. Gloria explained how she intentionally avoided people along the way on a journey due to her desire to be on her own: "I actually wanted to be by myself, most of the time, so I almost went out of my way to avoid contact with people, because I was really just wanting to be by myself in that particular journey." Meeting familiar people along their solo journeys was a source of discomfort for some SFTs and they actively avoided others during their solo travel planning. Thus, women preferred to visit international or non-local destinations as they wanted to avoid known people and interactions with them. Hence, they made deliberate travel decisions in favour of their needs.

When we travel internationally, the probability of meeting known people would be relatively low. Therefore, I very much prefer to travel alone to international destinations, because it gives me more freedom and to be with myself... when you're travelling and you [personally] know people in the country that you're going [travelling] to and you meet up with them it's actually a problem. (Dayani)

Similarly, Parami said: “You always have friends in Sri Lanka, so if you travel alone you would end up meeting someone who you know.” Madusha explained how she deliberately did not consider certain destinations recommended by her mother when she was planning a trip to Bali after separating from her husband:

She [Madusha’s mother] was telling me Bali might not be safe, we don't know anybody in Bali, and she wanted me to cancel my entire trip and go to Australia because there are people that we know, our family members and friends, and I told her that defeats the whole purpose because the whole point of it is, I want to be alone, and I don't want to go to a place where there are lots of people that I know.

Some women commented on their conscious decisions in choosing accommodation to avoid possible distractions: “I particularly selected that boutique hotel as usually, families don’t come, so I could avoid small kids” (Dorah); “I selected that hotel upon a recommendation of my friend who has been there on her own, and she told me it was a nice place to be on your own” (Britney).

Women commented on how they ensured being on their own during solo trips by selecting and visiting certain tourist attractions. In doing so, women carefully chose certain solitude settings that enabled them to experience aloneness. One such solitude attraction of SFTs was the non-touristy destinations. “I choose a place that's really not exactly very popular

or very dense in terms of the population” (Farah); “Touristy is not my attraction, so I will spend time in a quiet area like maybe some hidden place where there are no other tourists” (Hoa); “I’m not necessarily going to places that are high in tourism” (Lily); “I also search for weird places or odd places to see” (Madusha); “I like to do things that are different or that’s not usually on Google or advertised. I like to go off the beaten path of travel” (Roma). Visiting non-touristy attractions enabled women to experience certain novelties that are quite different from the typical experiences of a usual traveller:

There were places which I went to in Bali, that a lot of tourists don't go to, for example, there was this 500-plus-year-old banyan tree in one of the towns. The history of this banyan tree was that a few centuries ago when the devil invaders came to that particular town, the entire village, around 100 people had hidden inside the roots of that banyan tree. So that was an amazing feeling, to be able to see that tree and to actually go inside the roots to see where those people had hidden 100-plus years ago, so I really enjoy stuff like that. (Madusha)

There was a very cute chapel that I wanted to see, but it was not a touristy place, no one was going into it, so I went in, and I sat down. I couldn't find any leaflets or anything, so I googled ‘where am I right now?’, ‘what is this place?’, to find out that it was a fascinating ancient chapel back in the 1600s or something like that. That freedom and that opportunity to explore what you actually like, what you're interested in, that does not come with group travelling. Peace of mind does not come with the group, because the group would have all sorts of different people, and the group would have to cater to everyone's needs and adjust and make compromises all the time.

(Parami)

Similar to visiting non-touristy attractions, women engaged in certain activities that were quite different from the leisure activities a usual traveller or a group of travellers would engage in. Olivia shared a story from one of her solo trips to Scotland and how she attempted to find information about her descendants: “Looking through a historic building like a castle or looking at somewhere an ancestor lived...finding the street address or looking at records in a record office that gave me a clue to the family history.” She further commented on how being by herself helped her engage in such an activity: “I don’t think if I was travelling with someone, that person would like to join with me in finding out about my descendants.” Some women were able to participate in spiritual programs as a part of their solo travels which enabled them to have a deeper experience. Dayani said:

As I was on my own, I was able to participate in a meditation programme conducted by a Mahayana temple. In that programme, they played some light music and asked me to enjoy the music. It was a piece of calming music that soothes your mind. It helped me to be in that moment and enjoy that present moment. I felt like I am walking on the clouds.

During the solo trips women engaged in certain activities that enabled them to be on their own. Madusha shared her memories of how she spent her birthday at a park on her own, while she was travelling alone in the USA:

I had a really nice day. I spent the entire day not talking to a single person, and I really enjoyed myself. I took a book, I took my lunch, I took water, and I had a picnic there on my own.

Women engaging in activities on their own such as visiting non-touristy attractions, retreat programmes, and individual celebrations showcased how they met their distinctive travel needs and motivations.

Some women decided to travel during unsocial days or hours, seeking solitude in physical aloneness. SFTs visited places in the morning times to be on their own as they could avoid mingling with other travellers: “I like the alone time on vacation in the mornings, where I can just spend some time enjoying the atmosphere and the environment and doing what I need to do” (Nadia); “Times in the morning right before like your friends might be up where you might have more alone time” (Ritt). Some women chose to visit less crowded attractions first to avoid people as they perceived the presence of the crowd as a disturbance to experience solitude: “I go to the less crowded part of the attraction first...sometimes I wait for the crowd to move away before I go because I don't want to join the crowd as I may not be able to enjoy it on my own” (Parami). SFTs preferred to avoid families and hence travelled during the week to certain places to be on their own: “Usually, families visit this place, but I decided to go there on a weekday, so there weren't many people around at all” (Madusha).

Some women travelled in off-peak seasons to avoid other tourists ensuring their aloneness. Parami spoke of her solo trip to Europe during the off-season. She described, that even though the weather in Europe at that time was very harsh, she enjoyed travelling there on her own:

I usually travel during off-peak seasons. The time I went to Hungary and all these places in Europe, it was the harshest time of winter, so it was not touristy at all. I couldn't find many travel groups, so it was not crowded and only a very few tourists were there. I felt very peaceful, and I enjoyed my own company over there, even though the weather was unbearable.

While women were consciously involved in ensuring their aloneness in the solo trips, there were certain instances when they had to travel with a group as a part of their solo trips. Women commented on such situations in terms of their patience in interacting with others. Women shared experiences they had in group travelling and explained how being on their own

on a trip and enjoying solitude is much preferred over interacting with others: “It’s [travelling with a group] not a favourite activity of mine...I do like to be on my own...I can put up with other people for a short period, but I’d rather be on my own” (Olivia). Kathy expressed a similar perspective about her low preference for other people while travelling and how she prefers her own company to feel energetic: “I feel that I have a pretty small tolerance for other people, so in a group setting if it's comfortable and it's enjoyable for a short time...I don't feel energized from other people's energies, I feel pretty drained.” Lily shared her solo travel experience in Mexico, in terms of how she separated herself from the group of other travellers:

I would separate myself from the group. I'll find a step off to one side and go and look at something that the group might not be doing. In Mexico, I went to Teotihuacan where I climbed to the top of the pyramids, where a lot of people might not have the fitness to go up there, so I would separate myself from people by doing such things.

The above sentiments show that SFTs made deliberate attempts to experience solitude by carefully deciding where they travel, when they travel, and what they would be doing. In doing so, they were able to minimise distractions and realise their solitude needs through being on their own in the tourism discourse. However, women had to encounter certain negativities due to being on their own and experiencing solitude. The following sub-section will report how women perceived such negativities and coped with them on their own.

6.2.1.2 Being on my own and coping with negativities: Acceptance and disengagement

Experiencing solitude was not without certain downsides. However, SFTs were quite realistic in terms of the possibilities of such drawbacks in the aloneness experience and they managed to overcome these successfully. “Things can't go hundred per cent perfect all the time” (Ashley); “I always accept the things, then it would be easy for me to overcome the worries” (Dayani); “I think I just accept that's the way things are” (Lucy); “I am not bothered

by it” (Nadia). SFTs tried to reduce the perceived discrepancy between what they expected vs what they actually had to experience: “I am not surprised” (Ashley). Some SFTs commented on how they accepted the fact that the decision to travel alone was made by them willingly and hence, accepting that helps them to overcome the negativities: “That's [travelling alone] what I have chosen” (Lucy); “I try to predetermine what could happen...I'm not reacting to things and situations” (Tracey).

Acceptance helped SFTs overcome certain drawbacks they experienced during their solitude episodes. Kethmini commented on how she used acceptance to overcome loneliness, a sense of isolation she felt. She said: “I knew that when I came on this trip on my own that I was going to be alone, so when I am on my own, I am on my own, and I can't be thinking like oh, you know ‘I wish other people I knew were here’.” Participants shared how being positive helped them to overcome the negativities they encountered in their solo trips: “That is one negative aspect of what is largely a positive experience” (Lucy); “I tried to look at the glass half full” (Roma); “I'm always cautious, not to fall into the negative mind space or negative mental health that might cause me to make some really bad decisions” (Tracey); “You trust that more good times are coming” (Ritt). Being positive about the situations around them helped SFTs to cope with the negativities they encountered in their solo journeys.

SFTs commented on how becoming aware of their feelings helped them to handle the negativities: “I tend to be more aware of how I am feeling...I can come across whatever the negativities I am going through” (Dayani). Roma elaborated on how she takes time to process her feelings and reminds her about why she decided to travel alone when she feels lonely in her solo travels. She said:

I usually take time to actually process the feelings, as if this is something new, you have to get out of your comfort zone because a lot of times when you're by yourself you may feel lonely but you're not. You're actually

taking time for yourself to take care of yourself, so I had to remind myself this is something I wanted to do. You needed to be away from people. You flew all this way to another country by yourself. So, I was telling myself, you're going to do things by yourself and that's okay. So, just giving myself that self-talk makes me understand, it is not loneliness.

Ritt also shared how she tends to move on with the prevailing situation and become sensitive to the situation: “You need to feel more resilient, and you just have to trust the process.” Some women commented on overcoming the negativities through the awareness of their past life incidents: “Subconsciously, I thought if my husband can do something [being abusive] like this to me, I can get over this. Then I don’t give a shit about people on the road, I can handle them” (Madusha).

Some SFTs mentioned certain specific techniques they used to become aware of their feelings during negative encounters. Gloria explained how she overcame fear when she got lost on one of her hikes in her solo travels. She said: “I managed that I guess by deep breaths, just calming myself, you know, taking a few moments to calm myself by not letting myself get into deep, before it was sort of irrecoverable.” Ellie shared how she managed herself while travelling solo in Amsterdam. She said: “I get into self-management, just sit down and had a cup of coffee.” Therefore, while accepting external situations, becoming aware of internal feelings helped SFTs to handle the negativities in their aloneness.

Some SFTs explained how open-mindedness helped them to overcome the negativities they experienced while interacting with others when they travelled solo. Ashley explained how she overcame a situation where a taxi driver was late to pick her up and did not help her with the luggage. She said: “I’m open to things going wrong...this taxi driver got late to come, and he was not welcoming to even lift the luggage for me which was so heavy...I thought fine, there are people like this, so you need to understand some people take profession as a

profession but nothing beyond that.” Accordingly, women found being aware of the situations and their feelings useful to cope with the possible negatives in the solitude experience.

Women shared their views on how disengaging from the situations helped them to cope with the negatives experienced along with solitude. Parami talked about how changing the environment enabled her to overcome loneliness when she travelled alone. She said: “I would keep myself occupied, I would go to a museum because I can spend a lot of time.” She also said how deeply engaging in an experience helped her to overcome loneliness: “Looking at all these artefacts, I would read the descriptions, and I am a very curious person, so when you have curiosity, I think you can overcome loneliness with your curiosity because you would explore more things.” Similar ideas were shared by other SFTs as well: “Go for shopping” (Kethmini). Some SFTs talked about how they changed their travel plans impulsively to overcome loneliness: “Spontaneously, I decided to go to Austria the next day, as I had no special plans and I was bored and lonely” (Ashley). Changing environments, deep engagement, and changing travel plans impulsively helped SFTs to overcome the loneliness they felt during their solitude experience. While women were experiencing solitude on their own and successfully navigating through the dark episodes in their solitude experience, at another level women’s solitude experience took place in the presence of others. The next section will report the findings on women’s solitude experience in the presence of others.

6.2.2 Being in the presence of others

Even though women were travelling alone they often encountered others in their solo journeys. Hence, most of the time others were present in their tourism discourse. Therefore, women’s solitude experience in solo travelling often took place while in the presence of others. Thus, women had two different levels of aloneness while in the presence of others. The first level was alone among others in experiencing safe solitude, yet with no interactions. The second level was non-solo episodes which entailed certain interactions with locals, other travellers, and

service persons. The following two subsections will report the findings related to these two levels of aloneness experienced in the presence of others.

6.2.2.1 Alone among others: Safe solitude

Most of the SFTs illustrated in many ways that safety is a prime feature they would search for in travelling alone and being alone enjoying solitude: “Security and I think it matters a lot more than anything else” (Lucy); “Enough of an element of safety that I would feel comfortable being by myself” (Gloria); “Safety is one thing for sure” (Samanta). The general vulnerabilities a woman faces made safety a prime concern for females who travel on their own. Moana recalled her fearful thoughts while she was travelling alone in Peru. She said:

There was no one and I didn't feel safe at all when there was no one around on the streets. It was like six o'clock in the morning and no one was outside, so I went back to my room. So that limits my interests, though I wanted to do something, I still couldn't unless I met someone.

Several other participants expressed their concerns about safety and vulnerability when travelling alone: “When you are by yourself it is easier for somebody to attack, it's like when you put [an] animal by itself vs that animal with a group” (Adriana); “The apprehension about visiting these comedy shows or musical shows by yourself because, in a foreign country as a female, you are susceptible to many things that can happen” (Ava).

These vulnerabilities made women cautious about the potential dangers they may encounter while travelling solo: “I am concerned about being alone and how that affects my privacy. I always feel like somebody's watching me...I'm always vigilant about any danger, is anybody looking out for me or trying to contact me” (Ashley); “I practice advertence. I'm always looking around at my surroundings, I'm aware of where I'm going, I don't wander along, listen to music or looking at my phone. I'm always watching and looking” (Olivia).

Women's cautious and deliberate attempts in ensuring safety imply that they were deemed to be self-responsible for their safety while travelling solo. SFTs demonstrated their reliance on intuition in terms of judgements of safety. Adriana said:

I always try to trust people, but tried to look deep into their eyes and see if I can trust those kinds of people because when you are travelling if it doesn't seem dangerous you just go with the flow. And if you realise you're putting yourself into trouble, you need to move away from it soon.

In confirming the notion of safety and women's self-responsibility in taking care of themselves, Nadia explained how she would keep herself away from potential threats and be cautious. She said:

The aesthetics, of the area, so those are the types of places that I would tend to stay away from, I mean if you go down somewhere and you see a Nazi symbol or no negros or some nonsense, I will definitely get out from there.

The availability of certain basic facilities was an indication for women to ensure that they are not completely alone: "I guess like wi-fi being available or some kind of technological poll so you can contact people if you're in trouble" (Ritt). Kethmini explained how she searched for destination features in terms of conveniences and facilities to ensure that she travels to a safe place on her own. She said:

I look at the location so that I can get to that location conveniently. I literally check and see if there are supermarkets or something around and make sure that I'm not completely alone in a house in the middle of a jungle and that I am near some other people, yeah, I tend to focus on the reviews quite a bit, and what other people have said [about the place].

Due to safety concerns, women did not prefer certain conventional solitude settings in travel, such as the wilderness with complete seclusion: “I don’t think I would feel comfortable if I was completely alone, like in a tent in the middle of the wilderness” (Moana). Women enjoyed solitude in their solo travels while being around other people and they did not prefer complete seclusion as in conventional solitude: “I mean I don’t enjoy you know being alone-alone” (Amali). Some women were not actively seeking completely secluded places to be in solitude as it was not practical for them to do: “I do not actively seek alone places to be on my own. I know it is difficult to find, so it is not a huge part of my travels” (Parami).

SFTs felt comfortable enjoying solitude knowing they would be able to seek help in any potential danger: “When there is a crowd, I always have the feeling that some people will at least try to stand up when something [bad] is happening to me” (Mila); “Safety, and again having people around, you know that combination, but maybe changes in the future [solo travels], but yeah, having people around me” (Yara). Apart from the safety concern of SFTs in general, having others around provided a sense of assurance for SFTs visiting new places for the first time. Gloria explained how the presence of others around made her feel safe while she was walking along the Camino de Santiago hiking trail for the first time. She said:

There were a lot of other people walking the trail that you could pass by, so it was well-frequented...which gave me a kind of reassurance because it was the first time, I'd ever done anything like that.

Being alone in the mere presence of unknown people provided SFTs with a sense of being a part of a group yet not interacting and not obliged to interact: “I would go to a coffee shop. There will be people around me but since I am not interacting with them, I don't feel strange, or I don't feel the necessity to socialise, so I would just stay, and I would have a coffee by myself while listening to some music” (Parami). Women’s awareness of the presence of

others made them feel comfortable to be in their spaces. Moana described how she felt safe being alone while she was aware that other people were nearby:

I like the idea of having my own space, like my own room in a hotel or a hostel, but then knowing that other people are nearby, even if they're not directly in my space. I guess, my desired aloneness would be knowing that there is someone nearby, even if I don't know the person, just knowing that there are other people around but preferably not like directly in my space.

The presence of other people enabled SFTs to easily blend and enjoy their solitude without getting noticed: “In some crowded places, I didn't feel like I'm being recognised and that helped [to be alone]. I don't want to be the centre of attraction, or like you know, be the weirdo among the crowd. So that kind of blending in also helps” (Ashley). This idea was well captured by Kethmini's sentiments on how she enjoys her own company in urban settings:

I would like to be all on my own in a very busy city, extremely busy city, because when you're in a very busy place people are not paying attention to you, people are just doing their thing, nobody sees you, you can just be yourself in a place, full of people.

Priya also shared a similar experience in terms of being in the presence of others yet enjoying the aloneness as she walked through. She said:

I remember walking around [in the UK] just enjoying nature and the people of the whole scenery and it's been really great and relaxing, and I don't think I'd be able to do that in India. I would [be a] lot more conscious and also the fact that I noticed that people tend to stare at someone, especially if it's a girl who is walking alone, and I don't like people staring

at me. I can enjoy the whole place better when I know nobody's looking, nobody's judging, and it's just me walking.

Women found being in the presence of others in an international travel destination where people speak a different language or English is not the first language, made them feel in company. This was well captured by Parami. She said:

I didn't understand the local language. So, it's a completely different environment because of that language. In Sri Lanka, if you're by yourself, you can still hear people speaking, and you can understand it, and you will get distracted. Not that you necessarily eavesdrop on purpose, but you can still hear what they're saying you know what's going on, but here [in the countries she travelled], even if people are speaking you don't understand it. I think that is a nice experience, hearing a foreign language itself is a nice experience. At the same time, it's like background noise because you don't understand the context of what they're saying. It's like listening to a song in another language or listening to a song without lyrics. So, you feel like you have some company, you feel like you are in the presence of people, so you feel safe, and at the same time, you're not distracted because you don't understand.

The fact that SFTs prefer to travel in countries where a different language is spoken demonstrates how their sense of solitude is not disturbed by the 'meaning' of what other people say and is maintained by the 'presence' of others. Farah also described a similar experience when she was travelling alone in New York City: "I was just taking it all in on my own, you know, it's like you're around a sea of people, but you're just feeling like you're on your own basically like just try to take in everything." Being in solitude in the presence of others also

enabled the SFTs to freely engage as they wished. Kaala described how certain settings such as museums enabled her to be on her own as she preferred: “Especially the galleries and the museums because there are people, but you kind of feel like you can wander around do your own thing.” Similarly, Parami said: “Especially museums, other people are roaming around but that does not really bother me if I just want to be by myself.”

Safety elements exemplified both destination characteristics and other human characteristics of the people they met along their solo trips: “I heard that people in Cambodia are friendly, and they are welcoming foreigners” (Hoa). Women found it comfortable to be alone in certain countries that are used to the concept of women travelling alone. As Kethmini commented:

Because there [in Vietnam] are a lot of solo travellers, people [Vietnamese and other travellers in Vietnam] are used to the idea of people travelling on their own, they don't think it's a bit weird or they don't try to kidnap you or do something to you. Because they know that thousands of tourists come, and they travel on their own.

Several other women commented on choosing safe countries (as they perceived) to travel alone and be on their own: “Vietnam is good for being alone, and I think you can be alone, you can walk to beaches and you don't get hassled, I think that's good” (Lucy); “I just picked places that are very safe like Denmark or Japan; in these kinds of places I don't really feel too threatened about walking on my own” (Farah); “The Caribbean, so I've travelled there quite frequently by myself, I would prefer that with familiar people, this is a family-oriented environment” (Roma).

Women showed how they enjoyed being alone among others rather than in complete seclusion as it enabled them to be safe, reassured, and blend in without being noticed. Thus,

being alone in the presence of others enabled women to experience safe solitude without having to interact with others.

6.2.2.2 Non-solo episodes: Interaction in solitude

While SFTs preferred solitude on their solo trips, the majority of women (20 of 34) mentioned how they interacted with others in their solo travels while experiencing solitude. This demonstrated another level of aloneness that women experienced on their solo trips emphasising being in the presence of others and interacting with them. Travelling alone and the state of aloneness of SFTs helped them to foster interactions with others including locals, other travellers, and service persons they met in various service encounters. Accordingly, for women, travelling alone did not imply being completely alone or away from human interactions, but rather allowed women to connect with others as they wished and for other reasons that helped them to overcome the challenges they encountered in navigating the tourism space on their own.

Women had their own definition of solitude that permitted interactions and engagement with others along with the solitude experience: “It’s not this you know complete solitude” (Amali); “Whether you’re looking for the type of solitude where you also meet other travellers” (Moana); “You do need your own space as much as you want to socialise. I think that description fits me quite well” (Parami). Building up their own definition for solitude enabled women to experience a healthy mix of solitude and connection in their solo trips: “I wanted to travel by myself, but also, I wanted to meet people” (Britney); “...right balance between socialising and taking time for yourself” (Parami). Some women commented on how interactions helped them to be comfortably alone on their solo trips. Tracey said: “I feel like I can get positive doses of interaction throughout the day and feel confident by being on my own and feel more peace.” Leah explained how she plans her trips allowing her to connect with

others at times when she wants and disconnect from them to create a healthy mix in her solo trips:

I think that I might unintentionally plan my trips, in a way, where I can enjoy myself, but then I'm dropping people in the middle so that I feel that some kind of creating a healthy mix in terms of travelling.

Olivia explained how she planned her solo leisure vacations so that she could catch up with friends along the way and be on her own by the end:

If it's completely a leisure trip with nothing to do with work and I'm arranging it, I would go away for five or six weeks at a time and during that time, I would try and catch up with friends and probably one week after that, five or six would be staying with friends or seeing friends or whatever, and the rest of the time I'd be on my own.

Interestingly, the interactions that women preferred and sought were transient and free from the obligation of ongoing attachment: "I don't think I have made any long-term friends. Because they are strangers, and you would ideally not share your number with them, but I have made friends, for the time being, and [that] has been really great" (Parami). Similarly, Amali reflected on her experiences of small talk with other travellers she met in museums: "If we are looking at the same exhibit then I would say something and they [other travellers] would respond, but it doesn't really go on for a long time." SFTs commented on their openness to such momentary interactions with others regardless of their solo status in travelling: "You need to interact with them, even when you're alone. So, I don't completely block out that aspect of being able to interact with locals. I'm not completely against interacting with other people along these [solo] travels" (Parami); "I would be interacting with locals...going out of my comfort zone and talking" (Amali).

SFTs described how they will interact with others while prioritising their need for aloneness. Ashley said: “Trying to engage with the locals would come last.” Some women pledged to follow their plans even if they have had to interact with other people while they travel solo: “Whatever happens, if someone joins me or not, I would do whatever I have planned to do. Maybe later I would find a spare time to hang out” (Romena). Some women expressed their need for solitude after interacting with other travellers who they met along the way: “After socialising [with other travellers] I usually need some time for myself. I am quite extroverted and very social but not social enough that I can socialise all day or all night. I do need a break, I think it's called being an ambivert” (Parami).

Solitude provided an opportunity for SFTs to hover between solitude and interaction experiences as per their need. Romena said: “In the Balkans, and at a certain point, I talked to people and partied with them. I did that and then went back to my alone experience.” Mila explained how she could connect with others while experiencing solitude: “Being an outsider in the conversation, and you can say that's still you are alone, or you are kind of on your own, but you try to make connections with people from other cultures.” Women commented on how they were independent in switching between interaction and solitude as per their needs. As Madusha said:

Because I was alone, I had my solitude and there was some distance, but there was also company when I wanted....I love my own company and I do tend to go into groups if needed, but if I don't feel like that activity speaks to me, or if I don't feel pressed to join, then I will always seek a safer choice for me to enjoy the time that I spent by myself.

Several other SFTs commented on the ability to foster interactions while travelling alone, due to the independence and control they had: “I can build friendships as the way I wanted” (Dayani); “When I travel alone, and I am a woman, it makes it easier to get in touch

with people” (Irene); “When you are a woman, people would tend to interact with you more” (Julia); “When you are travelling with another group, you don’t have that motivation to meet new people, and you can’t always put yourself out there” (Ritt). Some women expressed interacting with others as a travel habit: “As a habit during solo travels, I would definitely engage with locals, I definitely speak to locals.” SFTs perceived interactions as a means of enjoyment in their solo trips: “I want to be able to enjoy different sides and chat with the locals” (Amali). In doing so, SFTs positively capitalise on their aloneness as a means of interacting with others while travelling solo.

SFTs enjoyed the interactions in their solo trips as they were transient and women had control over the interactions. Madusha commented: “Even though I met those people only for like a day or two, I really enjoyed the camaraderie.” Women described their experiences resulting from interacting with others they met along their solo trips: “I would like to engage with locals” (Ashley); “truly appreciative” (Lily); “It was fabulous” (Ellie); “...met great people” (Julia); “...really meaningful” (Ritt); “...really nice people” (Kethmini); “I felt that humanity” (Irene); “...it’s enjoyable” (Kathy).

Women preferred differing levels of aloneness that enabled them to engage in transient interactions with others at their own pace and desire. When such interactions were taking place the way they wanted, it resulted in various positivities that brought in certain benefits that women enjoyed as SFTs. These benefits contributed in shaping the overall solo travel experience by enabling women to navigate the tourism space on their own while overcoming certain adversities in solo travelling. The next sub-sections will report the findings related to the perceived benefits of interactions when the relations with locals, other travellers, and service persons were built and maintained appropriately as women wanted.

6.2.2.2.1 *Perceived customisation of offerings*

SFTs perceived certain encounters with service persons were customised towards them, and women believed their customer profile (i.e., being a SFT) was the reason for such special treatment. Samanta shared one of her experiences in a restaurant in Austria as a SFT. She was so grateful that she had the opportunity to consume a famous dessert in Austria, as the restaurant offered her a small portion of the dessert after Samanta refused the item as she was feeling full.

[The] waiter said, 'oh well, we can make a very small one, for you,' I thought 'wow.' He [waiter] went above and beyond, he thought maybe okay I'm [Samanta] alone and I'm also like really full already. So, he [waiter] was like 'don't worry, let me ask the chef to prepare just a very small one [dessert], for you.' I had a really good experience, and I was really appreciative of that. That was one of the highlights of my trip.

A similar experience was shared by Lily, commenting on one of her experiences at a hostel. She said:

I've stayed at some fabulous hostels, and they've been more than accommodating. I tend to eat predominantly a vegan and gluten-free diet and some of them completely went out of their way. They've come and told me, 'we have found these fruits for you, these are all fitting in with what you want'. And I was truly appreciative of the kindness when they didn't have to do that.

Some women mentioned service persons special attention to them after knowing that they are SFTs. Such initiatives of service providers made SFTs feel positive about the service establishment as women perceived it as an augmented level of service provision. Kethmini shared some of her personal experiences with extra customer service during her solo trips.

Cleaning ladies, usually ask if I'm okay and sometimes offered me tea as well. So, they would go beyond their necessary level to make sure that I'm okay. I've actually had service people help me after knowing that I am on my own, they went an extra mile of customer service, making sure I was fed, making sure I had enough to drink. I've had some service people actually give me recommendations of what to do, outside of the hotel.

SFTs recalled their positive experiences with service persons who offered to help when the SFTs were facing difficulties. For example, Hoa shared one of her experiences in India, at a time when she lost her valuables including her passport: "...male receptionist in that hotel was so helpful, he helped me to get back my passport. When I thanked him, he said, 'no worries, ma'am, you are a guest of India'. He even refused the tip that I tried to give him. I felt so grateful." By looking at the sentiments on receiving help as a benefit of interactions in SFTs' journeys, it is evident that SFTs felt appreciative for the help they received, which ultimately contributed positively in shaping their solo travel experience in the respective country.

Some SFTs reflected how their needs were prioritised over other types of travellers in certain situations. For example, Priya shared her experience at the UK and Abu Dhabi airports when the flights were delayed. She mentioned how the airport services accommodated her after knowing her profile as a SFT. She said:

In the UK when the flight got delayed, they [airport service persons] gave me extra food coupons and everything. And even in Abu Dhabi, for that matter, I got preference as a solo female traveller. There were so many people waiting in line to get rooms to rest before the next flight. I explained my situation to him [the airport service person] and he took my passport and then he came back soon five minutes later. He gave me food coupons

for the next entire day, and he even got me accommodation fixed up in no time and it was so good. So, I felt like only because I was a solo female traveller that night I got the privilege.

Some women shared their experiences with service persons who offered certain informal tour guiding, enabling women to travel and experience certain events which otherwise they would not have visited alone. Ellie highlighted one of her experiences in India:

It was a local hotel and there was a lovely guy, maybe a waiter, he took me to a temple, he took me through all those crowded cities, and he also took me to an extraordinary religious event where everyone was dancing and dressed up with bright colours. I still hear the sounds of those drums play[ing] – De-dum, De-dum. I might not have been to that event if I didn't have anybody to go with, because you know you may need someone familiar with such an event, to mingle or blend with that kind of an occasion.

Ellie further added how the service person who took her to different sites in India explained certain background information about the places, allowing her to ask questions and learn more. She said: "I enjoyed it a lot when I visited the Taj Mahal. The guy [waiter] who took me was an ex-builder. So, he talked a lot about construction, and I was able to ask many questions from him. It was a different experience than travelling with an ordinary tour guide." SFTs felt positive about the augmented level of service experiences they received in various service encounters. Further, the positive experience was reinforced when SFTs realised that enhanced level services were provided to them due to their customer profile.

6.2.2.2.2 *Helping hand: Combating fear and feelings of insecurity*

SFTs preferred to experience solitude in public settings, as the presence of other people made them feel safe, even though they did not personally know the people. Accordingly, most of the SFTs shared their experiences of getting help from strangers they met along their journeys. These strangers included the locals, other travellers, and service persons that they met in various encounters of their solo travels. SFTs sought help when they were feeling unsafe, sick, having trouble finding lodging, and losing belongings while travelling. Irene reflected on her memories of strangers offering help while she was travelling solo in Colombia:

There was a man who was following me, and he was bothering me. Then other people around saw that I was not comfortable in the station, and they stepped in and took care of it, and they removed him from me, and I felt ‘oh wow, humanity, so great to see how we care about each other, even if it's strangers’.

Lily also shared a similar experience of staying with some other travellers to overcome her fears. She said:

I felt so unsafe that night and I was scared to go back to my hotel. So, I decided to stay with the American guys (travellers) I met, and they were so helpful and allowed me to stay at their place.

Similarly, she recalled how the other travellers helped her when she got altitude sickness while she was climbing up a mountain: “I threw up when I climbed [to] the top of the mountain. They gave me all the first-aid and I felt so grateful about their kindness.” SFTs received help from strangers in various instances. One such instance is strangers offering accommodation in their homes when they found SFTs struggling to find accommodation in the hosting countries. Irene explained how an elderly couple that she met on a flight offered her accommodation after the couple found that Irene was unable to find a place to spend the

night in Colombia. Since safety is a prime concern for SFTs, Irene shared how she felt safe accepting the offer made by the couple as she could trust them. She said: “This old couple invited me to their home to spend the night. They insisted I should not go out in the city alone. I felt so safe, as they were like my parents’ age, and I decided to stay with them.”

Apart from the insecurities caused by safety issues, women also found that joining groups or friends along the solo journeys helped them to experience certain activities that they would not have been doing unless with a group. Amali shared one of her experiences in Poland. She said: “Some of my friends joined me on my trip to Poland and we went for a public hot water bath. I was glad that I had my friends with me because I would have felt really awkward if I was there alone. Maybe I would not have gone there either.” Mila shared a similar viewpoint in terms of her preference to have someone with her when she visited certain secluded places: “If I go to some secluded place somewhere in the middle of the woods or when I travel to the South Island, for example in New Zealand, I don't really want to be by myself. I probably would be more comfortable travelling with somebody.”

6.2.2.2.3 *Travel companionship*

Women shared their experiences on how locals, service persons, and other travellers became their travel companions along their solo journeys. Inter-tourist social interactions enabled SFTs to overcome loneliness in their solo travels in unfamiliar tourism landscapes: Parami said:

When I was in Hungary, I found a group of Brazilian volunteers who were in a volunteering project, and I became friends with them. I tagged along with them to some places, and I went to have coffee with them... Whenever I feel lonely, I text them and ask them, do you like to hang out?, or would you like to do something?, so I wouldn't really feel that lonely because of it.

Travel companionships took different forms including sharing travel information and travelling together to various places. Along their solo journeys, some women decided to join travel groups to visit certain local sites which enabled them to incorporate a different travel experience: “I visited an archaeological site, with another group, that was very rewarding because they [other travel group members] were also interested in it [archaeology]” (Amali). She further commented on how joining travel groups along the solo trips helped her to get to know other SFTs. She said: “There was a lady who was also on a solo trip, and she was from the US, and she knew exactly how to take photos. That is something that I thought was lacking when travelling solo.”

Most of the time SFTs preferred talking to other travellers regarding their travel backgrounds and sharing their own experiences in travelling alone: “We talked about why we selected this place. We started talking about our backgrounds and things...was pretty fun” (Farah); “I like speaking with other people and hearing other people's experiences” (Kathy); “I talked with another girl who was travelling on her own and we became good friends” (Kethmini); “We talked about our travel plans for the next couple of days and sometimes decided to visit the places they have visited before” (Julia); “They gave me a lot of advice and tips on where to visit, which was very useful” (Lily). Kethmini also mentioned how listening to other people’s stories inspired her as a traveller: “Everybody has their own travel story. It is fascinating to listen to them and there’s a lot I could learn. I use their advice when I travel alone.” Engagement with other SFTs enabled women to share their travel experiences and build up conversations on the areas of their interests: “It was very fun to have someone like that [another SFT], because she took all the photos, then we had a chat about those historical sites and she knew a lot of history as well, and I also knew the kind of history that she knew” (Amali).

Despite women’s clear preferences for interacting with other travellers in certain situations, they did not perceive interaction with other travellers as a good means of

experiencing the culture of a particular country, group, or community. Instead, travelling alone was considered the best way to experience culture and they did not prefer to join group travelling (which some SFTs do in the middle of their solo trips) or interact with other travellers. They believed groups were a distraction as they may need to think about the group interests and priorities. Hence, time spent thinking of others might reduce the time available to experience. As Ellie stated:

Other people are disturbing most of the time. I really like to understand what's going on in a culture. I don't like someone feeling hungry or having to meet their needs. And also, because the cognitive load is so great when you're travelling in another culture, you just don't want that extra distraction, so for me travelling alone is the way to do it.

However, in emphasising the subjective and context-bounded nature of interactions within the solo travel discourse, women considered connecting with locals as important in experiencing the culture. Romena described how the cultural experience she sought in the travel destination motivated her to engage with locals. She said: “When I'm interested in someplace, like, if I am attracted by the culture, I am more prone to get in touch with locals and I have been hanging out with them.” Women believed they were more welcomed by the locals as they were travelling alone, and it helped them to immerse themselves in cultural experiences. As Irene explained:

I always get invited by local people. I think it is because I am alone, and I am a woman. Locals may perceive me as less threatening to them. So, I [am] used to experience their culture more closely and deeply.

Mila shared a similar idea, feeling that she receives invitations from locals more often when travelling alone than with her family. She said:

When I travel with my husband, we stick together, and we have a programme. So, people [locals] usually don't invite us. But when I am on my own, they [locals] invite me to their homes and eat food. Sometimes I've been invited to join in cultural events as well.

Talking to locals made it easier for SFTs to navigate the tourism space on their own by getting to know the unknowns about the countries they travel to solo: "They [locals] are the best people to ask where to eat, for example, how to find the directions, they would know shortcuts, they would know the easiest way to go" (Parami). Lily also reflected on her memories of travelling alone in Latin America, in terms of how local people offered her local food and allowed her the opportunity to experience the local culture more deeply. She said:

I've had people spend time with me, showing me around the city, just going for a walk, sharing a day together, saying, 'hey look, this is a cultural drink or this is a cultural food', taking me to local markets that I probably wouldn't have gone to on my own because I wasn't sure how that would operate, and they did so I could go into the natural environment of these people. I was able to go into more intimate spaces of theirs.

Cultural experiences of SFTs took various forms showing their interest in experiencing cultural diversity at different levels. For example, Britt shared her experience of teaching English in a Vietnamese school and how she enjoyed the experience with local children. She said:

This lady took me to a school which is up in the mountains, and we watched a soccer game and after that we did karaoke with the children. It was very meaningful as I saw their lives genuinely. I really appreciate the cultural perspective and giving back something.

Similar sentiments were shared by several other SFTs who were accompanied by locals and service persons in visiting cultural attractions: “Locals were extra friendly. They offered to show me around the village and invited me to parties” (Julia); “People were very kind to me, maybe because I was a female travelling alone, they took me to places where I exactly wanted to go and even offered me...local food and everything” (Lily).

Certain travel companionships that women built up were quite strong and personal due to the traveller's background and the sensitivity of the information they shared. Kethmini shared her experiences in Airbnb accommodation hosted by an elderly couple. She said: “They [the hosting couple] showed me pictures of their children who've gone abroad then. They told me about their children's professions and what they do. It was a nice experience to get on to that level.” Irene who was offered accommodation by an elderly couple also shared a similar experience. She said: “They treated me like their daughter. They even put me into bed and made sure that I am doing fine.” Madusha, who was travelling solo soon after her divorce talked about her experience of meeting another SFT who was going through a similar phase in her life. She commented how meeting another SFT with a similar life story was an incredible experience for her, which was healing and spiritual. As Madusha explained:

That girl was exactly my age and had gone through a divorce same as me. We got really connected as the reason for her to travel to Bali was the same reason as mine [divorce].... I was going through a lot, and although I was relieved to a certain extent, I was mentally unsettled. But meeting someone who was very similar to my situation in a different country, gave me a healing and spiritual experience.

She further commented on her connection with the other SFT during the journey:

It went all dark outside and we just had our torches, and it was a very difficult climb. So, we were helping each other, and then when we got to

the top, we had some coffee. Then it was the sunrise which was so beautiful to see.... Although there wasn't anything religious about the volcano it was a very spiritual experience.

In reflecting on the deep companionships with other travellers while travelling solo, Kethmini mentioned how she kept connections with them even in the present. She said: “I still keep in touch with those people after like three years. During the Covid time I called them, and they called me and asked how I’m doing so we found trust-building friendships, which leads to a stronger connection.”

The women’s solitude experience during the solo trips emphasised the SFTs’ preference for different levels of aloneness. Further, it highlights that solitude in women’s solo travelling is not a standalone experience but a diverse and subjective encounter. Women exhibit a range of aloneness preferences and experiences featuring moving away from known people and allowing interactions with unknown others (i.e., locals, other travellers, and service persons) in their solitude experience. Similarly, women also preferred varying levels of interactions with locals, other travellers, and service persons within their tourism discourse. By interacting with others, SFTs were able to overcome safety concerns, fear of the unknown, and anxiety, in experiencing the local culture and obtaining the most out of their solo travel experience. Accordingly, women liked the interactions when they were helpful and supportive in enhancing their overall solitude experience. However, when the interactions were not helpful or in opposition towards their solitude needs, they became intrusive towards the women’s solitude experience. Thus, intrusions act against the realisation of the solitude experience and create dissatisfaction in the SFTs’ overall solo travel experience.

6.3 Chapter summary

This chapter provided the findings relating to the first research question. The findings emphasised how women perceive solitude as a travel need in the context of solo travelling. Therefore, it showed the importance of ‘solo travelling’ as a context and a means of framing women’s perceptions and experiences of solitude. The findings highlight the interplay between different levels of aloneness and interactions in forming the unique dynamics of the solitude experience for women during solo travel. Thus, it was found that solitude is not a standalone experience when encountered in a different context like solo travelling. The next chapter will report the findings relevant for research question two and will report how various contextual interactions influence SFTs’ solitude experience.

CHAPTER SEVEN - FINDINGS II: EXTERNAL INTRUSIONS TOWARDS THE SOLITUDE EXPERIENCE OF SOLO FEMALE TRAVELLERS

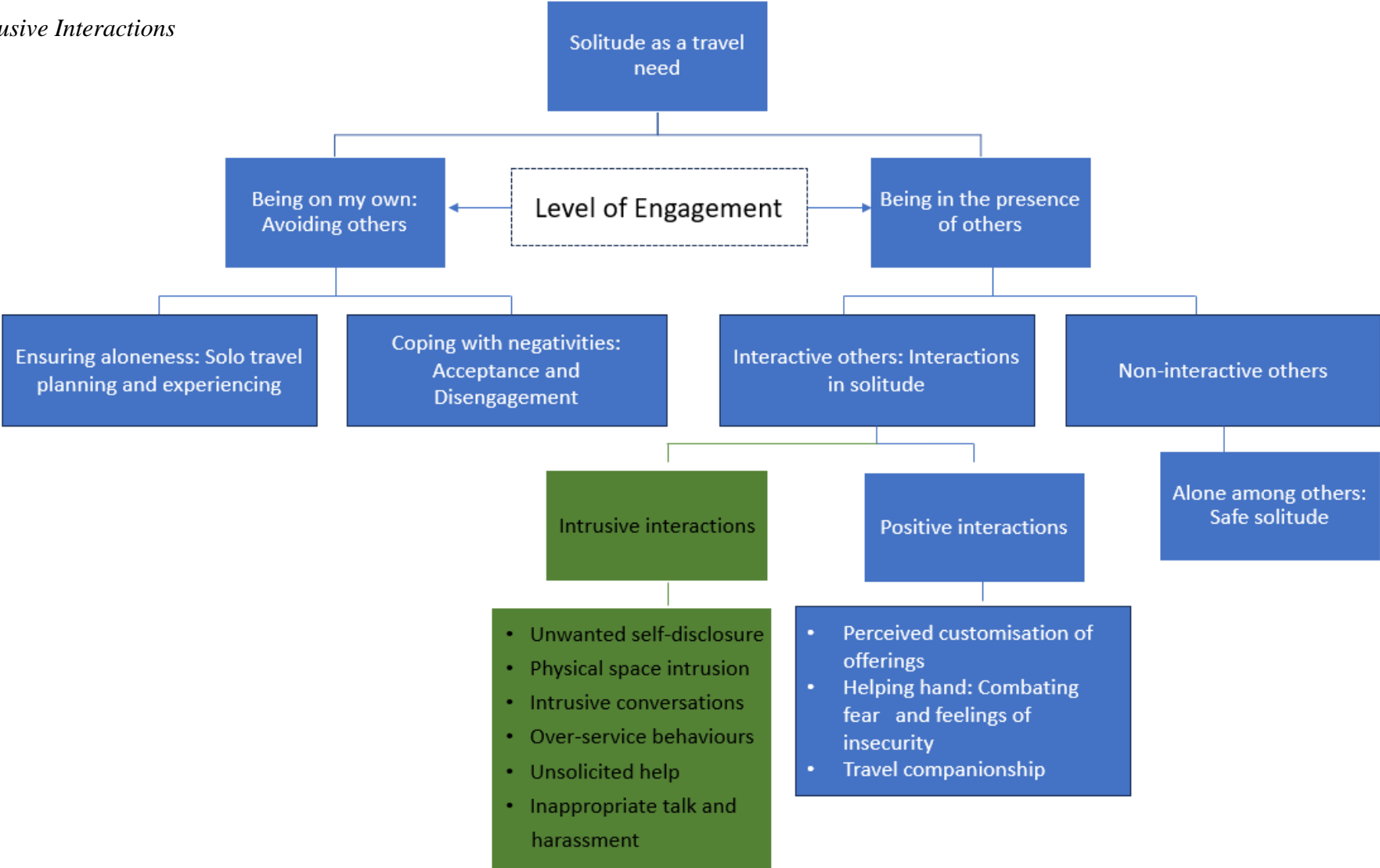
This chapter reports the findings of the current study addressing the second research question:

RQ2: How do various interactions influence the solitude experience of SFTs?

As illustrated in figure 7.1 this chapter presents findings on the intrusive interactions and their influence towards the solitude experience. In doing so, it will report the themes and sub-themes identified with regard to various intrusive encounters solo female travellers (SFTs) had to face in their interactions with locals, other travellers, and service persons. The findings revealed how interactions with others were crossing the women's boundaries leading to privacy concerns. Firstly, this chapter will report how women perceived intrusions from external others they met and had to interact with in their solo travels. Secondly, this chapter will emphasise how women's privacy in the solitude experience was primarily influenced by the unwanted presence of others in various solo travel contexts. Therefore, this chapter will report the various forms of intrusions caused by the presence of others distracting women from experiencing solitude in their solo travels.

Figure 7.1

Intrusive Interactions



7.1 Intrusive behaviours: Locals, other travellers, and service persons

Women found an emotional respite during the solitude experience. As reported earlier in Chapter Six, SFTs had different levels of aloneness that entailed various episodes of solitude experiences with the self and being in the presence of others. Accordingly, during the solitude experiences that women had in the presence of others, they were trying to achieve a state of purposeful withdrawal into their space. However, when others encroached on this state of separation, women perceived such interferences as intrusions that detracted from the solitude experience. The findings revealed that intrusions take different forms, and it was a subjective experience of SFTs depending on how they contextualised the interaction: “If I choose to go to an experience clearly by myself, say to a museum or somewhere, it's not abnormal to see someone being solo. I find it quite detrimental if people approached me” (Tracey); “It would be a little creepy if the other tables are empty and this guy or girl or whoever comes in and sits next to me” (Amali). “There were two other roommates in my room [in hostel accommodation] so I did not have much time for myself” (Parami). Women commented on the intrusiveness of the interactions when they were not in the mood: “Having people approach you when you are not enthusiastic to interact, and they still continue spending time with you” (Tracey). Accordingly, the presence of others around and encounters made in such surroundings resulted in intrusive experiences depending on the circumstance in which the interaction took place.

Gendered intrusions were quite common for most of the SFTs: “Any harassment, any kind of disturbance, just because you're a girl. People think that they can approach you, sometimes they try to flirt with you, if these sorts of things happen, I think it's an intrusion” (Parami). She further commented on how disadvantageous women have it in navigating the tourism space: “Especially these things [intrusions] happen to girls, especially by men unfortunately, it happens to girls.” SFTs also had certain pre-judgements about men in terms of

how men perceive SFTs as weak in the tourism space: "...being vulnerable like they [men] might have expected" (Tracey).

Apart from the intrusions from locals and other travellers, women reported how certain service interactions were intrusive towards their solitude experience. While these intrusions were affecting women's state of solitude, they believed being a woman and their state of aloneness while travelling were the prominent reasons for service persons' intrusive behaviours: "If I had been married at the time and had gone with my husband, obviously this guy [tour guide] would have never said something like that" (Madusha); "I always compare, if I was a man then they [Airbnb host] would not do something like this" (Romana); "If I said [to] them [restaurant operator], yes, I have a husband who's back at the hotel, I think they will treat me differently" (Lily).

Women perceived intrusion when the interaction experience fell short of their expectations or was out of their control. The intrusive behaviours of locals and other travellers were in various forms including intrusive conversations, disrespectful behaviours, and unsolicited help. Intrusions from locals and other travellers led to dissatisfaction emotions in SFTs. They used descriptors and phrases including, "harassed", "pissed me off", "hassled", "overwhelmed", "intimidating", "discontented", and "shocked". Too much social contact with locals and other travellers made SFTs feel drained and expended of energy that triggered dissatisfaction and eventually negatively influenced the solitude and solo travel experience in general.

7.1.1 *Unwanted presence of others: Breaking into spaces*

As reported earlier, while being in the presence of others, women were able to enjoy safe solitude and certain other positive outcomes via interactions within the solitude experience. However, the presence of others and interactions with others became intrusive when others attempted to invade women's spaces without their consent or beyond their desires. These

intrusions were violating women's privacy in their solo travel discourse and distracting their solitude experience. Solitude being an integral part of one's privacy, the intrusions towards the solitude experience adversely influenced the privacy concerns of SFTs. These intrusions took various forms including: unwanted self-disclosure, physical space intrusions, intrusions on the me-time of SFTs in the forms of forced conversations, over-service behaviours, and unsolicited help. Women also experienced disrespectful behaviours of others including inappropriate talk and harassment. The following subsections will report the findings related to these various forms of intrusions that took place in women's solo travel discourse.

7.1.1.1 Unwanted self-disclosure: Private matters

Women often had to encounter certain conversations that compelled them to disclose themselves unnecessarily. SFTs considered such self-disclosure as inappropriate since those matters were quite private to themselves and others may not need to know about it. Women shared their experiences on invasive questions that locals and other travellers attempted to ask: "Oh, do you have an email address or your Facebook" (Tracey). SFTs perceived questioning their alone status in travelling as unnecessary and intrusive. Tracey said: "A man approached me and was talking to me and being with me, kept following up questions, and specifically asked are you alone?" Questions on solo status were most of the time associated with a man and certain other personal details: "They always ask the first question, how old are you? Why are you not with a man? Have you got a husband?" (Lily); "He asked, where your boyfriend is?" (Romena); "Are you here alone?" (Samanta). Interestingly, women who were married and yet travelling alone, also had the same experience: "Why you're married and you're travelling by yourself? That was weird for people" (Yara). SFTs considered such questions were quite gendered implying that women were underprivileged as compared to their counterparts: "...if I was a guy, they won't be asking the same question" (Romena).

Further, some SFTs had to experience unnecessary hassles after revealing that they were travelling alone. Roma shared one of the solo travel experiences she had in Mexico. She said:

I was physically in the corner of the boat so that I could partake in the background scenery, and someone [another traveller] approached me and it was a man. He asked me, why am I by myself? No one else cared that I was by myself, we were already hours into this whole excursion. When he got to know I was travelling on my own, it was unfamiliar to him, he was trying to link up with me later.

Questioning the aloneness status also resulted in a feeling of anger and dissatisfaction as women felt disempowered and offended. Romena expressed her hostility towards others' questions about women travelling alone. She said: "I also got pissed off because I feel like 'don't you think I'm able, capable of doing something or being alone? Or do you think I need someone?...yeah it pissed me off, like these types of questions. I mean, what is it relevant for?"

Similar to concerns over self-disclosure with other travellers and locals, women also had concerns over the level of self-disclosure they had during service encounters. Women felt intruded on when they were questioned about their status of aloneness unnecessarily. They perceived such questions as intrusive when service persons raised such questions for no reason. SFTs found that the reason to travel solo and not having a travel companion was a concern for some service people they met along their solo travels: "When I say that I come from Vietnam, they [service persons] say 'I've never met any girl from Vietnam travelling alone'...they keep asking, 'why don't you go with your family?' I don't want to answer them, I think it is not necessary" (Hoa); "'Why are you here on your own?' That's pretty much the first question that I come across" (Lily); "He was trying to find out why I am on my own and travelling alone" (Olivia). For some women, these questions created an unnecessary fear: "After saying that I

am on my own, I was worried, thinking whether it will cause any harm to me” (Mila). “When they ask, ‘Aren’t you afraid of getting ripped off?’ or something like that, it made me scared” (Hoa). Women felt such questions were intrusive since the service persons were not raising those questions to customise or provide a better service as per their traveller profile: “They [service persons] were not trying to offer me anything special, so why do they want to know if I am alone?” (Hoa); “I don’t think he wanted to provide any kind of a special service to me, I mean like to reduce price or anything” (Olivia).

Some SFTs also encountered more intimate questions from service persons when they were questioned on their state of aloneness: “They come up with the most personal questions right from the beginning... ‘Why are you not with a man?’” (Lily); “‘Are you married?’ is the other question they would always ask” (Darin); “Where is your boyfriend?” (Hoa); “They all question why I’m not married with 25 children by now” (Leah). Participants considered personal questions of this nature as unnecessary and were none of the service persons’ business. Gloria said: “I mean why can’t they mind their own business without finding [out] if I am married or not?”

Some SFTs even perceived questioning their solo status as a way of stereotyping them negatively to take advantage based on their profile. As Lily said:

They’re scoping you out, kind of like what’s the sale point I’ve got on this person...I’m very sure from the way that these questions come to me that it is a part of the understanding of how they [service people] treat this client, to know to whom they are providing this service or the taxi ride, you know, to get something out of me...

Interestingly, women also commented on the inappropriateness of service people attempting to disclose too much in conversations about themselves as an intrusion in their solitude experience. SFTs who were navigating the dynamic tourism space had to go through

certain service encounters with people from diversified cultures. In doing so, some service persons were keen on sharing certain practices and rituals that were part of their cultures during the conversations they had with SFTs. However, women found certain topics too intimate and personal to be talked about in a transactional relationship. Tracey shared one of her solo travel experiences in Europe with a taxi driver from Africa. She recalled and commented on the emotional tiredness she experienced while trying to remain in the conversation:

He [the taxi driver] started to tell me about his family and experiences with children. Talked about female genital mutilation and putting children into the forest for survival or being killed by wild animals as part of the operation. His context of trying to talk to me was to give me an understanding of why he chose to move to a European country. I remained open to the conversation, thank[ed] him for his information, and respond[ed] positively. But it was a very personal and deep interaction for [a] 20-minute ride to the airport early in the morning. And I personally didn't need that kind of interaction as a solo traveller, but I trusted that I'm someone who can handle that level of ambiguity in someone's behaviour, like they're trying to size you up in your emotional reaction to what they're saying, and I was able to stay stable and tried to make them feel comfortable with the conversation. But I jumped out of that taxi really fast after arriving at the airport.

Similarly, SFTs perceived service persons trying to bring in their personal viewpoints on certain controversial topics (for example, politics) as a form of unnecessary self-disclosure of personal opinions. Priya shared one of her experiences where a driver was talking about his adverse opinion of cab drivers who have been supported by the prevailing government. She said:

...that auto driver had an aversion towards cab drivers, as the cab drivers were taking away customers from autos...I felt as if his total anger toward cab drivers was released on me. He also said, 'you didn't get a cab today, so you finally had to rely on an auto'.... he went on to talk about how the government brought in these multinational companies and how it affected their business, and I really don't like such conversations.

7.1.1.2 Physical space intrusions

Women considered physical space ownership as an integral aspect of their solitude experience and others invading such spaces (for example, hotel rooms) was an intrusion to being on their own. Women commented on their transient ownership of physical spaces in service establishments after paying for their stay. As Parami said: "If you [service persons] are renting a room, you have to be aware of the fact, cognizant of the fact, that while a tenant is in your room, it's not your room. It legally belongs to you, but physically it's not your space anymore." Similar ideas were shared by other women: "I have paid, so why can't I have my own time there as I want?" (Leah). Service persons' failure to understand women's solitude needs in their physical spaces led to feelings of invasion of the privacy of SFTs: "I felt, oh my god, I have no privacy in this place" (Adriana).

Focusing on physical space intrusion in service delivery, SFTs talked about their experiences with room service staff entering their rooms without their permission. While some of the service persons entered the rooms to provide services, some entered the rooms for other purposes after knowing the traveller is a solo female. However, in both situations, SFTs considered such behaviours as disrespecting their privacy and state of aloneness. Leah said:

The lady who was cleaning [the room] was just not caring, though I said I don't need you to come in and do not disturb as I don't want anybody to touch anything and disturb me. But she came and she did her thing.

Similar to Leah, Irene also shared an experience with a male room service person. She mentioned her willingness to clean her room on her own when she travels alone so that she usually does not need a room service person to come in. She said:

I always put the sign 'do not disturb' as I don't need strangers running in. Normally when I travel alone and stay alone, I can clean up my own mess. But one early morning, a room service guy was knocking on my door, and I said, 'don't come in'. But still, he opened the door and came in and asked, 'don't you want to clean the room?' I was like, 'Don't you understand? Just leave.'

Lily spoke of an owner who owned the place of accommodation who entered her room, which she could not lock as the door was broken:

Just wrapped myself in a towel and went and had my shower and came back to my room and I shut the door behind me, but I can't lock it. It was broken, so when I turned around after a few moments of drying myself off to see a man standing in my room and he was the proprietor.

Parami shared her memories of an incident where the hotel staff attempted to change a burned-out bulb in her room, while she was not in. She said: "Since I was alone, and no one else will be available, I clearly mentioned which times I would be in, and I asked them to come during those times. But they used their master key to enter my room when I was not there so that they could change [the bulb]." Women had memories of persisting intrusive behaviours of service persons. Parami reflected on her memories of the reoccurrence of the same incident (changing a burned-out bulb) when she was in the bathroom: "I could hear them ring the bell, so I put on my towel. I went out and I told them 'sorry, now it's not a good time. Would you come back?' And they said, 'sorry, but we can't wait'." She commented on her feelings of discomfort as a SFT. She said: "I had to open the door. I was wearing my towel, and I had to

tell them, 'please don't enter yet'. It was a very uncomfortable interaction, because it was men who came to change the bulb.” She mentioned that having to stay in budget hotels might be the prime reason for facing such intrusive encounters with service persons:

When I realised [that] they have entered my room when I was not there, which was so unprofessional, I thought when we go to the most budget cheap hotels, sometimes the service tends to reflect that...you wouldn't see these kinds of things in five-star hotels or reputed hotels, but we can't afford those places when we travel.

While certain service interventions as reported above were not necessarily physically threatening, women still considered them as intrusive: “I think that those will be major intrusions honestly, but they [service persons] were not inappropriate with me” (Parami). In contrast, some women experienced certain extreme intrusions from the service staff of hotels: “I was laying down on my bed, and suddenly he showed up in in the middle of the room” (Adriana); “He just barged in, he knocked on the door, and then he came in and he decided to wake me up in person” (Leah). Parami talked about one of her experiences with a room service person leaving notes for her, which she considered inappropriate and unprofessional: “The guy who came for room service, he left notes in my room saying ‘hey, if you would like a free drink or something at the hotel bar, why don't you meet me there after my work hours’...which is inappropriate.” Some SFTs experienced certain extreme incidents: “I was pestered by the hotel staff. They came in to service the room and one of the men just stayed and I had to kick him out because he obviously thought you know I am an alone person...that’s an extreme case” (Lucy).

SFTs experienced space intrusion in various instances. Women experienced intrusions when owners or service providers tried to bring in their personal associates to the spaces that SFTs (without any prior notice) were accommodating or travelling in during their solo travels.

Romena recalled one incident she had to go through when she was in an Airbnb in Greece. She was intruded on and dissatisfied, as the accommodation agreement did not convey to her the males who would be in the hostel during her stay. She said: “In Greece, I rented an Airbnb, it was a shared Airbnb. So, the owner was there, and he was from Pakistan. There were some other guys, males from Afghanistan or whatever, and I was looking at my reservation, and that was not the deal.” Gloria, who was travelling in Peru, had to accommodate a taxi driver's personal associate in the taxi. She said: “The taxi driver brought in his girlfriend and apparently it was three of us were travelling and I was paying for it.” Women felt uncomfortable after these kinds of incidents and were feeling negative about the entire trip: “I was so annoyed when I realised that, and I invested quite a bit of money” (Gloria); “I don't really like that trip. I was feeling fear about everything. I was feeling uncomfortable going back to the Airbnb and finding them again later...I feel like immediately wanting to go away” (Romena). She revealed how she kept herself locked away during her stay: “I felt uncomfortable right away so just like lock my door and came back.”

7.1.1.3 Intrusions on me-time: Stranger approaches and intrusive conversations

Strangers (locals and other travellers in this context) approaching women and forcing conversations was one of the prominent types of intrusions caused due to the presence of others in experiencing solitude. As reported in Chapter Six, women expressed a need for solitude in their solo travel discourse. Therefore, spending time with their own companionship with self was deemed important for SFTs. However, there were certain situations in which women could not spend time in solitude due to others attempting to approach them when they were on their own. SFTs perceived their traveller profile and the general other features that distinguished them as SFTs made them vulnerable towards others' approaches. Tracey shared her experiences while she was travelling solo in Japan. She recalled how some people were curious to know about her. She said:

If I look more open, they actually do strike up a conversation because I suppose, especially if I'm in a place where I visibly look different or sound different, they take an interest in why I'm there, especially if it's not normal to see people like me.

Interestingly, almost all the intrusive conversations were initiated by men who were either locals or travellers: "It was always men who approached to talk to me...never a woman" (Lily). SFTs had to talk to unknown people when they were navigating the tourism space on their own, which made them tired in certain situations: "If you had to small talk with a lot of people, I think that is more exhausting than hanging out with people that you already know" (Parami). Women commented on other travellers' perceptions of SFTs and how such perceptions may lead towards approaches. Tracey said: "Travellers specifically will make the assumption that as a woman I'm a very socialised person, so I should want company, so if people see me alone, they feel entitled to approach me because I'm a solo woman."

SFTs considered their 'mood' important for them to engage in a conversation with a stranger. Hence, when they were not in the mood to engage in a conversation, a stranger attempting to talk to them was considered intrusive. In such circumstances, the conversation itself was not disturbing or unpleasant for the SFTs, but due to their mood, it was deemed not necessary. As Lucy said: "I remember walking around and somebody came in and talked with me. It [the conversation] wasn't bad, but he [the stranger] didn't want me to be by myself." Tracey expressed her feelings of dissatisfaction if someone tried to approach her at a time she did not want such companionship: "I find it quite detrimental if people approached me when I didn't make any interaction with them and try to remain with me as a company." Ashley expressed her dislike of engaging in conversations with strangers on the plane and others getting to know her, regardless of the stranger's intentions: "I wouldn't want a stranger talking to me or getting to know me, although they might have good intentions." She further commented on her

nature of being very specific about what she may talk about: “I am very particular about what I talk [about].” Madusha focused on the idea of being in the mood to interact and her need for solitude as she returned from her solo trip to the USA where she had spent time alone celebrating her birthday: “Though I had spent the entire day by myself, I was still not in the mood to talk to anybody else. I still wanted to be by myself...but this guy who was at the bus stop was keen to talk to me.” Some women commented on how small talk became intrusive as the interventions were disturbing their travel moments: “...like ‘where are you from?’ and kind of small talk. I was already firstly annoyed because he was ruining my time-lapse moment [trying to take a photo]” (Samanta).

Some women shared their experiences of how other travellers and locals misinterpreted them and approached them to talk with hidden motives. Such situations created feelings of harassment in women regarding the other party’s approach:

A guy came and break into my space and tried to talk to me and I was not interested in talking to him. He was clearly looking for and thinking, ‘this should be a tourist with a lot of money, and I am going to try and connect with her’. I remember feeling quite harassed at that time. (Lily)

Lucy also shared a similar experience with another traveller she met trying to build up a conversation with her asking for money: “He was asking many things from me, and I was disturbed with his questioning, and finally he asked whether I could buy a ticket for him. I am sure he might have thought that I am rich.” Lucy’s and Lily’s experiences revealed that during the times that they wanted to be in solitude, someone approaching to talk was deemed as intrusive. Some SFTs had to engage in conversations as they felt they did not have a choice. In such circumstances, the conversations became intrusive for SFTs as they found it difficult to enjoy their time in solitude: “I did not have a choice, so I had to talk with him throughout

my meal” (Olivia); “I remember the one who sat next to me [in the plane] was talking to me and I couldn’t avoid” (Nathalie).

Some SFTs perceived conversations as intrusive when they were too long, and the other party was questioning continuously: “He was hitting on me like there is no tomorrow and I couldn’t get rid of him” (Leah). Women experienced persistent intrusions in certain situations: “When I got into the bus, also this [a stranger trying to talk] kept continuing” (Madusha). The single-minded nature of a person amplified the intrusive experience Madusha had to encounter, as she had to insist a stranger not talk with her. She said: “Even if he was trying to make small talk, still it was really bad manners, especially after I told him [her dislike of continuing to talk] ...that's actually harassment.” Further, Madusha also spoke of the behaviour of the particular person, once she told him that he was disturbing her. She said:

Once I verbally told him that I don’t want to talk to him, he told me that he is not interested in me and he already has a girlfriend, and I was shocked to hear that because that’s not what I meant at all. He clearly tried to embarrass me in front of all the other passengers.

SFTs had to encounter intrusive conversations in various settings including when they took part in group trips in visiting places, at restaurants, while on the plane, and when taking public transport. The findings showed that SFTs' positive experiences were diminished partly due to the frustration and embarrassment caused by such intrusive conversations. Madusha explained how the negative encounter with the above stranger ruined her whole experience: “I could still hear him saying stuff...it really pissed me off, because I had such a nice day, and in the end, it was ruined by this guy.”

Respondents explained certain conversations ended up with intrusive invitations disturbing SFTs. Moana shared her experience at the Vatican. She was invited for a coffee by a male traveller, and she was forced when she rejected the invitation. She was particularly

annoyed as she thought she was waiting to see a religious place and such behaviour was not acceptable from her perspective. She said:

When I was waiting in line at the Vatican, you know, it's the home of the Pope, a super religious place, and this guy was just asking me to get coffee and I was like, no, and then I was walking, and he was following me, I was like, no...I said, no.

Being a woman and travelling alone made SFTs susceptible to forced invitations, restricting them from travelling freely. Lucy said how a strange man proposed to her after a very short conversation: "This man, who talked to me at McDonald's, sat down and he proposed to me. He wanted to marry a white woman, so he proposed to me after five minutes." She further explained her reaction towards the proposal: "I rushed back to the room to get rid of him. I locked myself inside and I didn't go out on that day." Some women also shared their experiences of how others judged them as a SFT and were intrusive: "In Slovenia, I was buying some food and this person tried to talk to me and invited me to dinner because I was with my suitcase. It was super clear that I was alone" (Romena); "He was flirting with me and asked to go clubbing with him" (Parami).

7.1.1.4 Intrusions on me-time: Over-service behaviours

Similar to the intrusions caused by other travellers and locals on women's me-time during solo travels, women also perceived intrusions from service persons during their alone times in various consumption situations. Certain discrepancies between their expectations and service performance led to over-service behaviours that became intrusive towards their solitude experience. As interviewees perceived, this was mainly due to service people not comprehending their solitude needs. Women shared their experiences about situations in which the SFTs sensed their state of aloneness was often misunderstood as loneliness by service persons. As Lucy said:

I think a lot of people [service providers] do not understand there are times when you want to be alone, and being alone is not lonely, but I think most people [service providers] associate aloneness with loneliness. I think many people who guide service don't make that distinction, they think, 'oh, if you're alone you're lonely', and [that] is not necessarily the case.

SFTs mentioned that the service persons in certain encounters were misinterpreting their state of aloneness: "The assumption that when you're sitting somewhere alone and they [service people] think you want to interact with other people" (Darin); "Sometimes all I need is leave me alone, if I want something I would ask, you don't need to pre-empt it" (Moana). Women used descriptors like 'she didn't care', 'he didn't understand', and 'he was maybe a bit stupid' in explaining service persons' understanding of their need to be alone. As an outcome of service persons' lack of understanding of SFTs' solitude needs, over-service behaviours resulted leading to dissatisfaction of SFTs.

Over-service behaviours were perceived as intrusive since certain service offers were beyond women's expectations. SFTs reflected on their experiences of situations where service people attempted to offer things that they actually did not want. SFTs perceived such offerings as unnecessary attempts in making things better that were not required: "...therefore they try and make things better when they don't need to" (Lucy); "...like in a hotel lounge or if it is like a place where they have like a bar as well and service persons [were] often way more engaging...They [service people] think they have to entertain you" (Darin). Lily shared one of her experiences in solo travels, where she was offered a high-priced room in a hotel which was not what she was expecting. She said:

...especially a woman of my age who's travelling alone, I think there's an expectation that they want to upgrade into the best facility possible and,

often, they say, 'hey, we've got this room for you'...there is always that kind of trying to sell you the highest price.

Some women explained how certain service persons try to offer the service amenities overzealously without understanding customers' expectations. As one participant, Leah put it:

...the service provider in this little motel was very annoying. She was very keen, and she kept running around and trying to offer, 'we've got this laundry service', we['ve] got this, we've got that'. I'm like, I need nothing, just leave me alone.... she was kind of overly excited.... The small hotel owners they're all very keen, and they're like, 'I'll bring you ice, I'll bring you glasses, I'll bring you this, I'll do that...'.

Such over-generous attempts of service providers were deemed to be negatively influencing the SFTs' solitude experience and they perceived such efforts as; "Overly attentive" (Dorah); "More annoying...hard" (Darin); "Too much" (Leah).

Similar to the intrusive experiences with other travellers and locals, SFTs encountered overly familiar conversations with service persons in certain situations. These conversations took place during several service encounters including dining, accommodation, and taxi rides. Women shared their experience of service persons trying to engage in over-familiar conversations and how it influenced their state of aloneness in the particular consumption context. Gloria shared one of her experiences at a restaurant while she was travelling solo. She explicitly commented on what she wanted and what she experienced did not positively influence her solitude needs:

I went to have a meal and it just became a nightmare. I really just want to have a meal, but she [service person] was like, 'oh I've been to New

Zealand', 'I've gone here, I've gone there'...and I was like, 'oh really, go away'...

Ritt shared a similar experience in one of the hotels she stayed in, and the service person was engaging too much with her and trying to become friendly. She said: "He [the service person] was checking in too much on me, talking to me, like wanting to be friends, that was too much for me." Some SFTs commented that talking too much and providing excess information as a part of the service (as in travel guiding) might negatively influence the experience: "I've seen a lot of travel guides trying to talk so much that your whole experience is gone just listening to them [rather] than enjoying" (Ashley). She further elaborated on how tour guide narration may curtail self-exploration: "...when everything is being narrated to you, you don't feel like you are exploring anything by yourself." However, Ashley did not want to completely abandon the service of tour guides. Instead, she preferred the careful balance of interventions of tour guides and experiencing things alone: "Inside museums, they [travel guides] may explain certain things, but they should also let you do your own like, viewing alone."

Moana explained how she was interrupted while she was wandering in historical places alone. She said:

In those old places in Europe, I would just want to sit there and enjoy the scenery. But service personnel came up and started to describe things. He was just being helpful and had no bad motives, but I actually didn't want any explanation as such.

Several SFTs commented on situations where they had to engage in small talk as passengers while riding in taxis. Darin said: "I had to take a taxi and I was really tired and looking forward to getting to the airport. The taxi driver like, in a friendly way, but constantly, asked more questions." SFTs expressed their negative feelings over the conversations with taxi

drivers: "...the Uber driver questioned me minutely and I was quite annoyed by his questioning" (Olivia); "I was quite exhausted after a while talking to the driver" (Samanta). Some women commented on the difficulty of getting away from the conversations with taxi drivers: "I was on my phone, looking busy, but still he was talking, especially in that situation, you can't get away, you can't just say to the taxi driver, 'no, please leave me out'." Priya also shared a similar experience to Darin, where she also mentioned the intrusion was intensified as she could not avoid the situation:

I like observing outside when I am travelling in a taxi or a bus or maybe on a train. I remember once when I was in a taxi, the driver was asking me questions about so many things, and that was quite exhausting. The worst part is, you can't ignore it, even [when] you read a book or go on the phone.

Interviewees shared their experiences of service persons becoming overpolite in certain service settings that made them uncomfortable. They commented on how service persons' such over polite behaviours may draw the unwanted attention of other customers towards the women. Gloria shared one of her experiences in one of her solo travels: She said:

The waiter was trying to be too keen on me and always called me Madam. I was a bit nervous since I was on my own and most of the others were either families or groups. I felt some of them staring at me.

Tracey also shared a similar experience that she had while she was travelling solo in Japan. She commented on the behaviour of the service person as something cultural, yet that made her feel uncomfortable: "Suddenly the waiter bowed [to] me. He might be trying to be too nice. But I felt really awkward."

7.1.1.5 Intrusions on me-time: Unsolicited help

SFT's me-time during solo trips was intruded upon by external others they met on their journey. Another situation in which women's me-time was intruded upon was when people attempted to help them when they did not want help. SFTs perceived such helping behaviours as a result of others' misinterpretation of women travelling alone and undervaluation of the capacity of women who travel solo. As Lucy said: "People don't like you being by yourself [while travelling]. They feel as though they have to protect them and they [women] can't look after themselves; they're [women] vulnerable." Some approaches from external others were in the form of travel help, yet SFTs did not want it: "He was saying to me, 'look, I'll take you for a tour around Lima', but I did not want him to take me, I mean, I was fine on my own." (Darin). Lily stated how certain forms of help became an intrusion in certain settings and negatively influenced her state of aloneness: "When I go to museums and look around and wander on my own, I always get hassled. There is always somebody coming up to me and want[s] to help me. But I don't want [help]." Some women reflected on their experiences of being cheated by locals in the guise of helping: "He charged me something like 50 franks when it was only a five frank journey" (Lily). She further expressed her feelings of discontent after coming to know she had been cheated by a local. She said: "I thought, 'oh my god, that guy did this to me', and that was a horrible thing and why would he do it? Why do people do this?...It was a very harassing moment."

Priya, who was travelling on her own, shared one of her experiences with a group of other travellers at an airport while she was spending the night due to a flight delay: "He [another traveller] started saying something like, 'okay, maybe she can take a room with our girls'." She mentioned how she felt at that moment, as the other traveller was talking about Priya's accommodation to another friend of his though Priya was present: "...that really got

me worried because, first of all, why is he saying that to his friend and not to me when I am in front of him?”

Women who experienced unsolicited help had feelings of disgrace on why and how unknown others they met along their transient contacts could attempt to help them. SFTs had very strong feelings about their capacity to be alone while they travelled solo. Lucy said: “...who says you can't survive on your own? But they [other people] are assuming you can't, and I get really angry, and I get very discontented. It's like, oh my god, surprised, shocked as well, I think.” Priya also shared a similar opinion on the person who tried to decide on her accommodation when she did not want anyone else to be involved. She said: “...who gave him the right to make a decision on my behalf, he's a complete stranger.” She further elaborated that she did not attempt to ask for help: “...I didn't even talk to him, he heard of my situation from his colleague and then he just made the decision.” Unsolicited help from others made the SFTs feel inferior as others were devaluing their ability to safeguard themselves while travelling solo.

Further, the participants also had concerns about the motives behind the help offered by strangers they met along their solo trips. Lucy elaborated on her negative and suspicious view of strangers offering help: “I've got to the point where I think, what's in it for you? Why are you doing this? What do you want? Which is all very negative. Rather than saying, oh, they're trying to help me. My view has become more negative than positive.” In supporting her negative view, she further explained her opinion on strangers helping SFTs. She said: “...like gigolos, for example, you know they are after wealthy, white, and particularly women. They think we have money, but literally, that is not true.” Mila shared one of her experiences with a stranger who offered her help during a difficult situation on her solo travels and had ulterior motives: “I went with him on his motorbike to his house, but he was actually trying to

sleep with me to have sex with me. That was his motivation to help me, so I really had a horrible time there.”

7.1.1.6 Disrespectful behaviours: Inappropriate talk and harassment

In the solo travel discourse, women had to encounter certain experiences perceived to be disrespectful towards women’s dignity. SFTs experienced disrespect in the interactions they had with other travellers, locals, and service persons during various solo travel contexts. These disrespectful behaviours ranged from weird looks and inappropriate talk to physically abusive behaviours. The behaviour of some locals and other travellers was deemed to be offensive and SFTs considered such behaviours made them feel no value as a woman. SFTs experienced people’s negative attitudes towards alone women and women travelling alone. Moana shared memories of her trip to Peru. She said: “They [locals] were saying lots of inappropriate stuff. One man was joking about how I should get married to him.” While Moana was a young female traveller who is 29 years of age, Lucy who was an experienced and mature SFT (55 years) experienced similar encounters. Lucy interpreted such encounters specifically referring to her age. She said: “When I am getting older, certainly in the Middle East and some parts of Asia, people like older women. So, you get hassled, they think I am their sugar baby.”

Some SFTs encountered locals’ and other travellers’ disrespectful talk that was deemed unwanted and thus became intrusive: “I hang out with a local man actually. We were drinking beer in a local restaurant once. He got friendly, he started to talk very impolite stuff, I felt unsafe and scared” (Hoa). Hoa also shared another experience she had at the beach. She explained how the behaviour of a particular man was against her cultural values and traditions in Vietnam. She said:

He came to me and asked what do I think of him when he stands up. It was weird and I sensed that he got a hidden meaning behind that. I am from an Asian country [Vietnam], and unlike Westerners, we are not open to

discussing such things. So, I refused but he was flirting and tried to hang out with me.

Gloria explained how she felt discriminated against by men when she was waiting to buy a train ticket at a station. She also interpreted that maybe that was the culture in the country she was visiting solo. However, she perceived such behaviours as disrespectful as a SFT and as a traveller in general. She said:

Since I was a woman, all the men just pushed me to one side and passed me. I felt that I was totally invisible to them and have no value. It is not nice behaviour to anybody, I mean even for a general traveller.

Gloria further explained her feelings of annoyance after the incident:

I thought well, maybe this is just how they operate, and I thought this is crazy, I just couldn't get my head around this whole mentality of what was going on there, it was just so foreign to me, I could not comprehend it anyway.

Lily shared one of her solo travel experiences in Paris. She was conned by a local who bought her a train ticket at a higher price, which she initially thought was a help as she did not know how the ticket service worked. However, after she got to know the real price of the ticket, she realised she was deceived. Just after that realisation, she recalled the next bad encounter with another local that made her feel exhausted. She said:

While I was on the train, I was thinking, why would people do such things? So, after I got down from the train and was walking to where I wanted to go, all of a sudden, a man came up beside me and put his arm around my waist. I was like, what's going on here? I remember just being overwhelmed and intimidate[ed].

Women had certain perceptions of the countries they travelled to and in certain countries, they did not expect to be insulted or harassed. However, when that happened in reality, it caused feelings of shock and distress. Madusha commented on her experience in the USA, where she had a nice solo experience but unexpectedly had to face a situation: “When you don't experience it for some time and then suddenly something like that happens [intrusion from a man], then you are more disgusted.” She further commented on her travel expectations in the USA and how she perceived such incidents as quite normal in her country of origin. However, having to experience such an unexpected incident was distressing for her. She said: “I think, oh my God...like even in the States, something like this happens, because it's so common in Sri Lanka, sometimes you don't notice those things either, but when I was in the States it hadn't happened for a few months, and then something like that happened, that really stuck in my mind.”

Some women experienced discrimination because of their appearance and considered that disrespectful and intrusive. Amali reflected on her solo travel memories: “...whenever I got on to a bus, people would just stare at me simply because I looked different...it was because, I look different, and it was completely different from their nationality.” She further commented on her naiveness in understanding certain incidents that happened: “I wouldn't have really understood. I think I always instinctively knew people talked about me. But I never really understood if they were talking bad stuff about me, but I'm sure they did.” SFTs commented on others' unusual behaviours towards SFTs: “Some people would be quite aggressive if you were on the metro, and you looked unsure” (Tracey).

Some of the behaviours were deemed extremely disrespectful and intrusive as they involved physical abuse. Lily who was riding her bike on a cross-country solo trip was offered help by a local truck driver, which eventually ended up in a physical encounter. She said:

I was so grateful for him as he offered me a ride. So, I put my bike at the back of the truck and got in. After a while, he started driving, and his hands

started to reach over onto my legs. I thought I should jump out of this truck.

I knew I was going to lose my bike, but losing my body and rights was worse than that.

Some SFTs encountered invitations which were perceived as physically abusive: “There’s a kind of a community where most men live, and they couldn’t handle that I was around, and the young men they were knocking at my door at nighttime, and they were kind of looking for sex” (Mila). Some women experienced similar encounters when taking public transport for travelling solo within the country: “He suddenly kept his hand on my thigh, and then I realised it was not an accident anymore” (Madusha); “Mostly local men were intruding, and they touched me in the bus” (Mila). Women considered such experiences as quite negative, and they made them feel vulnerable to travel alone: “Those experiences were very disturbing” (Madusha); “It was just a horrible vulnerable moment” (Lily).

Similar to the disrespectful behaviours experienced in the realm of interactions with other travellers and locals, women encountered similar situations during the service encounters that emphasised forms of disrespect and unprofessionalism in service delivery. Moana shared one of her experiences with a waiter at a restaurant that she went to while travelling solo. She explained the service person’s approach which ultimately moved in a different direction that she was not expecting. She also expressed her embarrassment after getting to know the ulterior motives of the waiter. She said:

It was a tourist destination, and it was really nice. He [the waiter] told me a lot of stuff about the city and it was really cool, but then at the end, he gave me his number and said, ‘I’m finishing at nine, you can call me’...Like none of this was just like sincere, none of this [was] like you trying to help...it was for another motive, so I guess I felt disenchanted or like disillusioned.

Moana's experience showed that she perceived the conversation positively as long as it was about the destination and other information about the country that she was travelling in solo. However, the pleasant experience she had earlier was ruined as the talk veered off course and she realised she was approached by the service person for a different purpose. Madusha who was travelling solo and at a time accompanied by a tour guide shared one of her experiences:

...when I came back after the water ski session was over, my guide who bought the tickets for me, said something along the lines of 'you are really beautiful, and I was so jealous when I saw that you were sitting behind that guy [ski driver].'

She also explained how she did not feel anything bad about it at the moment itself, but she remembered the experience while she was relishing her experiences at the end of the day. She recalled the tour guide's inappropriate behaviour in hindsight:

I laughed it off at that moment because I think I was in an adrenaline rush after the water sports, so I was also looking forward to going to the next thing, so I sort of didn't pay attention at that point. But then after the whole day was over, and I came back to the hotel, when I was winding down, I started thinking, wait a minute, it was really inappropriate for him to say something like that.

She further stated: "I remember the feeling of creepiness and the feeling of disgust that I felt over it." Madusha's experience showed that negative encounters with service persons might be embedded as a part of the whole solo travel experience. She further commented on how her feelings of anger later led to her decision of avoiding tour guides in her subsequent solo travels. She said:

Obviously, it did have a very big impact on me and made me feel quite angry. That's when I decided I'm not going to use any other tour guides. I'm going to go in public channels so that's a pretty big decision to make right?

Adriana talked about one of her experiences at a hostel. She felt that she was objectified as a woman, and it was inappropriate for a service person to engage in such behaviour. She said:

I felt as if he [the hostel caretaker] puts me as an object. I am Brazilian, and they have the stereotype of being the country of Samba...I was cleaning a bench, and this guy came to me and started to show me moves and said Samba Samba, I was like, I don't even know you, how could you do this? He treated me like an object.

SFTs did not welcome certain approaches of service persons during service encounters, considering such approaches as inappropriate: "He [the taxi driver] said my taxi is free and opened the door and allow me in. It wasn't a very suitable conversational interaction for service" (Tracey). She further commented on her feelings of unsafety due to the unusual service interaction. She said: "I felt very unsafe in the taxi with the guy who picked me up, because of the conversation he insists on having with me on the way to the airport." SFTs commented on certain words yelled by street vendors they experienced which they perceived as inappropriate. Tracey from New Zealand recalled one of her experiences: "They were shouting to me 'Angelina Jolie' and internally, I was thinking, 'how polarising'. I didn't feel confident or flattered being yelled at and called names that I was not."

Women shared their experiences of how transactional relationships later turned into unwanted and intrusive relationships during their stay in certain accommodations. These intrusions took place in hotels, hostels, and restaurants: "Then in the middle of my stay, all of a sudden he [waiter] became over friendly" (Amali); "It was clear that I was alone so those guys

who were responsible of the accommodation, and they started to be like close to me, approaching me more” (Romena). Amali commented on how she was trying to reframe the unusual interactions of the waiter as something cultural. However, failing to do so, she realised the intrusiveness of it leading to feelings of discomfort. She said:

There was a lot of touching. Not in any inappropriate places. At first, I was thinking, it could be a cultural thing because Europeans kiss on the cheek more than we do, so I was okay with that. Then it was uncomfortable for me when I realised it was something more than that.

Some SFTs encountered experiences where the information they shared in transactions while travelling solo was misused by service persons. Mila shared her experiences at a local supermarket that she went to while travelling solo:

I recharged my phone from a supermarket in Colombo. I gave him 4000 rupees with my phone number...On the same day, I received a phone call and I got to know it was that boy who was at the supermarket counter.

She further commented on the inappropriateness of using her personal information: “I gave him the bill with my number and he [service person] was of course not allowed to use it in that way, but it happened...” Women’s reactions towards service persons’ disrespectful behaviours created intrusive feelings and they expressed their feelings of dissatisfaction: “It really made me upset” (Irene); “really uncomfortable” (Adriana); “very annoying” (Leah); “so uncomfortable” (Parami); “very frustrating and horrible” (Lily); “feeling constant fear and purposefully harass[ed]” (Romena).

7.2 Chapter summary

This chapter reported the findings of SFT’s experiences with the unwanted presence of others during their solo travel discourse. SFTs perceived the presence of others as intrusive

when they were invading their aloneness unnecessarily via interactions. Accordingly, women found it difficult to meaningfully separate themselves from others in order to experience solitude. The presence of others (i.e., locals, other travellers, and service persons) became intrusive via various forms including unwanted self-disclosure, physical space intrusions, various intrusions on women's me-time, and disrespectful behaviours. These intrusive episodes experienced with locals, other travellers, and service persons emphasised how SFT's need for solitude is influenced in customer-to-customer interactions (i.e., with locals and other travellers) and customer-to-service person interactions in the realm of solo travelling.

CHAPTER EIGHT - FINDINGS III: RESPONSES TOWARDS INTRUSIVE SOLO TRAVEL EPISODES

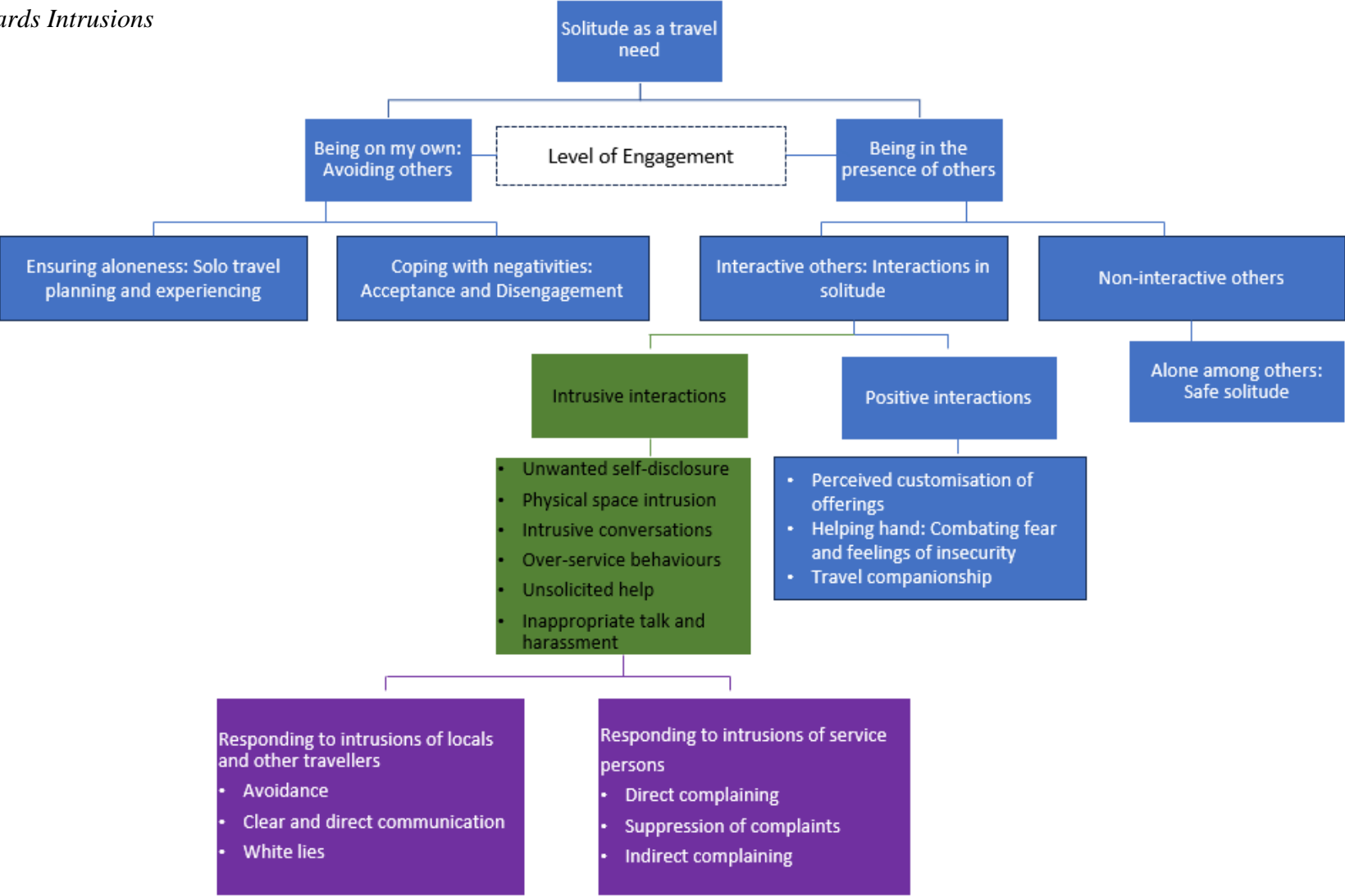
This chapter reports the findings of the current study addressing the third research question:

RQ3: How do SFTs respond to intrusive episodes during their solo travels?

This chapter will report the findings on how solo female travellers (SFTs) responded to intrusive episodes in their solo travels (figure 8.1). While Chapter Seven reported the various kinds of intrusions women experienced during their solo travel discourse, this chapter intends to specifically focus on SFTs' responses towards the intrusive episodes as it has important implications for destination management organisations and potential SFTs. Firstly, this chapter reports women's attempts in responding to intrusive experiences with locals and other travellers including: avoidance, clear and direct communication, and using white lies. Secondly, it will report findings on how women responded to intrusive experiences they had in service encounters that emphasised women's complaining behaviour in the realm of solo travelling.

Figure 8.1

Responses towards Intrusions



8.1 Responding to intrusions of locals and other travellers

The previous chapter reported how the unwanted presence of others intruded on women's solitude experience. Consequently, women used various response strategies towards the intrusions caused. In the event of intrusions from locals and other travellers, women were compelled to take care of it by themselves since they were not able to obtain help or seek redress from any third parties: "I don't know anyone so I may have to handle it [intrusion from other travellers and locals] on my own" (Irene); "Who is responsible? I don't know, so I usually take care of them [intruders] by myself" (Samanta). Most prominently women used avoidance, clear and direct communication, and white lies to keep intrusions minimised, or intruders away from them. The following sub-sections will report these actions along with supporting excerpts from the interviews.

8.1.1 Avoidance

SFTs encountered intrusions often leading them not to react upon the intrusive experiences: "I think when it [intrusions] happens all the time, you sort of get desensitised to it" (Madusha). SFTs mentioned ignoring and moving away from the situation helped them to successfully handle negative interaction episodes as it enabled them to avoid unpleasant encounters in interactions with others while travelling solo: "I would personally go out" (Ashley); "Remove myself from the situation without really conveying the message; this is not something you're supposed to do" (Amali). Further, Ashley commented that being vigilant in intrusive situations helped in avoiding such circumstances: "Remove yourself from a harmful situation before it occurs. You can definitely do that." Lucy explained how she made up her mind after being shocked when unexpectedly a stranger proposed to marry her while she was at a café on one of her solo travels. She said: "I used not to deal with it and then move on and forget about it." She also mentioned that she has realised such incidents are out of her control

and that staying away would be the best option for her to enjoy her solo travels: “ It hadn't dawned on me that it was something I could do, and I suppose when these things happen, I just walk away and I think, ‘oh well, that's it, what [can] you do?’”

Women shared their views on travelling solo and the possibility of interacting with others: “Of course, some people are going to ask you questions” (Kethmini); “If they came over and if they wouldn't move on, then I would just get up and say nice to chat to you and just walk off” (Gloria). Kethmini explained how she does not deal with the situation if it does not please her: “I don't want to get into arguments with them or anything, I don't want to deal with it, so I just completely avoid the situation...I think, usually, if you poke around the situation is when you get hurt, so what I do is just avoid [it] and I think that is the best in my opinion.” Nadia also commented on her view on strangers approaching women who travel alone, saying: “I just brushed [them] off rather than making a big deal out of it.” For some women, avoidance was a useful coping strategy in the context of travelling as they encountered various circumstances which required them to strategically evade possible intrusions: “I just made myself sitting physically invisible so that I just avoided having a problem where I could avoid having a problem” (Gloria).

8.1.2 Clear and direct communication

SFTs often encountered strangers in various transient interactions. Some of those interactions were positive and some were negative ranging from unwanted conversations to physical harassment. Some SFTs believed, rather than avoiding the situation, expressing themselves very clearly helped them to move away from unpleasant interactions with strangers: “Clearly say ‘no, thank you, please leave me alone’. Then most of them [intruders] would go away” (Parami); “I set my boundaries as clear as possible” (Romena); “I don't hesitate to create a boundary; always to make it clear that I'm not interested” (Tracey). Parami further elaborated on the importance of women being direct to keep intruders away: “It's how

you say no. If you bend to their [intruders] will, they will keep on imposing.” Being very clear and direct helped SFTs to keep others away from unwanted interactions and enjoy the solitude experience as they wished. Hoa explained how she directly refused certain offers made by strangers. She said: “Sometimes people invite me to join them. But I will tell them that I have a plan already. Or if I am tired, I will tell them directly, ‘sorry, I can’t do it’.” She also said how she struggled to say ‘no’ during the first few years of her solo travelling as a novice SFT: “In the first few years, I always say yes, no matter what, and I had to change my plans because of them. I think I was not smart enough to say no.”

Some SFTs mentioned that even when refusing or saying no was not accepted in the culture of the country they travelled to, they do say it directly, but in a kind and polite manner. Though it did not align with the customs and traditions, SFTs were not uncomfortable in doing so, as they value their own time while travelling solo. As Kathy stated:

I am very honest and I try to be kind, but sometimes customs in that country don’t translate, but I’m very confident to say ‘thank you so much for chatting with me, I really would just like to be by myself now’, or ‘thank you for inviting me, but I know what I need and it’s a day by myself’. I have no trouble saying what I need and what I want, and I just tried to be as clear as possible.

Participants mentioned that as a female who travels alone, they often encountered situations where strangers approached them in search of building relationships that were deemed not suitable or unnecessary. Some SFTs attempted to refuse such invitations by clearly expressing their intentions of travelling solo. Nathalie explained how she identified bad intentions of people and took proactive actions to stop such approaches before it led any further. She said: “As soon as I sense any intentions from the other person and if I don’t want that kind of approach, I’m going to be very clear that I am not interested.” She also explained

how sometimes she strategically mentioned her husband in conversations with strangers who seemed to be approaching her: "... some kind of hook in the conversation with the other person, like 'oh yes, my husband does the same thing', 'my husband likes the same thing', and then the other person already knows he can't hang with me." Roma shared one of her memories of her solo trip to Mexico. She described how a man approached her while she was on a catamaran. Roma spoke about the other traveller who talked to her and wanted to be with her after knowing that she was travelling alone. She described how she expressed herself during that situation: "I was like, 'no, I'm not here for any of those, I'm here just being by myself', and he understood." Women found that direct refusal and clear expression of solo travel intention helped them to overcome the negative experiences they encountered in their interactions with some strangers.

SFTs also found if they were not in the mood to engage in a conversation and would rather like to be on their own, they used small talk as a strategy to face such situations. Kaala said:

Most of the time I try to be friendly, smiling, and relatively engaging in the conversation. If they ask a question, I'll answer in a way that ends the conversation, trying to hint that I am not really interested in chatting.

Some women believed that engaging in small talk with others helped them to stay safe because they could converse with them without outright avoiding them. Kaala said: "...trying to keep alive and for safety sake. I don't want to anger anyone by totally avoiding them." Several other participants of the study mentioned their attempts to engage in limited small talk: "Closed answers and not keep the conversation going" (Britney); "One-word answers" (Farah); "If they talk to me I'll be like yep, yep, okay bye" (Julia); "Abrupt severance of communication as a way of protecting myself" (Lily); "Lovely to chat to you bye...making it clear they have been rejected" (Tracey). In doing so, SFTs were able to be nice to people and

at the same time enjoy their positive aloneness without being distracted by others' intrusions. Further, being smart enabled SFTs to take control of the situation: "I was like, 'ah thanks, nice folks, you have a lovely day,' and behaved, taking control, and ending the interaction" (Tracey).

8.1.3 *White lies*

SFTs found lying about certain things helped them to strategically overcome negative interactions with strangers. Women considered lying about their solo status, accommodation, name, or language ensured their safety without putting them into unnecessary trouble during transient interactions with locals and other travellers. Mentioning the presence of someone around them was a useful strategy to keep away intruders approaching the women unnecessarily: "I would say, 'I'm off to meet my friends'. I said that because I wanted to make it clear, I wasn't truly alone" (Tracey). Lying about a partner or husband was a common strategy used by SFTs to get away from unwanted interactions with strangers. Adriana mentioned how she talked about her boyfriend (though she actually did not have one at that time) when another set of male travellers came to her and started to talk to her while she was at a beach in Barcelona: "I had to tell them, 'okay, my boyfriend is going to come now, and this is not going to be good'." Several other SFTs shared their experiences in situations where they talked about their partners and husbands to move away from unwanted interactions and ensure their safety: "'My husband is on the way, we are meeting up' ...so that I know I won't be harassed" (Lily); "Even though I didn't have a boyfriend, I told them I had one. Especially Latin men respect you a lot more like if you say, you have a boyfriend" (Nathalie); "I decided not to stand on this, so I invented a husband" (Olivia); "I would tell them I was married, even if I wasn't" (Gloria).

Some SFTs said that they are not happy about pretending to have a boyfriend or a partner to overcome certain situations. Adriana mentioned her confession of not being able to

express her dislike without inventing a boyfriend: “I feel terrible about not being able to tell them my dislike and I had to pretend to have a boyfriend because I couldn't ask them to leave.” She also explained that if she had to face a similar situation now, she would be more direct in expressing herself without giving excuses to anybody else. She said: “I guess if it happens now, I will talk more directly like, ‘please, I’m relaxing, I want to stay by myself, so no means no’. I don't have to give an explanation for people that I don't know.”

Some SFTs lied about their traveller status and accommodation. Lily spoke about a strategy that she used to overcome situations where tourists are charged higher prices for certain goods compared to locals. She said: “I would say things like, ‘I'm not a tourist, I'm living here’. That can drop the prices of things quite dramatically.” When SFTs encountered situations where strangers wanted to hang out with them later, they lied about their accommodation and travel plans so the strangers could not follow them or hold prolonged interactions: “I always told people a name of a different hotel and gave the wrong address” (Mila); “I would probably tell them I'm going to go back to my hotel or my accommodation and I'm going to take the rest of the day off instead of telling them where I'm going to go” (Parami). Similar to being clear and direct, telling white lies also helped SFTs to engage with strangers without refusing their invitations while ensuring their safety and being able to discontinue the interactions when they wanted to.

8.2 Responding to intrusions of service persons

Similar to the intrusions women encountered due to the unwanted presence of other travellers and locals, SFTs also encountered intrusive interactions with service persons. Accordingly, women took certain actions to ensure a meaningful disconnection in order to experience solitude in the particular consumption context. In this situation, SFTs had the opportunity to seek assistance from the service management of the particular establishment in which the intrusion took place. The findings revealed SFTs’ complaining behaviour when

seeking help from service management. While some women directly complained about the intrusive experiences with service persons to service management, most of the women suppressed their complaints due to various reasons. Consequently, women engaged in indirect complaining as an alternative to direct complaining to service management. The following sub-sections will report women's direct and suppressive complaining behaviour that led towards their involvement in indirect complaining in the event of service persons' intrusions in the solo travel discourse.

8.2.1 Direct complaining

In the event of intrusions caused by service persons, women had the opportunity to seek redress from a responsible third party. Accordingly, some women decided to directly complain to a third party in certain situations when it was possible for them to reach a formal body (i.e., service establishment): "If he [the service manager] is around the premises, I would go and complain verbally" (Amali). Complaining is identified particularly as a way of handling mainly the intrusive experiences of service encounters. These negative service encounters broadly include unpleasant interactions with service persons and poor service deliveries resulting in SFT complaints. SFTs used direct verbal and written complaints. Some women attempted to raise their complaints verbally directly to service management: "If I had a negative experience, I would rather talk to that hotel or that person directly" (Ashley). Women who preferred complaining when the incident happened, expected the resolution would also be given at that time: "I'd rather raise the issue and I'd like them to acknowledge and have it sorted at the same time" (Gloria). Roma recalled her attempt to complain about an incident she had encountered in a hotel (service persons taking lack of care of SFTs compared to group travellers). She said:

I told the management, how can you discriminate against people? You can't profile anyone like that? You should actually get to know your customer and should not provide bad customer service across the board.

Roma further explained her intention in complaining was to make the service management aware of the negative profiling of customers: "It was a teachable moment. The whole point of voicing these complaints is that you should not profile people." Irene also shared a similar experience where a service person (male) entered her room without permission, and she complained about it to the reception. She said:

When that cleaning guy was in my room, I was on the bed and he was standing there looking at me. I was very angry. I went down to the reception and very clearly made [out] that it was not alright, and that is not okay, because that's something that I would not accept.

Irene spoke about her rights as a woman, and she was not ready to accept such things because she is a woman: "I don't need to feel vulnerable in that situation and I don't want to accept it because I'm a woman." In certain situations, SFTs reported having to raise their complaints to service management due to the unpleasant experiences they encountered with other travellers and locals within the service premises. Leah shared one of her experiences in a café in Amsterdam where she was troubled by another person who was in the café. She said: "I went to the bouncer and told [them] about this guy [who was bothering her], and they [the security] immediately removed him." Despite some SFT's approach of directly complaining to the service management regarding intrusive service experiences, notably, most of the women suppressed their complaints about service intrusions. The next section will report the findings on SFTs' suppression of complaints.

8.2.2 *Suppression of complaints*

Even though many SFTs encountered intrusive experiences with service persons and in general other contexts while they travelled solo, just over half (19 of 34) suppressed their complaints without expressing them. Women were quite explicit about their resistance toward complaining over the intrusions that took place: “I am not that person [who complains]” (Ashley); “It’s a one-word answer, no. There’s no gain by trying to engage in it [complaining]” (Lily); “I would not bother” (Gloria); “I would be very reticent about trying to engage in a complaining process”(Romena). Some women believed complaining was not necessary and would create an unnecessary uproar which they did not want to happen. Hence, they preferred to be silent rather than saying anything: “I don’t think that you always have to voice it out because sometimes being silent and removing yourself from the situation might help a lot, [rather] than creating a scene” (Ashley). SFTs tried to deal with the intrusive incident themselves: “I kind of dealt with it personally” (Samanta). Some women tried to lower their expectations so that complaining would not be necessary: “I always keep in my head that I’m the guest here and my expectations are my own. So, I would be very cautious against speaking out” (Tracey). Samanta also commented on her excessively high tolerance level before making a complaint: “I don’t complain much, but also unless it’s really bad and unacceptable.” It was found that SFTs had certain unique underlying reasons for not complaining about the intrusive experiences they encountered.

8.2.2.1 *Distrust*

One of the prominent reasons that SFTs suppressed their complaints was distrust. Women were unsure if complaining would benefit them: “I am not sure if it would benefit me by complaining” (Amali). SFTs were suspicious about the outcomes after complaining: “I don’t think it [complaining] would often benefit me, it might stress me even more” (Lily). SFTs had trust concerns over the complaints procedure and to whom they complain. Lucy’s

view on complaining was very negative and according to her complaining did not result in anything: “No, I didn't complain. I don't do any, no. I just leave it because I think, most of the world, if you complain, you don't get anywhere.” She further believed that other people do not believe in what she claims: “...people don't want to believe you.” In certain instances, SFTs felt that their complaints were not believed, so they did not want to make any complaints. As Adriana said:

Your case is treated like a joke, or you've been treated like crazy. Because they don't actually put our complaints seriously. It is like, ‘okay, maybe we can put this inside of the drawer’...I feel we are not treated seriously in those situations.

SFTs believed their complaints were often ignored: “When you are female and if you verbally complain, sometimes people tend to use that to their advantage and dismiss what you're saying” (Parami); “It's a waste of breath” (Gloria); “I don't feel that I will be heard” (Lily); “The voice of a woman might not be heard. I do believe that might happen” (Yara). Parami also expressed her views on service providers' stereotypical perception of female customers in general that led to dismissal of concerns and judgements that their complaints were unworthy of consideration: “All ladies complain about the littlest things are the slightest inconveniences.” SFTs expressed how certain other parties might not be empathetic towards their gender-specific requirements: “When you're trying to express something to some people who aren't used to being the minority or haven't felt that insecurity, they may not have empathy and not understand the importance” (Tracey). Some SFTs shared their experiences with situations that led to distrust in the complaint-handling procedures of certain establishments. Moana who sought redress from the police on a certain incident she faced in one of her solo travels, shared an unexpected experience after filing the complaint. She said:

...he [the policeman] literally found my name on the report and searched for me [on Facebook]. In my opinion, it's so inappropriate. They're supposed to protect you. So, this is why I wouldn't complain. In most places I've been, the people you're complaining to aren't necessarily safe either, they have ulterior motives, and that's unpleasant, you can't trust them.

Some SFTs shared their inferior feelings over the complaints made by females vs males. SFTs believed their complaints were not properly heard or attended to vs complaints made by men. Madusha explained her view on the better response of hospitality establishments if the complaint was made by her husband. She said:

Let's say I had got my husband to make a complaint, I think the company would also have responded differently or perhaps in a better way. If he said, 'this guy [tour guide] said something like this about my wife', that's taken more seriously, than what I say about myself.

Several other SFTs also had similar concerns over the role played by gender in the complaints they made: "When you are a female and if you have to go and verbally complain, sometimes people tend to use that to their advantage" (Parami); "Because you are a female, they can get away with not actually having to listen on or meet your needs" (Gloria). SFTs believed that a male's voice was more prominent and given higher priority when it came to complaining.

8.2.2.2 Perceived risk

Another reason for the non-complaining behaviour of SFTs was the risk women perceived in complaining. Hence, they decided not to complain and mitigate the risk. The profile of the SFT made them feel more vulnerable to risks and hence, they kept silent in

certain situations even if they wanted to complain. Participants viewed complaining about something in an unfamiliar country would put them in more danger: “You don't have to put yourself into danger” (Ashley). Moana further elaborated on this notion:

The main reason is that I wouldn't want to put myself in a situation that would be dangerous for me. Because I am not a local, I don't live there, I'm a foreigner and I think that's why I don't complain. I don't want to put myself in more dangerous situations. I just want to leave the situation.

Some women explicitly mentioned evading the situation, even in a harassing event: “In a different country, if I am walking, and somebody tries to touch me, I would personally withdraw myself rather than raising my voice. Because I am scared” (Ashley). In certain situations, women had concerns over the place where they had to complain. Parami who stayed in a low-budget hotel, felt uncomfortable complaining directly. She said: “I didn't complain, because I felt a little uneasy with complaining while I was still there, because it was already a shady place. Some other women also talked about the fear of reprisal in complaining while they stayed in the place. They believed complaining about certain things would make the situation even worse and may result in unnecessary consequences: “If I'm going to stay in that place for longer, how would they react, and if you have been complaining negatively, there can be negative repercussions” (Darin). Some women had concerns over the embarrassing situations that complaining might create subsequently: “If I complained about that guy in the Turkish hotel, then the rest of my stay would have been very awkward” (Amali). SFTs were explicit about being aware of the subsequent outcomes of complaining: “You need to be really clear about the consequences after complaining” (Tracey). Nadia shared a similar view regarding making complaints over her stay in a particular place. She said:

I would be wary of the fear of reprisals. I'm there alone and I don't know what anybody will do to me out of spite. You know if I say, this wasn't

clean, or this didn't happen, maybe for the rest of the trip, they definitely wouldn't clean something, or they may spoil my food. I think about all these things.

Some SFTs had concerns over the impact that would be created on them after complaining. They believed that complaining entailed a risk of damaging their self-image and might result in negative emotions. Hence, they avoided complaining and decided to move away from the situation rather than deal with it. Ellie talked about why she avoided complaining as a white woman. She talked about the negative stereotype of white women as ones who always felt entitled and privileged and hence, she did not complain even on genuine matters she encountered while travelling solo. She said: "It's really tough, I've got a horror of being a Karen." In certain unsupportive conditions (i.e., being alone in a crowd), women had concerns over their capacity to raise their voice against the intrusions they might have to face: "I don't know if I am brave enough to raise my voice if something happens to me" (Ashley). Also, women had concerns over the subsequent emotional impacts of complaining. Hoa shared her feelings about complaining about a negative encounter she had with one of the tour guides: "I felt ashamed to share it or tell it if everybody gets to know. I mean I was not so confident." Dependent on whom the women were complaining about or to, SFTs were cautious about the consequences. When Romena went through an intrusive experience due to an Airbnb owner's behaviour, she had concerns over whom to complain to: "I couldn't complain, because the owner was there, and he was with his friends." She further commented on her feelings of insecurity as a woman to complain: "I felt a little powerless to talk as I was alone, and it was a risk for me to complain because I was the only female there."

8.2.2.3 Uncertainty of the legitimacy of the complaint

Among the unique reasons that restrained SFTs from complaining about the negative experiences they faced in their solo travels was SFTs' uncertainty about the legitimacy of the

complaints they made. SFTs mentioned that with certain incidents they faced, they were not quite sure whether it was something to complain about or not. Such uncertainties were cultural as women were unsure if complaining was necessary or not: “Culturally, just because it's something I didn't like and I didn't feel comfortable with, it might not be wrong all the time. I didn't feel like me exerting my opinion was always a valid way of dealing” (Tracey). SFTs were suspicious about if the incident was something worthy to claim and seek redress or not from the responsible parties. Some participants associated certain incidents with the culture of the country they were travelling in and found it difficult to complain. When Moana was recalling her negative experiences with a waiter during a service encounter, she talked about how approaching women is culturally accepted in certain countries and hence, she found it difficult to raise her voice against them. She said:

I feel like I'm not complaining about the service; it may be a cultural difference and how can you complain about someone's culture. I think that in some cultures it's more acceptable to approach women...so I am not sure whether I'm actually complaining about the service or whether it's just perhaps like a cultural difference.

As discussed previously, some of the negative experiences that SFTs encountered in their interactions were not physically abusive or harassing (for example, unwanted conversations, questioning solo status, etc.). Hence, some SFTs had concerns over complaining about such encounters that seemed to be less threatening to a third party yet perceived to be disturbing to the self: “...when not even harassed but just like when people breach too much into your personal space. I don't know how to put it or complain about it though it is unpleasant to me” (Darin). For some women, complaining about a negative interaction with a person was quite subjective compared to complaining about an obvious (or

objective) service failure or a poor service amenity. Hence, they decided to avoid complaining.

As Nadia said:

I mean, if there's like a leak in the room, water dripping or something like that, would make you uncomfortable, it's not your opinion, it's a fact. But if a person seems to be too friendly or too much into me, it may be my opinion, right?

In certain situations, women perceived themselves as the cause of trouble and felt uncertain about complaining. Hoa talked about her friendly personality and considered herself overly socialised which may be the reason that she had encountered a negative experience with a tour guide in one of her solo travels. She said:

I also realised that it was my fault as well because if I was wise enough, I may not have gone through [with] it. So, I think part of that problem was my fault, because I am too socialised and friendly. I was afraid of the police to say that because of my hospitality, I said yes to him [tour guide] when he offered me [to go to a nightclub].

8.2.2.4 Duration of the stay

Some SFTs did not want to make a complaint, particularly with the service intrusions and failures, as their duration of stay in the particular service establishment was relatively short. Hence, they decided to keep silent and consider changing their choice next time: “I was staying one night. I’d rather sleep and just move on. Maybe for the next travel, I can consider changing it” (Ashley); “I was in this particular place for only two or three days. When it (service intrusion) happened, there was hardly time for me to complain” (Parami). SFTs believed if their stay was longer in the accommodation they would have complained: “In the Turkey hotel I was there for three or four nights. So, if I had stayed maybe for a week, I would

have felt more troubled, and I would have been driven to complain about the person that I was uncomfortable with” (Amali). In a short duration of a stay in a particular service establishment, women felt ambivalent about being responsible for intrusive situations: “Do I need to be an advocate? Is it my responsibility to improve the situation?” (Tracey).

8.2.2.5 Perceived hassle

Women perceived complaining as a hassling process to be engaged in while travelling solo: “Filing a complaint, that's a lot of trouble and that's why women try to remove themselves [rather] than going into the situation and creating issues” (Ashley). SFTs had concerns over the conflicting situations that might arise due to complaining which may be an extra hassle for them to go through after an intrusive experience: “I don't want confrontation and any more stress. It [intrusion] was already a stressful experience” (Lily). Participants explained the inconvenience in complaining due to their lack of awareness of whom to complain to and due to the difficulties entailed in the process itself. For example, Moana was uncertain about whom to complain about when she had to face a bad experience with a tour guide. She said: “It was a tour guide, so to whom am I going to complain? From where can I get that information? I didn't know.” In certain situations, SFTs had to obtain services through intermediaries and hence, various parties were involved in the service delivery process. Therefore, SFTs found it difficult to figure out whom they should reach out to if they wanted to complain: “I was unable [to complain] because these are different services...it was very confusing. I was complaining to the hotel, and they said they have no control” (Ava); “But that's harder because there was an intermediary for you and the actual provider, so it makes it [complaining] harder” (Gloria). Women perceived complaining in a foreign country would create problems for them and negatively influence their overall solo travel experience in that country: “Complaining and creating issues can be traumatic and it removes you from experiencing the rest of the travel” (Ashley).

SFTs believed going through the complaining process would be tiring as they perceived various difficulties entailed in the process. Hence, they believed complaining itself would stress them more than the incident they were to complain about: “I don't think it [complaining] would often benefit me, it might stress me, even more, to have to go through the process (Lily); “Honestly, I didn't want to go through that entire process, because sometimes [the] complaining process can be quite lengthy. You've already gone through a negative experience, and I don't want another hassle” (Parami). Lily also commented on the communication barriers that make the complaining process difficult, especially when travelling in a country where the first language is different from the traveller's native language. Lily said:

I think we need a good level of communication, a good ability to converse in quite varied ways. Most of the time when I travel, I found difficulties in a country where the language is not my language. So, I feel like I will not be able to express myself, I won't get my point across, and I won't be able to understand what they're saying to me, so there's no gain by trying to engage in it [complaining].

8.2.2.6 Empathy

Some women decided not to complain about the negative experiences they had with the employees or hospitality establishments at different service encounters as they had concerns over the repercussions that employees or business organisations might have to face: “I wouldn't want to put somebody else's business in danger” (Ashley). SFTs mentioned that they did not want the employees to lose their jobs because of a complaint they made. Dayani said:

I normally think about the people, because if I make a complaint, it will affect their job, because hotels normally fire their employees if they get

complaints, so I usually think twice before complaining, as I don't want anybody to lose their jobs because of me.

Adriana decided not to complain about an employee who was in a hotel and who was intrusively trying to engage with her. She considered it as simply another incident that happened in a transient interaction and decided to suppress her complaint for the betterment of the employee. She said: "I didn't want to make his life bad. He could lose his job or may not get a promotion. I was there only for five days and I moved on." Some women talked about the lower salaries paid to hotel workers and the lack of training given to hospitality workers. Hence, they admitted that things could go wrong in certain countries they travelled to. As Ellie said:

When you're travelling in Asia, for example, you know that hotel workers are not paid well and they are often not in a great situation. They do not have proper training as well, so sometimes things may not work as I am expecting.

Similar to the concerns over employees' jobs, some women did not want to harm and put someone's business at risk: "I won't jeopardise his business" (Gloria). Ashley commented that her personal bad experience might be one incident and it should not stereotype the whole business as bad. She said: "It might not be the best business, but just because of one incident that happened to me, it doesn't mean it is the same all the time." Overall, the empathetic feelings of SFTs towards employees and businesses in the hospitality sector, restrain them from complaining in certain situations.

8.2.2.7 Lack of female workers

Some women reported that they often found hospitality establishments were primarily led by male workers and therefore, raising a complaint was difficult for them: "It's even

embarrassing to complain about something like that” (Darin); “Lot of the places I’ve gone to, especially in Latin America, it’s very patriarchal. There would not be a lot of women in management...so I don’t think I will be able to express myself to males” (Lily). SFTs believed a female service manager, or a responsible official, would be more empathetic towards their situation if they had to raise a complaint. As Adriana said: “I don’t know how to explain, I’m sorry to say this, but as women, we can see each other in a better position than a man would understand [a complaint].” Adriana also commented that employing more female workers would ensure the safety of SFTs.

SFTs explained talking about an incident caused by another man to a male service manager or a male responsible official was quite uncomfortable: “If you want to say something to a manager, who is probably also a man, it’s quite hard” (Darin). Going beyond the male service persons, Mila who had to face an unpleasant experience in one of her solo travels, explained how she felt uncomfortable in seeking redress from the police even though the police officers were quite helpful. Mila said:

But these [the police officers] were all men and I didn’t feel comfortable talking with them about what actually happened. They were friendly, and they made me feel safe, but I couldn’t talk to them about my experience, so I briefly explained what happened.

SFTs believed that male service persons or other officials might have different viewpoints regarding the complaints that SFTs made, and they might not take their complaints seriously. Darin commented that a male service manager might have an entirely different perspective on an incident that had happened. She said: “He [a male manager] be like, ‘oh well, that’s just our staff is friendly. They just mean, it[s] friendly’. But that’s something else for me.” She added that sometimes SFTs’ complaints might not be taken seriously: “If a male person would address those complaints, they would be taken less seriously than if a female

[worker] would treat the complaints.” Some SFTs commented on the possibility that male service persons or officials may take pleasure in the fact that something bad has happened to a woman: “Even those men that you are complaining about are enjoying the fact that something happened to you” (Mila).

Some women were also worried that male service workers might be hostile in response to the complaints made by SFTs. Hence, SFTs may tend to avoid complaining or may use a different approach to complain if they really want to say something regarding a bad experience. As one participant, Ellie put it:

It is all about male aggression. It doesn't take much to flip a male from being nice and pleasant to being violent. So, we are always at risk of male violence, so you've really got to be quite careful of complaining. So, it is better not to complain or use humour if you want to say something. I tend to be very careful as I don't want to piss them off.

In general, SFTs believed having to complain to a man about something that has happened to a woman when travelling solo makes the experience worse. Hence, female engagement in the hospitality sector would make it easier for the SFTs to navigate the tourism space freely by seeking help whenever they wanted: “I think definitely it [having female managers or officials] would be much easier and much less of a hurdle to complain if I wanted to when I am travelling on my own” (Darin).

8.2.2.8 Negative perception of the country

SFTs found that their perception of the country they travelled in influenced their complaining behaviour: “It also might depend on the country that you are in” (Ashley); “For me to complain or not entirely depends on the country and its legislative system” (Parami); “That's [complaining] context and country-specific” (Gloria). Accordingly, if the participants held a negative perception of the country they travelled to, they avoided complaining about

the negative experiences they encountered. As reported above, women had inferior feelings about a woman's complaint vs a man's complaint. For some SFTs, this feeling was mainly triggered because of the country. Lucy commented on how certain Arab countries underestimated the value of women: "I wouldn't do that [complaining] in particularly Arab countries because I know I wouldn't necessarily be seen as important as in other places." She further commented on how the system would work for a man and a woman in the same situation: "If it's a man it works, but if it's a woman it won't. So better to keep silent."

Some women commented on the systems of the countries as not safe enough for a SFT to raise a complaint. As Ava said: "You are adhering to the country's bylaws and their code of conduct, and it does make you feel unsafe to address specific complaints." The systems in certain countries compelled some SFTs to avoid complaining as the systems are not supportive enough. Gloria shared her views on systems in countries where she travelled solo which made her unable to raise her voice against the negative experiences she encountered. She said:

the majority of the authorities are corrupted anyway...the reality is what you are going to complain about is how they operate, everyone knows that it happens that way...unless you are going to bribe them, they will not do anything [about the complaint], so no, you just don't bother and that's the best, I guess.

The various reasons as reported above highlight women's non-complaining behaviour in the context of solo travelling. Consequently, women's certain post-travel behaviours emphasised their attempts in seeking redress for the intrusions caused during the service encounters. Accordingly, some women who encountered intrusive experiences at the service encounters and could not directly seek assistance in restoring their experiences attempted to complain to third parties (for example, agencies), post social media reviews, and spread negative word of mouth. Therefore, women tried to find out alternative platforms in which

they could raise their concerns over the intrusive experiences. These alternative means are outlined in the section below.

8.2.3 Indirect complaining: Complaining to third parties, social media reviews, and negative word of mouth

As an alternative to direct complaining, women engaged in indirect complaining when they were unable to directly raise their complaints due to various reasons as reported above. Indirect complaining took different forms dependent on various circumstances. For instance, if the particular service was booked through an intermediary (for example, an agency) or they were unable to complain about the incident at the time, SFTs attempted to inform the agents: “I have written emails or letters to different providers or booking agencies saying what was expected or what I've expected” (Gloria). Rather than seeking immediate redress or compensation for the negative experience, women intended to complain to warn the intermediaries and future travellers about their recommendation of such service providers: “I wrote to the agent, so next time they would be more careful or may not recommend them to another customer” (Lily). Women believed complaining to a third party would be safer and would add more gravity to what they had to complain about. As Ava said:

I remember at one point I decided to tolerate what happened and contacted the agency that recommend me the provider, and I made it very clear to them that they should not be doing this as it is cheating. I think that made some impact because sometimes the provider would simply ignore what you [the customer] say as you are just one customer to them. But if they are contacted by an agency, they would take it seriously as they would be losing future businesses as well. Also, I thought it is safe for me to contact them rather than the provider.

In some situations, women decided to raise their concerns over intrusive experiences during the service satisfaction survey undertaken by the providers or intermediaries. Madusha who had to face an unpleasant experience with a tour guide on one of her solo trips mentioned how she assigned a poor rating. Further, she also quoted verbatim since the feedback was sought quickly by the provider. She said:

When the company, who was in charge of this guide emailed at the end of the day asking me to rate their service. I rated it one out of ten. Then I wrote, it was fine, it was organised very well, and I enjoyed myself, but this guide's comments made me very uncomfortable, and I quoted verbatim exactly what he said which made me so uncomfortable, and I asked them to talk to him because you know female travellers don't need to be subjected to this.

Madusha further mentioned that after that incident she stopped using guides in her solo travels. Roma also mentioned that she posted her negative experience on a survey: "It was Expedia or Orbitz, one of those two websites, they had a survey and I posted good and as well as bad. Especially with that incident, of course, I bolstered that." Similarly, after returning from the trip, Romena complained to the Airbnb owner about the intrusive incident she experienced: "Later I sent something to Airbnb to let them know what happened. It was not specified. Though I rented the house, it was not empty." The surveys enabled women to freely express themselves regarding dissatisfaction caused by intrusive experiences: "You can answer honestly about a [service] person's bad behaviour, especially if it [the survey] is anonymous" (Tracey); "I sent my honest experience through the survey" (Parami); "You can be very open when you answer their [intermediaries or service establishments] questions later on when they wanted to know our experience" (Darin).

Some SFTs had to seek redress from third parties when their complaints were not properly handled by service management. Ava recalled one of her experiences in Australia when her possessions were stolen while she was staying in a hotel. She talked about the hotel's approach in handling the situation: "Although they were empathetic, they were on a business model. They blamed me for not caring about my possessions." Having experienced the negative approach of the hotel management, she raised her complaint to the police: "I went to the police, but I did not have substantial evidence to process the claim."

Apart from complaining to third parties, women used social media as an indirect mode of expressing their concerns over service intrusions. Similar to the intention of complaining to third parties, SFTs intended to make other people aware of possible intrusive experiences: "I would just put a Facebook status or comment saying don't stay in this hotel...I wanted other people also to learn" (Ashley); "To inform other future travellers that you will, or you might have to experience the same as I did" (Parami); "The whole point of me sharing this feedback is to improve service for the rest of my stay here, but also for other people" (Samanta). Respondents also found sharing their concerns on social media as a means of emotional relief in the event of a bad experience caused due to a service intrusion. Moana who felt intruded upon by a waiter's unwanted approach in a restaurant shared her experience:

I posted a short story [on social media] about what happened. Others have commented on it, and I felt it wasn't only me. There are a lot of others who've gone through the same. It was some kind of relief for me since I could not help...any others.

Several other women commented on how social media served as an immediate mode for them to share their bad experiences: "It is just a matter of click, you could post it [an intrusive experience] on Facebook or somewhere that other people could see" (Leah); "It's [social media] very quick, if I comment or post a negative comment, others will not go to that place

for sure” (Mila). Women believed blocking future customers through negative reviews on social media would create very bad consequences for service establishments. Kathy said:

If they won't listen [to the complaints] or if I can't make a complaint, I can simply share my views on my social media and that would block many other people going there. I think it is worse than handling my complaints responsibly and spending some time to compensate me.

Some SFTs attempted to complain on public platforms by posting negative public reviews if their complaints were not heard or handled by the service management. In doing so, SFTs wanted to make other female travellers aware of such incidents. As Parami said:

I have only made it public when they [service management] did not respond to it. If they do not respond to the complaint positively, if they say something like ‘okay, I'm very sorry that you had to experience this and we will make sure that it won't happen in future’, I will never go public because they handled the complaint well. But if they say, ‘this is how it works, we can't change’, then, of course, I will post publicly. Not to get back at them or take revenge, but to inform other future travellers that you will have to experience, or you might have to experience, something like this.

While women used online platforms to raise their complaints against intrusive experiences, they also refused to recommend certain service providers due to the bad encounters they had and the lack of response for the concerns they had over the intrusions: “There were [a] few of my friends who wanted to have the same trip that I had in Peru, but I did not recommend that guy [the taxi driver], who could have also served my friends. He was so irresponsible and insensitive” (Gloria); “I told one of my friends who also wanted to visit

the same place, not to book that hotel” (Parami). “I would definitely tell my family or friends about the bad experience I had” (Samanta).

SFTs’ service intrusive experiences handling approaches mainly emphasised their complaining behaviour in a solo travel context. Findings revealed how some women would attempt to complain directly at the point of intrusions. However, the majority of women suppressed their complaints due to various reasons that were deemed unique to SFTs and the context of solo travelling. As a result, women were involved in indirect complaining in the forms of complaining to third parties, posting reviews on social media, and spreading negative word of mouth which could have negative effects on service establishments missing the opportunity for them to handle the complaints at a more personal level.

8.3 Chapter summary

This chapter reported the findings answering the third research question of the study. In doing so, it revealed that SFTs used various actions in handling intrusive episodes encountered with locals, other travellers, and service persons. When managing intrusions from locals and other travellers, women mainly used a personal approach and dealt with such experiences on their own. These approaches mainly included avoidance, clear and direct communication, and white lies. In contrast, women decided to seek redress from service establishments when SFTs were intruded upon by service persons during various service encounters. However, the majority of women expressed their concerns with complaining and hence, emphasised the non-complaining behaviour of women in the context of solo travelling. Women’s non-complaining behaviour led them to undertake an indirect approach in raising their concerns about service intrusions to spread awareness of the negative experiences and therefore, influence others to avoid obtaining the service from intrusive service providers. These findings will be discussed later in Chapter Nine relating literature by emphasising SFT dissatisfaction caused by intrusions and resulting behaviours in managing intrusions.

8.4 Overall summary of findings

Chapters Six, Seven, and Eight presented the key findings of this study. First, the findings revealed SFT's need for solo travel and within the solo travel discourse, the perceived solitude as a distinct type of travel need. Accordingly, SFTs demonstrated a preference for different levels of aloneness confirming that solitude is not a stand-alone experience in the context of solo travelling. Women's solitude experience was situational and subjective which entailed different contexts. Accordingly, SFTs demonstrated mainly two contexts in which they experienced solitude. These are being on their own and avoiding others and being in the presence of others. Being on their own, women engaged in deliberate solo travel planning and experiencing solitude during their solo travels. Experiencing solitude in the presence of others enabled women to experience safe solitude as they were able to seek help in the event of any threat or danger that may arise due to the vulnerabilities an alone woman may encounter in her solo travel discourse. At this level of aloneness, women decided not to have any interactions with others but simply to be present among others for safety concerns. In contrast, women's solitude experience entailed non-solo episodes that women were interacting with others as this state enabled them to engage in transient interactions with locals, other travellers, and service persons. These interactions aided women to enjoy the customisation of offerings, combat fear and feelings of insecurity, and enjoy travel companionship.

Second, the findings revealed how certain interactions with locals and other travellers became intrusive towards women's solitude experience. Women commented on various instances they were intruded on by locals, other travellers, and service persons during their solo travels detracting them from the solitude experience. Women experienced solitude mostly in the presence of others creating a high possibility for intrusions. The unwanted presence of others resulted in various intrusive episodes including unwanted self-disclosure, physical space intrusion, intrusive conversations, over-service behaviours, unsolicited help, and

disrespectful behaviours. Women found these intrusions as a disturbance and found it difficult to separate themselves from others.

Third, the findings showed the meaningful actions taken in responding towards the intrusive behaviours of locals, other travellers, and service persons. Accordingly in managing intrusions with locals and other travellers, women used avoidance, clear and direct communication, and white lies. In managing intrusions of service persons, the findings revealed women's complaining behaviour in the context of solo travelling. Accordingly, it was found that while some women decided to complain to the service management directly, most of the women suppressed their complaints due to various reasons including distrust, perceived risk, lack of female workers, the uncertainty of the legitimacy of the complaints, negative perception of the country, perceived hassle, empathy, and duration of the stay. This non-complaining behaviour of women led them to become involved in indirect complaining in the forms of complaining to third parties or intermediaries and complaining on social media. Further, women who could not directly complain and seek direct redress also engaged in spreading negative word of mouth by not recommending particular services to their families and friends.

In synthesising the findings, the current study conceptualises the solitude experience of SFTs, which will shed light towards defining solitude in a consumption context.

The solitude experience of solo female travellers is dynamic and multifaceted, encompassing deliberate isolation, moments of being alone among others, and transient positive social interactions. While solitude in consumption often occurs in the presence of others, certain interactions can intrude upon the solitude experience leading towards different responses. Accordingly, in a consumption context, experiencing solitude requires balancing and reconciling various tensions that result due to the presence and interactions of others.

CHAPTER NINE – DISCUSSION

This chapter discusses the findings of the current study in relation to the existing literature. The overall aim of the study was to examine the dynamics of the solitude experience of solo female travellers (SFTs) in their solo travels. In pursuing the aim of the study, the following research questions were developed:

RQ1: How do SFTs perceive solitude as a solo travel need?

RQ2: How do various interactions influence the solitude experience of SFTs?

RQ3: How do SFTs respond to intrusive episodes during their solo travels?

The findings relating to the first research question are discussed in two main sections including 'solo travel and the need for solitude' and 'different levels of aloneness'. This will be followed by three subsections titled 'being on my own', 'alone among others', and 'non-solo episodes'. The chapter then proceeds to discuss the findings relating to the second research question. Accordingly, the six types of intrusions identified in the current study will be discussed relating to the literature on social presence, consumer territorial intrusions, and traveller interactions (with other travellers, service persons, and locals). Next, the chapter will discuss the findings related to the last research question. In doing so, the response strategies will be discussed in line with the consumer territorial responses.

9.2 Solo travel and the need for solitude

Solitude is considered one of the prime motives of women who travel alone (Yang et al., 2019) and also a feature that aids in profiling future solo travellers in general (Leith, 2020). In accordance with the notion of solitude being a common and voluntary disposition in one's everyday life (Hammond, 2016; Long & Averill, 2003), SFTs were intentionally seeking solitude in their solo travels. Intentionality in solitude seeking was expressed throughout the

narratives of SFTs emphasising solitude as a travel need of women travelling alone. Participants found it to be comfortable to be on their own while they travel solo. It was evident that women sought and enjoyed positive solitude in their solo travels, enabling them to experience various benefits. Positive solitude is defined as a “volitional positive experience that people may seek or enjoy” (Palgi et al., 2021, p. 3358). Positive solitude results when a person willingly finds time to engage in an enjoyable activity or experience oneself (Ost-Mor et al., 2020). Women expressed their willingness to experience aloneness by travelling solo to various destinations on their own. The ability to experience solitude is considered a prerequisite for one’s individuality and connecting with oneself authentically (Merton, 2011). The skill of perceiving solitude positively is a necessary condition to reap the benefits of experiencing solitude (Rodriguez et al., 2020; Thomas, 2023). Willingness and choice are considered as main preconditions for enjoying positive solitude (Lay et al., 2019; Nguyen et al., 2018; Pauly et al., 2017). The intentionality behind the solitude-seeking behaviour of SFTs showed their perception of ‘positive solitude’ and validated solitude as a worthy pursuit in their solo travel discourse.

SFTs were voluntarily engaged in planning their solo trips to experience positive solitude during their solo travels. A person intentionally moves away from others in seeking solitude under voluntary conditions (Knafo, 2012a). Women’s general tendency of being comfortable with aloneness led them to seek solitude deliberately on their solo trips. The ultimate intention of solitude could be broadly encapsulated as having “time to oneself” (Choi et al., 2023, p. 219). SFTs personalise the solitude experience in solo travels by considering the time spent as totally devoted to self. In making time for themselves in solo travels, SFTs expressed their willingness, taking pleasure, and a higher preference for solitude in various aspects of travel planning and travelling.

SFTs valued solitude as an important aspect of their lives. Hence solitude as a travel need and its fulfilment are deemed important for them. Some studies found women place less value on solitude due to seeking emotional support from others (Cheng & Chan, 2004). However, a recent study by Pruijn (2022) found women have a higher valuation of solitude. Women shared their perspectives on experiencing solitude as a part of their lives regardless of their individual differences (for example, marital status) and various circumstances (for example, not having a travel companion). Further, women emphasised creating time to travel on their own (to experience solitude) during trips taken for other purposes (for example, business, visiting family and friends) and while travelling in a group. Even though women posited to be more relational, empathetic, and care-oriented (Arndt, 2013), women showed an overt need for solitude and creating time for themselves, generally in their lives and while travelling solo. One possible explanation for women's higher need for solitude can be women's tendency to engage in self-reflection compared to men (Csank & Conway, 2004). Further, women in the current study were all either employed or studying and hence, escaping from their routine tasks might have been important for them. Since solitude is a means of escape from daily life pressures and renewal (Storr, 2012), women may find themselves enjoying the solitude experience, enabling them a temporary disengagement from mundane tasks. In valuing solitude and personalising the time, SFTs were willing to pay a higher price to enjoy the solitude when travelling alone. They considered it as an investment in themselves and a means of treating themselves without any guilt. Solo travel facilitates self-indulgence allowing a person to be generous to oneself (Bianchi, 2016; Wilson & Harris, 2006; Yang, 2021).

Women exhibited several reasons behind their motivation to travel solo and experience solitude. Motivation is one of the most important determining factors of tourist behaviour and is the initial stage in the travel decision-making process (Terziyska, 2021). It is well-established that various underlying motivations compel women to navigate the dynamic tourism landscape

on their own (Abbasian, 2019; Breda et al., 2020; Hosseini et al., 2021). Women in this study were conditioned by certain internal mental factors (in the forms of needs, desires, and goals) that resulted in travelling solo to meet those needs. As per the findings, the main motives of women to travel alone included the excitement of solo travelling, stress relief from work pressure, time for oneself, and significant life events. The motivations of women to travel alone were mainly push factors deriving from one's own self (Dann, 1977). Push factors represent socio-psychological aspects rooted in the tourist's personality and usual environment (Dann, 1977).

SFTs felt excited by the thought of travelling alone which took them out of their comfort zones and inspired them to travel on their own. Excitement was a positive triggering factor during the pre-travel phase of women in this study who were thinking of travelling alone to destinations for which they had a strong desire. Leisure travellers are motivated by excitement (Crompton, 1979) and for some, excitement was an outcome of travelling (Bianchi, 2016). Retirees found it exciting to engage in destination activities as they found such engagements meaningful after leaving work since work-related excitement was no longer available (Nimrod & Rotem, 2010). The excitement of women was mainly associated with the possible challenges of a woman travelling alone in the unknown tourism space. The degree of risk involved in women travelling alone heightened the state of excitement felt (Falconer, 2011). Solo travellers found excitement in experiencing novelty and learning (Bianchi, 2016).

The desire to escape is widely identified as a motive in general tourism, that enables a person an opportunity to change (mundane tasks and environment and/or a social role) (Crompton, 1979; Iso-Ahola, 1989; Iso-Ahola, 1980; Iso-Ahola, 1982). Travel is a process that “provides an outlet for avoiding something and for simultaneously seeking something,” it is both a dialectical–developmental process (individuals change through an inner experience of contradiction and conflict) and a dialectical–optimising process (individuals seek to avoid and

acquire a new experience) (Iso-Ahola, 1982, p. 261). In the current study, women found travelling alone and experiencing solitude as a means of restorative escape from their routinised tasks and a retreat to compensate their busy lives. Escaping from everyday reality is a common motivation for women to travel on their own (Chiang & Jogaratnam, 2016; Seow & Brown, 2018; Wilson & Little, 2005). While some women were travelling to escape from their usual surroundings including their home country and known others, others were motivated to travel simply expecting a change from their routine lives. Escapism in travelling may not essentially result from unhappiness with one's daily life (Chylińska, 2022). SFTs made a conscious choice to travel alone to relax from the psychological and environmental pressures of reality. Certain distinctive types of tourism, such as spa tourism generally serve the escapism motive in travelling due to the inherent retreating elements (Voigt et al., 2011). The liberating and independence involved in solo travelling enabled women to temporarily move away from their everyday realities and to engage in something they considered for 'themselves'.

Women who were passing a certain life cycle stage and experiencing significant life events were liberated from obligations and distressing relationships, consequently, pushing such women to travel on their own as a means of connecting with their authentic selves. Separation is a tragedy of a person's life that needs careful review and revision (Harmon & Kyle, 2022), and leisure travel serves in bringing in transformative experiences, especially after tragic life events (Kleiber et al., 2002; Sengupta, 2022). Women reported their motive to travel alone after certain major life events, for example, separation from their husbands, since they perceived solo travelling as a means of restorative experience. Changed perception of self, or interrelationships and feelings of greater appreciation are some of the transformative experiences manifested via travelling (Riffle et al., 2020). For some women, liberating from their commitments as a woman, triggered them to travel alone as they felt sufficient freedom to travel on their own. Familial responsibilities and obligations are considered as main constraints

for women to travel (Harris & Wilson, 2007). Hence, freedom from such obligations motivated women to travel alone, as it provided them with the peace of mind to explore the world as per their interests.

Solitude was a dynamic experience for women, as it has differing levels of aloneness preferred throughout the solo trips. SFTs had their own definitions of solitude. Accordingly, they did not perceive solitude as absolute physical aloneness in the tourism space. Women often encountered others in destinations to which they travelled solo. Further, they purposefully avoided travelling to deserted destinations with complete seclusion. This was sometimes due to safety concerns, as for many SFTs safety is a prime concern (Thomas & Mura, 2019; Yang, 2017; Yang et al., 2018a). Further, women who travel alone consider safety as their self-responsibility (Yang et al., 2018a). Hence, women had to realise their solitude needs most of the time in the presence of others during their solo trips. In accordance, for SFTs, solitude was about being ‘alone among others’ rather than experiencing complete aloneness. The philosophical definitions of solitude are mainly associated with physical isolation, social disengagement, and reflection (Koch, 1994). However, absolute physical aloneness might not be possible in one’s everyday life and therefore, one may experience solitude by deliberately not interacting (or engaging) with others around (Burger, 1995; Long & Averill, 2003). Thus, solitude is defined by the absence of social interactions or being physically alone (Burger, 1995). Larson (1990, p. 157) defines solitude as the “communicative separation from others” and argues it is an objective condition of being alone.

SFTs perceived engagement or disengagement with others as the determinant of being in solitude. Hence, women deliberately chose when to engage with others and when not to interact, making solitude a subjective experience for women determined by relative levels of engagement and disengagement with others (other travellers, locals, and service persons). Hence, this solitude experience falls in line with Nguyen and Taylor-Bower (2023, p. 5) who

defined solitude as “time and space when there is an absence of social contacts.” According to Nguyen and Taylor-Bower (2023), this definition covers the objective and observable states (i.e., physically alone) of solitude and the subjective experiences of solitude where one may experience solitude in public but without interacting with others. Accordingly, women experienced different levels of aloneness which will be discussed in the sections below.

9.3 Different levels of aloneness: Situational aloneness and interactions

Women reflected a range of preferences for being alone. The context of solo travelling enabled women to experience solitude at different levels with various outcomes. Therefore, women’s solitude experience while travelling solo went beyond the physical withdrawal as in conventional solitude. Women’s solitude experiences in solo travels were situational and contextual involving various solo and non-solo episodes enabling SFTs to experience aloneness at different levels. During these solo and non-solo episodes, SFTs deliberately chose to engage with and disengage from interactions with others including locals, other travellers, and service persons. Various non-solo episodes within the women’s solo travel experience confirm the multidimensionality of the solo travel construct that spans from being solo throughout the trip at one end and being a part of a travel group alone at the other (Yang, 2021). While women reported their interactions with other travellers during the group trips taken, this study also found important interactions SFTs had with locals and service persons in various situations and activities they engaged in across various circumstances.

9.3.1 *Being on my own: Avoiding others*

At this level of solitude, women reported their overt need to be alone while they travelled solo. Therefore, some SFTs were strongly opposed to the idea of having travel companions, not only during their trips but also during the pre-travel stage, which includes travel planning and drop-offs at the airport. Hating other people was a reason for women to travel alone who considered themselves introverts (Terziyska, 2021). SFTs did not prefer the

company of other people while travelling as they considered it as an extra responsibility and may also have to compromise their own interests over others. Further, women also had concerns over the possibility of their own experience being negatively influenced or dominated by the presence of others. The autonomy in solo travelling and not having to compromise one's travel interests over the other's preferences motivated SFTs to travel on their own rather than with a group (Osman et al., 2020).

Women expressed solitude needs at different stages of travelling. Accordingly, solitude needs were not restricted only during travelling, but also women were consciously involved in travel planning to ensure their aloneness experiences. Solo travellers take their own responsibility for planning, decision-making, and organising their own schedules and travel itineraries (Myers, 2010). In search of meaningful disconnection and disengagement, women engaged in deliberate solo travel planning behaviours. These helped women to experience solitude in their solo travel discourse. During the travel planning stage, women deliberately chose their travel destinations to ensure they did not meet known others. While being away from people or physical aloneness was considered a necessary condition in early conceptualisations of solitude (Larson, 1990), for women who travel alone, specifically being away from known others was deemed important in experiencing solitude. Further, women also did not want to be in groups or in other associations that obliged them to be a part of (for example, cruise trips) as it did not enable them to be alone. Women considered such travel contexts (i.e., groups) compelled them to interact with each other and hence, will not allow them to be in solitude. In contrast, women felt more independent and liberated in spending their alone time when they were on their own. Further, women were also trying to avoid the crowds when they were visiting certain places. These preferences demonstrated women's overt need of avoiding people and interactions in fulfilling their solitude needs in a solo travel context. Lack

of interactions allowed people to be in an inward-focused psychological state experiencing solitude (Weinstein et al., 2022).

Women's willingness to experience solitude was situational and context-bounded in the realm of solo travelling. During the solo trips, women reported their need for solitude in certain situations such as visiting historical sites and observing artefacts. Being on their own enabled women to deeply engage with the experience they had in such tourism settings. The solitude experienced in the wilderness results in autonomy, spiritual connection, reflection on life, empowerment, intimacy, and focused attention (Hammitt et al., 2001; Kalisch et al., 2011; Nicholls, 2008). Women preferred solitude while they engaged in certain activities during their solo trips such as celebrating their birthdays, exploring, or writing. Some of which they were willing to do but could not do due to their busy lifestyles in everyday routines. In doing so, women were able to enjoy their solitude time meaningfully and take pleasure in what they did. Solitude is a more open-ended experience characterised by increased freedom for individuals to choose their mental and physical activities of choice (Long et al., 2003).

Solitary activities have been studied in various contexts and related to different age categories (Coplan et al., 2021; Lam & García-Román, 2019; Leary et al., 2003). In the solo travel context, women reported certain activities and visits that other travellers would not usually engage with. For example, visiting non-touristy attractions and archaeological sites in search of ancestor history. Women gain pleasure and fulfilment via engaging in such activities on their own that enable them to meaningfully utilise their solitude time in solo travels. Leary et al. (2003) measuring the pleasure in solitary activities, found that frequency and enjoyment of solitary activities while alone were strongly related with a higher preference for solitude. Further, "doing something" during solitude is perceived as enjoyable rather than being inactive or "just thinking" (Buttrick et al., 2019).

In ensuring the aloneness experience, SFTs purposefully selected to travel during off-season and unsocial hours. While studies on off-season travelling are relatively less compared to peak seasons, Kozak and Rimmington (2000), measuring tourist satisfaction during the off-season, identified certain factors that led towards overall satisfaction. These included destination attractiveness, tourist attractions and facilities, availability of the English language, and facilities and services at the destination airport. SFTs' preference for travel during off-peak seasons demonstrated a new attribute of a destination (i.e., less crowded or low tourism density) that women would look into when they travel in fulfilling solitude as a distinctive type of travel need.

Despite the benefits, solitude can be sometimes a challenging experience (Pentzold et al., 2020). Women experienced some downsides of solitude including loneliness and overwhelming feelings. Many scholars have distinguished loneliness from solitude emphasising that loneliness is an experience that a person would deliberately avoid while solitude is being intentionally sought (Galanaki, 2004; Long & Averill, 2003; Shearer & Davidhizar, 1999). Regardless of the conceptual difference between solitude and loneliness, studies have claimed certain risks involved with spending time alone, while loneliness is one such risk (Burger, 1995). For women who were intentionally seeking solitude and navigating the tourism space on their own, loneliness was embedded within the solitude experience despite their willingness to be in solitude. Solitude is a multidimensional construct with constructive solitude as well as feelings of unwanted loneliness and isolation (Maes et al., 2015). Solitude, which is a state of aloneness, may or may not result in feelings of loneliness (Galanaki, 2004). Loneliness is a subjective condition even in the presence of others (Larson, 1999). Loneliness is an unwanted experience that demands companionship (Hawkley & Cacioppo, 2010).

Women felt lonely in their solo travel discourse and in experiencing solitude in the context of solo travelling. However, women were not longing for any companionship but were

able to successfully overcome their feelings of loneliness by accepting and disengaging from situations enabling them to be in prolonged solitude resulting in positive outcomes. Acceptance has been identified as a risk negotiation strategy used by SFTs. As found by Yang et al. (2018b, p. 40) “it is the acceptance that enables these women not to be affected by the perceived risks.” Similarly, the current study found that acceptance helped women to overcome the dark sides of solitude and remain in the experience as they wished. A solitary person may avoid loneliness, anxiety, and boredom by relying on their relationships or by engaging in certain pleasurable activities or commitments (Long & Averill, 2003).

Loneliness in the solo female travel discourse has been studied as an independent subject of investigation. For example, Neluhena et al. (2023), studying how SFTs sustain loneliness, found that women attempted to spend alone time meaningfully, connecting with others, and enjoying loneliness with pleasurable activities. In line with Neluhena et al. (2023), women hovered over various travel activities as a part of their disengagement strategy in overcoming feelings of loneliness. In addition, this study found women’s conscious awareness of loneliness and acceptance of other feelings of denial in solo travel enabled them to successfully overcome such negativities and experience solitude. This is in line with solitude skills posited by Thomas (2023), who identified emotion regulation and enjoyment of solitary activities as essential in experiencing positive solitude and reaping the benefits. Loneliness is also considered as a personal constraint that prevents women from travelling solo (Bianchi, 2016; Wilson & Little, 2005). Further, some studies have identified feelings of loneliness as an aspect of the psychological risk of SFTs (Valaja, 2018). In the current study, loneliness was mainly associated with the experience of solitude. However, it did not prevent women from travelling solo or result in any risk perceptions.

9.3.2 Alone among others: Safe solitude

At this level of aloneness, women reported their preference to be alone among others provided there is no interaction. In line with Nguyen et al. (2023), in experiencing solitude, women were in their own mental space without interacting, which is considered as a positive experience. This nature of solitude experienced by SFTs could be identified as ‘public solitude’, where others are present but one may not actively select to interact with them (Nguyen et al., 2021). The absence of communication and interaction with others would mark the solitude experience which may or may not involve physical separation from others (Thomas, 2023). In debating physical and virtual separation and eliminating social and interpersonal cues in experiencing solitude, Larson (1990) and Long et al. (2003) argued physical separation is not a must, provided there is no interaction with others. Introducing public solitude, Nguyen et al. (2021) also argued that the presence of others would be or not be influencing one’s solitude experience and this state is different from private solitude which is experienced in absolute physical aloneness. Several other scholars have broadened the understanding of solitude by bringing in the concept of social solitude where people experience solitude in public or shared spaces such as public transportation (Epley & Schroeder, 2014) or urban settings (Nicol & Sangster, 2019). The findings offered more convincing reasons for ‘being alone among others’, with the use of the presence of ‘non-interactive others’ in one’s consumption context. Previous studies have investigated the mere presence of others and its influence on one’s consumption experience (Argo et al., 2005). Accordingly, the presence of non-interactive others influences the focal consumer in both positive and negative ways depending on the consumption context. In a retail environment, customers feel association and belonging when the number of people present (non-interactive) increases at a desired level and results in overall positive emotions (Argo et al., 2005). In contrast, some studies found that social presence results in negative emotions (e.g., embarrassment) in certain consumption contexts (Dahl et al., 2001; He et al.,

2012). However, for women who were travelling solo, the presence of non-interactive others created a safe setting to experience solitude on their own in an unfamiliar environment.

Safety concerns were the prime reason for SFTs to be alone among others in experiencing solitude. In line with previous studies, women considered safety as a major concern for them while travelling solo (see for example Kour & Gupta, 2019; Thomas & Mura, 2019; Yang, 2017; Yang et al., 2018a). Women are more cautious about being perceived as vulnerable and weak (Hosseini et al., 2021; Ngwira et al., 2020). Hence, they become easy targets of physical and sexual assault during solo travels (Seow & Brown, 2018; Yang, 2017; Yang et al., 2018a, 2018b). SFTs mainly associated their safety concerns with realising their solitude needs during the solo trips. This may be due to women needing to be cautious about physical threats and sexual objectification during outdoor solitude experiences (Arndt, 2013). A female may need to consciously choose their states of solitude being cautious about their surroundings (Sapon-Shevin, 1993). Being in a safe place provided women a mental freedom from possible threats and dangers enabling them to experience solitude safely in the unknown tourism space.

Due to safety concerns, women did not prefer complete seclusion or typical sites for solitude as the wilderness. Instead, they preferred to be among others while not undertaking any interactions with them. SFTs felt secure being in the presence of others as they could seek help if needed. Physical settings with a safe psychological space are more likely to create opportunities for solitude (Nguyen et al., 2023). Being alone around others helped women to feel some kind of companionship that did not require any interaction. Individuals who experience solitude in shared spaces felt a certain level of anonymity and a sense of invisibility making them free from social surveillance (De Backer, 2019). Women felt it easy to blend with and go unnoticed as a SFT when they were alone among others. Blum (2014) identifies solitude as a state of being alone among anonymous others in temporary sites lacking permanence and

engagement. Women found travel as a transitional space for them to experience solitude being in the presence of unknown others, whom they had no obligation to stay or interact with. SFTs were able to experience and enjoy solitude being in the presence of other people who would not interfere with them. Birditt et al. (2019) claim a person's well-being evaluation of solitude is affected by socially threatened feelings. This is more prominent for women when alone, due to the societal expectations around families and rearing children (Nguyen et al., 2023). SFTs perceived being alone among others in an international destination would enable them to experience solitude provided it was not a must for them to keep interacting with others since others were personally unknown to them. In addition, even though they sometimes had to interact, those interactions were transient, and women could decide upon and keep control over the encounters they made. A person's awareness of the surroundings, control over the immediate setting, and the ability to escape from threatening situations may create an exciting experience of freedom in urban solitude (Can et al., 1992).

9.3.3 Non-solo episodes: Interaction in solitude

While women were deliberately making efforts to be on their own in ensuring aloneness, they also had space for interactions with others while they travelled solo. Women tend to have their subjective definition of solitude in the solo travel discourse. Many SFTs perceived solitude as a balance of being on their own (aloneness) and interacting with others (interactions). This is in consensus with Weinstein et al. (2022), who found that many participants sought a balance (solitude and social time) in defining solitude in everyday life. Maintaining a balance between social time and solitude moments that help a person connect with oneself is important for understanding the nature of solitude and how it is experienced (Coplan et al., 2019). Certain theories have posited that when an individual experiences too much solitude they would turn into seeking interactions, and on the other hand, if too many interactions are experienced, people would seek solitude (O'Connor & Rosenblood, 1996). Spending excess alone time or

too little alone time would lead to imbalances in a person's life (Nguyen et al., 2023). Thus, shifting between solitude and social interaction when necessary is important to maintain the balance (Elmer et al., 2020).

Women who were on their own during their solo travels were navigating between their alone time and interactions with others. Accordingly, women interacted with others they met during their solo trips and considered it as a part of their solo travel and solitude experience. However, SFTs' preference for interactions was always with unknown others (for example, locals and other travellers) whom they met in the tourism space. Human interaction in the form of meeting new and interesting people and friendly service providers was an important driver of satisfaction for solo travellers (Bianchi, 2016). Association with others is integral in the process of constructing meaning in one's travel experience (White & White, 2008). Reframing the solitude experience by allowing interactions with others, enabled SFTs to positively enhance their overall solitude experience in their solo travels. Women found the interactions they came across were, most of the time, transient, and did not allow them to develop long-term relationships. Very few past studies have investigated the nature of interactions that SFTs would like to have during their solo trips. For instance, Su and Wu (2021) studying SFTs' encounters with male strangers, found a continuum of encounters that ranged from less close neutral encounters to very close sexual relationships and posited that all the encounters were not transient in nature. In contrast, a study by Jordan (2008) shows SFTs enjoyed encounters with other people but they were cautious of interactions and did not let them lead to long-term social exchanges. Despite encounters with others being short-term and temporary, women felt grateful about the interactions they had with others. This is in line with Glover and Filep (2016) who posit that even though the relationships may be short-term and the bonds may disappear, the strength and influence of such interactions in travel may prevail longer.

Women's solo travel status enabled them to freely decide when to interact and when not to interact. Solo travelling enables one to meet and interact with others from diverse backgrounds and fosters networking (Kour, 2020). Feeling free from any obligation to interact with others or commitment to interact enabled SFTs to experience solitude while creating social time to optimise their solitude experience when wanted. Freedom is an important component of the solitude experience (Nguyen & Taylor-Bower, 2023), in terms of it gives independence in engaging with enjoyable activities and relief from everyday demands and obligations (Long et al., 2007; Pentzold et al., 2020).

Tourists are generally interested in encounters with other tourists since the interactions are usually free from the obligation of ongoing attachment and do not have a specific function, content, or outcome (White & White, 2008). SFTs in the current study ensured that the interactions they made with others during their solo travels were totally under their control. Women decided the situations, contexts, and activities in which they would interact with others. SFTs were also concerned about the duration of the interactions as they did not want to engage in prolonged encounters with others. Women had control over the transient interactions along their solo journeys by prioritising their solo travel needs and not compromising their interests as a result of the interactions. The controllability over the interactions helped the SFTs to maintain the balance they expected in solitude and social time, which in turn uplifted their overall solo travel experience. It is argued that women who travel alone tend to control their actions due to the gaze of men and the ability to control their own actions results in empowerment (Heimtun & Abelsen, 2013).

Several studies have focused on the social interactions that SFTs had during their solo travel discourse. While most of the studies mainly investigated the risk and harassment women encountered in the realm of solo travelling due to the interactions they had (see for example, Kour & Gupta, 2019; Su & Wu, 2020; Thomas & Mura, 2019; Yang, 2017; Yang et al., 2018a),

a few studies focused upon social interactions as a positive pursuit. According to Murphy (2001), social interaction is a main motive for alone travelling and an important experiential attribute in a solo trip. In particular, social interaction is identified as a motivation associated with SFTs (Jordan & Gibson, 2005; Osman et al., 2020; Pereira & Silva, 2018; Wilson & Harris, 2006; Wilson & Little, 2005). In some studies, interactions are identified as an element of meaning construction for SFTs (Jin & Zhang, 2022). For women in this study, social interactions were not primarily a motive. However, they were aware of and allowed certain interactions within their solitude experience which in turn resulted in certain benefits that enhanced their overall solo travel experience.

Women interacted with various others in their solo travel discourse including locals, other travellers, and service persons. Interactions with different others enabled SFTs to enhance their solo travel experience by enriching the diversity and vividness of the different interactions they had. The tourist experience is built up via inter-tourist interactions and interactions with the host population (Pons, 2003; Wearing & Wearing, 1996). In tourism, social contact is not uni-directional between the hosts and guests, but entails influences from various parties (Williams & Lew, 2014). Tourism is a public space that brings strangers together and makes encounters easier (Filep et al., 2017). Further, being solo makes a traveller more likely to interact and more independent in terms of interacting with others, as they are free from the influence of close others (for example, family or friends) (Jordan, 2008; Wilson & Harris, 2006).

Previous studies have discovered various benefits and implications of constructive interactions among strangers in the realm of travelling. To name a few, prominent positivities include: hospitality, kindness, trust, and immediate gratification (Filep et al., 2017; Glover & Filep, 2016; Yu & Lee, 2014). Further, social interactions may have a positive influence on visitors' behavioural intentions through enhanced satisfaction (Choo & Petrick, 2015).

Interacting with others during travel may bring in intense levels of hedonic benefits adding richness to the travel experience (Su & Wu, 2021). The current study found the interactions women had during their solo travels brought in several positive outcomes in the forms of perceived personalising of hospitality offerings, overcoming fear and insecurities, and travel companionships.

9.3.3.1 Perceived customisation of offerings

The positive outcomes that women enjoyed by interacting with service persons bring important insights relating to tourist-service person interactions in the context of solo female travelling. Women perceived certain special customisation hospitality offers as a positive outcome of the interactions they had with service persons. While studies on SFTs' experience with positive service encounters are rather limited, in general, it is contended that the value of the experience is increased along with positive service encounters (Wu & Liang, 2009). Women perceived a certain extra level of care from service persons. These included customised offerings (for example, food items), special treatment from service persons and care workers (for example, cleaning staff), helping when in need (for example, extra assistance proffered when there was loss of property or flight delays), and assistance as a tour guide (which is not a part of the usual service). These perceived benefits helped SFTs to feel good and that they were being taken care of in their solo travelling discourse. Iacobucci and Ostrom (1993) note that female customers are more positively influenced by polite and helpful employees who are more relational in their service provision.

Women perceived the positive interactions received from the service persons as genuine and honest, as they truly felt the level of care the service persons provided was beyond their financial gains. This is in line with sincere social interactions discussed in the tourism literature (Chen et al., 2023; Jiang & Tu, 2023; Li et al., 2021; Prince, 2017). Tourists perceive interactions with hosts as sincere when the hosts provide insights beyond financial intentions

(Prince, 2017). The women felt very grateful for the extra level of care and service they received within certain service encounters as they were beyond their expectations. Sincere social interactions are an exception rather than a specified criterion in host-tourist interactions (Jiang & Tu, 2023).

9.3.3.2 Helping hand: Combating fear and feelings of insecurity

SFTs' interactions with other travellers can be broadly located within the realm of tourist-to-tourist (T2T) interactions in the service experience. Existing literature postulates that T2T interactions mainly influence the service experience by enhancing it or detracting from it (Choo & Petrick, 2015). In the current study, the interactions between SFTs and other travellers were important both within the service experience and outside the service experience. Interactions with other travellers were important for SFTs in navigating the tourism space on their own, indicating an indirect influence on their service experiences in certain service encounters (for example, sharing travel interests at a particular tourism destination). Women perceived interacting with others (mainly with locals and other fellow travellers) helped them to overcome certain fears and insecurities they had during their solo travels. According to Greenblat and Gagnon (1983), women may seek assistance when they encounter problems when travelling in an unknown tourism space. Su and Wu (2021) found that SFTs were amazed by how male strangers helped them without any ulterior motives. SFTs were mainly seeking assistance when they were lost or finding directions. They were able to overcome certain fears arising from stalkers, walking in the dark, and sickness. Further, women were also able to overcome their feelings of insecurity in engaging in certain activities they perceived to be social (for example, public hot baths). SFTs found that having a tour companion made it easier for them to overcome the awkwardness and embarrassment that would have occurred from being alone among other families and groups (Jordan, 2008). Liechty et al. (2009), studying older SFTs' experiences, found that being in a tour group in the middle of their solo trips, provided

them with a comfortable atmosphere enabling them to experience positive states including fun, self-expression, and sociability.

Previous studies have focused on SFTs' risk negotiation strategies and concluded that safety is a self-responsibility of SFTs and overcoming insecurities would result in women's empowerment and positive identity re-construction (Schwab, 2019; Thomas & Mura, 2019; Wantono & McKercher, 2019; Yang et al., 2018a, 2018b). However, Otegui-Carles et al. (2022) have challenged the notions of normalising women's unsafety in solo travel and considering overcoming risk as women's empowerment. Instead, they propose research should focus on the ways and means of mitigating risk that women encounter in their solo travel pursuits. Accordingly, obtaining help from locals and other travellers is deemed to provide important insights into how tourist interactions with other travellers would serve as an important means for SFTs to overcome their fears and insecurities with external help, rather than internalising the risks or being purely self-responsible.

9.3.3.3 Travel companionship

Women enjoyed the companionship they built up by interacting with mainly other travellers and locals along their solo trips. Travel companionship with other travellers aids women in many ways including, simple hangouts, sharing travel information and travel interests, and building up emotional bonds with travellers from similar personal backgrounds (for example, a divorced SFT's interaction with another divorced SFT). White and White (2008) found conversing with fellow tourists enabled travellers to affirm a sense of shared circumstance. Choo and Petrick (2015), studying tourist interactions during a farm visit, found that information exchange positively influenced overall satisfaction. Travel companionship functions found in this study resonate with the informational and social roles of purchase companions as suggested in the marketing literature (Haytko & Baker, 2004). Certain interactions women had with other travellers showed some intimacy. Su and Wu (2021) found

that SFTs built affective relationships with male strangers, and it varied in degrees from ambiguity to romance and to sexual interactions. However, women in the current study reported intimate relationships with other fellow SFTs and older couples they met along their solo journeys. Further, in contrast to the affective relationships with male strangers found by Su and Wu (2021), the current study found familial bonds and emotional relationships with fellow SFTs. These relationships helped SFTs to overcome mental sufferings (for example, suffering after a divorce) they had at the times of travelling.

Interactions with locals during solo travels helped SFTs to experience the local culture. Women were quite explicit about interacting with locals rather than other travellers when experiencing the culture of the country or locality they were travelling within. Backpackers found locals they met as a part of the tourist infrastructure (Huxley, 2004). Women found the local communities of the countries they visited were hospitable and willing to interact with SFTs enabling immersive cultural experiences. Moyle et al. (2010) found locals (in the Australian community) were motivated to enter into social exchanges with tourists for various reasons ranging from economic motives to a genuine desire to provide a quality experience for the visitors. SFTs perceived interacting with locals helped them to know the unknowns of a particular place and these experiences included tasting local food, family dinners, local community engagement activities (for example, visits to local schools), and city tours. Women genuinely appreciated the positive encounters they had with the locals as a part of their solo travel experience. Perceived opportunities to encounter authentic local experiences are identified as a component of constructing memorable tourism experiences for travellers (Chandralal & Valenzuela, 2013).

9.4 External intrusions towards the solitude experience of SFTs

The current study found varying levels of sought aloneness in SFTs' solitude experience in their solo travel discourse. Accordingly, it was revealed that women's solitude experience

mainly took place in the presence of others as women preferred to be alone among others due to safety concerns. In addition, the variation in sought levels of aloneness was also due to the nature of the social encounters in one's travel experience. Aloneness level can be broadly placed within the context of consumption during the interactive social presence of others.

In a consumption setting, the social presence of others can be either non-interactive (mere presence) or interactive (Argo et al., 2005). While non-interactive social presence enables women to enjoy safe solitude as discussed above, the interactive social presence (i.e., service persons, locals, and other travellers trying to interact with SFTs) results in both benefits and intrusions. The presence of others may sometimes compromise one's ability to control the privacy they expect from the solitude experience (Patterson & Hammitt, 1990; Stewart & Cole, 2001). In public solitude, everyone may not welcome the possibility of social interaction (Nguyen & Taylor-Bower, 2023). Women reported their experiences with the intrusions they encountered that detracted them from experiencing solitude. These intrusions resulted from interactions with locals, other travellers, and service persons that were beyond their perceived boundaries. In a retail environment, even though customers did not prefer to be alone, when the number of people present increased beyond the comfort of a person, it turned consumers' emotional reactions into negative ones (Argo et al., 2005). Jordan (2008) found that SFTs often preferred the companionship of others within the boundaries that demarcated 'singleness'. In other words, women in their solo travels expected companionship only for a short period and they did not want to lead those interactions into prolonged social exchanges (Jordan, 2008). Similarly, the current study also found that in the event of any interactions beyond their comfort, that would infringe on women's aloneness and compel them to compromise their solitude and solo travel interests, an intrusion would result.

Women perceived the unwanted presence of others and their interactions as an intrusion if they were breaking into SFTs' spaces in different ways. SFTs were sometimes distracted

from their solitude needs and experience because of various intrusive behaviours of service persons in the dynamic travel context. Intrusions caused by marketing initiatives and service persons have been identified and studied across a few studies. From a marketing perspective, consumers are intruded upon through misusing personal consumer information (Horne & Horne, 2002; Schwaig et al., 2013) and intrusive promotional activities (Belanche, 2019; Madhavan et al., 2019). Intrusiveness of promotional initiatives is a widely studied phenomenon in marketing and has been conceptualised in numerous ways. According to Li et al. (2002, p. 39) intrusiveness is defined as “a perception or psychological consequence that occurs when an audience’s cognitive processes are interrupted.” Women who were travelling alone experienced intrusive behaviours of service persons contrary to the solitude needs they had in their solo travels. In a promotional context, the intrusiveness of an advertisement is a measurement that assesses how much an ad will create an unwelcome distraction or diversion from the user’s task at hand (McCoy et al., 2008).

Consumer territorial behaviours discuss intrusions from service providers in various consumption encounters (Ashley et al., 2020; Ashley & Noble, 2014; Wang & Li, 2020). In a consumption context, employee actions may result in perceptions of intrusion pressure, hassling an individual via unwelcome infringement on his/her territory (Ashley & Noble, 2014). Ashley and Noble (2014) report several employee intrusive behaviours near the closing time of a shop. These include blocking, hostility, withdrawal, audio-visual behaviours such as making announcements on closing time, dimming the lights, personal cues (for example, taking off uniforms, talking about plans after work), and productive cues (for example, turning off an open sign before closing time, closing down departments of the store, turning off the music). However, the intrusive behaviours of service persons that women experienced during their solo travels in this study were quite distinct from the intrusions caused by the behaviours outlined above. These will be discussed later in detail.

Intrusions caused by other travellers and locals could be discussed in the realm of interactive social presence and customer-to-customer interactions in the marketing literature. According to Grove and Fisk (1997), fellow customers may either enhance or decrease satisfaction for the focal consumer. Other customers are an important and inevitable aspect of hospitality services and service experiences (Miao, 2014; Sarkar Sengupta & Pillai, 2017). Several studies have advocated that direct and indirect interactions with other customers may influence the overall experience of the focal customer. For example, other customers' dysfunctional behaviours such as drunkenness and violence, talking loudly, and verbal abuse may disturb the fellow customers present (Harris & Reynolds, 2003). Sarkar Sengupta and Pillai (2017), studying other customer perceptions, found that customers who were exposed to unfavourable perceptions of other customers, reported lower service quality and revisit intentions. In a café environment, customers did not welcome other customers sitting at their tables and considered it as intruding on the focal customer's demarcated space in the setting (Griffiths & Gilly, 2012a).

Intrusive behaviours of other travellers found in this study show another dimension of negative T2T transactions as reported in previous research. If an interaction is deemed to damage one's travel experience, such encounters are conceived as negative interactions (Adam, 2021). The intrusive behaviours of other travellers were negatively influencing SFTs' solitude experience. While past studies document several types of negative T2T interactions, Adam et al. (2020) classify those broadly into four categories as: interpersonal-directed, interpersonal non-directed, site-directed, and intrapersonal negative interactions. The intrusions caused by other travellers (which will be discussed in detail below) mainly add to the dimension of interpersonal-directed negative interactions by emphasising certain distinct types of negative behaviours that take place in the context of solo female travelling. Further, apart from the

negative T2T interactions, this study also found certain negative interactions with service persons and locals that were unfavourable towards women's solitude experience.

As a result of the various interactions women had with locals, other travellers, and service persons, women came across various intrusive episodes. These include: unwanted self-disclosure, physical space intrusion, intrusive conversations, over-service behaviours, unsolicited help, and disrespectful behaviours including inappropriate talk and harassment. The following subsections will discuss each of these intrusive behaviours in relation to the literature.

9.4.1 Unwanted self-disclosure: Private matters

Women who were travelling alone had concerns over disclosing their self to others. Women often encountered others questioning their personal matters which they deemed as unnecessary and considered an infringement upon them. Self-disclosure is "revealing to another person how you perceive and are reacting to the present situation and giving any information about yourself and your past that is relevant to an understanding of your perceptions and reactions to the present" (Stewart, 2011, p. 211). In certain encounters women had with service persons, locals, and other travellers, women were asked questions on their status of aloneness as a traveller. As a part of such questions, others expressed their opinions about women travelling alone and some of them also wanted to know if the women were married or not. During initial transactions, a person may feel vulnerable as self-disclosure often involves risk and sensitive information (Laurenceau et al., 1998). Women felt insecure and were not willing to share their personal matters with strangers and with service persons (such as taxi drivers, waiters, and room cleaning staff) for no reason. Emotional fear, perceived physical danger, and other potential damages may result in feelings of vulnerability during self-disclosure (Moon, 2000). Questioning the solo status of solo women diners outlines a particular interactional order in sharing public space and may also create a sense of surprise and disappointment (Lahad & May, 2017).

Despite the risk and vulnerability involved in self-disclosure, previous studies found that disclosing of the self is related with positive consequences including feelings of connectedness (online platforms) (Huang, 2016; Utz, 2015). Lin et al. (2019) found that self-disclosure among tourists increases engagement by strengthening perceived cohesion and intimacy. However, Lin et al.'s study was experimental and investigated a group travel scenario. The findings of the present study highlight how self-disclosure may negatively influence a traveller in a real travel setting and with a distinctive traveller profile (i.e., being a SFT). Another stream of research posited that self-disclosure of employees/service personnel is a significant contributor in increasing consumer trust, reducing perceived risk, and motivating future reciprocal behaviours (Andersson et al., 2016; Utz, 2015; Zeng et al., 2021). However, for this study, women who were travelling solo found that too much self-disclosure or having to reveal information about their traveller status was intrusive. Further, women also found it intrusive when employees tried to reveal too much personal information. SFTs considered such deep conversations as unnecessary in transient relationships they encountered with others. Xu et al. (2021) also found that too much information diminishes and creates a negative impact on customers' buying behaviour. Accordingly, the relationship between the self-disclosure of service providers and its impact on customer relationships is complex and may not be positive under all circumstances (Tran et al., 2022). In line with Tran et al. (2022), this study found that solo female travelling is a context in which self-disclosure may not work as expected due to the distinctive profile of the customer. Hence, the level of disclosure and types of information shared should be carefully decided to ensure that the travellers are not put off from the experience they sought (solitude, as in this study).

Existing studies on self-disclosure are focused on two main approaches: consumers' self-disclosure and service providers' self-disclosure (Tran et al., 2022). The former approach is mainly focused on consumers disclosing themselves to service providers. However, this study

also found that customers may also have to disclose themselves to other customers in the realm of solo female travelling due to the encounters they came across with locals and other travellers. Even though it was not directly in the service or consumption experience itself, such interactions took place within the consumption experience (for example, meetups with other travellers on a boat trip), which in turn might influence the overall experience of the focal customer. Hence, the findings provide important insights into customer-to-customer interactions by revealing questions about self and having to disclose personal matters to other customers as an intrusion in the solo travel experience of women.

9.4.2 Physical space intrusion

SFTs experienced physical space intrusions during their solo trips which disturbed them, being on their own and enjoying solitude. Interestingly, physical space intrusion most of the time stemmed from service persons. Personalisation of one's living space is deemed to be an important aspect of living alone and experiencing positive solitude (Galčanová & Vacková, 2016). Women reported how room service staff entered their hotel rooms without permission to provide room cleaning services. SFTs considered such interventions as intrusive upon their solitude experience. SFTs recalled their experiences of room service staff entering their rooms during the times they were in the rooms and hotels using their master key to enter the rooms at times in which the SFTs were not present. Female tourists considered hotel staff entering their rooms as invading their privacy and property and hence, disliked such interferences (Wong Chak Keung, 2000). Women believed in temporary ownership of the spaces (for example, hotel rooms, Airbnb) once they paid for it. Hence, the property owner (for example, the Airbnb host) or the service staff (for example, the cleaning staff of a hotel) trying to enter their rooms created an intrusion pressure and distracted women from their solitude experience. Humans usually construct, communicate, maintain, and restore their sense of ownership toward an object or space (Brown et al., 2005). Wang and Li (2020) studying host-guest interactions in Airbnb

accommodations, found hosts entering guests' rooms to check up on guests, as an intrusion during their stay in the accommodation.

Women found being on their own in a space for themselves as important in experiencing solitude. Accordingly, service persons entering women's spaces resulted in intrusion and feelings of discomfort. Space intrusions may result in negative consumption consequences and could be perceived as a threat and cause discomfort (Saenger et al., 2020; Thomas et al., 2017). Some women had to encounter certain intrusive incidents in hotels, where room service staff stood in front of them while they were sleeping. Women considered such practices as extremely intrusive regardless of whether the service persons entered their rooms to provide room service. Otterbring et al. (2021), studying the proximity of salespersons and customers, found that customers' behaviour (store loyalty, purchase intentions, and actual spending behaviour) was negatively impacted when a salesperson was standing too close to the customer.

9.4.3 Intrusions on me-time: Stranger approaches and intrusive conversations

SFTs encountered intrusive and forced conversations during the interactions they had with locals and other travellers. Women perceived others trying to strike up conversations when they were not ready to talk and were enjoying their time in solitude as intrusive towards their solitude experience. This was more prominent when women were alone among others and had decided not to interact with others. Further, when fellow travellers did not understand or value another traveller's preference to be alone, conversations resulted in intrusion pressure and disturbed women's solitude experience. Across five related studies, Epley and Schroeder (2014) found that in public settings (as in public transportation), people prefer solitude over conversations regardless of the enjoyment and positive emotions that would have resulted from conversations. Women found being compelled to talk with someone as a distraction from experiencing solitude as they were mentally not prepared for conversations during certain times. Further, feeling obliged to talk or someone approaching to talk made it difficult for women to

meaningfully separate themselves from others to fulfil and experience their solitude needs. This resonates with Guthrie and Anderson (2007), who have suggested that tourists who are targeted by other tourists in unwelcome conversations find it difficult to appreciate the value of a trip even though the tour package and other service offers were well planned and delivered.

9.4.4 Intrusions on me-time: Over-service behaviours

Women reported several instances in which certain service persons' behaviours created intrusion pressure and the interactions were deemed unnecessary. Service persons' lack of understanding of the solitude needs of the SFTs was the prime reason for some of the intrusive service offerings. Certain standardised service offerings such as interventions of tour guides, service explanations, and offerings (tour packages and selling tickets) were deemed intrusive as they were not expected by the SFTs. These findings reflect the relative underperformance of the tourism industry in customising offerings for clients (Hao & Har, 2014; Sundbo, 2002). Further, it also emphasises the importance of drawing a clear distinction between alone and lonely customers when serving solo customers (Goodwin & Lockshin, 1992).

In certain encounters, service providers (for example, small restaurant owners, front-line employees in hotel lounges, and room service attendants) tried to be overzealous and highly attentive in providing services to SFTs. However, SFTs perceived such encounters as intrusive and demonstrated a unique and distinctive need for understanding solitude they sought in solo travels. Some women commented on service persons' conversations regarding their personal interests (familiarity with the SFT's country, service person's cultural backgrounds, and political opinions), which SFTs considered to be intrusive. Engaging in small talk and acting overly familiar with the customer are considered to be features of over-service behaviour (Sun et al., 2022). Findings reveal how SFTs are more susceptible to experiencing over-service behaviours of service persons depending on their travel and consumption context (i.e., solo).

In the context of solo female travelling, certain services in establishments are similar to the concept of commercial friendships (for example, showing familiarity and deep conversations), in the hope of resulting in customer delight. Commercial friendships are considered an important marketing relationship enabling customers and service persons to open up with each other about themselves leading to a deeper and more effective relationship imbued with a more communal orientation (Price & Arnould, 1999). Women shared their experiences of service persons (for example, waiters, taxi drivers, hostel owners, etc.) trying to build up connections with them, for example, engaging in deep conversations and pretending familiarity. Customer-employee relationships include customer feelings of rapport, comfort, friendliness, trust, and familiarity with employees (Gremler et al., 2001; Kim & Ok, 2010).

Liu (2019) identifies three attributes relating to high service attentiveness. They are: (1) frequent contact – the frequency at which service providers contacted or interacted with consumers during a service experience; (2) intensive warmth – the overtly enthusiastic behaviours toward customers; (3) unsolicited information and care – the service providers care and offering of information that consumers felt as unnecessary. Out of these high service attentive attributes, SFTs mainly encountered intensive warmth and unsolicited information and care in solo travel and consumption contexts. Over-attentive services are practices that are deemed unusual and go well beyond the service protocols (Ku et al., 2013). In the context of solo female travelling, overly attentive services were deemed intrusive as they did not allow the SFTs to enjoy their alone time as intended in the settings they came across. Women who encountered overly attentive services felt intruded on and dissatisfied since their solitude needs were not properly understood by the service providers. Over-service behaviour may result in nervousness, feelings of being overwhelmed, and disruption in consumers (Price et al., 1995). In the context of food service, customers feel annoyed as over-attentiveness disrupts the relaxation and enjoyment of dining out (Cliff, 2014).

Certain over-service behaviours that SFTs came across (such as the offering of amenities and detailed explanations) may perhaps be offered to pamper the customer. These offers are identified as ‘social support’, which is the “verbal and non-verbal communication that is transmitted from an employee to a client, which facilitates the exchange by increasing a client’s comfort” (Rosenbaum, 2006, p. 69). However, SFTs did not expect such support and therefore, considered it an intrusion. People respond negatively to socially supportive offers when they do not feel a need for additional social support (Rosenbaum, 2009). In line with this, SFTs perceived unwanted help and persuasion (in the form of in-depth explanations of service facilities) from service personnel as intrusive and preventing them from enjoying their solitary time. SFTs value their own time in solitude and expect the service persons to correctly understand their need for solitude while travelling solo.

SFTs considered over-service behaviours and high service attentiveness as intrusive towards their solitude experience and such behaviours resulted in dissatisfaction leading to the creation of an overall negative solo travel experience. Highly attentive service in various consumption settings such as telecommunication, hair salons, and computer services lowers consumer satisfaction since customers were suspicious of the service providers’ intentions (Liu, 2019). SFTs had concerns over the underlying reasons for service persons’ overly attentive behaviours as they were travelling alone and had to take care of themselves on their own. Individuals with higher suspicion tendencies may feel higher dissatisfaction (Ku et al., 2013).

9.4.5 Intrusions on me-time: Unsolicited help

Women perceived unsolicited help as an intrusion towards their solitude experience. Unsolicited help mainly stemmed from the encounters women had with other travellers. Women were conscious of situations when other travellers offered or were trying to help them when they were not in need or had not asked for help. Whether or not a customer asks for help when receiving assistance from others during service interactions may have an impact on the

recipient's reactions (Kim & Yi, 2016). Unsolicited help demonstrates an important behavioural aspect of fellow customers that influences the experience of another customer. In a retail context, unsolicited help from other customers resulted in increased customer satisfaction and the receiver perceived such help positively (Kim & Yi, 2018). Similarly, Kim (2017) found that inter-customer helping aids in enhanced customer satisfaction by relieving disappointment in the event of a service failure. In contrast to these findings, the current study found help from other travellers may become intrusive when such help was unsolicited. It is expected that providing help would lead to positive outcomes for the recipient (Kim & Yi, 2017). However, women found certain unsolicited help received from others as disempowering them and underestimated their ability to navigate the tourism space on their own. This may be due to the idea that women are more likely to attribute help from others to others' perception of their poor performance or lack of ability (Daubman & Lehman, 1993).

9.4.6 Disrespectful behaviours: Inappropriate talk and harassment

SFTs found certain interactions with service persons, locals, and other travellers disrespectful. Women reported how certain disrespectful behaviours of service persons were unprofessional and intruded on SFTs' solitude needs. These disrespectful behaviours were manifested in the form of conversations with ulterior motives, discourteous comments about the SFTs, unusual physical touching, and privacy invasion (mainly with room service staff). Women perceived such behaviours as disrespectful since they were not appropriate, and women should have the freedom to navigate the tourism space on their own safely, meeting their solitude needs. When a person feels deprived of something they are entitled to, they may feel disrespected (Miller, 2001). While disrespect has received little attention in the marketing literature, amongst very few studies that have investigated disrespectful behaviours, Kumar (2009) found six types of disrespectful behavioural categories including: general rudeness, negative expressions, unwillingness to help, actions of superiority, perceptions of inequality,

and uncaring behaviour. In another study by Evans and Gore (2016), people with intellectual disabilities found that staff being too controlling, too busy, not providing enough support, and talking rudely as disrespectful in service encounters. In the context of solo female travelling, the findings reveal certain unique kinds of service persons' behaviours that SFTs perceive as disrespectful (for example, inappropriate conversations and comments made). Accordingly, it is evident the context and consumer profile play a significant role in determining the perceived disrespect of the service persons' behaviour.

Disrespectful behaviours at the service encounters instigate feelings of dissatisfaction in SFTs. Women commented on how they decided to change their consumption and travel decisions (for example, stop using tour guides) as a result of the disrespectful behaviours they had to experience in their solo travels (for example, tour guides making inappropriate comments). Feelings of disloyalty are heightened when a person is disrespected by another party with whom they have an interrelationship, for instance, a service provider (Miller, 2001). In general psychology, the impact of disrespect is classified into three areas including, internalising effects on the disrespected party, consequent feelings and emotions, and consequent behaviours (Kumar, 2009). SFTs who felt disrespected showed certain consequent feelings and actions in the form of feeling dissatisfied about the solo trip (or the service establishment/provider) and taking certain actions against the disrespected party (for example, switching providers – stop using taxis and start using the public transport, dining-in). Customers tend to decrease their levels of commitment and loyalty as a result of the disrespect (Miller, 2001). Some women commented on their feelings of betrayal and sense of distrust resulting from service providers' ulterior motives. Disrespect is often associated with emotions such as annoyance, frustration, and resentment (FitzPatrick et al., 2004; Ward & Ostrom, 2006). Customers may decide to discontinue the relationship with the service providers in the event of severe disrespect (Myers, 1997).

Apart from the disrespectful behaviours of service persons, SFTs also encountered certain disrespectful behaviours resulting from interacting with locals and other travellers. Disrespectful behaviours of other travellers in the form of inappropriate talk and physical harassment are in line with previous studies that widely report risks encountered by women when travelling alone. For instance, sexual harassment is commonly voiced by SFTs in their travel discourse (Su & Wu, 2020; Thomas & Mura, 2019; Yang et al., 2018a). While physical harassment was not so prominent in the current study, women often encountered disrespectful comments and inappropriate talk that were initiated by locals and other travellers in certain encounters. These intrusions could be broadly identified as ‘stranger harassment’, which is defined by Bowman (1993) as “both verbal and nonverbal behaviour, such as wolf-whistles, leers, winks, grabs, pinches, catcalls, and stranger remarks; the remarks are frequently sexual in nature and comment evaluatively on a woman’s physical appearance or on her presence in public” (p. 523). Schwab (2019), studying constraint negotiation of SFTs, found persistent flirting, talking too much, catcalling, whistling, and hitting on a woman as behaviours that highlight unwanted male attention in solo female travelling. In another study by Yang et al. (2018b), women perceived gendered risk and it was reinforced by their experiences, including catcalling, uncomfortable gaze, and stalking. Even though these experiences were not directly embedded in the consumption experience of SFTs, it may create an indirect influence on their overall travel experience since such intrusions were disturbing them in experiencing solitude which was a distinct travel need.

9.5 Responding to intrusions of locals and other travellers

Due to the various intrusions that women had to experience, women were compelled to take meaningful actions to overcome such intrusions and fulfil their need for solitude in the solo travel discourse. Therefore, women had to reconcile the tension between aloneness and the presence of others to ensure their state of aloneness within their solo travel. Relating to

consumer territorial behaviours, customers expect to regain control or relinquish control by responding to territory intrusions (Kirk et al., 2018). Similarly, in this study, SFTs who perceived intrusions towards their solitude experience responded in return using various strategies. However, the strategies used in managing intrusions from different parties were quite different from each other. In managing intrusions from locals and other travellers, women mainly had to rely on themselves as they were unable to seek redress formally from third parties. Accordingly, women mainly used avoidance, clear and direct communication, and white lies, as these techniques enabled women to overcome the intrusions quickly and be in their own space enjoying solitude.

9.5.1 Avoidance

The current study emphasised avoiding intrusive people as a strategy that SFTs use when it comes to realising solitude as a travel need. Avoidance helped women to simply ignore and move away from intrusive experiences without having to deal with them. Previous studies have found women using avoidance as a strategy to overcome the risks they encountered in solo travelling. For instance, SFTs avoided remote areas, evening activities (Wilson & Little, 2008), and entertainment venues as a risk mitigation strategy (Yang et al., 2018a). Further, women avoided travelling to rural areas and less developed countries for safety concerns (Wantono & McKercher, 2019). Women felt self-responsible for avoiding danger in their solo travel pursuits (Osman et al., 2020). Similarly, women in this study felt responsible for their solitude experience and therefore, decided to avoid intrusions. Findings emphasised ignoring the intruders and intrusive incidents also as a part of avoidance. SFTs used ignoring as a negotiation strategy when overcoming the constraints they encounter when travelling alone (Ngwira et al., 2020). Women perceived avoidance as a safe strategy to use as they believed avoiding an intrusion would stop something from becoming more intrusive and harmful towards them.

9.5.2 *Clear and direct communication*

Women in the current study were clear and direct in their communication to overcome intrusive encounters caused by locals and other travellers. In certain situations, women believed being firm was important to reject unwanted interactions. Despite the various risk negotiation strategies reported in past studies, the instances in which women were firm and straightforward in the event of any unwanted incidents were relatively rare. However, Schwab (2019) found that SFTs used firm rejection when they encountered unwanted male attention during their solo trips. Consequently, women stated ‘no’ in a firm voice and kept walking without making eye contact (Schwab, 2019). In several instances, women directly refused invitations of other travellers to join group trips, as they wanted to stay on their own in experiencing solitude. Solo female travelling blogs mention that allowing permission to say ‘no’ to things that make women uncomfortable and turning down others' invitations is a useful tip in solo female travelling (Mulhern, 2023; O'Donnell, 2023).

9.5.3 *White lies*

Lying is another strategy used by women in the event of intrusions from locals and other travellers. Women believed lying when answering the intruders helped to keep the intruders away from approaching them. Most of the time, women were lying about their solo travel status (for example, mentioning travelling with a partner, friend, or family). By doing so, women were able to indicate their unavailability and lack of interest in interactions. This is in line with (Schwab, 2019), who found that SFTs lied about more personal information such as having an STD, Ebola virus, or that they were transgendered when they encountered unwanted approaches by men. Lying about solo traveller status is widely reported in past studies as a strategy used by women in overcoming the challenges they face in the solo travel discourse (Ruoho, 2023). Further, lying to strangers is also recommended in online articles written about women travelling alone (see for example, KKday, 2016; Perkins, 2022). This strategy also falls in line

with intentional deception as reported by Griffiths and Gilly (2012a) in studying territorial responses. Accordingly, customers intentionally lied to other customers who were trying to sit next to them in café settings (Griffiths & Gilly, 2012a).

9.6 Responding to intrusions of service persons

Consumers may display reactionary behaviours or passive behaviours in safeguarding their boundaries from perceived intrusions (Ashley et al., 2020). In the context of solo female travelling, women chose to respond to the perceived service intrusions as they did with the intrusions from locals and other travellers. However, in the event of service intrusions women primarily engaged in seeking formal assistance from service management in the form of complaining. In doing so, this revealed women's complaining behaviour in the realm of solo travelling. Customer responses to service intrusions are discussed in studies relating to consumer territorial behaviours. Customers used retaliation, accession, abandonment, and negative word of mouth in responding towards intrusive behaviours of front-line employees (Ashley & Noble, 2014). Similarly, Ashley et al. (2020) found customers using deferential verbalisation as a response towards intrusive behaviours of employees during the closing time of a shop. Accordingly, customers engaged in shopping while acknowledging the closing time had arrived. In the Airbnb context, guests found certain behaviours of hosts as intrusive and used adaptation, assertive defense, appeal, and avoidance as responsive strategies. However, while complaining could be a possible response mechanism (Tang et al., 2022) none of these studies has investigated or found complaining as a response strategy in service intrusions. On the other hand, even though complaining has been widely studied in the consumer behaviour literature in various industries, the majority of the studies are focused upon service or product failures in general, leading to dissatisfaction (See for example, Casado-Diaz & Nicolau-Gonzalbez, 2009; Hart & Coates, 2010; Kaur & Sharma, 2015). However, the service intrusions reported in this study are quite subtle and remain under-researched in the current body of

knowledge. Therefore, complaining about such intrusive service encounters (for example, inappropriate comments made by a tour guide) may be quite different from complaining about a general service failure (for example, tasteless food). Recent studies have focused on the complaining behaviour of consumers in the event of an embarrassing service failure and found that consumers are more likely to complain about an embarrassing service failure (Wan, 2013). Even though this study has considered the culture of the consumer, a distinctive profile or status of a consumer (for example, being a solo female) might influence the way a consumer would react to a service intrusion which is likely to be embarrassing. Hence, the current study identifies complaining as a distinctive type of response strategy in the event of service intrusions encountered by SFTs. Three types of behaviours were identified pertaining to SFTs' complaining behaviour. They are direct complaining, suppression of complaining, and indirect complaining.

9.6.1 Direct complaining

Complaining directly to the service management enabled women to seek redress at the same time the intrusion took place. Women had to complain due to the intrusive behaviours of service persons (for example, room service staff entering their room without permission), intrusive behaviours of other customers (for example, disturbances from another traveller in a café), and certain other intrusive service experiences (for example, the service person profiling the SFT as solo and treating them poorly). These intrusions made it difficult for women to pursue their solitude goals within the solo travel experience. In the service context, customer complaints emerge when the customer experience is no longer realisable because of the service encounter (Tronvoll, 2007). By complaining directly, women expected the service establishment to acknowledge the error and sort it out at the time itself without any delay. Female customers are more emotionally involved in the complaining process and expect employees to apologise for problems (Gruber et al., 2009). Direct complaining results in several

benefits for both the customer and the organisation. For example, consumer complaining results in increased satisfaction as the aggrieved party has an opportunity to express their frustration (Nyer, 2000). Consumer complaints will enable the firm to speed up service recovery and inform future service offerings (Umashankar et al., 2017). Apart from immediate redress, women also expected the service firms to become aware of and learn fair practices. Female customers are more likely to communicate their dissatisfaction as they are motivated to help the service providers to acknowledge service failures and fix problems (Fan et al., 2018). In doing so, SFTs demonstrated their capabilities and empowerment in raising their voice against unfair service practices.

9.6.2 Suppression of complaints

While some women attempted to directly complain to the service management in the event of an intrusion, most SFTs did not complain and suppressed their complaints. This is in line with the general notion of the current consumer behaviour literature that many customers do not complain even if they are dissatisfied with the product or service (Chebat et al., 2005). Non-complaining is also a type of consumer behaviour since complainants are categorised into different types depending on their style of response. One such type includes consumers who are passive and do not make any complaints against the firm despite their dissatisfaction (Singh, 1990). Most women reported that during intrusive service encounters, they suppressed or decided not to complain regardless of the presence of a formal body (i.e., service management) for them to complain to. Consumer complaining is important for various stakeholders in business markets and temporal aspects (Arora & Chakraborty, 2020). However, individual, situational, relational, structural, and cultural differences in consumer complaining remain under research in the existing body of knowledge (Ringberg et al., 2007). Therefore, non-complaining behaviour and its underlying reasons will expand the current understanding of

consumer complaining behaviour in a distinctive consumption context (i.e., solo female travelling).

The existing literature reports contradictory findings relating to the likelihood of female customers complaining. For example, while some studies claim that female customers are more likely to complain than their male counterparts (Heung & Lam, 2003), some researchers claim that male customers complain more than females (Manickas & Shea, 1997). Fan et al. (2016) found that female consumers were more likely to raise their complaints when they were alone (vs. the presence of other customers). However, their study was experimental and hence, the actual behaviour is likely to change in a real scenario as investigated in the current study. The findings of this study revealed certain reasons for women not to complain highlighting the complexities in complaining behaviour due to individual and situational contexts. These reasons highlight female consumers' non-complaining behaviour in a specific consumption context (i.e., solo travelling). The reasons include distrust, perceived risk, lack of female workers, the uncertainty of the legitimacy of the complaint, negative perception of the country, perceived hassle, empathy, and duration of the stay. These reasons will be analysed later in this chapter relating to the literature.

Consumer non-complaining has been studied across several studies (see for example, Chebat et al., 2005; Kevoe-Feldman, 2018; Kwok, 2019; Nimako & Mensah, 2012). Past studies on consumer non-complaining have focused on various aspects relating to customers' suppression of complaints. A few studies have focused on the antecedents of customer non-complaining. For example, referring to past literature, Kwok (2019) proposed five main categories of reasons underlying non-complaining behaviour. This included: situational factors (for example, cost and benefits, success probability, the extent of the service failure, etc.), individual factors (for example, demographics, personality, and cultural factors), service provider and market factors (for example, reputation, reliability, type of store, and competition),

social factors (for example, the influence of family and friends), and resource factors (for example, complaining skills, availability of time, etc.). While these factors broadly cover a general consumer's non-complaining behaviour, distinctive consumer groups may have certain unique reasons for not complaining in the event of service dissatisfaction.

9.6.2.1 Distrust

Most women were not sure whether complaining in the event of a service intrusion would be worth it or not. Hence, they did not trust that the service establishments would fairly attend to their concerns. Women had concerns over the responsiveness of the service firms regarding their complaints. Therefore, women were not confident about the active response of the firms even if they complained about a service intrusion. Feelings of distrust regarding the service providers' responsiveness towards the complaints made SFTs think complaining was not worthwhile. Therefore, they decided not to complain. While distrust is destructively impacting market relationships (FitzPatrick et al., 2004), this study also emphasises how distrust could lead towards certain passive behaviours of consumers such as non-complaining. Uncertainty over service providers' sensitivity towards SFTs' complaints influenced them to refrain from complaining. Service provider responsiveness is a key non-complainer motivation (Voorhees et al., 2006). Nimako and Mensah (2012), studying consumer motivation for non-complaining towards mobile telecommunication services, found that the perception that nothing will be done about the problem even if a complaint is raised, was the second most ranked reason for non-complaining. Consumers will not complain if they perceive a lack of responsiveness and that complaining will not make any difference (Ro, 2015). SFT's perceived distrust and ambiguity of service providers' responsiveness led them towards not complaining in the event of a service intrusion.

9.6.2.2 Perceived risk

For most women, the risk perceived in complaining was a reason for not complaining. Women in the current study believed being on their own in the unknown tourism space made them vulnerable and trying to complain about a service intrusion would make the situation worse. They firmly believed raising their voice would put them in danger and make them helpless. Even though the perceived risk is widely reported in studies relating to solo female travelling, this study highlights women's risk perception in complaining over intrusive service encounters. Women were cautious about the repercussions of complaining and fearful of reprisals. This seems to be a noteworthy finding of the current study as previous studies have not explicitly identified risk as an underlying reason for non-complaining. Given the complaining behaviour of a consumer may depend upon many factors such as demographics, situational, and personality (Kwok, 2019; Meng et al., 2010), perceived risk implies the complexities and dynamics that exist in consumer non-complaining behaviour in various contexts. Apart from the perceived risk of women's safety after complaining, women also commented on the risk they perceived in terms of the possible negative impact of complaining on self-image. Sometimes, women did not complain as they did not want the service management to know what they had to go through during intrusive service encounters, (for example, inappropriate comments made by a waiter). SFTs were cautious about their dignity as a woman and hence, believed complaining about an intrusion would result in feelings of shame and awkwardness. This is in line with past studies that report the complaining behaviour of consumers is not simply a function of dissatisfaction, but may also be influenced by feelings of embarrassment and shame (Kucuk, 2020; Shacola, 2020; Suki, 2011; Wright & Larsen, 2023).

9.6.2.3 Uncertainty of the legitimacy of the complaint

This study found another unique reason for SFTs' non-complaining behaviour. Women were concerned about what they were complaining about. Since women had to encounter a

diverse range of experiences when navigating the dynamic tourism space, in certain situations, some of the service practices were unfamiliar to them. For example, some women commented on service persons becoming over-friendly as intrusive towards their solitude experience. However, at the same time, they were not sure if it was normal to be that way, in that particular culture. Hence, they did not complain. Past studies have investigated the perception of employees regarding the legitimacy of the complaints made by consumers in providing feedback and compensating the dissatisfied consumer (Khantimirov & Karande, 2018; Wang et al., 2012). For example, employees were concerned if the customer was complaining about a genuine concern that should be addressed. In contrast, the current study found consumers' (i.e., SFTs) concerns over the genuineness of the complaints they raise. While Reynolds and Harris (2005) state that consumers engaged in inauthentic complaining to impress and gain the approval of observing other customers, the current study found that SFTs prevented from raising potentially illegitimate complaints due to their uncertainty about the objectivity behind the reason to complain due to the diversity experienced in solo travelling. Therefore, the context in which the complaining takes place might bring in certain distinctive motives that explain consumer non-complaining.

9.6.2.4 Duration of the stay

Women who were staying in accommodation or a hotel for a short duration decided not to complain as they did not want to ruin their vacation for a short time of stay. Further, they believed that they should not be solely responsible for 'rectifying things'. Women considered time as an important aspect of their solo travel pursuit and hence decided not to spend it on complaining. This resonates with the findings of Voorhees et al. (2006) where customers did not complain when they were in a hurry and did not want to spend time on complaining. Time is a resource factor of consumers and a shortage of it led customers not to involve in complaining (Kwok, 2019). Since most of the time, SFTs were spending less time in service

encounters, they did not want to be involved in complaining as it was deemed to create extra difficulties for women.

9.6.2.5 Perceived hassle

Women perceived complaining as an extra hassle for them to go through in their solo travel pursuits. Accordingly, complaining caused additional stress for women. Women commented on the complexities of complaining when it comes to hospitality services due to the different intermediaries involved and the lack of accountability of the different service providers involved. Further, language incompatibilities also made the complaining a hassle for the SFTs. Women commented on the value of time during a solo vacation. Hence, they did not want to compromise their leisure time to engage in complaining which they perceived as a costly process which is greater than the possible benefits. Due to the time and effort involved in complaining, customers perceived it as a hassle and hence, avoided complaining (Ro, 2015). Some studies have found that the time and cost involved in complaining is the most prominent reason for consumers not to complain (Voorhees et al., 2006).

9.6.2.6 Empathy

The trait of being considerate towards others is a personality-specific motive behind consumer non-complaining behaviour (Iram et al., 2023). Women suppressed their complaints over intrusive services due to the empathetic feelings they had towards the employees and the business. Women did not want to be the cause of someone's job loss or jeopardise someone else's business. Compassionate feelings about a service firm or an employee might prevent a consumer from complaining about an organisation. For example, consumers who had compassionate feelings towards the firm (for example, feeling bad about complaining about the service provider), decided not to complain in the event of a restaurant service failure (Ro, 2015). Consumers may not complain as they may feel sorry for the employee in certain situations (Shacola, 2020; Voorhees et al., 2006).

9.6.2.7 Lack of female workers

SFTs found that most of the staff in service establishments were males. Therefore, women were reluctant to raise their concerns about service intrusions (mainly caused by another male) to a male worker. They believed that their situation would be better understood by a female worker rather than a male service person. SFTs' concerns over the complaint listener emphasise that it is not only the personal factors of the complainant that influence the complaining behaviour, but the characteristics of the complaint handler who also influence one's complaining decision. This could be discussed under the service provider factors as identified by Kwok (2019), who identified reputation, reliability, responsiveness, and accountability of the service provider as influences on the complaining decisions of consumers. Accordingly, the availability of female workers in handling complaints raised by female customers is deemed to be important in distinctive consumer segments such as SFTs. Even though past studies have not explicitly focused on the complaint listener's gender and its influence on complaining, Joe and Choi (2019), in studying the gender of fellow customers, found that female consumers were comfortable raising complaints when they were with another female consumer.

9.6.2.8 Negative perception of the country

Women's perception of the country they were travelling within, was another factor influencing them not to engage in complaining. If women held an overall negative perception of a country, their views about the service firms also became stereotyped and they decided to keep silent. Where SFTs had concerns over how a country would operate in general, its legislative systems, or they believed the country did not generally respect women, they would also likely believe service firms may not be responsive towards complaints against unwanted service intrusions. The overall image of the country seems a salient factor that explains the complaining behaviour of consumers in the tourism and hospitality industry. The influence of

country image has been investigated relating to traveller behaviour including satisfaction, loyalty, and travel intention (Chaulagain et al., 2019; Wang, 2021; Zhang et al., 2020). However, this has not been previously recognised as a reason for the non-complaining behaviour of travellers and consumers in general.

9.6.3 Indirect complaining: Complaining to third parties, social media reviews, and negative word of mouth

This study revealed that when women could not directly raise their concerns with service intrusions towards service management, they tried to find alternative ways to express their experience. Therefore, in the event of a service intrusion, women engaged in indirect complaining which mainly involved complaining to third parties, posting social media reviews, and spreading negative word of mouth. When the services were booked via an agent or a third-party intermediary, women decided to complain to those parties in the event of service intrusions. By doing so, they expected the agents to be cautious when recommending such service providers to other customers in the future. Seeking external agency help is a form of voicing complaints used by hotel customers (Yuksel et al., 2006). Rather than seeking redress, women intended to make others aware of the intrusive encounters they experienced with certain service providers. Third-party complaining may not involve an intentional motive to jeopardise a business but may be used to overcome customers' frustration by voicing dissatisfaction (Cortina & Magley, 2003). In certain other situations, women were not aware of who was directly responsible. Hence, they decided to complain to the agent without contacting the hotel (for example, an intrusive incident caused by a taxi driver of a car hired through the hotel). When customers were unaware of who caused the service failure, they were more likely to blame intermediaries than the suppliers (Lee & Cranage, 2017).

Women used social media as an indirect mode of sharing their experiences of intrusive service encounters when they were unable to directly complain, or the complaint was not

handled properly. This broadly complements the findings of previous studies that customers post negative reviews upon service failures and poor service recovery (Davidow, 2003). Social media served as a platform for them to share as well as to feel relieved in certain unpleasant service encounters. Previous studies found that SFTs gain psychological support via engaging in online travel communities to reduce their travel anxiety and perceived risk (Karagöz et al., 2020). Online communities help provide and receive emotional support and facilitate information exchange among community members (Chu, 2009; Wang et al., 2002). Women were able to overcome feelings of dissatisfaction due to intrusive services, by getting to know that other women also have faced similar incidents. Online communities convey empathy towards other members by expressing their emotions verbally or non-verbally (Wang et al., 2002).

Negative word of mouth was another alternative approach that women used when they were unable to complain about an intrusive service experience. This tendency resonates with Lau and Ng (2001), who found a positive association between feeling worthless and unable to complain and spreading negative word of mouth. Non-complainers are likely to engage in negative word of mouth (Voorhees et al., 2006). A dissatisfied customer may opt to take no action, complain directly to the service provider, or spread malicious word of mouth about the service provider (Istanbulluoglu et al., 2017). Hence, apart from sharing their views online, women also engaged in talking about their experiences in person with their families and friends. In doing so, they influenced the travel decision-making of their known others by not recommending the services or providers who were intrusive during the SFT's travel pursuit.

9.7 Chapter summary

In summary, this chapter discussed the main findings of the current study in light of the existing literature on solitude and social presence in consumption settings. The discussion of findings relating to the solitude experience advances the current understanding of solitude as a

travel need. Further, the discussion also emphasises the multidimensionality of solitude in the solo travel context and how SFTs experience aloneness at different levels depending on various circumstances encountered in their solo travel pursuit. By combining solitude need satisfaction and social presence effects, the discussion highlighted how various social interactions shape women's solitude experience in the context of solo travelling. The overall discussion of the findings accentuates the distinctive travel needs of women who travel alone and how various contextual and situational aspects might influence fulfilling such needs.

CHAPTER TEN –CONCLUSION

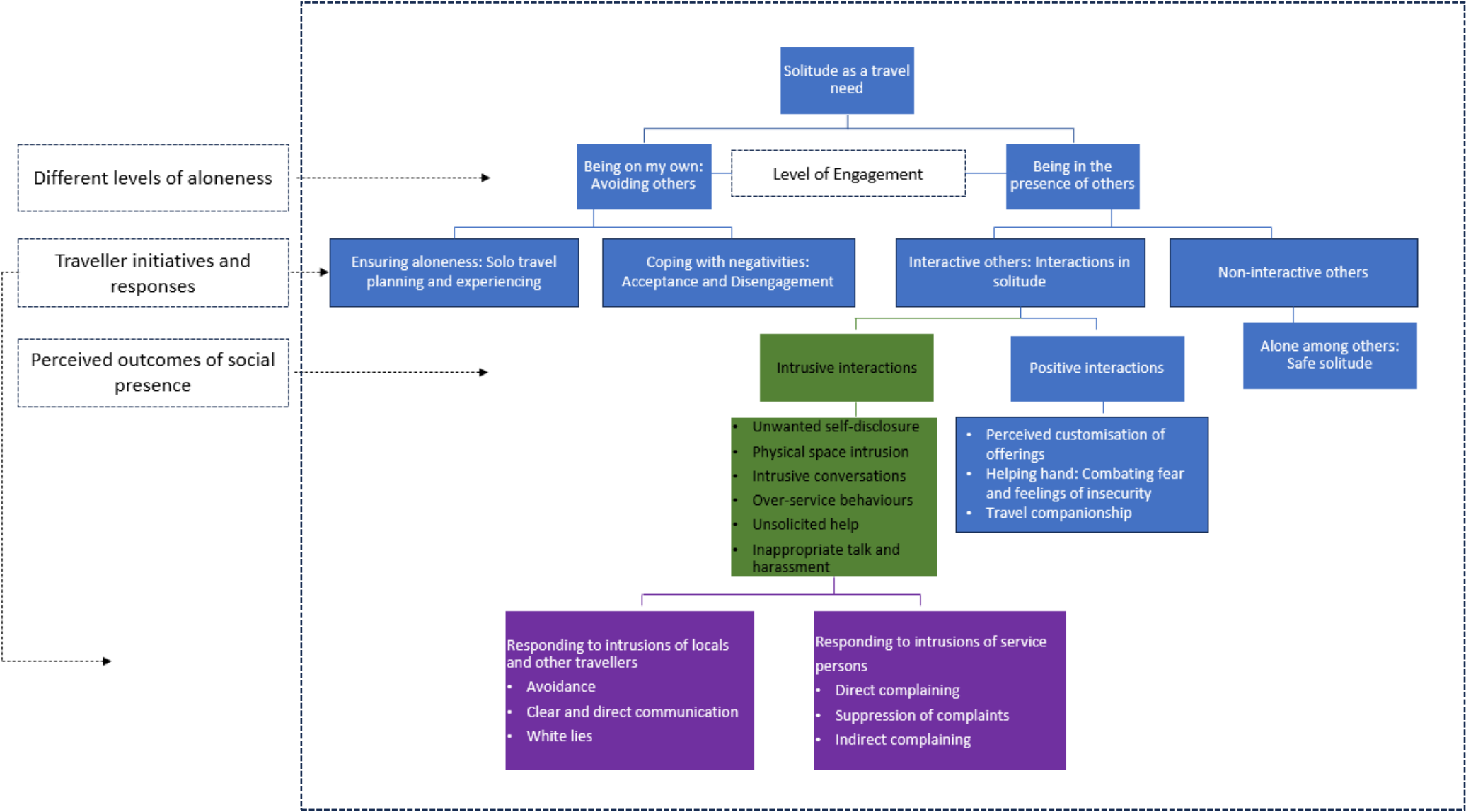
In synthesising the answers for the three research questions, this chapter will first depict the solitude-interaction nexus. Afterwards, the chapter will highlight the theoretical implications relating to solitude as a travel need, social presence, and territorial behaviours of consumers followed by the practical implications relevant to destination management organisations (DMOs). Next, the chapter will acknowledge the limitations of the current study and provide directions for future research. The chapter will then provide the researcher's personal reflection on carrying out this study and the PhD journey. The chapter will conclude by providing an overall summary and a conclusion of the entire study.

10.1 Solitude-interaction nexus

Figure 10.1 depicts the solitude-interaction nexus to understand women's solitude experience in solo travelling. Accordingly, it shows the solitude experience of SFTs is intricately linked to the level of engagement. This results in two main levels of aloneness experiences. At one level, women preferred being on their own, actively avoiding the presence of and interactions with others. In doing so, women were in charge of their aloneness status through solo travel planning and coping with negativities in complete seclusion. On another level, women experienced aloneness in the presence of others. Thus, women found the mere presence of non-interactive others as facilitating a sense of being alone among others, creating a feeling of safe solitude. The presence of interactive others emphasised varied interactions within SFTs' solitude experience, signifying positive interactions that enriched the overall solitude experience. Conversely, intrusive interactions negatively influenced SFTs' solitude experience compromising the intended benefits of solitude.

Figure 10.1

Solitude -Interaction Nexus



10.2 Contributions of the study

The findings that emerged from the current study have contributed to both the literature and practice in several ways. Each aspect will be presented below.

10.2.1 Theoretical implications

10.2.1.1 Solitude as a travel need of solo female travellers

The findings contribute to a better comprehension of the solitude experience in solo travelling. It also helps understand how SFTs experience solitude as a travel need and what effects these solitude experiences have on SFT behaviour. Solo travelling as a means of experiencing solitude enables women to explore various dynamics in the solitude experience. In doing so, this study expands the current understanding of the solitude experience which to-date, was rather limited to certain settings (or extreme settings, such as the wilderness) making it difficult to fully comprehend one's solitude experience. This study has shown that women were able to experience solitude at different levels due to the contextual and situational circumstances of their solo travels, demonstrating the dynamic and multidimensional nature of solitude. In doing so, this study shifts the current knowledge of solitude as a mere singular psychological construct towards a distinctive traveller need by highlighting the interplay among multiple contexts, settings, and people involved in experiencing solitude in a solo travel setting. In other words, solitude is no longer someone alone in the wilderness, but instead can be a person alone among others, or even a person choosing to interact, albeit minimally, among others, purely to enhance their solitude experience. The findings enable us to understand how solitude experiences are shaped by the travel context as well as the presence of others. Accordingly, this study will enhance the current understanding of SFTs, and their solitude needs and experiencing solitude in the presence of others, which is an under-researched area, despite the numerous non-solo episodes encountered in women's solo travel discourse.

The findings of this study extend the understanding of solitude as a distinctive type of travel need. It will contribute to the wider tourism literature by uncovering the dynamics of solitude as a travel need of a different consumer group (i.e., SFTs). The current study identified different levels of aloneness embedded in the solitude experience emphasising that solitude is a multidimensional and subjective experience that depends on its context. Even though solitude has been conceptualised as an experience that takes place both in physical isolation and even in the presence of others (Burger, 1995; Long & Averill, 2003; Nguyen et al., 2018), how individuals really engage in such an experience was not clear. Accordingly, this study uncovered the solitude experience in a solo travelling context through the lived experiences of SFTs. In doing so, for SFTs, different levels of solitude experiences were identified, each with its distinctive characteristics. This broader understanding of different levels of aloneness allows for deeper insights into the solitude experience in different other contexts.

10.2.1.2 Non-intrusive social presence and solitude experience

Different levels of aloneness and their underlying reasons in SFTs' solitude experience provide important insights into the current understanding of solitude as a distinctive travel need. First, women perceived engagement and disengagement with and from others as key determinants of their solitude experience in the context of solo travelling. Hence, this emphasises the subjective nature of the solitude experience. Second, women's solitude experience mainly took place among others which emphasises the notion of 'alone among others.' Consequently, women decided when to interact and when not to interact during their solitude experience. Regardless of conventional settings for solitude discussed in the literature, being alone among others provides a new perspective to identify possible solitude settings and servicescapes apart from the traditional settings (for example, the wilderness). Third, safety was the prime reason for women to be alone among others and refuse complete seclusion as in conventional solitude. This brings in an important insight into the solitude setting features. It

also highlights that apart from the willingness to be alone which is considered a pre-requisite for solitude, certain external factors may also influence one's solitude experience. This will add to the literature by emphasising how the presence of non-interactive others may enhance the sense of safety in the solo travel context as studied in this research. The presence of non-interactive others provided SFTs with non-intrusive companionship offering a feeling of safety without disrupting their solitude experience. This finding expands the current knowledge relating to the role of non-interactive social presence in a distinctive consumption context as focused on in this study.

Finally, being alone among others emphasises how certain transient interactions may enhance the solitude experience in specific contexts. While the existing understanding of solitude as a psychological construct is often associated with physical seclusion or a state of introspection, the present study emphasises solitude as a travel need that may benefit from occasional and transient interactions with others. Thereby this study adds to the knowledge in the areas of the presence of interactive others by highlighting how interactions positively contribute in one's solo travel experience, given the interactions take place within the desired boundary expectations of the consumer. Accordingly, this highlights solitude in certain contexts (as in solo travelling) may entail interaction episodes that do not detract from the solitude experience but may enhance the quality of the overall experience.

10.2.1.3 *Intrusive social presence and solitude experience*

This study attempts to combine social presence and women's solitude need satisfaction during their solo trips. Although previous research on social interactions in tourism highlights its centrality in forming one's tourism experience, the broader focus does not sufficiently capture its influence on one's travel needs and satisfaction which is an integral part of the tourism experience. Therefore, this study will bring important insights towards the current

understanding of social presence effects by focusing on traveller need satisfaction as a specific and important aspect in the context of solo female travelling.

While the context of solo travelling aids in expanding the solitude experience at different dynamics, it also contributes to understanding how certain personalised consumption experiences (like the need for solitude) take place in the presence of others. Therefore, the present study contributes in the area of social presence in consumption situations, while emphasising tourist-to-tourist interactions, tourist-to-service person interactions, and tourist-to-local interactions.

The findings emphasise how SFTs' solitude experiences are intruded upon in the presence of others and due to their unwanted interactions. Therefore, this study adds to the knowledge of how the presence of others may distract a person from realising certain distinctive needs regardless of the focal customer's intentionality and efforts. Previous studies on consumption in the presence of others have mostly considered the mere 'presence' of others in certain hypothetical consumption scenarios that are mainly involved in purchasing products (for example, Dahl et al., 2001; He et al., 2012). However, by looking at a more realistic consumption context, this study identifies apart from the presence of others, the various interactions that take place beyond customer expectations on boundary conditions may influence one's consumption experience compelling them to engage in certain behaviours.

Although social contacts are integral in one's tourism experience, most studies have focused on one aspect of these interactions (i.e., either with other travellers, service persons, or local communities) in one's tourism experience. Further, past studies primarily focus on either positive or negative interactions considering a single type of interaction. The present study attempts to uncover all possible human interactions in the context of solo female travelling and identify both positive (as stated in 9.6.1.2) and negative interaction outcomes. Accordingly, this study will add to knowledge by highlighting the interplay among various actors in the solo

tourism arena and expand the current understanding of complexities in the areas of social presence and interactions in the tourism experience.

10.2.1.4 Territorial behaviours of consumers

Women were seeking meaningful interactions and separation in experiencing solitude. Therefore, when women were unable to meaningfully separate themselves from others or engage in interactions within their comfort levels and boundaries, they perceived it as an intrusion towards their solitude experience. The intrusive behaviours and their resulting responses expand the understanding of consumer territorial behaviours that mainly discuss intrusions of other customers and service persons in consumption in the presence of others (Ashley et al., 2020; Griffiths & Gilly, 2012a). Even though territorial intrusion is discussed in various consumption settings such as groceries and cafes, these studies have not explicitly focused on why an external party's approach becomes intrusive. The findings of the current study suggest that an event may become intrusive when the infringement does not allow the focal customer to satisfy a type of need (solitude as in this study). The intrusions found in the current study emphasise how external parties (i.e., locals, other travellers, and service persons) may interfere with SFTs' aloneness experience by breaking into spaces, including compelling women to disclose themselves unnecessarily, intruding on physical spaces, intrusive conversations, over service behaviours, unsolicited help, and disrespectful behaviours.

Intrusive behaviours of other travellers, locals, and service persons will also extend the knowledge relating to consumer territorial behaviours that are displayed when consuming in the presence of others. The current territorial intrusions of other customers are mainly informed via physical space intrusions (for example, table-sharing requests) in café environments. However, findings reveal that apart from physical space intrusions, other forms of possible intrusions are not necessarily physical space encroachment (for example, intruding conversations, unsolicited help, and making bad or inappropriate comments) may also exist in

various other settings in solo travelling influencing the consumption experience of the focal consumer. Further, the territorial intrusions of service persons will also add insights into consumer territorial behaviours by highlighting how service encounters may become intrusive towards certain distinct and sensitive consumer groups (SFTs as in this study). These findings will shed light on the understanding of possible intrusions that may take place in other vulnerable consumer groups. Further, the intrusive behaviours identified in this study will also bring important insights into customer-to-customer interactions and customer-to-service person interactions by highlighting how certain encounters may become intrusive towards fulfilling consumption goals (i.e., solitude). While several studies have focused on other customers' impact on the behaviour of focal customers (Nicholls, 2020; Sarkar Sengupta & Pillai, 2017; Sreejesh et al., 2018), the intrusive behaviours found in the current study are new to the customer-to-customer interactions literature in the realm of solo female travelling. This also highlights that the perceived intrusiveness of interactions with other customers may depend upon the focal customer's type and profile.

The service intrusions found in the current study seem to provide important theoretical insights into intrusive marketing practices in general and the intrusive behaviours in consumer territorial behaviour literature. The intrusive marketing initiatives mainly evolved around intrusive promotion and using consumer-sensitive information (Horne & Horne, 2002; Madhavan et al., 2019; Schwaig et al., 2013). However, the intrusiveness of certain practices during the service delivery process highlights that intrusions may take place beyond marketing communication and handling sensitive consumer information. The territorial intrusions caused by service persons as reported in consumer territorial behaviour literature are quite limited and have focused on very specific situations (for example, employee intrusive behaviour near closing times) (Ashley et al., 2020; Ashley & Noble, 2014). Therefore, the current study expands the understanding of possible intrusive behaviours of service persons that may

negatively influence consumer goal accomplishment. Further, this study will also add to the current understanding of customer-to-service person interactions by highlighting service intrusions. As mentioned above the intrusive service behaviours reported are mainly evolved around solitude need accomplishment in the solo travel context and therefore, these intrusions denote certain subtleties in service delivery and failure which are out of the limelight in the current services marketing literature.

Finally, the different response strategies of women when responding to intrusions upon solitude were identified. These strategies enhance the current understanding of response strategies identified in consumer territorial behaviour literature. The response strategies of women to intrusive experiences depend upon the intruder. Accordingly, in the event of intrusions caused by locals and other travellers, women mainly used avoidance, clear and direct communication, and white lies. These findings are consistent with the current literature on consumer territorial responses displayed in consumption settings such as cafes and restaurants in the event of intrusions from other customers (Griffiths & Gilly, 2012a). However, women's responses towards service intrusions were new to the consumer responses reported in the current consumer territorial behaviour literature. Therefore, complaining was identified as a novel territorial response of women in the event of service intrusions. Among the three types of complaining behaviours identified (i.e., direct complaining, non-complaining, and indirect complaining), the non-complaining behaviour provides unique insights as to why women had to suppress complaints in the event of a service intrusion. In doing so, it adds to the growing body of literature on non-complaining as an important consumer behaviour that scholars focus on to identify the motives behind non-complaining as it embeds many negative consequences for firms. The unique reasons identified in suppressing complaints imply the multiplicity of reasons behind non-complaining that may exist in various consumption and consumer contexts. These findings also inform the DMOs and destination managers, discussed next.

10.2.2 Practical implications

The findings of the current study will provide important practical implications to destination management organisations (DMOs) and site managers who will be targeting SFTs as an emerging and distinctive traveller group. Some specific DMOs that are benefited may include, accommodation providers (hotels, guesthouses, hostels, Air BnB providers, women-only hotels/accommodation providers), adventure tourism operators, local restaurants, and tour guide service operators. Given the SFTs are an emerging traveller segment and solo female travelling is a growing trend in the travel and tourism industry (Condor Ferries, 2023a; Solo Traveler, 2023), the findings relating to solitude as a distinctive type of travel need will provide a better understanding towards DMOs in better designing their servicescapes. The findings discovered relating to the solitude needs of SFTs emphasise the different dynamics involved in solitude. Therefore, DMOs can utilise these findings to reframe their service offerings catering to different levels of aloneness as reported.

When catering to SFTs and their needs for solitude, DMOs should make a clear distinction between loneliness and aloneness, as failure to do so may lead to discrepancies between what is offered vs what is expected by SFTs. Further, the findings were in agreement with the current understanding of solo travel as multi-dimensional ranging from being solo to being a part of another group (Yang, 2021). Accordingly, women in this study experienced solitude at different aloneness levels in their solo travel pursuits. Therefore, women's solitude experience in the solo travelling discourse was different from the conventional solitude in complete seclusion. This brings important implications towards DMOs in designing the alone consumption servicescape for customers who prefer aloneness at different levels. Based on the findings, SFTs prefer public solitude as they perceive safety as a prime concern for them to experience positive solitude. Therefore, DMOs may ensure a safe environment for SFTs to experience solitude in their solo travel pursuit. For instance, proper surveillance systems,

emergency contacts, and staff training in safety and security procedures could be some aspects that DMOs may consider. DMOs could consider promoting low-occupancy time slots for bookings for SFTs who would prefer their own company over being with others.

Further, women were also able to enhance their solitude experience through the transient interactions they made with locals and other travellers. DMOs may consider how SFTs' experiences could be enhanced by being a facilitator in fostering meaningful interactions among SFTs, other travellers, and locals. For example, planning escorted travels with fellow travellers while allowing alone time could be useful for SFTs who wish to join other groups. Further, DMOs could also look into ways of collaborating with locals in the community, particularly in facilitating SFTs to experience the local culture.

The intrusive experiences women had to encounter in their solo travel discourse bring important implications towards DMOs in managing customer-to-customer interactions and customer-to-service person interactions. Given the SFTs' preference for joining travel groups during their solo trips (Solo Female Traveller, 2022) DMOs should look into ways and means of ensuring SFTs' distinctive needs (such as solitude- and interaction). In doing so, DMOs could implement certain protocols and group travel etiquette (for example, respecting each other in terms of their privacy concerns) to ensure the betterment of all. Next, the findings revealed certain service practices that were deemed intrusive towards women's solitude experience. It is recommended that DMOs implement a code of conduct that effectively communicates the guidelines to service staff in order to reinforce solo female traveller-friendly behaviours. DMOs should provide training to their service staff in terms of catering to different consumers and staff should be made aware of particular traveller groups such as SFTs who may be sensitive and distinctive due to their traveller profile. For example, hotels and accommodations may take extra care in providing room services and ensure that the rooms are not accessed without the consent of the SFTs, being cautious when raising questions relating to

the traveller's status, and respecting SFTs by ensuring their privacy and avoiding unusual approaches. Further, this study also highlights the influence of interactions with locals in women's solo travel experience. Even though DMOs may not be able to directly manage or influence locals and their interactions with SFTs, individual DMOs can work closely together with locals who are into unregulated tourism services (for example, tour guiding and taxi services) and therefore, find ways and means of managing and improving the service provisions to ensure travel satisfaction of SFTs. In doing so, this will enable DMOs in specific destinations that are attractive towards SFTs, to become more aware and sensitive towards the needs of SFTs.

In responding to intrusions caused by other travellers and locals, SFTs were managing such intrusions on their own as they could not find a proper system to seek formal assistance. DMOs may take extra care about the intrusions that take place in customer-to-customer interactions within the service experience. As mentioned above, protocols would be useful to ensure the satisfaction of all consumers, especially when travellers are mingled in certain experiences (for example, in escorted travels, within the hotel premises, etc.).

SFTs' responses towards intrusive service experiences bring important practical implications in the realm of consumer complaining behaviour. SFTs' complaining behaviours took mainly three forms including direct complaining, non-complaining, and in-direct complaining, the latter two mainly resulting due to non-complaining. The underlying reasons for women's non-complaining behaviour are identified as quite detrimental towards organisations due to its post-effects (Chebat et al., 2005). Thus, developing an organisational culture wherein complaints are perceived as opportunities is deemed important. Accordingly, DMOs should develop strategies to enhance SFTs' perceptions of responsiveness to overcome the trust issue they have with raising complaints. For example, DMOs could train their frontline employees to be proactive in encouraging SFTs' complaint behaviour in the event of a service

intrusion. DMOs could consider employing female service staff when catering to SFTs and handling complaints as SFTs perceive it difficult to raise their intrusive experiences to men. In making the complaint procedure hassle-free, DMOs could leverage new technology (for example, a kiosk) to reduce the time and effort required in launching a complaint. Given the non-complaining behaviours of SFTs, and to reflect that gender is integral, DMOs should implement customised female-sensitive complaint handling to facilitate SFTs making complaints when needed, mitigating possible service intrusions, and satisfying their solitude needs.

The indirect complaining reported in the current study found that complaining to third parties, posting on social media, and spreading negative word of mouth were the alternatives that SFTs used when they were unable to raise their complaints directly to the service management. Thus, finding ways and means to encourage SFTs to raise their concerns directly to the service firms is deemed important before it gets publicised in any form. However, given the tendency of SFTs to complain to third parties such as agents or intermediaries, DMOs and agencies could work more collaboratively in communicating any concerns that women had during their encounters with the service firms. Third parties may also delegate a personable service agent to coordinate with the customers who may encounter any issues during the service encounters at firms booked via them. Further, DMOs could employ designated people to monitor their social media presence and address the concerns of SFTs in the event of publicising dissatisfaction caused due to intrusive service encounters.

10.3 Limitations and directions for future research

There are certain limitations of the study that need to be acknowledged and may provide directions for future research. This study highlights how solo travelling serves as a means of fulfilling women's distinctive solitude needs while travelling. Therefore, it shows the importance of the role of context in one's solitude experience. Future studies may adopt

quantitative research strategies to gain further insights into different types of solitude experiences in different contexts (for example, travel destinations vs at home). This will enable reaching generalisable findings given the correct and accurate use of suitable measurements in studying the solitude experience.

This study is focused on solitude as a travel need during women's solo travel discourse. Future studies may focus on related topics including anonymity, intimacy, and reserve to understand how women who travel alone sense privacy as a solo travel need. While the current study's focus is on SFTs, future studies might explore solo male travellers' solitude experience. This will help DMOs to understand the unique attributes of solitude as a travel need of solo female and male travellers together and also separately.

Given the importance of solitude as a travel need, future studies may explore the solitude experience embedded in different types of travellers and tourism (for example, backpackers, volunteer tourism, voluntary simplicity tourism, urban tourism, etc.). Apart from human interactions (as studied in this study), future research may investigate the influence of other external factors (for example, atmospheric features, technology, etc.) that may influence a solo consumer's solitude experience. On a related note, the findings of such studies may bring important insights towards solo consumption and servicescape design in firms that cater to solo customers. Further, moving beyond the travel context, solitude could be studied in other service contexts. For example, retail and fitness/wellness (gyms, yoga, wellness spas). Studying the solitude experience in these settings will enable a deeper understanding of the consumption of solitude.

Given the reticence of research into the solitude experience in the presence of others, this study was focused on the intrusive experiences of SFTs in their solitude encounters. However, from a positive psychological lens, as travel and tourism continue to evolve, there is a growing recognition of the importance of individual well-being and solitude experiences in

shaping travel preferences and experiences. Future research in this area could explore the multifaceted relationship between travel, well-being, and solitude, examining how various aspects of travel, such as destination choice, accommodation type, and activity selection, impact the physical, psychological, and emotional well-being of SFTs and travellers in general.

The current study identifies various intrusions from service persons, other travellers, and locals distracting women from experiencing solitude in their solo travel pursuits. Given the importance of sharing space in travel and tourism, future research can consider how psychological ownership of space may influence and shape one's solitude experience in the presence of others. This will provide valuable insights for tourism marketing practitioners in space design and management.

This study collected data from SFTs from fifteen different nationalities, however, half of the participants were from either Sri Lanka or New Zealand. Thus, cultural differences are not a focus of this study. The findings of the current study focus on the solitude experience of SFTs in general and therefore, insights into whether cultural differences play a role in experiencing solitude, perceiving intrusion, and response strategies were not fully explored. Future studies may examine SFTs from different cultural backgrounds (for example, individualistic vs collectivist) to see whether the solitude experience is the same or different from the current findings of the study.

This study focused on SFTs' solitude experience in their solo travel pursuits. However, when analysing the findings, the destination differences were not taken into consideration. Hence, future research may focus on comparative studies of SFTs' solitude experience in different countries (for example, solo travel in Western countries vs non-Western countries). This will provide more specific insights into DMOs visiting different countries.

The current study identified complaining as a territorial response of SFTs in the event of service intrusions. Given the distinctive nature of SFTs complaining behaviour, future

studies may focus on the complaining behaviour of SFTs as an independent subject of investigation. This will provide insights towards the complaining behaviour of female customers as well as solo customers while addressing the void in scholarly discussion on consumer complaining behaviour. Future studies may incorporate quantitative approaches to measure the relationships between the need for solitude, perceived intrusion, and complaining behaviour. This will help in generalising the results to a wider group than in the current study.

10.4 Personal reflection

As a researcher with a collectivist cultural background, undertaking a PhD thesis on solo female travellers presented a unique journey of reflexivity and self-discovery. The researcher's cultural upbringing, which emphasised community cohesion and collective identity, initially posed a challenge in comprehending the motivations and experiences of solo female travellers, a phenomenon seemingly distant from my own cultural norms. However, this divergence served as a catalyst for curiosity and exploration, prompting me to delve deeper into understanding the drivers and dynamics behind solo female travelling. Moreover, with the progression of the study, I understood that it is not the 'culture' but the fact that 'being a woman' is what matters in travelling solo. Therefore, being a woman enabled me to comprehend the stories of SFTs more empathetically.

In exploring the solitude experience of SFTs for my PhD study, I embarked on an intellectually stimulating journey. Though I may not personally identify myself as a SFT, the process of immersing myself in this research topic allowed me to listen and reflect upon narratives of women who undertook solo travels. The invaluable insights and perspectives transcended my own lived experiences. Women's stories of their independent travel pursuits allowed me to rethink my own capabilities and weaknesses as a woman. Certain stories that participants shared emphasised how strong they are as a woman as they were challenging the cultural norms and beliefs around the notion of woman. These narratives helped me in

numerous ways to face the challenges I encountered during the last two years of my PhD where I was literally a single mother as my husband had to leave the country due to his official commitments. I remembered how I used to spend time alone in parks in Palmerston North, which I had never been to before. Not only that my daughter and I also found ways and means of spending time alone together in a foreign country where no one was close to us.

This study enabled me to talk to women from different countries. Naturally, I am a little anxious when it comes to talking to strangers. However, this experience helped me a lot to overcome my anxieties in initiating conversations. More importantly, the network I was able to build with some of the interesting personalities I met during my study is a lifelong experience.

The numerous challenges I encountered during this journey crafted me as a strong woman who could play multiple roles under various circumstances. Looking back on this research journey, I am grateful for the opportunity to have explored such a fascinating and complex topic, and for the insights and perspectives it has brought into my life. As I continue on my academic and personal journey, I carry with me the lessons learned from this study and the profound impact it has had on my understanding of solitude, travel, and the human experience.

10.5 Chapter summary

This chapter synthesised the overall findings of the current study and presented the solitude-interaction nexus. In doing so, this chapter provided theoretical and practical implications that tourism scholars and DMOs could look into in enhancing the solo travel experience of women. Further, the chapter provided recommendations for future studies acknowledging the limitations embedded in the current study. Finally, the chapter ends with the researcher's reflection highlighting the personal and academic growth achieved in the PhD journey.

10.6 Conclusion

This study explored solitude as a travel need of solo female travellers (SFTs) and how social presence influenced women's solitude experience. In doing so, this study investigated how SFTs perceive solitude as a travel need, the influences on the solitude experience, and the response strategies used by women towards the intrusive experiences in their solo travel discourse. Having explored the lived experiences of SFTs who have travelled internationally alone, the findings revealed the complexities and multidimensionality of solitude in the context of solo female travelling. The findings show that solitude was not a stand-alone experience for women who were navigating the tourism space on their own. The traditional conceptualisation of solitude of absolute physical aloneness was not a usual condition for SFTs. Instead, it was only one level of solitude, while the majority of women had other levels of solitude. Thus, for SFTs, solitude was mainly about being 'alone among others' rather than being in complete seclusion. SFTs' definition of solitude had a subjective meaning that allowed different levels of interactions within their solitude, given the interactions were not obligatory and were transient in nature. These interactions demonstrated the various encounters SFTs came across with other travellers, locals, and service persons, which in turn shaped the solitude and overall solo travel experience. It was found that 'safety' was a key prerequisite for SFTs to experience. Hence, being 'alone among others' and allowing interactions within the solitude experience enabled them to maintain a good balance between aloneness and sociality in their solo travel discourse.

This study attempted to bridge an important gap in the current literature by focusing on SFTs' solitude experience in the social presence of others, which is an important aspect of tourism, given the space is often shared by various actors (other travellers, service persons, and locals). In exploring the interactions that SFTs had with other travellers, locals, and service persons, the study found how certain non-solo episodes became intrusive towards fulfilling

SFTs' solitude travel needs. These intrusive episodes resulted in various forms: (1) Unwanted self-disclosure; (2) Physical space intrusion; (3) Intrusive conversations; (4) Over-service behaviours; (5) Unsolicited help; and (6) Inappropriate talk and harassment. These findings expanded the current literature on consumer territorial intrusions, customer-to-customer interactions, and customer-to-service person interactions.

Further, this study has found various response strategies of SFTs in the event of intrusive experiences. These responses were different from each other and depended upon the intruder. Accordingly, in the event of intrusions caused by other travellers and locals, SFTs mainly used three response strategies: (1) avoidance; (2) clear and direct communication; and (3) white lies. In the event of service intrusions, SFTs used complaining as a strategy, but mainly suppressed complaints and were also involved with indirect complaining. This study found complaining was a novel response strategy in the event of service intrusions and there were also certain unique reasons behind SFTs' non-complaining behaviour in the event of intrusive service experiences. By exploring the solitude experience of SFTs, this study broadly contributes to the current literature around travel needs, social presence effects on consumption, customer-to-customer interactions, and customer-to-service person interactions in the context of solo female travelling.

Finally, this study provides important insights for DMOs targeting SFTs as a growing segment in travel and tourism. This study emphasises the importance of identifying the dynamics and complexities of distinctive travel needs such as the solitude of certain specific traveller segments. The findings inform how tourism offers and service design could be improved to facilitate SFTs to fulfil their solitude needs in their solo travel discourse. Further, research into various aspects of privacy-related travel needs of SFTs will be of particular interest to explore the subtleties in women's solo travel needs and their fulfilment. This in turn

will allow DMOs to make more informed decisions targetting SFTs as a lucrative segment in the future travel and tourism industry.

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APPENDIX A

In-depth Interview Guide

General/overview questions

- Self-Introduction (Age/country of origin/profession)
 - Which countries/places have you visited as a solo female traveller?
 - When did you take your last solo trip?
 - Length of your trip?
- Be specific to ask about the solo travel experiences they had on international tours.

Solitude – Conceptualising

1. When you think of travelling alone, what does ‘alone’ mean to you?
 - In your solo travels, how would you describe your state of being alone? (the solitude experience)
2. Are there times in your travels when you enjoy/do not enjoy being alone? Tell me about those times (solitude episodes).
 - When you are feeling bored/helpless/lonely, how does it affect (or not) enjoying your solo time in travels?
3. What is your desired level of ‘aleness’? (ask for which phase/part of the journey; length of aleness days/time; context; situation)
4. How does ‘being alone’ make you feel? (probe for in general and specific situations - emotions and feelings; happy, surprised, bad, fearful, angry, disgusted, sad, guilt) ask them to further explain their feeling/s. Perhaps also ask as a probe ‘were there any times in your travels when you felt X (specific emotion) while alone? Could you tell me about that?’
5. Are there any specific destinations (countries)/ places (museums) that you would visit in search of being alone (settings for solitude)? (Probe for specific characteristics; women-only hotels/activities/pubs etc., location)
6. What activities would you like to engage in when travelling alone? What activities would you like to do on your own?
7. In which type of setting (characteristics of the setting), would you not feel the desired level of ‘aleness’?
8. Do you think that tourism organisations (hotels/hostels/nature parks/wellness centres/spas etc.) helped you to experience aleness? If yes, how? If not, why?

9. What are your (other) suggestions for tourism organisations to help with ‘alone experiences’ for a solo female tourist?

Ensuring aloneness

1. What (probe for physical and mental territorial behaviours (implicit and explicit) do you do to keep yourself alone in your solo travels? (probe for different behaviours in different settings: e.g., while travelling, in museums, on cruises, recreation parks, hostels, hotels etc.) – to keep others away from distracting your aloneness.
2. Do you think the tourism service personnel (site managers, tour guides, etc.) you met (or came across) in your solo travels, created opportunities for you to be alone? If yes, how? If not, why?

Social Interaction

1. What is your opinion of interacting with strangers while travelling solo? (during which situations/ what factors would you look into when interacting with strangers/what type of other travellers will you be interacting with? /level of preference).
2. Are there any specific places/destinations that you would visit in search of getting connected with/meeting strangers?
3. Can you recall a situation/s where you had a positive experience as a result of interacting with others in your solo travels?
 - Probe for interactions with: Other travellers, service personnel, and general others
 - What was the situation? (look for the reason for interaction: getting information, help, just to have a chat, to overcome boredom, etc)
 - Why did you feel positive?
 - Explain the positive experience in terms of emotions (happy, valued, joyful, relief, cheerful, etc.)
 - Did it shape your solo travel experience? If yes, how so? If not, why not?
 - Did you tell others about this positive experience? If so, in what ways did you relay your experience? (find links to post travel experience – talk about it positively with others, post about the experience on social media platforms, etc.). If not, why not?
4. Did you find the tourism organisations (that you dealt with during your solo travels) helped you to connect with strangers at your desired amount of interaction? If yes, how? If not, what are your suggestions for them to help with this?

Distractions/disturbances upon solitude

1. Can you recall a situation where you were happy being alone, but your state was disturbed upon?

- Probe for disturbing interactions separately: Other travellers, service personnel, and general others
- What was the setting? (while travelling, in cafes, in museums, in cruises, recreation parks, hostels, hotels etc.)
- Who were the people disturbing (other travellers, service personnel, or general others) and explain their disturbing behaviour
- How did you feel? (Probe for emotions- angry, frustrated, annoying, sad, embarrassed)
- How did you respond? (at the time and also find links to post travel experiences – talk about it negatively with others, post about the experience on social media platforms, etc.). Look towards the specific response strategies in various situations that involved various other parties (i.e., other travellers, locals, and service persons)

Concluding Questions

- Why do you choose to travel alone? (prompt for a particular objective or something they aspire to achieve or avoid).
- Could you please recommend any friend/s of yours who would fit into my study?

APPENDIX B

Facebook Advertisement

Dear friends,

If you are an **avid solo female traveller**, please spare a few minutes to read the below description and record your response.

I consider it as a great helping hand lend me towards.

Link:

[https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd1xIEtHOOFmdt4rKy3F4EgnaBH_RBoMNya6_3SawIwdYiqPA/viewform?usp=sf link](https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSd1xIEtHOOFmdt4rKy3F4EgnaBH_RBoMNya6_3SawIwdYiqPA/viewform?usp=sf_link)

Thank You.

APPENDIX C

Approval of Ethics



27/09/2021

Dear: Sachithra Somasiri

Re: Low Risk Notification - 4000025040 - Conceptualising the Solitude Experience of Solo Female Travellers

Thank you for your notification which you have assessed as Low Risk.

Your project has been recorded in our database for inclusion in the Annual Report of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee.

The low risk notification for this project is valid for a maximum of three years.

If situations subsequently occur which cause you to reconsider your ethical analysis, please contact a Research Ethics Administrator.

Please note that travel undertaken by students must be approved by the supervisor and the relevant Pro Vice- Chancellor and be in accordance with the Policy and Procedures for Course-Related Student Travel Overseas. In addition, the supervisor must advise the University's Insurance Officer.

A reminder to include the following statement on all public documents:

"This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named in this document are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you want to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Professor Craig Johnson, Director - Ethics, telephone 06 3569099 ext 85271, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz."

Please note, if a sponsoring organisation, funding authority or a journal in which you wish to publish requires evidence of committee approval (with an approval number), you will have to complete the application form again, answering "yes" to the publication question to provide more information for one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. You should also note that such an approval can only be provided prior to the commencement of the research.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'C Johnson', is written over a light yellow rectangular background.

Professor Craig Johnson

Chair, Human Ethics Chairs' Committee and Director (Research Ethics)

Research Ethics Office, Research
and Enterprise

Massey University, Private Bag 11 222, Palmerston North, 4442, New Zealand T 06 951 6841;
06 95106840 E humanethics@massey.ac.nz; animalethics@massey.ac.nz; gtc@massey.ac.nz

APPENDIX D



Conceptualising the Solitude Experience of Solo Female Travellers

Information Sheet

Would you like to help us?

We invite you to take part in a research study looking at the needs of solo female travellers, with a particular interest in solitude activities you may wish to undertake. This section gives detailed information about the study. Please read it carefully before deciding whether you wish to join our study.

We need solo female travellers who have at least once travelled internationally for leisure purposes, who can express ideas in English, and are over 18 years old. After reading the information sheet, should you need any further clarification, please do not hesitate to contact us via the contact information given below.

Researchers' Introduction

This research is led by Sachithra Somasiri, a doctoral student in Marketing at the School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand. The academic supervisors involved are Dr. Niki Murray and Dr. Emma Dresler (School of Communication, Journalism and Marketing, Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand).

Project Description and Invitation

The proposed project mainly aims to investigate why female travellers seek to travel solo and their needs and wants from these experiences. A primary interest is also how solo female travellers talk about 'solitude' in their solo travel experience. Further, this study intends to explore how solitude may be intruded upon by others and how you might respond to these intrusions. We would like to know about your solo travel experiences and how they have influenced the realisation of your needs that you expected to fulfil through solo travelling. Given that solo female travellers are a distinctive and alluring consumer segment in the tourism market, research that provides useful insights into this segment can make a noteworthy contribution.

We would like to invite you to take part in an online in-depth interview conducted by the lead researcher of the study. We have sent this invitation to several Facebook traveller and solo female traveller groups. The topic of interest to be discussed would be your journey of

becoming a 'solo female traveller'; what made you become a solo female traveller; how solo travelling helps you to realise your needs; how solitude (if this is a need for you) is intruded on by others during your solo travels and your responses on the same. The discussion is expected to last for 60 minutes to 90 minutes (1.5 hours).

In the interview, I will ask you to introduce yourself and actively participate in the discussion. You will need to join the interview via Zoom with both audio and visual on as it will facilitate a smooth and interactive discussion on the topic. The researcher will record the interview as data needs to be retrieved for analysis purposes. However, your identifying information will not be used when reporting the findings. The non-identifying information will be used in my thesis and may be used in academic publications. While being used, all data will be kept safely within a password-protected computer or in locked cabinets. After the publication of the non-identifiable data, all data such as transcripts and recordings will be destroyed by my primary supervisor. If you would like to be sent a summary of the findings, please let me (Sachithra) know.

Participant's Rights

You are under no obligation to accept this invitation. If you decide to participate, you have the right to:

- decline to answer any particular question;
- withdraw from the study at any time;
- ask any questions about the study at any time during participation;
- provide information on the understanding that your name will not be used unless you give permission to the researcher;
- be given access to a summary of the project findings when it is concluded.

Project Contacts

Researcher:

Sachithra Somasiri: s.somasiri@massey.ac.nz

Supervisors:

Dr. Niki Murray:

N.S.Murray@massey.ac.nz

Dr. Emma Dresler:

E.Dresler@massey.ac.nz

Please contact us if you have any questions.

This project has been evaluated by peer review and judged to be low risk. Consequently, it has not been reviewed by one of the University's Human Ethics Committees. The researcher(s) named above are responsible for the ethical conduct of this research.

If you have any concerns about the conduct of this research that you wish to raise with someone other than the researcher(s), please contact Prof Craig Johnson, Director, Research Ethics, telephone 06 356 9099 x 85271, email humanethics@massey.ac.nz.

APPENDIX E



MASSEY UNIVERSITY
TE KUNENGA KI PŪREHUROA
UNIVERSITY OF NEW ZEALAND

Conceptualising the Solitude Experience of Solo Female Travellers

Participant Consent Form

I have read, or have had read to me in my first language, and I understand the Information Sheet attached as Appendix I. I have had the details of the study explained to me, any questions I had have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time. I have been given sufficient time to consider whether to participate in this study and I understand participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time.

1. I agree/do not agree with the interview being video and sound recorded.
2. I wish/do not wish to have my recordings returned to me.
3. I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the Information Sheet.

Declaration by Participant:

I _____ hereby consent to take part in this study.

Signature: _____ **Date:** _____

APPENDIX F

Codebook

Name	Description
Attempts to fulfil the need for solitude	What women would do to fulfil their need to be alone on their solo trips
Activities	The things they prefer to do while they travel on their own and experience solitude.
City tours	Roaming around cities, visiting different places, visiting urban areas of the countries they travelled
Meeting people/networking/ intimate friendship building	Interactions SFTs come across with other travellers, service persons and locals. Talking to people and getting to know each other.
Outdoor activities - hiking, walking	Various activities that SFTs engaged in outdoors.
Sightseeing/exploring	Visiting sights particularly tourist attractions and any place personally interested in.
Try things out	SFTs attempt to try new things they usually do not do. (mainly activities)
Trying new food	Trying local food and any other cuisine experimentations.
Different levels of disengagement	The levels/circumstances they need/ do not need companionship/interaction with 'others'.
Being alone at different times - mornings	Preference to be alone during various times of the day.
Intentional avoidance of people - Avoiding people at the destinations	SFTs deliberately avoid people or take measures to avoid interactions with others.
Less use of technology	Moving away from technological devices and engagement with them for the purpose of ensuring aloneness.
Personality factors	Natural habit of being alone. Inherited preference to be alone.
Planning trips and places to visit	Travel planning to avoid people. Deciding upon itineraries.
Positioning self	SFTs sit, walk or stand in particular gestures to avoid people in certain visitor attractions.
Solitude skills - learning to be alone	Practicing to be alone. Managing thoughts and emotions.
Task and purpose dependence	Being alone depends upon the purpose and the activities taken during the solo trip.

Name	Description
Travelling to extreme settings	Visiting certain places that other tourists or many tourists usually do not go.
Solitude Settings	The type of setting that will allow the SFTs to experience solitude at an optimum in their solo travels. This includes the features and characteristics of the destinations/places or countries.
Dissimilarities - language~ so one will come and talk	Not knowing the language enables SFTs to stay away from conversations with others (particularly locals)
Ease of reach/Accessibility	Not having to seek help from others when visiting to places that could be easily accessed/navigated.
Natural scenic places	Being alone in nature.
Nice people	Comfortable to be alone when others around seem to be nice and well-mannered. Other people respect privacy concerns.
Non-judgemental People	Feeling comfortable to be alone when others around do not care about when someone is alone and trying to spend time on their own.
Non-touristy attractions	Visiting places that other travellers usually do not visit.
Nostalgic places - Homely environment	Feeling comfortable to be alone in homely environments.
Places for learning and reflection	Prefer to be alone in places that enable SFTs to think and reflect deeply.
Places to avoid	Places that SFTs will not usually visit or do not feel comfortable to be alone
Safety	Safe is a prime concern to be alone.
Similarities - cultures and value systems	Comfortable being alone in countries/places that work similar to SFTs' home country.
Urban settings - alone among people	Comfortable to be alone in cities with people as they could seek help if needed
Space marking and other social cues	SFT's proactive behaviours (intentional/unintentional) to keep "others" away from them while they travel alone.
Being alert and extra vigilant	SFTs being extra vigilant about safety when being alone.
Body language	Using various body language techniques to keep others away from approaching SFTs.
Paying for extra space	SFTs bearing extra financial cost secure extra spaces to ensure their physical aloneness (or spaces)

Name	Description
Physical distance - settings in motion	Maintaining physical proximity with others.
Using preps - books, mobile phone, earphones, newspapers, travel guides	Using various objects to keep themselves alone and avoiding others joining in.
Connectedness Episodes	Positive and negative experiences in connecting with others
Negative	Any encounters that SFTs find unpleasant.
Other travellers and locals	Interactions with other travellers and locals
Being robbed	SFTs possessions being robbed.
Disrespecting behaviours and Catcalling	Verbal harassment SFTs come across during their encounters.
Disturbing behaviours	Any behaviour of locals and other travellers that made SFTs uncomfortable.
Intrusive conversations	Conversations had with locals and other travellers that were deemed to be too intrusive or too much.
Intrusive invitations	Invitations that SFTs perceived as unnecessary or disturbing.
Stalking	Locals and other travellers who were following SFTs after realising they were on their own.
Unsolicited help	Help was received from locals and other travellers when SFTs did not ask for it and therefore perceived as unnecessary.
Self-induced	Any factors that arise from within and self and are deemed disturbing to the aloneness experience of SFTs
Boredom	Feeling bored when alone.
Fear	Feelings of fear when alone.
Feeling helpless	Feeling helpless when alone.
Feeling overwhelmed	Feeling too tired since everything has to be done on by own.
Inability to share real-time experience	SFTs wanting to share their experience with someone but could not since no one was there.
Loneliness	Feeling lonely in a negative way.
Tiredness	Feeling tired during the trip.
Service persons	Encounters with service persons
Changes/surprises	Changes in the travel plans without prior notice.
Controversial topics	Service persons trying to talk about certain controversial topics that SFTs deemed as unnecessary

Name	Description
Discriminatory practices - price, hurrying up	SFTs perceive unfair practices on them because of being a solo customer/traveller.
Disrespecting & Unprofessional behaviours	Service persons' unprofessionalism.
Forced selling	Hawkers trying to sell things by force or shout at SFTs to make sales
Lack of understanding	Service persons' inability to understand SFTs' need for aloneness
Negative encounters at immigration	Immigration officers trying to be too intrusive at checkouts.
Negative stereotyping	Service persons trying to profile SFTs negatively based on their pre-judgements.
Offensive questions	Service persons raising too personal questions
Unexpected service packages/deliveries	Offering services that were unexpected and SFTs considered them unnecessary.
Positive	Encounters with others that SFTs perceived as positive
Customisation	SFTs receive any special customised service because they are a woman and a solo traveller.
Experiencing authentic culture	Being a solo traveller enabling to experience the local culture more closely.
Familial bonds	Being able to get close to certain people and build long-lasting relationships.
Help in time of need	Receiving help from strangers during times of need.
Priority as a SFT	SFTs enjoying certain priorities in service deliveries.
Strangers as travel companions	SFTs finding strangers as good travel buddies.
Future travel intentions	SFTs perception about travelling solo in the future.
Intentional Solitude Seeking	Women deliberately seeking aloneness.
Interesting Quotes	Any quote that seems interesting but can/cannot classify.
Miscellaneous	Any other points that seem important but unclassified.
Post non-complaining behaviours	Behaviours of SFTs after being unable to make a complaint directly.
Responses for the complaints made	Responses of the service persons once a complaint has been made.
Negative	Negative responses from the service firms upon a complaint.

Name	Description
Defuse the situation	Service firms trying to neutralise the situation and act as if such an incident did not happen.
Less empathetic	Service firms not being able to understand the situation from a woman's perspective.
No follow-ups	Service firms do not bother to confirm if the problem has been resolved.
Not accountable	Service firms not being answerable or responsive enough.
Positive	Any positive responses from the service firms upon a complaint.
Responses towards the influences	Reactive behaviours upon the influences from others on solitude
Complaining Behaviour	Reactive response behaviours towards service management and other relevant authorities in the form of complaining.
Attitude towards complaining or raising a voice against discrimination	Women's overall idea about raising their voice against intrusive incidents that detract them from the solitude experience.
Being careful about how you complain	Women being cautious about complaining and how they complain.
Complaining to tourism local bodies	Complaining to parties like police, and embassies in situations where complaining to hospitality firms is not possible or if such firms are not responsible for the intrusions happen.
Direct complaints to the service management	Complaining directly to the service management upon service failures that may result in intrusions.
Non-verbal	Any form of written complaints
Verbal face-to-face	Direct complaints to the management, in person, face-to-face.
Indirect complaints to third parties	Complaining to third parties, when directly complaining to hospitality firms is not possible
Anonymous public reviews	Writing anonymous negative reviews about the intrusive incident.
Negative word of mouth	Talking bad about the service firm with friends and family and not recommending the service firm to others.
The way complaint is made	Women think the way the complaint is made is important for them.
General in-situ behavioural responses	General reactive behaviours against intrusion upon solitude
Assist from technology	Using technology to get help when needed

Name	Description
Being in the presence of people	Preference to be among people rather than in complete isolation
Being mindful and practising socio-cognitive mindfulness	General mindful practices to overcome the negativities experienced while solo.
Being open-minded - perceive things differently	Perceive negative things with an open mind – trying to see the positives in the negatives.
Changing Environment	Moving from one environment to another as a solution to overcome the negatives.
Connecting with family	Contact family when feeling lonely or down.
Fake behaviours and lying	Using fake behaviours and lying to get rid of unwanted interactions and conversations with strangers.
Firm body language	Pretending to have firm and masculine body language to signal others a strong personality that easily cannot be messed with.
Ignore and forget	Simply ignore and forget when something bad happens.
Make friends along the way	Trying to build friendships with strangers along the trips.
Small talk and move away	Transient interactions. Engage in very short conversations and move away from the situation quickly.
Smart talking/stop being nice/talking back directly	Not talking friendly or nicely. Instead being very direct in answering questions and talking with people who suspect as unwanted or not necessary to interact with.
Non complaining ~suppress complaining	Reasons for not complaining directly to service management firms
Distrust	Women do not trust the complaining process and are not sure if their complaints will be taken into consideration by the service firms.
Empathy on service employees	Do not complain as women feel sorry about the employees, if they lose their job or get scolded because of their complaints.
Expected experience	Do not feel complaining as women were ready for such an experience depending on the country they were travelling to.
Fear of reprisals	Do not complain due to the fear of after-effects of complaining and they were not ready to deal with it as they were alone.
Hassling process	Do not complain as women did not want to go through the process as it is very complicated and it

Name	Description
	is another burden on top of the bad experience they had.
High tolerance level	Do not complain as women were ready to tolerate it.
Lack of awareness - where to complain~	Do not complain due to the unawareness of the process
Lack of female service workers	Do not complain as there were no female workers to raise their complaints. And women did not want to complain to another male worker.
Negative perception of the country	Do not complain due to the negative perception women had over the country and think the same about the service firm.
Perceived risk of complaining	Do not complain as they perceived it as riskier for a solo woman.
Uncertainty of the legitimacy of the complaint	Do not complain as women were not sure about whether the complaint was genuine or not and not sure if it was something cultural in the country they were travelling.
Value their own happiness	Do not complain as women did not want to jeopardise their own happiness.
Waste of time	Do not complain as women did not want to spend their time complaining during their solo trips.
When the service provider is recommended by a close friend and a close contact of the same	Unable to complain when service was obtained upon a recommendation by a close friend.
Solitude episodes	The positives and negatives of solitude in their solo travels
Mixture of positives and negatives	Solitude entails both positives and negatives.
Negative	
Loneliness	Feeling lonely and having no one around.
Feeling helpless	Feeling helpless when alone in an unknown country.
Feeling nostalgic - negatively	Remembering home and family when alone.
Feeling overwhelmed and no one around to share the experience	Wanting someone to share the experiences but no one around.
Feeling unsafe and threatened	Feelings of unsafety when alone in an unknown country.
Overthinking	Overthinking when alone.
Personal fear/phobias	Personal fears become intense when alone.

Name	Description
Remembering tasks and commitments	Inability to enjoy aloneness because of remembering the tasks and commitments back at home and office.
Social Anxiety	Feeling anxious when alone among others – in group trips when others are there with family friends.
Vulnerability	Feeling vulnerable when alone.
Ability to inspire others	Being alone as a woman can inspire others who want to travel alone.
Authentic self-finding true self	Being alone enables women to find their true selves.
Deeper experience, learning, new habits, and curiosity	Being alone enables women to experience things deeply.
Experiencing life from a new perspective	Being alone helps women look into life from a different perspective.
Independence/Controllability/Self-will	Being alone enables women to make decisions independently and work as per own will.
Interface between place and space and realising self-potential	Being alone in an unknown place will help women to realise their capabilities.
Learn to be accountable	Being alone teaches women to be accountable for their actions.
Networking	Being alone helps women to network with others they meet along the way.
Realising your capabilities	Being alone allows testing your self capabilities.
Rejuvenation	Being alone helps refresh yourself.
Sel-confidence	Being alone boosts self-confidence.
Sense of achievement/accomplished/fulfillment	Travelling alone to a country gives the feeling of achieving something.
Spirituality and inner peace	Being alone helps create mental peace and relaxation.
Well-being	Being alone enhances women's well-being.
States/meaning of solitude	What does solitude mean to the participants in their solo travels. Some of the aspects are related to positive episodes of solitude.
Anonymity	Being alone among people gives an opportunity to be around others yet not known by anyone else.
As a way of Celebration	Be alone to celebrate a milestone in life.
Solidarity-reassurance seeking help	Being alone among others gives the feeling of safety as women could seek help if needed.

Name	Description
Unaccompanied by anyone	Travelling alone means unaccompanied by anyone during different phases of the trip.

APPENDIX G

Thematic Table

Research questions	Themes	Sub themes - Level 01	Sub themes - Level 02	Codes	Sample Quotes
RQ1: How do SFTs perceive solitude as a travel need?	Solitude as a travel need			Alone is not physically alone Not sharing experience with others Your way of perception Ability to enjoy your own As a means of understanding life No one to talk to Enjoying aloneness Experiencing on your own	“I think as a person, you also need to enjoy being alone” “I feel as I'm making that choice [travelling solo] for me. I'm not making a choice for anybody else” “Without having to ask other people for help, or permission, just doing the [travel] planning on my own” “I can independently decide my [travel] schedule” “I suppose, making my own way and plans”
		Being on my own: Avoiding others		Being with someone is tiring Planning alone Exhausting to be with someone Different needs compared to others Never travel with someone Being alone is self-fulfilling	“...that [interacting with strangers] is more exhausting than hanging out with people that you already know” “I want to see and learn, and they want to interact, and the needs are quite different” “There are a few things I would never do, I would never travel with a group. To me, that is just awful.”

				<p>“...there are so many distractions, because there are so many people in the group”</p>
		Being on my own and coping with negativities	<p>Accepting the drawbacks of aloneness Disengage and switch among activities Travel activities</p>	<p>“Things can't go hundred per cent perfect all the time” “I try to predetermine what could happen...I'm not reacting to things and situations” “Spontaneously, I decided to go to Austria the next day, as I had no special plans and I was bored and lonely”</p>
		Ensuring aloneness: Solo travel planning and experiencing	<p>Deciding where to go Visiting non-touristy attractions Deciding upon accommodation Travel time</p>	<p>“You always have friends in Sri Lanka, so if you travel alone you would end up meeting someone who you know.” “I particularly selected that boutique hotel as usually, families don't come, so I could avoid small kids” “I choose a place that's really not exactly very popular or very dense in terms of the population” “I like to do things that are different or that's not usually on Google or advertised. I like to go off the beaten path of travel”</p>
Alone among others: Safe solitude			<p>Uncomfortable to be completely alone Safety matters</p>	<p>"Enough of an element of safety that I would feel comfortable being by myself” “I don't think I would feel comfortable if I was completely alone, like in a tent in the middle of the wilderness”</p>

Non-solo episodes: Interactions in solitude			Definition of solitude allowing interactions Balancing solitude with interactions No obligation to continue with interactions Deliberate travel planning allowing interactions Interactions with locals Transient interactions	"It's not this you know complete solitude" "You do need your own space as much as you want to socialise. I think that description fits me quite well" "Whether you're looking for the type of solitude where you also meet other travellers" "I feel like I can get positive doses of interaction throughout the day and feel confident by being on my own and feel more peace."
	Customisation of offerings		Priority as a SFT Special treatment of service employees Special help received Services beyond	"I've stayed at some fabulous hostels, and they've been more than accommodating." "...male receptionist in that hotel was so helpful, he helped me to get back my passport." It was a local hotel and there was a lovely guy, maybe a waiter, he took me to a temple, he took me through all those crowded cities, and he also took me to an extraordinary religious event where everyone was dancing and dressed up with bright colours.
	Helping hand: Combating fear		Help in trouble Help when sick Help with accommodation	"There was a man who was following me, and he was bothering me. Then other people around saw that I was not

			Joining with certain activities unless otherwise not do alone	comfortable in the station, and they stepped in and took care of it" "I threw up when I climbed [to] the top of the mountain. They gave me all the first-aid and I felt so grateful about their kindness"
		Travel companionship	Getting along with others Sharing travel information Sharing travel experience Experiencing local culture Deep connections	"When I was in Hungary, I found a group of Brazilian volunteers who were in a volunteering project, and I became friends with them" "I like speaking with other people and hearing other people's experiences" "Everybody has their own travel story. It is fascinating to listen to them and there's a lot I could learn"
RQ2: How do various interactions influence the solitude experience of SFTs?	Unwanted disclosure: matters	self-Private	Questioning solo status as a traveller Questions on marital status and children Asking too personal questions Questioning the ability to travel solo as a woman Service persons sharing their personal experiences	"Oh, do you have an email address or your Facebook" "A man approached me and was talking to me and being with me, kept following up questions, and specifically asked are you alone?" "They always ask the first question, how old are you?" "Have you got a husband?"
	Physical intrusions	space	Service persons entering room with no permission Accommodation owners' claiming physical ownership	"I have paid, so why can't I have my own time there as I want?"

			Service persons' friends' presence	"The lady who was cleaning [the room] was just not caring, though I said I don't need you to come in" "a room service guy was knocking on my door, and I said, 'don't come in'. But still, he opened the door and came"
Intrusive conversations			Strangers talking when not in the mood Trying to talk by force Too long conversations Intrusive invitations	"I find it quite detrimental if people approached me when I didn't make any interaction with them and try to remain with me as a company." "I was still not in the mood to talk to anybody else. I still wanted to be by myself" "I remember the one who sat next to me [in the plane] was talking to me and I couldn't avoid"
Over service behaviours			Misunderstanding Assuming the need of companionship Trying to be too attentive Service persons talking continuously Over generous behaviours	"I think a lot of people [service providers] do not understand there are times when you want to be alone" "The assumption that when you're sitting somewhere alone and they [service people] think you want to interact with other people" "...therefore they try and make things better when they don't need to" "...the service provider in this little motel was very annoying. She was very keen, and she kept running around and trying to offer"

Unsolicited help			Assuming you need help Strangers trying to offer help when not needed Trying to help because you are a woman and not capable	“He was saying to me, ‘look, I’ll take you for a tour around Lima’, but I did not want him to take me, I mean, I was fine on my own.” “...that really got me worried because, first of all, why is he saying that to his friend and not to me when I am in front of him?”
Inappropriate talk and harassment			Offensive jokes and comments Being impolite when talking Physical harassment Trying to build relationships deemed not necessary	“They [locals] were saying lots of inappropriate stuff. One man was joking about how I should get married to him.” "all of a sudden, a man came up beside me and put his arm around my waist. I was like, what’s going on here?" “Mostly local men were intruding, and they touched me in the bus”
Avoidance			Moving away Ignoring Remove from intrusive situations	“I think when it [intrusions] happens all the time, you sort of get desensitised to it” “Remove myself from the situation without really conveying the message; this is not something you’re supposed to do” “I used not to deal with it and then move on and forget about it.”

RQ3: How do SFTs respond to intrusive episodes during their solo travels?

Clear and direct communication			Expressing clearly Saying No Direct refusal Small talk	“Clearly say ‘no, thank you, please leave me alone’ ” “I set my boundaries as clear as possible” "I will tell them directly, ‘sorry, I can’t do it’.” "I’ll answer in a way that ends the conversation, trying to hint that I am not really interested in chatting"
White lies			False information Lying about the presence of family Lying about the presence of a friend Lying about a partner	“I would say, ‘I’m off to meet my friends’” “Even though I didn’t have a boyfriend, I told them I had one” “I always told people a name of a different hotel and gave the wrong address”
Direct Complaining			Complaining to service managers Complaining to the security Complaining to the reception	“If he [the service manager] is around the premises, I would go and complain verbally” “I’d rather raise the issue and I’d like them to acknowledge and have it sorted at the same time” “I went to the bouncer and told [them] about this guy"
Indirect complaining			Complaining to third parties Spreading negative WOM Writing negative social media review	“I have written emails or letters to different providers or booking agencies saying what was expected or what I’ve expected”

				<p>"I wrote to the agent, so next time they would be more careful or may not recommend them to another customer"</p> <p>"I posted a short story [on social media] about what happened"</p>
Suppression of complaints			<p>Didn't want to complain</p> <p>Wanted to complain but did not</p> <p>Didn't express the complaints</p>	<p>"It's a one-word answer, no. There's no gain by trying to engage in it [complaining]"</p> <p>"I would be very reticent about trying to engage in a complaining process"</p>
	Distrust		<p>Unsure of the benefits</p> <p>Waste of time</p> <p>Not taken for granted</p> <p>Cannot trust people</p>	<p>"I don't think it [complaining] would often benefit me"</p> <p>"...people don't want to believe you."</p> <p>"It's a waste of breath"</p> <p>"I don't feel that I will be heard"</p>
	Perceived risk		<p>Feeling vulnerable</p> <p>Feelings of danger</p> <p>Feeling scared</p> <p>Fear and embarrassment</p> <p>Feeling ashamed</p>	<p>"You don't have to put yourself into danger"</p> <p>"I would personally withdraw myself rather than raising my voice. Because I am scared"</p> <p>"I would be wary of the fear of reprisals"</p> <p>"I felt ashamed to share it or tell it if everybody gets to know. I mean I was not so confident."</p>
	Uncertainty of the legitimacy of the complaints		<p>Not sure to complain or not</p> <p>Not sure about cultural differences</p>	<p>"Culturally, just because it's something I didn't like and I didn't feel comfortable"</p>

			Not sure how to put it Thinking it is subjective	with, it might not be wrong all the time." "I don't know how to put it or complain about it though it is unpleasant to me"
	Duration of the stay		Short stay No time to complain due to short stay	"I was in this particular place for only two or three days. When it (service intrusion) happened, there was hardly time for me to complain"
	Perceived hassle		Lot of trouble Stressful Inconvenience to make a complain Lack of awareness Complain is tiring	"Filing a complaint, that's a lot of trouble" "I don't want confrontation and any more stress" "It was a tour guide, so to whom am I going to complain? From where can I get that information? I didn't know."
	Empathy		Feeling sorry about employees Dislike to put someone's job in danger Dislike to put someone's business in danger	"I wouldn't want to put somebody else's business in danger" "I didn't want to make his life bad. He could lose his job or may not get a promotion. I was there only for five days, and I moved on."
	Lack of female workers		Difficult to express to men Mismatch of thinking Male being less serious Male aggression	"I don't think I will be able to express myself to males" "but as women, we can see each other in a better position than a man would understand [a complaint]"

				"But these [the police officers] were all men and I didn't feel comfortable talking with them about what actually happened"
	Negative perception of the country		System differences Feeling unsafe in some countries Corruption	"That's [complaining] context and country-specific" "I wouldn't do that [complaining] in particularly Arab countries because I know I wouldn't necessarily be seen as important as in other places." "You are adhering to the country's bylaws and their code of conduct, and it does make you feel unsafe to address specific complaints."