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**An investigation into travellers repatriating to New Zealand,  
having completed their OE.**

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A thesis  
submitted in partial fulfilment  
of the requirements for the degree  
of  
**Master of Management Studies**  
at  
**The University of Waikato**  
by  
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## **Abstract**

The overseas experience (OE) is an extended journey undertaken by young adults who travel and work abroad. It provides personal development in terms of independence, initiative, cultural awareness and other competencies identified as fundamental to the global careers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. However, scholars suggest that re-entry is often harder than leaving. They have examined the phases of transition back to the home country and generated theories like the W-curve of repatriation. Yet the broad issues of OE repatriation, specifically, have not been addressed. This research, therefore, investigates the experiences of OE travellers returning home to New Zealand. The OE has become an important part of New Zealand's culture, and while diaspora initiatives connect valuable expatriate resources, they fail to consider the wider implications of repatriation. For that reason, this research explores the personal experiences of OE returnees through in-depth conversational style interviews, specifically pertaining to relationships with friends and family, employment opportunities, and personal development.

The results of the research show that repatriation is an individual and subjective experience; a period of transition occurs, sometimes involving depression, distress, or difficult periods of adjustment, that vary in intensity based on factors like personality, readiness for return, and coping style. This transition comprises first impressions and a comparison of home and overseas, followed by the thought of 'what's next?' Eventually, returnees who remain at home readjust to the culture and adapt their priorities and behaviours until the OE is "like a dream". As such, this thesis posits that the return home from travel, and the personal life event experiences of returnees, are fundamental dimensions of the tourism experience that are yet to be fully understood in tourism research. In essence, this thesis examines travel from a holistic perspective, as part of the wider life course of individuals, and argues that researchers should consider the realities of the tourism experience, and adjust their data collection methods accordingly.

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*Shall we ever cease our explorations  
So that the end thereof will be  
To arrive where once we started –  
And know the place and the people  
For the first time?*

- T.S. Eliot

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# 1 Introduction

The overseas experience (OE) is an extended journey undertaken by young adults who travel and work abroad. Young people from increasingly more developed countries are setting out to see the world, often backpacking on low budgets and working along the way. For some, the OE is a working holiday whereby travel takes priority and work simply finances the travel. In contrast, for other OE travellers work is a priority whether to save money for the return home, to advance the career, or to gain new skills. For these 'travelling professionals', tourism is of secondary importance and the length of stay overseas is uncertain.

Regardless of the time spent overseas, most OE travellers report a personal development in terms of intercultural and communication skills, self-confidence, independence and a more global outlook. This personal development implies that, similar to the reported nature of some other travel experiences (for example, backpacking and volunteer tourism experiences), the OE is life-changing (Noy, 2004; Wearing, 2001). Moreover, the skills developed on the OE are consistent with those identified by employers as necessary virtues for success in the global economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century:

The self-directed, improvisational character of the typical OE makes it a good analogue and preparation for the flexible, insecure, entrepreneurial character of work and careers in the 21st century and equips New Zealanders to be self-reliant and to cope well in a rapidly changing economic environment (Myers & Inkson, 2003, p.47).

It has indeed been argued that the OE may enable a superior development than expatriate assignments (Inkson, Arthur, Pringle, & Barry, 1997). Therefore, an examination of the return from the OE is pertinent to ensure these skills are capitalised on by policy makers and potential employers. While OE literature has examined the return home in terms of career, and repatriation literature has examined the wider issues for expatriates returning from assignment, specific research on repatriation from the OE in a broader context than that related to career advancement is non-existent.

The wider context and literature of repatriation generally, therefore, provides the foundation for this research. Before discussing this wider context, it should first be noted that the terms repatriation, re-entry and reacclimatisation are used interchangeably within this thesis, as they are within the wider literature, meaning the transition back to one's own country after living abroad for a significant period. The terms culture and country are also used interchangeably, as while it is acknowledged that cultures differ between countries, a majority culture usually exists within each country; therefore, re-entering a country or culture implies an adjustment to the majority culture within that country.

The repatriation literature describes the repatriation experiences of expatriates on assignment, students, migrants, missionaries and children of expatriates. Repatriation can often involve periods of distress or even depression. Scholars have described the reverse culture shock phenomenon, the phases of repatriation, and have suggested some coping styles and methods for overcoming repatriation distress. These concepts are described in detail within chapter two. Irish (1986) describes these concepts aptly:

Re-entry is often painful, it's a change for personal and professional renewal. The price of re-entry is often paid in the coin of anxiety and guilt. That's part of the stress of re-entry... Fortunately, like other personal crises, re-entry is an opportunity for growth (p.237).

The in-depth repatriation experiences of OE travellers have not been captured within the academic literature. As such, this study is applicable to a significant proportion of New Zealand's population, as the OE has become part of New Zealand's culture and, now, not going on OE almost needs justification (Bell, 2002). The exact number of OE travellers migrating is unrecorded; however, for New Zealand at least, it is common knowledge that more OE travellers leave than return. For example, approximately 31,000 New Zealanders leave annually for Australia alone, yet the return flow of citizens to New Zealand overall is estimated at a mere 20,000 per year (Chamberlain, 2005).

This exodus of OE travellers creates an issue for small countries like New Zealand, especially when the majority of OE travellers are highly skilled, tertiary educated, fit young adults (Milne, Poulton, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2001), who have little incentive to return and hence contribute to the national economy. While New Zealand's immigration policy draws skilled migrants to overcome this 'brain drain', controversy surrounds many of these immigrants regarding their sometimes inadequate English skills and subsequent inability to secure a job in their profession. However, the solution is perhaps not simply to discourage OE travellers from leaving, nor to compel them to return, but rather to develop and maintain relationships while they are away and provide them with opportunities to employ their newly acquired skills at home should they choose to return.

Initiatives are underway, for example, to establish such relationships with expatriate New Zealanders. These initiatives recognise the value of the expatriates and returnees in terms of their intellectual capital as well as their ability to build relationships between individuals, communities and countries in an increasingly interconnected world. These connections between expatriates and abroad capitalise on the global flow of skilled human capital, which is viewed as a resource rather than a loss to be stemmed (Davenport, 2004).

However, current policy initiatives fail to consider the wider implications of repatriation, for example reverse culture shock, phases of repatriation, or methods for overcoming repatriation distress. As mentioned above, the return home from OE is often challenging and at times traumatic, and scholars agree that adjustment to the home culture can be more difficult than adjustment to a foreign culture, due mainly to unrealistic expectations of the sojourner and those at home (Sussman, 1986; Rogers & Ward, 1993; Smith, 2002). With so much investment in attempting to entice OE travellers home, easing their repatriation experiences is the next logical step in retaining them here once they arrive.

The purpose of this research was therefore to investigate the in-depth repatriation experiences of OE travellers to New Zealand in terms of their transition to home, and their personal or individual experiences, with a view to identifying how the transition from overseas to home can perhaps be made smoother for future generations of returning OE travellers.

### **1.1 Research Objectives**

To set a context for the investigation of repatriation experiences and to contribute to pragmatic discussions regarding the reasons for return, this research sought to investigate why OE travellers return home to New Zealand. Specifically, the main objective of this research was to uncover the personal repatriation experiences of returned OE travellers, including their social networks, careers, and personal development, by conducting in-depth conversational style interviews. In addition, the research aimed to consider the impact of life events on OE repatriation, to explore possible explanations for varying levels of distress among repatriates, and to gain insight into considerations for potentially minimising the transitional difficulties for returning OE travellers.

The specific objectives that guided this research comprised:

1. To investigate why OE travellers return home.
2. To examine the in-depth personal repatriation experiences of returned OE travellers, including:
  - relationships with friends and family
  - employment opportunities
  - personal development.
3. To consider the impact of life events and other key influences on OE repatriation.
4. To gain insight into considerations for minimising repatriation distress of OE travellers.

## **1.2 Thesis Outline**

This thesis is divided into six main chapters. This chapter, the Introduction, has grounded the thesis in academic literature, highlighted the gaps in the literature, and identified the research objectives for this thesis which will aim to fill those gaps.

The second chapter expands on the literature review and considers not only the OE and its implications for New Zealand, but also the wider context of repatriation and the phases of transition. This chapter argues the case of OE in light of 21<sup>st</sup> century boundaryless careers and explores the personal development of OE travellers. The literature review also considers the concept of tourism impacted by the course of individuals' lives and examines this in the context of the OE.

Chapter three outlines the methodology used to collect in-depth personal experiences of OE returnees. This chapter builds a case for in-depth conversational style interviews, describes the techniques used for establishing rapport, and reflects upon the impact of the researcher in the research process, as well as ethical considerations. The chapter also describes the administration of the interviews themselves and the demographics of the respondents, then details how data was collated and categorised into key themes, recognising within these themes that multiple realities exist and that travel is an individual and personal phenomenon. Research limitations are also outlined in this chapter.

Chapter four presents the results of the research, firstly describing the reasons repatriates returned home, then their experiences in terms of phases of transition. In-depth, personal perspectives are also presented, detailing the individual experiences of respondents relating to relationships with friends and family, working in New Zealand and personal development. These were the aspects of life at home that emerged from the interview conversations. These aspects are then reflected on by respondents in terms of how they view the OE and repatriation experiences, and explanations are suggested for the diversity in

repatriation distress. The impact of life events on OE and repatriation is also reflected upon, as life events were more significant for some repatriates than for others.

The fifth chapter concludes that the repatriation from OE is an individual and subjective experience, which ranges from severe depression to seeing repatriation as an opportunity for learning and change. Notwithstanding this individual perspective, common themes also emerged in terms of personal development following OE and the phases of transition. This chapter argues that repatriates can apply strategies to ease their transitional distress, for example taking time to reflect on the experience and understanding changes that have occurred within themselves and at home, thereby setting realistic expectations of home. Opportunities therefore exist to educate repatriates and heighten the awareness of repatriation distress. This chapter also suggests opportunities for further research.

## 2 Literature Review

A dearth of literature exists on the OE, and what has been published focuses predominantly on stories from abroad (McCarter, 2001; Robertson, Mash, Tickner, Bird, Curtis, & Putnam, 1994), classifications of the OE (Bell, 2002; Milne et al., 2001) or the OE and career development (Inkson & Myers, 2003; Inkson, Thomas & Barry, 1999). With the exception of the career-specific studies driven by Kerr Inkson (Inkson et al., 1997; Inkson et al., 1999; Inkson & Myers, 2003; Myers & Inkson, 2003), little empirical research has been conducted into the return home from OE. There is also a dearth of knowledge about the return home from travel more generally. As such, broader academic literature concerning the repatriation experiences of other types of expatriates, the concept of reverse culture shock, the phases of repatriation, and coping styles for overcoming repatriation distress have informed this research. In addition, the concept of the OE in terms of work and travel is examined, and the effect of travel on wider life courses is noted. More specifically relating to New Zealand society and commerce, the affect of the 'brain drain' is considered and emerging diaspora policies are discussed.

### **2.1 OE: More than a Working Holiday**

Within the published literature, the OE has been described as “a quest or pilgrimage from . . . remote countries, to the places familiar in national and family histories, popular media, and in tales from previous OE travellers” (Bell, 2002, p.143). It is a significant life stage or rite of passage for young adults, especially those from ex-colonial countries like New Zealand, Australia and South Africa, where the OE, predominantly to the UK, has become a cultural institution (Bell, 2002). Moreover, young people from increasingly more developed countries, including the UK, Israel, and Germany, “desire to ‘see the world’, and... follow their curiosity, travel light, and search for whatever employment they need along the way” (Inkson & Myers, 2003. p.170). The vast majority of OE travellers are “backpackers” for at least part of their time away, as their low budgets and their nomadic lifestyles match the characteristics of a backpacker

undertaking a working holiday (Slaughter, 2004). However, the backpacker mentality has generated much negative discussion in the tourism literature, for example backpackers have been described as portraying bad conduct, superficiality, stinginess and exploitation of poor locals (Cohen, 2004).

Nevertheless, it is vital that youth travel involves the appreciation of other cultures; “The importance of encouraging youth to embark on modern day ‘grand tours’ to learn about and experience other countries and cultures cannot be overlooked” (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995, p.841). Along these lines, backpackers themselves have reported profound personal changes that are “always markedly positive, and are described rhetorically in terms of a significant development and maturation in central personality traits” (Noy, 2004, p.86). These profound changes are long-lasting, often attitudinal, and concern a holistic personal development rather than mere temporary individual emotions, experience, or behaviour. For example, backpackers talk of increased confidence, broader perspectives, and increased independence following their travel in remote locations. These personal changes imply a life transition to a more advantageous position than their stance prior to their travel (Noy, 2004).

However, while OE travellers backpack during their ‘holidays’, they also tend to settle semi-permanently in the foreign country, acquire a job and long-term accommodation, and establish social networks. Therefore, although knowledge concerning backpacker behaviour may apply to their travel patterns overseas, their OE is not limited solely to backpacking; it is more than just a working holiday, and a broader context of work and travel is required.

Within the work and travel literature, Uriely (2001) distinguishes between “travelling workers” and “working tourists” and suggests four typologies of travellers, who combine travel and work: Travelling professional workers; migrant tourism workers; non-institutionalised working tourists; and working-holiday tourists (Uriely, 2001, p.1). However, this work and travel



literature overlooks OE travellers, who work in order to finance travel but also travel in order to work; are generally middle class young adults; and cross a wide range of professional, skilled and unskilled roles.

A review of published OE literature regarding work and travel reveals that for some, the OE is a working holiday, whereby travelling is the main priority, and work simply finances the travel. For these 'working tourists', the OE is "a temporary escape from conservative New Zealand, family constraints, and looming responsibilities of adulthood" (Bell, 2002, p.145). So keen are they to escape responsibility, these 'working tourists' will leave their jobs in order to travel on months-long trips in remote locations. Academic literature has characterised these working tourists as drifters and nomads (Cohen, 1973), wanderers (Vogt, 1976), long-term budget travellers (Riley, 1988), and backpackers (Loker-Murphy & Pearce, 1995). The vast majority of these travellers today reside between trips in London-based houses, which are often over-crowded with "dossers", people who pay a nightly fee of usually £5 to cover their expenses. The existence of these extra residents contributing to house expenses means that rent is cheap for tenants, which helps facilitate the extra travelling.

In contrast, for other OE travellers work is a priority, whether to save money for coming home, to advance the career, or to gain new experiences like working on global projects. For these 'travelling professionals', tourist-related activities are of secondary importance and travelling occurs during standard holiday periods.

On the whole, many OE travellers begin their OE as a 'working tourist' and conclude it as a 'travelling professional'. Once they have exhausted the desire for travel, they tend to either return home or settle into a more permanent professional job overseas. In terms of repatriation to New Zealand, relatively fewer travelling professionals than working tourists return, as the job prospects and financial rewards are significantly lower in New Zealand. Professional groups like accountants and IT technicians "argue that they are underpaid in New Zealand and can double or triple

their salaries offshore, and that moreover, opportunities for stimulating and lucrative career development are much higher offshore” (Inkson, Carr, Edwards, Hooks, Johnson, Thorn, & Allfree, 2004a, p.30). Certainly, with the introduction of the new Highly Skilled Migrant Programme in the UK ([www.workpermit.com/uk/highly\\_skilled\\_migrant\\_program.htm](http://www.workpermit.com/uk/highly_skilled_migrant_program.htm)), travelling New Zealand professionals will find it harder to make the decision to return home. For many, the intended length of stay is uncertain and the planned one to two years easily extends to three or four years.

In summary, the OE and backpacker literature is well documented in terms of experiences while abroad, and as indicated above, these experiences can be applied to the work and tourism typologies put forward by Uriely (2001). However, the change in typology on returning home has not been investigated. Where do returnees fit within the ‘travelling workers’ and ‘working tourists’ typologies, if at all? Is working now more important than travel, or is travel still a high priority? How do returnees feel about their career prospects at home compared to those overseas? This study will thereby contribute to the work and tourism literature by describing the transitional work-related experiences of travellers returning home and discuss their repatriation in terms of their employment opportunities at home having completed their OE, although a broader consideration of issues in addition to career is also required (see chapter one).

## **2.2 *Boundaryless Careers***

Previous studies discussing the OE’s impact on career have argued that OE travel in some shape is inevitable in a globalised world:

Working life in the immediate future will be one big OE... the typical career will be a blur of jobs, people, places, and relentless self-improvement.... dislocation will be the norm... you will be your own brand... it will be essential to manage your work life as though you were a Proctor and Gamble. (Parker, 1998, cited in Inkson et al., 1999, p.60).

Therefore, although international experience of any kind can be a source of competitive advantage and personal growth, the voluntary, self-directed nature of the OE and the subsequent skill development through this type of travel, it has been argued, is unrivalled by any other form of expatriate

travel, except perhaps permanent migration. As Inkson et al. (1997) suggest, "OE may represent a more important means of knowledge acquisition, individual enrichment, and national human resource development than does [expatriate assignment]" (p.364). In comparison, students on exchange are directed by and dependent on the exchange organisation, while expatriates on assignment must adhere to the individual company's policies and are driven by the company's goals. Therefore, these groups do not encounter the same opportunities for growth as OE travellers. As a result, as careers become 'boundaryless', the OE may become a more popular international experience option.

Boundaryless careers represent a world of global business, where loyalty between companies and employees diminishes, and careers grow across companies rather than within the hierarchy of a particular company. The competencies leading to the success of a boundaryless career comprise: Highly proactive individuals who identify opportunities and take action on them, demonstrate initiative, and persevere in the face of setbacks; individuals who build organisational and personal networks, which represent a resource for expertise, reputation development, and learning; individuals who develop broad and flexible skill and knowledge bases that contribute to the organisation and individual development and are transportable across organisation (and national) boundaries (McConnell, 2004). These competencies overlap significantly with the OE characteristics described in section 2.3, and therefore it could be argued, that the OE offers virtues necessary for success in the global economy of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Yet, as the notion of boundaryless careers transpires, the smooth transition of these self-directed global careerists between overseas and home will become increasingly important. In 1978, Business International identified re-entry as a major international HR issue (Hurn, 1999, p.228), and much literature has been published regarding repatriation from expatriate assignments (MacDonald & Arthur, 2005; O'Sullivan, 2002; Baruch, Steele, & Quantrill, 2002; Paik, Segaud, & Malinowski, 2002;

MacDonald, 1993), whereby the initiative for travel is generated by an international company rather than the individual. However, despite the noted importance of OE on careers in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, OE repatriation is barely researched; notably within the published literature on travel and tourism.

### ***2.3 OE and Personal Development***

As the previous section alluded to, the competencies developed on OE significantly overlap with the variables leading to a successful global career. Furthermore, the skills developed by OE travellers are consistent with those identified by employers as necessary virtues for success from entry level to executive. A study of corporations' requirements of MBAs listed communication skills, interpersonal skills, and initiative as the three most desired capabilities (Goleman, 1999), and OE travellers have reported acquiring exactly these competencies.

Previous scholars have outlined the extensive personal development of OE travellers in terms of the interpersonal, relationship, and communication skills; self-confidence; self-sufficiency; cross-cultural skills and a global perspective; and independence and autonomy (Myers & Inkson, 2003). Scholars have argued that the OE enables a transcendence of limitations encountered with staying at home, implying that these skills may not have been developed had they stayed at home. OE travellers are faced with a broad range of perspectives, situations, and experiences which they would be unlikely to encounter within the familiar home environment. Even challenging situations like muggings, poverty and homesickness are seen as growth experiences by OE travellers (Myers & Inkson, 2003). Therefore, the OE enables a broader understanding and fosters a wider vision than staying at home can apparently proffer.

In conjunction with these competencies relating to personal development, OE travellers purport to developing traits such as self-awareness, self-management, relationship management and social awareness, which are

identified as the four domains of emotional intelligence; “the prime quality that makes and keeps us employable” (Goleman, 1999, p.4). OE travellers reportedly become self-aware in terms of recognising their limits, strengths, weaknesses and tolerance levels. They exhibit self-management through their independent self-directed travel. They must manage relationships without the guidance of elder and often wiser family members, and while they may rely on friends abroad for advice and support, they must become self-reliant enough to leave home, set up a new life overseas, and manage the relationships necessary to sustain this new life abroad. Finally, by travelling through diverse cultures and interacting with strangers on a daily basis, OE travellers develop a social awareness that could not be achieved at home due to the sheer difference in cultures experienced.

As part of this social awareness, the OE encourages an appreciation for other cultures, and an appreciation for the New Zealand way of life. “OE provides insight into the rest of the world. It also provides insight into one’s own nation, and the value of being here” (Bell, 2002, p.152). Most OE travellers view their experiences as positive as they recognise that “although long-term living, working, or studying abroad can be difficult at times, it can also provide sojourners with some of the most challenging, growth-producing, and rewarding experiences of their lives” (Smith, 2002, p.253). To undertake an OE is therefore life-changing on a personal level, sometimes difficult on an emotional level, but mostly gratifying on a developmental level.

#### **2.4 OE and New Zealand – ‘Brain Drain’ vs World-Wide Web**

A review of relevant literature reveals that this life-changing but gratifying experience is so popular in New Zealand that the OE has become a fundamental aspect of the New Zealand’s culture, and for the “middle class young Pakeha New Zealander, *not* taking an OE is now unusual, and almost requires justification” (Bell, 2002, p.145). Since the first pioneers arrived in New Zealand, people who took on the wilderness, worked hard and were self reliant (Bell, 2002), young New Zealanders

have been travelling back to the other side of the world, expressing these values and creating a unique image or cultural identity for New Zealand.

This identity exhibits a strong work ethic that is recognised and welcomed by the British Prime Minister Tony Blair as a valuable contribution to the British economy (Sell, 2002, cited in Bell, 2002). OE travellers themselves have commented on the relative ease of finding a job abroad due to the reputation of the New Zealand work ethic. However, while this work ethic is crucial for New Zealand's global image, it equally implies that New Zealand competes with countries like the UK for the talents and direct economic contribution of its travelling citizens.

Popular literature has lamented the brain drain phenomenon with calls to government to stem the outflow of young talented New Zealanders (Mahne, 2002; Dreyer, 2001; Gamble, 2002; Watkin, 2005; Jackson, 2003). Indeed, since New Zealand and Australia signed the Closer Economic Relations Trade Agreement in 1983, the net migration from New Zealand to Australia has only heightened (Davies, 2003). The exact number of New Zealanders currently residing overseas is unknown, but estimates range from 10% (Clark, 2005) to 15% (Davies, 2003) and higher, for example 22% (Inkson et al., 2004a). What is known is that over 7000 young New Zealanders sought work in Britain in 2002 (Sell, 2002, cited in Bell 2002), and approximately 31,000 New Zealanders leave annually for Australia alone, yet the return flow of citizens to New Zealand overall is estimated at a mere 20,000 per year (Chamberlain, 2005). Moreover, New Zealand has the "biggest per capita exodus of skilled workers among OECD nations" (Chamberlain, 2005, p.36), with almost a quarter (24.2 per cent) of New Zealand-born people with tertiary education living offshore, compared to Australia's 2.5 per cent (Watkin, 2005).

Furthermore, according to an investigation of 980 members of the Dunedin Multidisciplinary Health and Development Study, comparing emigrants (of which 63% were classed as OE travellers) to non-emigrants, emigrants were reported to have higher IQ's, to be better qualified, leaner and fitter,

with happier and less stress-prone personalities than non-emigrants (Milne et al., 2001). These emigrants are reported to comprise the “best and brightest” of New Zealand’s populace (Dunn, 2005), and it has been argued that as long as these driven and ambitious travellers remain overseas, they are not contributing directly to New Zealand’s economy.

However, “the return of [these 20,000 per year New Zealand] citizens to their home country has a significance that is often overlooked” (Lidgard, 2001, p.16), for example, the afore-mentioned personal development and valuable socio-cultural experience. As such, it has been argued that continuing to promote the OE, while providing opportunities for travellers to return and employ their newly acquired skills in New Zealand, is more beneficial in the long term than discouraging them from leaving New Zealand.

Moreover, the OE creates “global thinkers”; a proficiency that is emerging as a necessity in New Zealand. For example, Chris Liddell, CFO for Microsoft, believes New Zealand needs to complement its "great all-round capabilities" with an aspiration to succeed on a global basis (Calder, 2006). Similarly, the Trade and Enterprise New Zealand CEO is encouraging regions to think more globally (Gibson, 2005). In addition, a new school of thought is encouraging New Zealanders to capitalise on creative and innovative products rather than the more traditional commodity-based products:

New Zealand is struggling with a fundamental shift, from relying on the physical advantages... to an economy based on ideas and our ability to sell them. What matters now is neither our land nor the things we grow on it... The real drivers of economic growth are the industries of our minds: Science, entrepreneurship, creativity, imagination and our ability to connect (Heeringa, 2006, p,34).

Harnessing the global outlook in OE repatriates is believed to create a significant competitive advantage for the New Zealand economy.

Therefore, “instead of lamenting their departure as a loss to the country... we should be relishing the new ideas, experience and remittances that

returnees and expatriates contribute to our society” (Lidgard, 2001, p.16). It has been argued that policy should recognise the skills and broader perspectives returnees can offer, and in Lidgard’s (2001) opinion, the contribution of returnees to the economic and social development in New Zealand is “rarely appreciated or acknowledged by politicians” (p.11).

Although it could be argued that politicians have created an immigration policy that ensures near to equal the number skilled immigrants arrive; for example, a net gain in permanent and long term migration was achieved in the year ended June 2005 of 8,593 (Statistics New Zealand, 2005), the question of appreciation in policy terms of returnees compared with immigrants remains. While some researchers argue that New Zealand attracts higher skilled migrants than it loses (Choy & Glass, 2002, cited in Inkson et al., 2004a), a controversy surrounds some of these immigrants regarding their sometimes inadequate English proficiency and their subsequent difficulty securing a job within their profession. Stories have emerged, for example, concerning immigrant doctors working in fish and chip shops. While this ‘brain waste’ is an issue in itself, and politicians need to facilitate the recognition of immigrant skills and their potential contribution to local and national communities, the value of the returnee as well as the expatriate is also largely overlooked. Therefore, this thesis intends to focus on the repatriation of OE travellers.

Certainly, the value returnees and expatriates offer to New Zealand is their ability to “play a pivotal role in strengthening of relationships between individuals, communities and countries in the highly interconnected world economy” (Lidgard, 2001, p.11). This opportunity for strengthening relationships is clear in the case of repatriates, who return indefinitely to New Zealand with the afore mentioned maturation, global outlook and broad perspective. However, an additional opportunity exists for expatriates to strengthen relationships between individuals, communities and countries while they are still abroad, and therefore a new dimension of policy has recently emerged; that of diasporas.



Whilst mentioned briefly above, “diaspora policies are based on an assumption that many expatriates are not likely to return, at least in the short term, but represent a significant resource wherever they are located” (Davenport, 2004, p,624). This resource may take the form of skilled human capital, expatriate networks, or the inherent bond with home, and it enables New Zealanders abroad to contribute indirectly to the New Zealand economy. These resources furthermore have the international contacts essential in a global society (Inkson et al., 2004a). The implicit assumption with diaspora policies, therefore, is that the global flow of skilled human capital is inevitable, and “should be viewed as a resource rather than a loss to be stemmed” (Davenport, 2004, p,628), as has been the case in the past.

Previous governments have attempted to stem the loss of OE travellers by implementing various controlled and stimulation incentives to encourage expatriates home and restrain others from leaving. For example in 2002, doctoral scholarship holders were required to return to New Zealand for a period equal to that of the scholarship, the Deputy Prime Minister called for expatriates to come home, and interest rates on student loans were removed while students were studying (Davenport, 2004). However, it is also important to acknowledge that OE travellers will leave New Zealand regardless of controlled or stimulation incentives encouraging them to stay as it has become an integral part of the New Zealand culture.

OE travellers may leave for personal reasons (family and friends overseas or a change in personal circumstances), exploration reasons (adventure or to ‘see the world’), or reasons of escape (Inkson & Myers, 2003). Due to family encouragement, peer pressure and enticing stories of abroad, New Zealanders leave their jobs, friends and family to set up a semi-permanent life in a foreign country. It is therefore “necessary for national policy-makers to accept that skilled individuals may wish to migrate for personal, familial and career development whilst, at the same time, seeking to encourage the migrant’s return, mobilisation or association with their country of origin’s development” (Davies, 2003, p.4). In other words, it is

important to build and maintain relationships with OE travellers while they are abroad to ease their transition should they choose to return.

Two examples of successful organisations building such networks and relationships among New Zealand expatriates are World Class New Zealand and Kiwi Expats Abroad (KEA). World Class New Zealand is run by Trade & Enterprise New Zealand to “connect high potential New Zealand-based businesses and sectors with internationally recognised experts... be they expatriate Kiwis or ‘New Zealand friendly’ foreign nationals” ([www.nzte.govt.nz/worldclass](http://www.nzte.govt.nz/worldclass)). World Class New Zealand Awards recognise New Zealanders who are making an outstanding contribution to New Zealand’s economic development. In addition, KEA is “a global community of people who work together to advance New Zealand’s interests all over the world” (<http://www.keanewzealand.com/index.html>). KEA has established channels to help connect New Zealand’s global talent and facilitate the sharing of knowledge, expertise and opportunities world-wide. However, these initiatives do not currently address the issues surrounding repatriation, nor do they provide support for the members of their ‘global community’ who decide to return home.

Certainly, it is clear that most expatriates want to return home at some stage (Inkson, Carr, Cameron, Edwards, Jackson, & Allfree, 2004b; KEA, 2006), with approximately 50% of expatriate kiwis certain or likely to return to New Zealand and a further 26% undecided. However, few expatriates currently see any incentives to return other than for personal reasons. “We encourage young New Zealanders to explore the world and be independent; the problem is that there is no incentive to return and bring those experiences back and apply them to New Zealand” (Wilson, 2001, p.6). Perhaps an opportunity exists to enable expatriates to continue their careers in New Zealand. “A little encouragement and a well conceived support structure may be all that is needed to bring these [off-shore] professionals home” (McConnell, 2004, p.49).

To this end, initiatives are underway within government to facilitate this recognition of skilled expatriates and to encourage them home. For example, in August 2005, Prime Minister Helen Clark and the Immigration Minister launched an initiative to “bring expatriate New Zealanders up to date with job opportunities at home” (Clark, 2005, p.1), and in November they published a question-and-answer-style website (<http://newzealandnow.info/>), as part of a publicity campaign in the UK, including a seminar in London (<http://www.expo-newzealand.com/>) on working in New Zealand. However, this initiative appears to be a short-term, reactive scheme to address the current shortage in labour supply and may be attracting more foreign nationals than repatriates to New Zealand.

Indeed, neither diaspora initiatives nor the emigrant repatriation programmes encompass a proactive analysis of factors like repatriation distress, phases of repatriation, coping styles and repatriation preparedness, which are crucial in addressing repatriation issues. The return home from an OE is noted as challenging and at times traumatic. Many returning OE travellers do not want to return home, but are forced to do so by expiring visas or family ties (Inkson & Myers, 2003). Even for those who return voluntarily, scholars agree that adjustment to the home culture can be more difficult than adjustment to a foreign culture (Martin, 1984; Sussman, 1986; Rogers & Ward, 1993; Smith, 2002). One expects overseas to be different, and members of the host country expect foreigners to behave differently. In contrast, returnees expect home to be familiar, “friends, family and colleagues expect returnees to exhibit ‘normal’ or pre-sojourn behaviour” (Sussman, 1986, p.236), and no-one expects the sojourner to have re-entry difficulties. Therefore, “the unexpected nature of repatriation difficulties appears to exacerbate re-entry outcomes” (Sussman, 2002, p.392), and returnees, especially those returning from self-directed independent travel, are often not prepared for such difficulties.

Recruitment companies in the UK are starting to address the issue of managing repatriates' expectations. As the General Manager of Global Career Link says, "professional people will either come back and be completely disillusioned as their expectations are not met and they will leave again, or if they have had their expectations managed, come back and be more realistic" (South, 2006, p.3). However, little evidence exists of New Zealand-based agencies, companies or policy makers adopting a similar approach. With so much effort and investment in networking expatriate New Zealanders and attempting to entice them home, easing their repatriation experiences is the next logical step in retaining them once they arrive. This requires an understanding on the wider personal experiences of OE travellers returning home.

### ***2.5 A Wider Context - Travel Experiences and Individuals' Life Courses***

It is important to note that life events unrelated to the OE itself can influence the OE experience and subsequent repatriation. These life events impact emotionally on the returnees' perceptions of their OE and repatriation. For example, the emotional upheaval of a relationship break-up overseas may cause an OE traveller to cut their trip short and return home earlier than planned, leading to an unsettled repatriation transition because the returnee was not ready to return. As such, the holistic perspective of travel, including the experiential aspects of travel, the individual's wider life courses and people's lives and emotions are important to understanding travel and tourism. As Harris & McIntosh (2006) argue, "Fundamental to an evaluation of the tourist experience are the subjective meanings, subjective experiences and situations of individual tourists" (p.1). Hence, in order to understand the wider story of the effect of life events on tourism experiences, it is important to capture the affective nature of the experience.

Two areas of tourism research that have generated such understanding are backpacker and volunteer tourism research. Backpacker research has contributed to experiential descriptions of activities and adventures to

reveal the covert, personal, and emotional stories of self-change. To achieve this, narrative research has facilitated a more holistic understanding of the correlation between the backpacking trip and backpackers' wider life courses. "One of the most striking characteristics of the narratives is that they consistently describe deep and profound personal changes as a result of the trip" (Noy, 2004, p.86). Another area of tourism research that has contributed to the experiential descriptions of activities and deeds to reveal the personal and emotional stories of self-change is the research on volunteer tourism. Volunteer tourists have reported significant, lifelong personal development in terms of attitude and behaviour through their travel experience. "As part of the volunteer tourism experience, interactions occur and the self is enlarged or expanded, challenged, renewed or reinforced. As such, the experience becomes an ongoing process which extends far beyond the actual tourist visit" (Wearing, 2001, p.3). Therefore, the life-changing nature of these aspects of tourism are comparable to the return from OE, because "beyond the actual physical flight to the other side of the globe [the OE] is a spiritual journey of discovery of the world and of the self" (Bell, 2002, p.144).

Moreover, of relevance in the study of tourists' experiences are the factors which travellers bring to the tourism experience; the person's background, interests, motivations, values, expressive behaviours; their personality. "Personal constructs serve to mediate and personalize [sic] the nature of the interaction between visitor and the physical context of... [the setting], and consequently also the resulting benefits, or value, which may be derived from such an interaction" (McIntosh, 1999, p.44). Therefore, the perception of the tourism experience depends upon a variety of emotional factors like values, feelings, and attitudes, which are derived from the tourist's personality.

Likewise, the perception of cross-cultural and repatriation experiences may also be related to the emotive factors derived from the returnee's personality. In general, people deal with change differently from extreme

distress, to a passive and accepting attitude, to a recognition that one can learn from change. This diversity in coping with change is largely dependent on an individual's personality and can also be applied to the way returnees deal with repatriation. For example, "the person who has difficulty coping with difference, change, and uncertainty will most likely have difficulty with cross-cultural adjustment" (Foust, Fieg, Koester, Sarbaugh, and Wendinger, 1981, p.9). Therefore, the way people feel, think and reflect upon change in terms of travel and repatriation experiences is largely based on their personality.

However, while subjective meanings are increasingly being captured in recent tourism literature (for example, Noy, 2004; Wearing, 2001), the academic literature to date has not considered, specifically, the long-term impact of OE on an individual nor the impact of life's events on the OE repatriation. The return home from travel can be an important factor in the life of an individual, and can influence future travel behaviour. Yet this stage of the tourism experience is rarely considered in the published literature, nor the associated emotional impact upon the return from travel.

Regarding the relationship between OE and life's courses, some scholars would argue that the OE is simply "a life stage that ranks with leaving school, getting a degree, the first job, or getting married" (Bell, 2002, p.144), that people grow through life's events whether at home or overseas, and that the meaning and experience of life's events are independent of the OE. In contrast, others would argue that the "OE changes young New Zealander's lives through the learning that they do" (Myers & Inkson, 2003, p.51), that OE travellers develop self-reliance, confidence and independence which they would not have developed to the same extent had they stayed at home, and that the new coping skills they have acquired through OE may influence the extent that life's events impact their repatriation. Considering the diversity of these theories, a context whereby the impact of life's events on OE and repatriation are considered is important to this study to gain a more holistic understanding

in tourism research. This thesis aims to contribute to this by evaluating the consequences of life events on OE and repatriation.

## **2.6 *Repatriation and the Phases of Transition***

Repatriation, return migration or re-entry is the transition from a foreign country back to one's own after living abroad for a significant period. Previous research has centred around the repatriation experiences of students (Brabanta, Palmera, & Gramling, 1990; Butcher, 2003; Chur-Hansen, 2004; Gaw, 2000; Martin, 1986; Martin, Bradford, & Rohrllich, 1995; Rogers & Ward, 1993), expatriates on assignment (Hurn, 1999; McCormick & Wahba, 2001; O'Sullivan, 2002; Sussman, 1986, 2001, 2002), migrants (Ghosh, 2000), missionaries (Stringham, 1993), and children of expatriates (Yoshida, Matsumoto, Akiyama, Moriyoshi, Furuiye, & Ishii, 2002). Even the re-entry of prisoners to society has been considered and likened to repatriation within the published literature:

Re-entry is the process... [of returning] to the social system of which [one] was once a part. In re-entering the former social system, [one] may try to regain [one's] former status, or because [one's] values have shifted away [one] might... try to redefine [one's] relationship with those around [one]. In either case, the re-entry process is likely to be slow, painful, and under certain circumstances, terrifying (Jansson, 1986, p.49).

Important for understanding the experience of repatriation are the stages of the re-entry process.

Repatriation is not an isolated event, but part of a continuous phase of transition, and previous empirical research consistently reports high levels of repatriate distress upon returning home, making consideration of the emotion involved important. As Freedman (1986) explains, "when people have been temporary, transient residents (more than just tourists) and return from the foreign culture to their native culture, they will soon discover that their cross-cultural problems are far from over" (p.23). Therefore, a number of transitional theories have emerged out of previous research to account for these high levels of distress. Such transitional theories, which are briefly evaluated in the following paragraphs, include

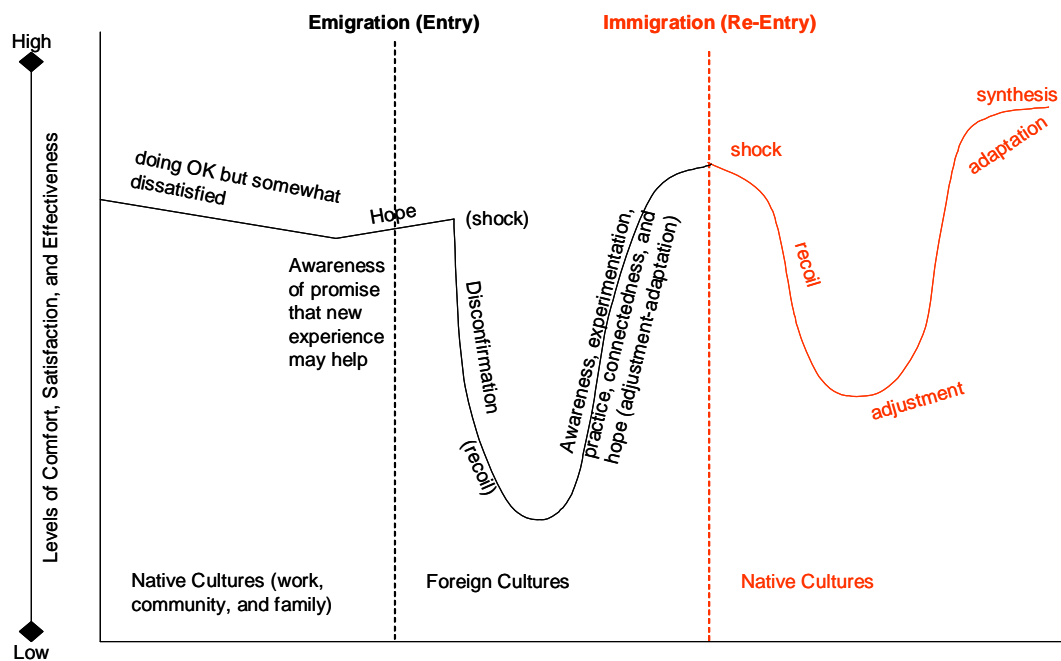
culture shock and reverse culture shock phenomena (Brabanta et al., 1990; Gaw, 2000; Hurn, 1999), cross-cultural adaptation and learning (Brabant et al., 1990; Sussman, 1986), and a broader view encompassing various phases of repatriation. A review of published literature also reveals that repatriation transition is effected by psychological preparedness on transition (Sussman, 1986; Werkman, 1986; Rogers & Ward, 1993).

To briefly explain these transitional theories, reverse culture shock is described as “the psychological, physical and emotional symptoms of feeling like a foreigner in their own country” (Hurn, 1999, p.227). It is generally unanticipated by both the returnee as well as those at home, and “many returnees describe feelings of discomfort and vague dissatisfaction with their lives, though they cannot pinpoint the basis of their difficulty” (Werkman, 1986, p.12). These theories are useful for explaining the initial phase of repatriation, but fail to consider the long-term implications of transition distress.

In terms of cross-cultural adaptation and learning theories, scholars disagree as to the extent to which the level of adjustment to the foreign culture influences repatriation distress, indeed whether adaptation and learning in the foreign country alleviates or aggravates repatriation. Some argue that the more the sojourner adapts to overseas living, the more difficult the repatriation becomes (Brabant et al., 1990), while others suggest that sojourners who adapt well overseas have learned cross-cultural coping skills and will therefore experience a smoother re-entry (Adler, 1981, cited in Sussman, 1986). Sussman (1986) argues that “most first-time returnees experience difficulties... however, subsequent entry and re-entry transitions are frequently smoother and less stressful as one perfects adaptation skills and strategies” (p.242). Perhaps it would be possible to learn from the experienced returnees, and teach their lessons to first-time repatriates.



A broader view encompassing various phases of transition offers perhaps the most pragmatic tools for reporting cross-cultural experiences, because they provide repatriates with “conceptual handles that they can use in re-entering their ‘native’ culture... and [allow them] to anticipate the re-entry ‘dip’ and develop a plan that will reduce its depth” (Freedman, 1986, p.25). While “no research has characterized [sic] the re-entry process as occurring in discrete stages, [fluid] phases have been described” (Martin, 1984, p.117), which comprise shock, recoil, adjustment, adaptation, and synthesis or integration with the home culture as first hypothesised by Gullahorn & Gullahorn (1963). This W-curve theory indicates that repatriation is experienced in differing waves of socialisation over time, which affect the emotions of repatriates and perceptions of significant others (see Figure 1).



**Figure 1 The W-Curve hypothesis model**  
(Adapted from: Freedman, 1986, p.26)

This theory offers a generalisation of repatriation, whereby the depth of the curves may depend upon like personality, attitudes, and relationships, and where the cycle of culture shock, recoil and understanding is the same for adaptation to the foreign culture and re-entry to home. The theory also acknowledges that the dips tend to be shallower and peaks are higher for

re-entry, because the returnee is at least partially familiar with the culture of home and “has advantages in culture learning that were not present [when adjusting to the foreign culture]” (Martin, 1984, p.121). However, some scholars doubt the usefulness of the W-curve theory, because “while sojourners can usually identify points in their adjustment as highs and lows of the curve, it is not clear whether the model accurately represents most sojourners experience” (Martin, 1984, p.119). These scholars call for more conceptual perspectives such as coping theories and culture learning approaches (Ward, Okura, Kennedy, & Kojima, 1998) in cross-cultural transition studies. Nevertheless, the W-curve theory can be loosely and usefully discussed within the qualitative results of this study, and while it is important to note that the extent of the phases (or depth of the curves) will differ, depending on complex circumstances like personality and coping style, this thesis does provide some evidence to show that the general experience of OE repatriation does reflect waves of re-socialisation as described by the W-curve theory.

In terms of the final theory concerning the effect of psychological preparedness on transition, scholars agree that repatriation distress can be treated and minimised through effective training and by setting realistic expectations. “People moving from one culture to another need advance information... before they move” (Werkman, 1986, p.16). The academic literature defines useful concepts for preparing for repatriation, for example, the first step is to be aware of the changes that have occurred, both within the individual and within the home culture. Returnees should also be aware of the phases of cultural transition and seek advice on coping strategies, for example finding fellow returnees to share stories with, rather than non-travellers (Sussman, 1986). Literature exists pertaining to training programmes for returning students (for example, Rogers & Ward, 1993), for corporate repatriates (for example Hurn, 1999), and for repatriates in general (for example, Werkman, 1986; Foust et al., 1981; Smith, 2002), which could be effectively applied to the OE repatriation experience. However, no information or training sessions are currently available for returning OE travellers exclusively.

## **2.7 Summary of the Chapter**

A dearth of literature exists on OE repatriation. While repatriation transition experiences have been described extensively in academic literature for students and expatriates on assignment (for example Martin, 1986; Hurn, 1999), and while this research is informed by the wider context of this repatriation literature, the repatriation experiences of OE travellers specifically have not been captured. Therefore, this thesis aims to fill a gap in the literature in terms of understanding OE repatriation experiences.

The wider context of repatriation has revealed that the return home can be challenging and at times traumatic, and scholars agree that adjustment to home can be more difficult than adjustment overseas (for example, Martin 1984). Various theories have been presented to explain the distress in transitioning home, though it is also noted that transition depends upon complex factors including one's personality, attitudes, and life events. As these factors impact transition experiences, they constitute important factors influencing the personal in-depth experiences discussed within this thesis.

The importance of this study has also been justified with an analysis of the migration situation in New Zealand. With over 20,000 OE travellers returning to New Zealand each year (Lidgard, 2001), an opportunity exists to ease their transition home, and this thesis seeks to offer considerations for realising this opportunity. The additional value of this thesis is in the recognition and appreciation of the personal development acquired through the OE and its subsequent application to the predicted boundaryless careers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Overall, the literature review has presented a broad perspective of OE repatriation from an evaluation of wider repatriation literature to an application of tourism concepts. The emerging tourism discourse on tourist types, experiential dimensions, and wider life-course perspective is important in understanding the tourism experience as well as in relation to understanding the return home from travel, such as with OE repatriation.

### **3 Methodology**

The research objectives were to investigate why OE travellers return home and the repatriation experiences of returned OE travellers, and to gain insight into considerations for minimising transition distress of OE returnees. In addition, the research aimed to consider the impact of life events on repatriation experiences and to suggest possible explanations for varying levels of repatriation distress. These objectives called for an interpretive approach to the research design, due mainly to the need for personal responses and its assumption of multiple realities.

#### **3.1 Epistemology**

The interpretive paradigm is built upon empathic understanding, whereby the researcher listens attentively in a non-judgemental way, supports the respondent and encourages the respondent's feeling of value. It is a subjective rather than objective approach to research. An interpretive approach enables the researcher to gain empathic insight into the others' attitudes and to capture an insider's personal perspective. "The insider's view is perceived as providing the best lens to understand the phenomena or social actors being studied" (Jennings, 2001, p.40). By soliciting an insider's perspective in terms of individual experiences, one presumes that multiple explanations or realities exist to explain a phenomenon rather than one causal relationship or one 'theory'.

The people studied will not be representative of the wider population – the findings of a study are specific to those who participated... The researcher will acquire an in-depth knowledge of the tourism phenomena or experience that is grounded in the empirical world (Jennings, 2001, p.40).

Therefore, in order to examine these multiple realities, the interpretive researcher assumes an inductive approach to research by studying the world empirically to explain a phenomenon or build a theory, rather than commencing with 'theory' and then testing that theory empirically. To this end, the interpretive paradigm was adopted and a qualitative research method was deemed appropriate to understand OE repatriation from the respondent's perspective.

### **3.2 Methodology**

Working within the interpretive paradigm, the qualitative method chosen, in-depth interviewing, was deemed the most effective method for examining experiences of potentially sensitive topics like repatriation experience and transition distress. Interviews allow the interviewer to gather rich data and ‘thick’ descriptions, especially with regards to an individual’s experience (McIntosh, 1998). “An interview is literally an *inter view*, an inter-change of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest” [italics in the original] (Kvale, 1996, cited in Jennings, 2005, p.102). Due to the conversational format of in-depth interviews, deep and detailed data can be collected with both parties feeling at ease through the rapport building that is inherent in the process.

In contrast, previous scholars have used questionnaires to gather data regarding repatriation experiences (Sussman, 2001, 2002; Brabanta et al., 1990; Rogers & Ward, 1993; Ward et al., 1998; Inkson et al., 2004b). However, whilst it has been noted that “qualitative research still struggles to gain legitimacy in several of the academic disciplines that are oriented towards human-social phenomena” (Jamal & Hollinshead, 2001, p.4), qualitative research methods, such as interviews, arguably provide “richer” insight into experiences and perceptions of tourists than questionnaires, because researchers have the opportunity to “probe” deeper. For example, a questionnaire might ask respondents to list three adjectives to describe their OE experience, whereas the interviewer would probe these answers and discover why particular words were chosen. The OE might be described as “challenging” on a questionnaire, but the interviewer would discover *why* the OE was challenging. This could be from leaving family and friends indefinitely, catching a bus in a country where no-one speaks English, or setting up a new life by finding accommodation, friends and a job. These more in-depth reasons may not emerge in a quantitative questionnaire, and therefore an in-depth interview approach is more appropriate for the attainment of rich narrative. As Obenour (2005) argues, the “empowerment of the individual’s voice generates narrative

and holistic data” (p.213), which provides meaning and interpretation to experience that is not captured with more deductive forms of research.

Critics of in-depth interviews question the validity and reliability of the results and argue that data cannot be extrapolated to the wider population. In addition, a rapport between the interviewer and interviewee is necessary to collect rich data, and this data may be wasted if the interviewer is unable to probe and follow leads at the appropriate times. Critics would also argue that the researcher may create bias in the results by following a particular line of questioning. “It is presumed that personal, subjective involvement necessarily produces bias of falsehood” (Howe, 1991, p.50). However, for the purpose of this study, the researcher collected data to the point of saturation of new information, which represented the depth rather than breadth of the OE repatriation experience. To assist with rapport building, some of the interviewees were already known to the researcher and various additional rapport building techniques were used as described below. Finally, the researcher endeavoured to minimise the bias by following pre-determined themes and topics and by asking follow up questions at appropriate times.

Critical theorists would argue that “every researcher makes certain presuppositions and assumptions about nature and human society that influences how the research is conducted and presented, even if they are not voiced or recorded” (Jamal & Everett, 2004, p.13). Phenomenologists believe that through interaction with participants the “most accurate and revealing data are collected” (Howe, 1991, p.50). They argue that data is the description of the experience of life with the meanings people attach to their actions, rather than their behaviour in objective terms, and that because researchers are human with previous knowledge and experience, objectivity is impossible. “One has to participate in some fashion in the experience and action of those observed if one is to understand participants from their own frame of reference” (Howe, 1991, p.50). In addition, “numbers do not protect against bias; they merely disguise it” (Patton, 1990, p.480). At least with in-depth interviews, the influence of

the researcher is acknowledged and accepted, and experiences can be understood in personal subjective terms; in respondent's own words. In-depth interviews effectively enable multiple realities to be determined, and although the interviewer may have themes or topics to cover, the session is largely driven by the thinking processes of the interviewee. This conversational style format enables detailed information to be captured regarding attitudes, opinions and values, as the interviewer may ask follow-up or clarifying questions regarding a particular theme or topic.

### **3.3 *Building Rapport – Researcher's Reflections***

In order to draw out individual realities and narrative, rapport between the interviewer and respondent is essential. The following techniques were consciously used at the outset of this research to establish rapport with the interviewee and to encourage the sharing of personal experiences. These techniques are elaborated in some detail below, as it is felt that the methodology for examining more personal and holistic tourism experiences is crucial for advancing tourism knowledge in this regard.

These techniques are:

- understanding the topic
- offering personal experiences to build trust
- demonstrating active listening
- snowball sampling
- creating comfortable settings
- funnel questioning
- probing questions
- transition signals and paraphrasing
- keeping the conversation informal
- reinforcement and feedback techniques (Patton, 1990).

The objective of in-depth interviewing is to obtain personal responses, as they are the key to "understanding people." These techniques enabled the researcher to meet this objective and elicit personal responses.

### 3.3.1 Understanding the Topic

Interviews are an exchange, whereby the interviewer must establish a rapport with reciprocity (Jennings, 2001). To build rapport, the interviewer builds trust and confidence with the interviewee by using illustrative examples (Patton, 1990), which may stem from the researcher's own experience. Having recently returned from overseas herself, the researcher could offer practical knowledge and an in-depth understanding of the topic, terminology and meanings. For example, terminology associated with OE like "dossing", "Shepherds Bush", "party house", and "The Church" were understood along with the implicit meanings the terms contain.

In addition, rapport was built when respondents realised that the researcher empathised with how they were feeling, for example one respondent commented, "It's more acceptable to be single in the UK than in New Zealand." Having lived in the UK and in New Zealand recently, the researcher understood the different social scenes, which are more family-orientated in New Zealand and more liberated overseas, but was careful not to overtly push her own opinions. Another respondent asked after about five minutes whether the researcher had been overseas herself. Following the positive reply, the respondent was more comfortable talking about his personal experiences, as he knew the researcher would understand his repatriation experiences. This respondent was going through the transition phases of repatriation, which is often a difficult and challenging period. At the time of the interview, he was unsure how to explain or interpret his feelings as he had not had time for any reflection; therefore, the researcher's explanation of repatriation as experienced by herself and by other respondents eased his discomfort, making him more open to discussing his personal repatriation experiences.

As the researcher had recently repatriated herself, she was able to comment on some of the reported transition experiences. She built rapport with the respondents who described a diverse range of OE and



repatriation experiences, due to her own varied OE and repatriation experiences.

### 3.3.2 Offering Personal Experiences to Build Trust

To encourage the sharing of personal experiences and to demonstrate further her understanding of the topic, the interviewer built trust and confidence with the interviewee by sharing some of her own personal experiences, without the intention of biasing the results. “Essentially, qualitative interviewing is a social interaction/interchange. It is a two-way exchange” (Jennings, 2005, p.102). As the researcher divulges his or her own personal stories throughout the interview, a sense of reciprocity or rapport will develop (Lindlof, 1995). As Jamal and Everett (2004) point out, “We ourselves are interwoven into the life-world we study, as researchers, residents, societal members and tourists” (p.3). As the researcher was able to demonstrate that she had experienced the repatriation from an OE herself, her personal stories enhanced her credibility and rapport with the interviewee. For example, as interviewees discussed the challenge of establishing new friendships in New Zealand’s smaller communities, the researcher empathised, explaining that she had encountered the same challenges and suggesting methods for overcoming the challenge, like joining sports teams to meet new people.

The concept of reciprocity based on personal experience was especially demonstrated with one respondent, who volunteered information regarding her depression only after the researcher had shared some of her own personal experiences. Reading the transcript, it is clear that the respondent is holding back at the beginning of the interview. She hints at the depression early in the interview, “I was tired and worn out... had been sick and was run down... I was ready to come home... had had enough”, but then moves on to talk about her travelling experiences. She later mentions her difficulties overseas, “I was one of the most experienced people on the staff, which is quite scary... I wouldn’t do it again... it was a lot of responsibility.” However, only after the researcher talks about her personal difficulties in rekindling old friendships in New Zealand with

people who had stayed at home, does the respondent lead the conversation to the issue of her depression, “I had a bit of a shaky start... I took a job [straight away] but the wheels came off... I went heavily into depression.”

It is clear through these examples that rapport was established when the interviewer shared her own experiences, thereby building trust and confidence with the respondent, who was then more comfortable discussing his or her own in-depth personal experiences, thoughts, and feelings.

### 3.3.3 Demonstrating Active Listening

Active listening with an empathic attitude is an essential aspect of in-depth interviewing. “Listening [is] the vital connective tissue of the interview” (Lindlof, 1995, p.184). Listening means not just paying attention to what is being said and showing the respondent that what he or she says is valued, credible and interesting, but also listening for the significance of the interviewee’s remarks.

Due to the presence of the dictaphone and the subsequent release from the requirement of extensive note taking, the researcher was able to listen at a deeper and more complex level in terms of emotion, important insights, figures of speech, non-verbal body language, inconsistencies, and repetitions. She was able to make a mental note of these factors and return to them during the interview, asking for further clarification if necessary, and comparing them to later statements. As the respondents consciously or subconsciously recognised this deeper level of listening, rapport was built. For example, some respondents would allude to an aspect of their repatriation experiences while discussing their OE, like a comparison of work versus lifestyle. The researcher would make a note to return to that topic later and on doing so would often uncover more detail pertaining to the initial comment as the following extract illustrates:

Researcher: You said while we were discussing your OE that you work harder here than over there, why is that?

Respondent: I have more responsibility here, and with the nature of my job I spend a lot of time out of the office. Like yesterday I was in court all day and this is a pile of things I didn't get done (*indicates pile of papers*), so I tend to work longer hours than I did in London. There is more pressure here because of the responsibility. I normally work between 8 and 6.30, whereas in London law firms don't open until 9.30, so I worked 9.30 til 5.30... the expectations were different over there.

The reason for making a note to return to this subject later rather than interrupting the flow of conversation with probing questions whenever relevant topics arose was that the researcher wanted to let respondents dictate the flow of the conversation. To this end, only after the discussion of OE appeared to be complete did the researcher move on to questions regarding repatriation experiences, and these questions began in most cases by following up on comments the respondent had made in their discussion of OE. This revisiting of a previous comment demonstrated to the respondent that their contribution was important and indicated the level of detail desired by the researcher, thereby establishing rapport.

While listening actively, the researcher was also able to read the non-verbal cues. For example, the researcher demonstrated active listening with nods, smiles, looks of concern, and affirming language like "uh-huh" and "yes." These active listening techniques build rapport as they illustrate the value of the respondents' comments. On the whole, active listening enabled the researcher to build rapport by noticing the deeper understanding of what was being said, by returning to key points alluded to in previous discussions, and by adjusting her questioning style where necessary.

#### 3.3.4 Snowball Sampling

Although snowball sampling is a form of non-random sampling, it has the advantage of sampling "difficult to reach participants because the researcher may not be informed about formal or informal 'network connections'" (Jennings, 2001, p.139). Snowball sampling was used to

identify respondents, whereby all travelling contacts of the researcher were asked via email to forward a message to any people they knew, who had returned from their OE (refer to Appendix I for examples of the correspondence). A certain level of rapport is inherent in the snowball sampling process as the interviewee offers to respond and, for the purpose of this research project, had in most cases heard of the study through a friend of the researcher or through the researcher herself. This indirect relationship and willingness to volunteer implies that the respondent commences with a certain degree of confidence and trust in the researcher, and therefore rapport could be established more quickly than with a more impersonal and detached relationship.

### 3.3.5 Creating comfortable settings

The interpretive paradigm calls for data to be “collected in their real world or natural setting as opposed to being collected under ‘experimental’ conditions” (Jennings, 2001, p.38). Where ever possible, the researcher endeavoured to create comfortable settings, to ensure the respondent would feel relaxed and secure enough to discuss personal experiences, and to minimise distractions. Appendix II provides pictorial detail of each interview, with a key detailing the level of comfort for both the researcher and the researched and degree of distraction that each setting presented.

Interviews set in basic but comfortable settings like the respondent’s lounge or office were the most productive and enabled the best rapport to be established, as neither the researcher nor the researched were distracted by external interruption. Those conducted with the presence of any disturbance (for example a baby crying or extensive traffic noise) were the most interrupted and distracting, and therefore the level of rapport was adversely affected, so these settings were avoided where possible.

### 3.3.6 Funnel Questioning

An additional technique used to build rapport was the funnel questioning process (Patton, 1990), which creates a relaxed and non-threatening interview atmosphere in which the respondent can reflect first on general

issues before providing more specific responses. “Only as rapport develops are [respondents] asked to interpret their own personal circumstances” (Minichiello, Aroni, Timewell, & Alexander, 1995, p.84). In this research, general overview questions were asked initially to determine key themes from the respondent’s perspective, for example:

- “How do you feel about being home?”
- “What surprises did you encounter when you arrived back?”
- “In what ways has your life has changed since your overseas experience?”

Follow up or clarifying questions were then asked regarding a particular theme or topic to capture data regarding behaviours, attitudes, and opinions, based on the research objectives, for example:

- “How would you compare travelling in New Zealand to travelling while living overseas?”
- “To what extent do you think New Zealand employers value the OE?”
- “How well do you mix with people who have travelled compared to those who stayed at home?”

This technique was effective as it allowed respondents to form opinions while they were thinking. It also established multiple realities, for example the respondents’ attitudes towards domestic travel at home varied from a keen desire for domestic travel to a blasé attitude of ‘been there, done that’. This funnel questioning technique also ensured the results were largely driven by the thinking processes of the interviewee, for example the question “To what extent do you think New Zealand employers value the OE?” usually stemmed from a statement by the respondent regarding employment at home, which arose from a more general question like “What surprises did you encounter when you arrived back?” The technique also helped build rapport by creating a relaxed atmosphere, whereby the respondent could first consider the wider experiences of repatriation before delving into the more personal aspects of individual behaviour, attitude and opinion.

Overall, the funnel questioning technique was effective as it enabled multiple realities to be determined through the diverse thinking processes of the various respondents, and because it created a non-threatening atmosphere in which the respondent could reflect broadly before responding to more specific questions.

### 3.3.7 Probing Questions

Probing questions enabled the researcher to obtain deep responses and gather rich data, and they gave cues to the respondent about the depth of response desired (Patton, 1990). For example, the initial question asking the respondent to “Tell me about the OE” elicited in some respondents a very brief, five to ten sentence response that required further probing, and in others an up to 35 minute response, much of which was superfluous. Most interviewees responded more fluently if the initial question was followed up with clarifying questions, for example “Where did you live?”, “Where did you work?”, “Who did you socialise with?”, and “Where did you travel?” This meant the interviewees could respond with the topics they deemed most significant to their experience first, and the researcher could then probe the topics she felt the respondent had not covered adequately. In addition, probing questions helped indicate that the researcher valued the response, by asking for more information about a particular topic.

To elaborate on the 35 minute response mentioned above, depending on the personality of the interviewee and the comfort of the setting, some respondents volunteered more information than others. For example, with one interviewee, who likes to talk and was comfortable in her office setting, the field notes offered these comments:

I hardly had to ask questions; as I thought of moving on to the next theme, she went there herself. I asked a few prompting questions to elaborate on some themes which I had identified as relevant, but she mentioned everything on her own. She talked a bit too long and in too much detail about her OE itself, but as I moved her onto comparing the OE and New Zealand, she gave some unsolicited valuable insights.

In contrast, with others, it was necessary to probe for deeper responses. For example, when the reason given for returning home was a visa expiring, probing questions regarding opportunities for sponsorship or visas for other countries revealed more in-depth reasons for the return home like lifestyle, being close to family, and career prospects.

In general, the researcher adapted her style of interviewing depending on the personality and responsiveness of the interviewee. In some cases, it was necessary to probe, while in others the respondent volunteered more information. In both situations, the probing questions helped establish rapport as they indicated the depth of response desired and confirmed the value of the response to the interviewee.

### 3.3.8 Transition Signals and Paraphrasing

Transition signals and paraphrasing indicate to respondents the flow of the conversation and give respondents a chance to add final comments or clarify statements before moving on to the next topic. "Questions prefaced by transition statements help maintain the smooth flow of the interview" (Patton, 1990, p.321). As an alternative approach, "the summarizing (sic) transition lets the person being interviewed know that the interviewer is actively listening and recording what is being said" (Patton, 1990, p.322). While in some cases these transition signals and paraphrasing enabled the conversation to flow, obvious attempts at transition signals in semi-formal interviews can backfire.

The following extract, from an interview that took place early in the research process, illustrates how a transition signal can interrupt the natural flow of conversation:

Researcher: So, we've talked about your OE experience and I'd like to move on to your experience since you came home...

Respondent: *Laughs* Are you reading this from your sheet?

Researcher: No... kind of... I'm supposed to be making conversation, but I guess that sounded funny... So, what made you come home?

This transition signal sounded too formal in the semi-formal setting of an in-depth interview and distracted the respondent from the topic being discussed.

In general, the smooth transition of a seemingly natural conversation established rapport, as the respondent simply responded to the flow of the conversation. However, in terms of this research, probing questions and sharing personal experiences seemed more natural in establishing conversational flow than transition signals and paraphrasing due to the semi-formal atmosphere of the interviews.

### 3.3.9 Keeping the Conversation Informal

Interviews have been described as conversations with a purpose (Jennings, 2001), and interviews need to be “established on ‘a relationship of mutual trust’” (Oakley, 1981, cited in Jennings, 2001, p.162). Interviews are more complex than straightforward conversations, as the “habitual patterns of conversation must be modified in order to maximize [sic] the flow of relevant information in the interview” (Gorden, 1969, cited in Jennings, 2005, p.103). The researcher therefore adjusts his or her conversational habits to gather relevant data from the interviewee.

In terms of this research, as the objective was to gather the personal experiences of the respondents, through semi-formal conversations, a relaxed atmosphere in most interviews was established by either joking with participants, starting with an informal conversation like mutual acquaintances, or offering explanations of respondents’ transition experiences. For example, the researcher explained that the literature states it is harder for people to come home than it is for them to leave, which eased the minds of some repatriates who were experiencing difficulties.

As an example of how informal conversation built rapport, one respondent seemed unenthusiased by the interview, and at one stage the researcher felt that he was holding back, so moved the conversation to the less formal



topic of where he was from. It was discovered that he went to primary school with the researcher's sister-in-law, and after that he eased into the interview.

Another respondent joked about the lack of eligible males within New Zealand, as there are 24,000 fewer single males than females in the 30-something age bracket in New Zealand (KPMG, 2005), and suggested offering free botox to enhance New Zealand women's appearance and attract more males home as this extract illustrates:

Researcher: Do you have any other ideas for enticing OE travellers home?

Respondent: Are you talking about men or women? If you're talking about women, you need to make them hotter, wouldn't you, like offering free breast implants and botox.

Researcher: Just because you need botox, doesn't mean I should recommend it in my thesis.

*Laughing*

Respondent: But let's get practical here, if you want to get the men home, you have to make women more enticing... what are you doing? (*laughing*) You could do with scrubbing up...

Although the conversation takes a humorous turn, the mere mention of this difference of women in New Zealand compared with those overseas by this respondent implies that the gender imbalance and the relatively relaxed attitude of New Zealand women regarding their appearance may be an issue or consideration for returning OE travellers. Therefore, through relaxed and informal conversation, insights were gained that perhaps would not have surfaced were the conversation solely based on formal and reserved conversation.

### 3.3.10 Reinforcement and Feedback Techniques

Reinforcement and feedback techniques reassure the respondent that their individual input is valued during the interview (Patton, 1990). When a new topic arose, the interviewer highlighted the different opinion and probed deeper, "That's interesting, no-one else has said that... why do you think that is?" In contrast, when common themes were established

across the interviewees, the researcher was able to verify the thoughts of the respondent by sharing the experiences of others. For example, when respondents discussed the difficulty in meeting new friends in New Zealand, the interviewer said, “A lot of people are finding the same thing”, which reassured the respondents, making them feel less isolated.

Another reinforcement technique was the use of field notes, which were taken to highlight especially note-worthy remarks, and therefore made the respondent feel that their comments were valued.

### **3.4 Ethical Considerations**

In the gathering of experiences, perceptions, and feelings, the researcher encountered deeply personal stories that pose important ethical considerations. Qualitative researchers are known for ‘drawing out’ the participant and revealing the introspective self (Howe, 1991). Semi-formal settings, conversational style interviews, and relationships based on rapport techniques and trust combine to reveal in-depth insights into respondents’ experiences. For example, in his research of striptease clubs, Ryan & Martin (2001) discussed abuse and suicide with the dancers, and Ryan later viewed this research as “a process of maturation of understanding” on the part of the researcher as well as the researched (Ryan, 2005, p.17). While he set out with broad themes regarding prostitution and sex tourism, the specific nature of the personal responses was unanticipated.

Similarly in this research, while broad themes of repatriation were pursued, individual experiences of depression and personal perspectives of repatriation arose unprompted. For example, two respondents volunteered descriptions of their depression in detail without prompting by the researcher, and another discussed her feelings on getting pregnant as she was planning to travel again. In such cases when delicate topics arose during the course of an in-depth interview, the researcher tried to exhibit empathic neutrality; showing an interest in and caring about the respondent, and listening attentively and empathically in a non-

judgemental way as much as possible. “Empathic listening allows the researcher to reduce emotional tension by providing a supportive response and endorses the informant’s feeling of value” (Minichiello et al., 1995, p.102). These conversations flowed naturally and comfortably, as the researcher allowed the respondent to dictate the direction of the conversation, and respondents were aware they could stop discussing the topic at any stage or later withdraw their transcript.

Therefore, this researcher attempted to exhibit intellectual rigor, professional integrity, and honesty to ensure the trust shown by respondents in discussing in-depth and personal topics was upheld. Rapport was built with sincere albeit conscious intentions to solicit in-depth and personal experiences from respondents, and reciprocity was created as the researcher described her own experiences as part of the informal conversational exchange, thereby offering “a mutual exchange of information and experiences” (Jennings, 2005, p.108) to ensure honesty and trust was established.

### **3.5 Reflexive Considerations**

In the act of building rapport, in considering ethical issues, even in the implicit processes of judging, summarising and reporting research results, the researcher impacts on the research process. It is therefore important to acknowledge that “any gaze is always filtered through lenses of language, gender, social class, race, and ethnicity. There are no objective observations, only observations socially situated in the worlds of the observer and the observed” (Denzin and Lincoln, 1998, cited in Santos, 2005, p.157). Even positivist researchers, who endeavour to explain phenomena objectively by basing them on scientific rules and by using controlled and repeated experiments, impact on research results through their underlying assumption that the world is guided by rules and behaviour is based on causal relationships. However, no such rules and assumptions exist in qualitative research, and therefore, the positivist calls for validity in quantitative research are replaced with trustworthiness and credibility requirements in qualitative research. “Validity in qualitative

research has to do with description and explanation, and whether or not a given explanation fits a given description” (Janesick, 1998, cited in Santos, 2005, p.157). Reflexivity, or clearly locating oneself in one’s research, provides one way of overcoming this issue of validity in qualitative research.

In terms of this research investigation, although the researcher attempted at all times to minimise bias in the investigation, “even with qualitative research, we as researchers decide on what tourist experiences, interpretations and meaning we wish to hear about before we go out to collect the data” (Harris & McIntosh, 2006, p.6). Based on her own personal transition experiences, the OE literature, the experiences of other repatriates as described in the repatriation literature, and the discipline within which the research was conducted, the researcher identified broad topics or themes for enquiry before commencing the research, for example job opportunities on return and establishing social networks. This approach is consistent with other qualitative studies; however, it could be argued that in identifying these broad themes the researcher has anticipated and therefore already biased the research results.

Therefore, in reflecting on the research process, researchers must record their feelings and behaviours that may impact the data, and see themselves as part of the human experience that they are observing (Howe, 1991). They must “expose [themselves] as human beings with individual histories, life stories and experiences, and then discuss how these in turn impact on how [they] approach and analyse research” (Ateljevic, Harris, Wilson, & Collins, 2005, p.17). To achieve this reflexive perspective, this researcher will discuss her own ideologies which drove the research conceptualisation, discuss how her own repatriation experience influenced her approach to the research, and identify her relationship to participants.

Before reflection on the researcher’s involvement in the research process, it is acknowledged that reflexivity refers to more than simply writing one-

self in to the research and should be recognised as “a wider socio-political process which must incorporate and acknowledge the ‘researched’ and our responsibilities to them in the production of... knowledge” (Ateljevic et al., 2005, p.9). An in-depth reflection on these wider implications was out of scope for this research process, nevertheless, it is noted here that external socio-political considerations did indeed impact this research process. For example, the relatively immature scope of tourism as a discipline with it’s “strait-jacketed fascination with applied business research” (Ateljevic et al., 2005, p.10) resulted in the need for a multidisciplinary approach (Zahra, 2003; Ryan, 2000), which incorporated broad cross-disciplinary questions (Echtner & Jamal, 1997) and allowed a wider context of repatriation to emerge in terms of a more psychological perspective to explain the transition of OE repatriation.

### 3.5.1 The Researcher’s Involvement in the Research Process

Firstly, the ideology of the researcher to make New Zealand a ‘better place’ and her tendency to identify opportunities for improvement in any environment drove the research conceptualisation. Having recently returned from her second OE, the researcher understood the difficulties associated with repatriation. She identified a lack of initiatives, networks, and guidance for repatriates, and recognised a gap in academic knowledge and pragmatic initiatives to resolve the issues and minimise the distress experienced by many repatriates. She wanted to raise awareness of OE repatriation experiences with the hope of making the transition easier and minimising distress, and undertook this research with these goals in mind. However, the researcher equally sought a grounded perspective of the repatriation experience by capturing the lived realities of respondents themselves, as guided by an interpretive paradigm.

Secondly, while she experienced minimal transition distress following her OE, the researcher could empathise with distressed repatriates due to her transition following a previous overseas experience as an exchange student:

When I was 18, I went to Germany as an exchange student, which was one of the most challenging years of my life. On my return, with my 'real' parents overseas and after missing the re-entry training, I realise now after conducting this research, I experienced transition distress.

While she was unaware of the term 'transition distress' prior to this research process, the researcher was able to intuitively anticipate and empathise with the distress of respondents. Moreover, the researcher's own transition from her OE influenced the research process in terms of the rapport building and empathic understanding needed in interpretive research.

Thirdly, in terms of her relationship with the respondents, although some respondents heard of the research through mutual acquaintances, and a few were already known to the researcher through previously established relationships, the majority of respondents had no direct connection with the researcher, and mutual acquaintances were not identified. The connectedness between the researcher and researched was based mainly on a common age, background and ethnicity. Most respondents, and indeed most OE travellers, were middle-class, 'pakeha', 25-35 year olds (Bell, 2002), who willingly volunteered to respond, and who, like the researcher, had been home for less than two years. This commonality was a benefit for this research as the researcher was able to understand the repatriation experience of the respondents. Without this empathy and commonality, ethical considerations may perhaps have been greater.

Finally, as with any investigation, the researcher impacted on the research process by establishing parameters by which to limit the scope of the research. Some parameters were defined to be consistent with previous research, while others defined the characteristics of an OE returnee, as the next section explains.

### **3.6 Research Parameters**

For the purpose of this thesis, an OE was defined as three months to five years away from home, as these timeframes imply a desire to settle in a foreign country temporarily and to return home eventually. The OE differs

from the experience of tourists, emigrants, expatriates on assignment and refugees due to the intended length of the sojourn being longer than three months and less than five years (Milne et al., 2001). In terms of how long the effect of repatriation lasts, the literature provides no guidelines and “anecdotal evidence indicates great individual variability” (Sussman, 2002, p.403). However, for the purpose of determining sample parameters for this investigation, respondents were selected if they had returned to New Zealand within five years of the interview, which is consistent with the Inkson & Myers’ (2003) investigation of OE.

Therefore, the specific sample parameters for this study comprised:

1. Returned to New Zealand within five years of interview.
2. Less than 40 years of age (consistent with Inkson & Myers, 2003).
3. Intended to return within five years of leaving New Zealand (Milne et al., 2001).
4. Away for more than three months, which implies a period of settling in a foreign country.
5. New Zealand resident prior to departure and on arrival.
6. Intended to work and travel while overseas, which fits the definition of an OE.

The first three parameters were chosen to retain consistency with previous research and therefore provide an opportunity for comparison in terms of future research. The latter three parameters were chosen to ensure the sample fitted the characteristics of an OE traveller returning to New Zealand.

### **3.7 The Interviews**

Based on these parameters, a total of 24 in-depth conversational interviews were conducted between 12<sup>th</sup> August 2005 and 10<sup>th</sup> January 2006, when saturation occurred as data fitted the research objectives with no new evidence or categories emerging (Jennings, 2005). Each interview lasted on average 50 minutes, with the shortest being 38 minutes (due mainly to the distraction of the presence of a baby in the interview setting) and the longest being 90 minutes. The variations in

interview length indicate the conciseness with which the interviewee spoke, the effect of external distractions, and the personality of respondents in terms of people who liked to talk versus respondents who needed more probing to reveal in-depth thoughts.

While some respondents were known previously to the researcher, and some had heard of the research through mutual acquaintances, most had no direct connection with the researcher. Some respondents were chosen specifically to diversify the sample, for example males were chosen over females in some cases to equalise the gender bias, but most demographics were varied within the sample without the influence of conscious selection, as the next section in this chapter will illustrate.

Approval was obtained by the University of Waikato Human Ethics Committee for this research, and an information sheet was presented prior to each interview to explain the scope of the conversation, the purpose of the study, anonymity and confidentiality, and contact details should the respondent wish to withdraw from the study at any time (refer to Appendix III for a copy of the information sheet). Due to the nature of internet-based messaging, emailing the information sheet in advance of the interview to all contacts was deemed inappropriate, as attachments can pick up and spread viruses, people are generally reluctant to open attachments, and forwarded messages sometimes lose the attachment. However, general information regarding the topic was included in the initial message (refer to Appendix I).

A consent form was signed by the respondent before the interview commenced and the interviewer explained that responses were anonymous and that all data was confidential (refer to Appendix IV for a copy of the consent form). Interviews were conducted face-to-face; therefore, respondents were not forced to answer any questions and could ask questions of the interviewer regarding the study.



A set of themes in the form of an interview guide (refer to Appendix V) was used to remind the researcher of the topics to be covered in the interview. However, the interview schedule “does not necessarily determine the order of the conversation of an in-depth interview” (Minichiello et al., 1995, p.82), and conversations flowed naturally based on the thinking processes of the interviewee. At the start of each interview, the researcher explained the overall agenda and format of the conversation, making clear the objective to discuss repatriation rather than the OE itself.

To provide context, the researcher opened questioning by asking for a brief overview of the OE, which warmed the respondent to the topic and questioning format. Depending on the description of the OE, the rest of the themes listed on the interview guide were discussed in varying order throughout the conversation, until each of the key themes had been covered. For example, depending on the relative importance to the individual respondent, some respondents discussed employment issues first and family relationships later, while for others the reverse was true.

The topics covered in the interviews, based on the research objectives included: Relationships with friends and family, for example the ease of rekindling friendships on returning home; employment opportunities and the perceived value of the OE by New Zealand employers; and personal development in terms of how life had changed following the OE.

Additional themes, like transitional phases of repatriation, the relatively high cost of living in New Zealand, and an evaluation of transportation in New Zealand, were raised by the respondents themselves.

The data gathered in interviews was audio recorded in all except two interviews. The presence of the dictaphone was acceptable for most respondents. For some though, the dictaphone did influence their responses, for example one interviewee said he was “drained” after the “official” conversation ended and the dictaphone was turned off, but then continued discussing the topic afterwards. Another respondent may have been uncomfortable with the dictaphone as she whispered a few things,

like admitting she hadn't paid tax overseas; however, with gentle probing questions and a reminder that all responses were confidential she relaxed and responded in more depth.

Field notes were taken by the researcher to highlight note-worthy remarks and to document non-verbal details of the interview like lengthy pauses, interpersonal interactions, and body language, mainly for the researcher's own reflections on the interview process. Some respondents continued conversing after the official interview was completed and relevant comments were included in the interview transcripts on permission from the respondent. In order to minimise the disturbance of the note-taking during the interview, the field notes were expanded after the researcher departed from the respondent, to include a description of the setting, its influence on the interview, the relationship with the respondent and communication before and after the interview.

### **3.8 *The Respondents***

From the 183 initial emails sent to all contacts of the researcher who had travelled on their OE or were on an OE at that time, 89 responses were received, of which 23 were known personally to the researcher; however, most of the respondents for this research were not chosen for this reason. The first four respondents were selected initially as they were known to the researcher, which is a beneficial way to begin interviewing, as it allows a new researcher to find his or her feet in a 'safe' and comfortable environment. One risk with this familiarity, as was highlighted in the first interview, is that the respondent may assume the researcher knows something (for example the first respondent was adopted as a child which affected her response regarding family relationships), of which the researcher is actually unaware. Subsequent respondents were selected based on having no direct relationship with the researcher, their geographic dispersion (all within the North Island due to budgeting constraints), gender, and the length of time at home, to create diversity across the sample. By chance, the occupations, housing situation, salary

range, time spent overseas and age of respondents were varied within the sample without the influence of conscious selection.

### 3.8.1 Demographic Profile of Respondents

Demographic information (refer to Appendix VI) was obtained for example the length of the OE, location of residence in New Zealand, main location of residence while overseas, age, gender and salary range of respondent. This information was used for categorising the profile of the 24 respondents (see tables 1-6 below).

Most OE travellers conduct their OE in the UK, whether in London, Dublin or small towns in the UK, due to the visa regulations and the common language, and some conducted their OE in multiple locations, for example London and Vancouver. Therefore, most respondents for this research had repatriated from the UK (Table 1).

**Table 1 City of residence overseas**

City of Residence Overseas	Number of Respondents
London	16
Western Europe (other than London), including Spain, Amsterdam, Ireland, Scotland, France, and elsewhere in England.	12
China	1
Africa	1
Vancouver	1
NB: N>24 as some respondents spent their OE in multiple settings	Total N = 24

OEs were found to vary in length. However, as the UK offered, until recently, a two year working holiday visa or a four year ancestry visa, most respondents were away between two and two and a half years, or longer than four years (allowing time for travel before and after the visa limitation). Table 2 indicates the range of timeframes of respondents' OE.

**Table 2 Months away overseas**

Months Away Overseas	Number of Respondents
0-6 months	1
7-12 months	1
13-18 months	0

18-24 months (18 months - 2 years)	2
25-30 months (2 - 2.5 years)	7
31-36 months (2.5 - 3 years)	2
37-42 months (3 - 3.5 years)	2
43-48 months (3.5 - 4 years)	3
49+ months (4+ years)	6
	N = 24

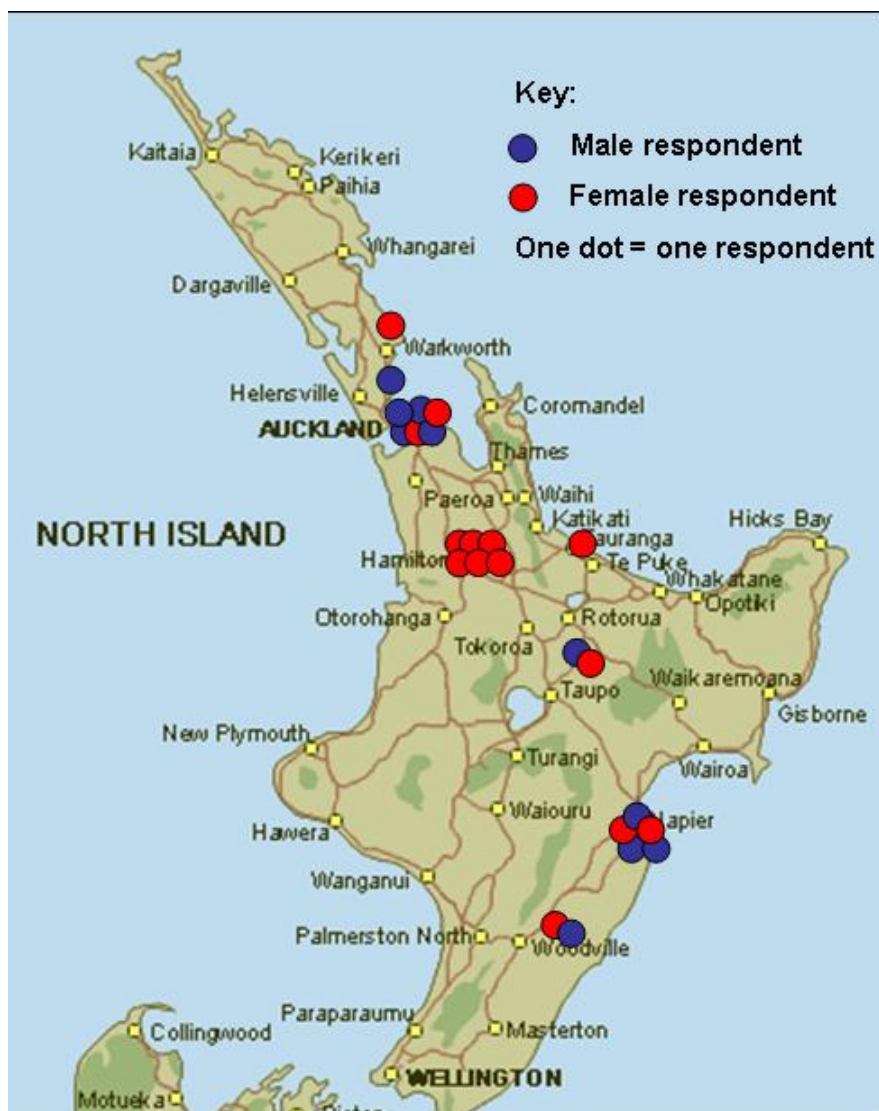
To obtain a variety of results in terms of the repatriation experience, some respondents were selected specifically based on the amount of time back in New Zealand as at the date of the interview. Most respondents had been back for between seven months and two years (Table 3). It was found during the interviews that repatriates back for less than six months were less able to reflect on their repatriation experiences, as they were still experiencing and trying to make sense of the changes. Those home for longer than two years, were also less likely to reflect effectively on their transition as they had forgotten much of the experience and could in some cases barely remember the OE itself. Therefore, respondents returned between seven months and two years offered the most in-depth reflections on their repatriation. Table 3 details the range of periods of return.

**Table 3 Months returned home**

<b>Months Returned Home</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
0-6 months	4
7 months - 1 year	8
13 months - 2 years	7
2+ years	5
	N = 24

Some respondents were selected based on their geographic location within the North Island of New Zealand to obtain a diverse sample as Figure 2 illustrates (overleaf). About half (54%) of respondents returned to the same city they had left from.

Figure 2 Geographic location of respondents



In terms of specific living circumstances, Table 4 indicates the range of accommodation across the sample. The majority of respondents own their own house, reflecting a life phase of 'settling down', and the other categories are relatively evenly spread, possibly reflecting the range of periods of return.

Table 4 Housing circumstances

Housing Circumstances	Number of Respondents
Flatting	4
Living with parents	5
Living with partner	5
Own house	8
Other (trailer in caravan park + in parent's house without parents)	2
	N = 24

More females (70%) than males volunteered to an interview from the initial email sent to all contacts; therefore, some respondents were selected to provide a more even spread of gender (42% male n=10: 58% female n=14).

The ages of respondents varied between 26 and 34 years, although 30 was the mean age; 28 was the mean age at the time of return from OE. Table 5 indicates the age ranges of respondents at the time of the interview and at the time of their return.

**Table 5 Ages of respondents**

Age of respondents	Number of Respondents (age at time of interview)	Number of Respondents (age at time of return)
24 years	0	3
25 years	0	0
26 years	2	4
27 years	2	3
28 years	2	3
29 years	5	4
30 years	2	3
31 years	4	2
32 years	2	1
33 years	2	1
34 years	3	0
	N = 24	N = 24

The range of professions was diversified across the sample with no influence in conscious selection (Table 6). Occupations ranged from unemployed to self-employed to employed professionals (accountants, teachers, public servants, managers etc.). Salaries were spread across the range from less than NZ\$20,000 to more than NZ\$100,000, and most salaries were between NZ\$40,000 and NZ\$60,000.

**Table 6 Occupation at home**

Occupation in New Zealand	
Accounts Receivable	Nurse
Bank Manager	Office Manager / Accounts
Business Analyst	Physio, Mother
Business Owner	Policeman
Civic Events Coordinator	Public Programme Leader
Environmental Engineer	Recruitment
Farmer - part owner	Reservations Consultant
Farming - dairy	Senior Sponsorship Producer
Finance	Teacher
Freelance photographer	Teacher, Mother
Lawyer	Unemployed
Marketing	Unemployed
	N = 24

Approximately half the respondents (n=13) viewed their overseas job as a 'career advancement', whereas more respondents (n=16) viewed their job at home as a career advancement. In addition, many repatriates (n=17) changed jobs when they arrived back home, meaning they either weren't working in their field overseas, or they decided on a career change upon returning home.

### **3.9 Data Analysis**

Data was analysed using content analysis; "an observational research method that is used to systematically evaluate the actual and symbolic content of all forms of recorded communication" (Hall & Valentin, 2005, p.191). This analysis took a summation approach, whereby data was reduced into categories that integrated and generalised the major themes (Jennings, 2001). It has been argued that content analysis has potential for bias due to the influence of the researcher. However, many forms of social science research method depend on the expertise, judgement, and reflection of the researcher. By using content analysis, the repatriation 'stories', as determined by the respondents, emerged from the data naturally. In addition, as the findings were continually compared against the conceptual categories, the researcher was able to validate the

emerging theories against the data to “complete its grounding” (Jennings, 2001, p.211). Therefore, the findings of this research were generated inductively using a grounded theory approach.

For the purpose of data analysis, a summary of notes from each audio tape was created as time and resource constraints precluded full transcriptions. For the two interviews where no dictaphone was used, the fuller field notes were summarised. These summary notes produced 167 pages of single-spaced, often bulleted text for analysis, with key quotes transcribed in full. These notes were sorted, so the researcher could add comments in the margins, highlight the reoccurring points from each interview to establish commonalities between respondents, and create a categorisation system (Patton, 1980). The categories were derived from the respondents’ stories, the research objectives and the literature review (Minichiello et al., 1995).

Interview notes were categorised initially with a colour-coded transitional timeframe as illustrated below (Figure 3) as the responses seemed to differ significantly based on the period respondents had been home, i.e. less than six months, seven months to a year and thirteen months to two years. At the same time, initial categories and associated codes were derived based on the following common themes that emerged through the interviews:

- tourism (Trav)
- friends and family (FF)
- living Conditions (Life)
- personality (Pers)
- job (Job)
- recommendations (Rec).



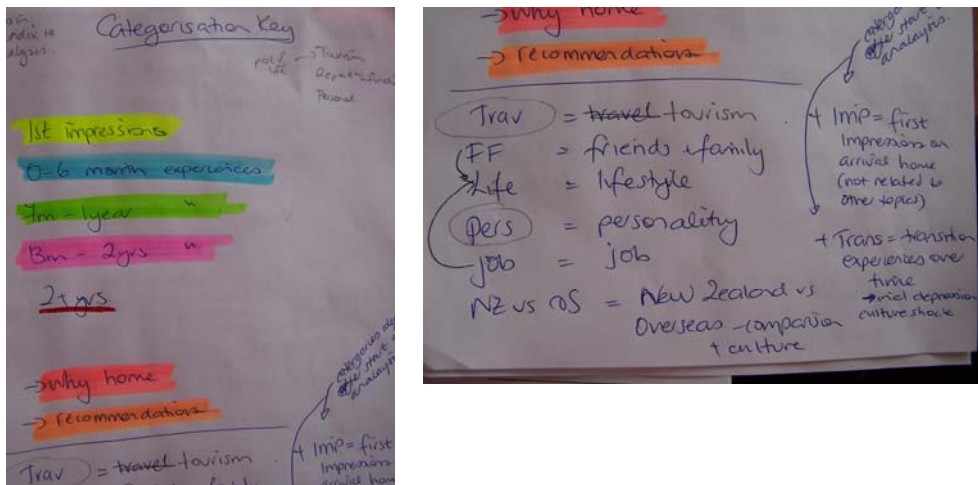


Figure 3 Initial categorisation of notes

As the notes were analysed in more depth at subsequent times, three additional categories were identified:

- New Zealand vs. overseas (NZ vs OS)
- first impressions (Imp)
- transition (Trans), which were in-depth personal experiences over time including culture shock and depression, and which were later merged with the colour-coded transitional timeframe categorisation listed above.

Noteworthy comments were then cut out of the transcripts, numbered by interviewee, and pasted together under the common theme (see Figure 4).

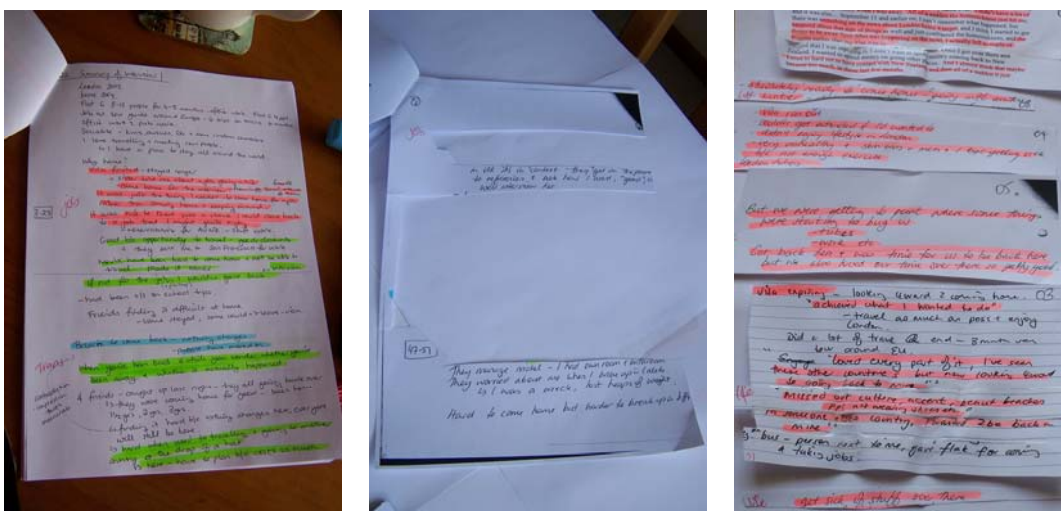
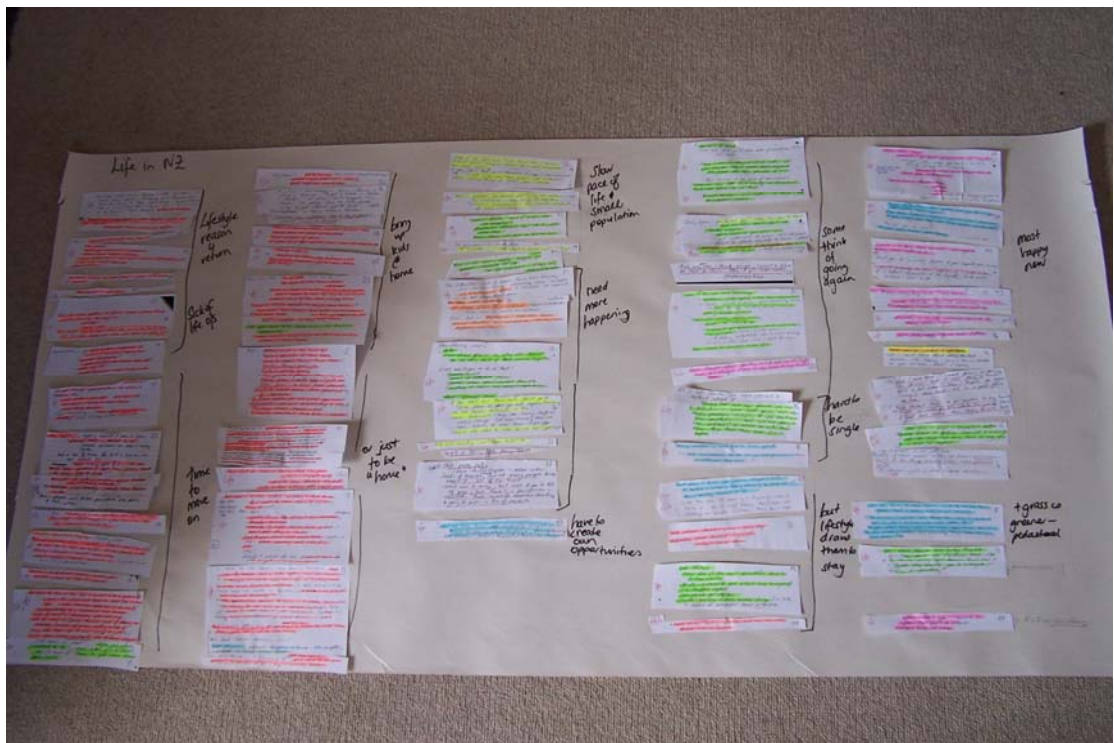


Figure 4 Collating comments under categories

Comments were collated within their categories to elicit key narratives or personal experiences, and in the first analysis, there were 11 dining-table-sized sheets of “stories” (Figure 5).



**Figure 5 Putting the ‘stories’ together**

The research notes were reviewed following an iterative process, whereby as the ‘stories’ unfolded, previously analysed data was reviewed to confirm or reassign the categorisation. During this reanalysis, it was found that living conditions (Life) comments corresponded more effectively with the transitional timeframe categorisation (Trans), for example the first impressions of cost of living in New Zealand, and the transitional nature of housing from living with parents initially to finding their own accommodation. In addition, this further analysis revealed that the ‘personality’ comments better fitted a ‘personal development’ category as the discussions centred on change rather than individual personality characteristics. As the final transcripts were categorised, the notes and quotes corresponded clearly with the key themes discussed by respondents and five main categories with sub themes were confirmed. These categories incorporated the previous categorisation and coding as follows:

1. Why OE travellers return home (FF, Job, Life).

2. Transition period
  - first impressions (Imp, Life)
  - comparing home to overseas (NZ vs OS)
  - the thought of 'what's next'? (Trans, NZ vs OS, Life)
  - adjustments to home (Life, NZ vs OS)
  - changing priorities and behaviours (Trans).
3. Personal experiences
  - relationships with friends and family (FF)
  - working in New Zealand (Job)
  - personal development (Pers).
4. A Reflection of repatriation (Trans, NZ vs OS)
  - possible explanations for the degree of repatriation distress
  - impact of life on OE repatriation.
5. Considerations for easing OE repatriation (Rec, NZ vs OS).

This systematic content analysis procedure is recommended by qualitative research scholars (for example, Hall & Valentin, 2005; Patton, 1980), as the data is not forced by 'a priori' theory and the researcher is able to "discover what the textual units being studies reveal" (Jennings, 2001, p.202) while maintaining independence from the data itself. As can be seen from the iterative categorisation process described above, the results did indeed emerge from the respondent 'stories'. With content analysis, it is the researcher's responsibility to explain the meaning of these textual units in the context of the 'real world' environment and social setting in which they arose (Jennings, 2001), and in summarising these 'stories' within the said categories, the researcher has attempted to generate theory based on the generalisation of multiple realities, in accordance with the interpretive paradigm.

### **3.10 Research Limitations**

Although the researcher has endeavoured to generate valid robust data, every research investigation is constrained by research limitations to some degree. In terms of this research, due to the time and financial constraints, interviews were not conducted with OE travellers who had

tried to repatriate and had returned overseas, nor with OE travellers who were still overseas and thinking about repatriating. However, while the perceptions of these attempted and potential repatriates may challenge some of the conclusions drawn in this research and may pose valuable contributions in further research, the purpose of this research was to describe the repatriation experiences of actual repatriates, and therefore these potentially challenging views were out of scope of this investigation.

More congruent to the scope of this investigation is the limitation regarding the fact that only one individual interview was conducted per respondent at one point in time, meaning the subsequent transition phases for each respondent could not be measured. It would have been interesting to re-interview especially the recently returned repatriates, to assess how their comments might have changed. For example in two separate instances, respondents who thought they may go back overseas at the time of the interview spoke to the researcher casually approximately six months afterwards and said they would now stay at home. While these statements validate the research findings in terms of a transition period, deeper comments regarding their change of mind would have contributed significantly, but were limited by the timeframe constraint of completing the research by a specific date.

Furthermore, as chapter four illustrates, the research results often pertain to individual experiences and examples provided illustrate personal perceptions. This individualistic version of reality is fundamental to the interpretive paradigm, which assumes that multiple realities exist. However, a more collective construction of the repatriation experience may have been useful, for example through focus groups which would verify or refute the individual comments. On the other hand, the individualistic nature of repatriation may have prevented a common agreement being reached within a focus group and the deeply personal experiences may not have been as easily shared in the more formal group environment.

Chapter four also indicates that the respondents' attitudes pertaining to the stages of repatriation could in some cases potentially be attributed to personality. For example, the respondent for whom repatriation posed few problems and who viewed it as "just another phase of life", was described by his wife in a subsequent interview as easy-going, whereby "nothing ruffles his feathers." This almost complete lack of transition issues was certainly not the norm amongst respondents as chapter four will indicate and therefore may have reflected this respondent's personality. However, personality tests were not conducted, nor were they an objective within this research process, and can therefore not be analysed against the results.

Finally, in terms of the analysis, some scholars would argue that "value-free interpretive research is impossible... because every researcher brings preconceptions and interpretations to the problem being studied" (Denzin, 1989, cited in Patton, 1990, p.476). A team of researchers could have analysed the results independently to generate potentially more credible and reliable results.

### ***3.11 Summary of the Chapter***

The research design was based on the objectives of this research, which required the researcher to assume multiple realities, collect data in 'real' world settings, and build rapport with reciprocity by creating a comfortable and natural atmosphere for in-depth interviewing. The objectives also required the capture of personal experience and narrative; thus, consideration of epistemology and methodology were important. Moving beyond historical tourism research that has mainly adapted a positivist or applied approach, this study sought to further the capture of 'thick' description using an interpretive paradigm, and specifically in-depth conversational interviews; this requiring a certain level of skill and reflection on the part of the researcher.

This research design enabled the researcher to solicit in-depth responses relating to personal aspects of repatriates' lives by also exhibiting

empathic understanding in naturally flowing conversations. As part of this interpretive approach, rapport was established using a variety of techniques, which were adjusted based on the individual respondent. For example, some respondents needed more probing questions to share their personal experiences, while others needed more feedback and reinforcement to illustrate the importance of their responses. In some cases, due to this rapport, the respondents offered deeply personal stories. In addition, the researcher endeavoured to incorporate a holistic approach by reflecting on her relationship with participants, acknowledging the role she played, and reflecting on her subsequent impact on the research process.

In terms of the research method, the data collected from 24 in-depth interviews across a variety of respondents was analysed using content analysis. 'Stories' were divided and categorised under common themes, and conclusions were drawn from the summation of these 'stories'. The following chapter will present the findings of this research detailing in-depth personal responses regarding OE repatriation experiences as captured using the interpretive paradigm. Chapter five will then discuss considerations for easing the repatriation of OE returnees.

## 4 Findings

From 24 in-depth conversational style interviews, the personal experiences of OE returnees were collected. Rapport building techniques like probing questions enabled deep and personal experiences to be captured, and the researcher ensured the respondents' thought processes dictated the direction of the semi-formal conversation. The transcribed notes and key quotes were analysed through content analysis, and categorised based on the insider's perspective that emerged in the form of common themes. These common themes were based on the research objectives of why OE travellers return home, capturing the in-depth personal experiences of OE returnees regarding relationships with friends and family, working at home and personal development, and considering the impact of life events and other key influences on OE repatriation. An additional theme arose through the interview conversations in terms of the phases of transition comprising first impressions, comparing home to overseas, the thought of 'what's next?', adjustment to home and changing priorities and behaviours. The final research objective regarding considerations for easing the repatriation experience are addressed in chapter five.

### **4.1 *Why OE Travellers Return Home***

To discuss the first objective of why OE travellers return home, although visa expiration was a common reason given for returning, deeper probing revealed more complex, underlying motives like lifestyle, family, career prospects, personal relationships, life events and personality. Moreover, the reasons for return are not mutually exclusive as they are interconnected, and isolating or categorising them tends to ignore the holistic perspective of the return home. For example, a respondent may return for 'family reasons' which may be linked to lifestyle reasons like homesickness or may be caused by a life event like a relationship break-up and the subsequent need to be geographically close to loved ones. Nevertheless, for the purpose of reporting results logically and methodically, this section provides an overview of the key reasons for

return: Family and romantic relationships, lifestyle, and career prospects. The impact of life events and personality on the reason for return and repatriation experiences in general will be discussed later in this chapter.

#### 4.1.1 Family and Romantic Relationships

In terms of family relationships, the findings of the in-depth interviews revealed that respondents returned from their OE for a variety of specific family reasons, including missing the aging of loved ones, a 'feeling of exclusion' from family activities like birthdays, weddings and in some cases funerals, or simply missing out on family life.

With reference to missing the aging of loved ones, some respondents talked of aging parents, grandparents, nieces and nephews. For example, one respondent talked of her niece, who she had been close to before she left and who had grown in the four years that the respondent was away. "I still feel sorry about missing her grow up... We were really close when I left and it wasn't the same when I got back, which was pretty sad."

Regarding the 'feeling of exclusion' from family events, some respondents talked of family events that they missed, for example, a death in the family, "I decided there was no point coming home to celebrate death... I would've liked to go to [her auntie's] funeral... it's just one of those things." Others discussed siblings' weddings and significant birthdays as a reason for returning, for example, "I came home for three weddings during my OE. They were difficult decisions but I'm glad I came back for them... After the third time, I knew I wanted to be home again indefinitely." The effect of life events generally will be discussed in more detail later in the thesis; however, the point here is that significant family events influenced repatriates' decision to return. In addition to specific events, missing out on family life in general caused some respondents to return, for example:

You can't come home for a weekend... you couldn't come home for a three day weekend and mow the lawns for your old man... or go around to your mates place for a barbeque on a Tuesday night... And that just got to me... well not 'got to me' but if I was going to stay overseas, I needed to be able to do those things; and I couldn't. So family was my reason for coming home mainly.



An additional aspect of the “family reason” that emerged through this research was the relationship with a partner. Both the desire to continue a relationship and the effect of a break-up reportedly influenced the decision to return home. Some respondents returned with their partners, for example, “I decided he was worthwhile to come home for... I would still be over there except for my partner.” Another respondent talked of his relationship with the partner he had left at home, saying, “My partner was here and wasn’t coming overseas, so it was either walk away from that relationship or come back to it... I decided to come back and now we’re married.” These respondents made a conscious decision to return home to pursue their romantic relationships.

Alternatively, for others, a break-up overseas generated a desire to return home. Breaking up overseas can be traumatic and can “ruin your whole experience over there.” For one respondent, her concept of home was tied up with her partner, and when he broke up with her overseas, she no longer felt she had a ‘home’ there:

Being with him felt like another home, so when that fell apart, that’s when I really missed home, because suddenly I didn’t have that home overseas anymore... I needed to be home... coming home was part of needing to heal.

In contrast, for another respondent, while she yearned for the support of family and security of home to heal after her relationship ended, she decided to persevere and changed location overseas instead:

I got homesick the first year, because I only had my partner and his family. Then he moved away for a couple of months and I was in Scotland by myself. So I found I got quite depressed, but at the same time I didn’t want to go home, because I was there now and I had to stick it out. When we broke up - I was so heartbroken, I’d never experienced that before – I could’ve easily just got on a plane and come home. I was ringing my Mum every night; she was saying, ‘Don’t come home. I know you want to, but it’ll be for the best’... I decided to stick it out, and get out of Scotland and go to London instead.

As the contrast in these examples illustrate, the end of a romantic relationship overseas may cause some travellers to return home, although others may decide to stay. As such, other factors like the personality of

the respondent, or the length of the sojourn, may influence the final decision of whether to repatriate or remain overseas.

#### 4.1.2 Lifestyle Reasons

In addition to family and romantic relationship reasons, repatriates also returned for a variety of reasons relating to lifestyle, for example the pressure of the overseas lifestyle, living conditions overseas compared to home, the desire to settle down at home, or simply because they were ready to return.

Respondents described how the lifestyle can exhaust OE travellers and push them to return home for a rest. According to most respondents, while the OE offers adventure, excitement and new friendships, it also comprises self-reliance, complete independence, and challenges which can become “wearying”. Therefore, for some travellers, the OE lifestyle became tiresome, for example for the teacher who travelled during every school holiday for four and a half years:

I was tired and worn out. I'd had no rest over four and a half to five years overseas, had overloaded myself with work and stress, my body was tired, and I was sick a lot. I needed to come home. I thought, 'I've had enough of this'. Even travelling... I needed a break from it. In London, you travel when you have a holiday, but travelling isn't really a holiday. I never gave myself a proper holiday; I was either working or travelling.

While for some people, travelling may seem like a holiday, for these respondents travelling often comprised backpacking on low budgets, finding their own accommodation, food and transport, and making their own decisions, which can in itself be quite stressful, as another respondent summarised:

Travelling is this exciting thing but it's one of the most stressful things you can do... In a living situation, you make decisions often but in a travel situation you make them every three seconds, 'Do we go left or right? Do we eat here or there?' It's so stressful... People don't realise the pressure travel puts you under.

The type of travel these respondents undertook was therefore not the relaxing break from work that the traditional definition of 'holiday' implies.

Moreover, another contributing factor to the return home was the seemingly unhealthy lifestyle overseas, including the intense partying, the increased toxic ingestion (excessive alcohol, drugs and smog) and relative lack of healthy living options. For example, one respondent noted his “skin was a mess” and he “kept getting sick because of not enough exercise”. Regarding exercising options, another respondent described an attempt at a mountain biking excursion from London:

The one time I went mountain biking in the UK, we put our bikes on the train, then on the tube, and on another train... it was an hour and a half before we got anywhere where we could start biking... our climate at home permits us to do more stuff outside.

This lack of healthy living added to the stress of the OE lifestyle and therefore contributed to some respondents’ decision to return home.

Due to these feelings of dissatisfaction with the overseas lifestyle, respondents reported feelings of homesickness which contributed to their decision to return home. For example, for one respondent, homesickness occurred suddenly and became unbearable: “All of a sudden the homesickness just hit me... it just became too much in those last few months. I just needed to come home.” Likewise, for another respondent, who had found that “leaving summer on the Coromandel to go back to a February English winter after a visit home was just horrific”, said her homesickness built up over time and contributed significantly to the decision to return: “Once you start feeling homesick, you get it in your head that you want to come home and nothing will displace that.” Others found the English winters depressing, and got homesick during the winter because it was “dark at eight in the morning and dark again by three”. Although homesickness alone was reportedly not a deciding factor for travellers to return home, it was often based on the dissatisfaction of the lifestyle abroad compared to home and therefore contributed to the overall decision to return.

Some respondents also became ‘sick’ of the living conditions overseas and lamented the perceived comfort and ease of their lifestyle, which they remembered enjoying in New Zealand. Respondents commented on how

the living conditions overseas are significantly different from that at home, especially in London, and that these living conditions can cause sickness and stress. The main difference in living conditions reported was the housing circumstance of paying cheap rent to finance the 'travelling and partying' lifestyle. Especially in London, the vast houses overcrowded with "dossers" created difficult living conditions for some respondents, who favoured the cheap rent to finance travel over moving to a place with fewer people. In addition, these vast houses were often poorly heated, rundown and located in dubious suburbs, thereby further contributing to the cheaper rent. Such living conditions can reportedly become taxing and initiated in some respondents a feeling of discontent. For example, one respondent became "sick of living with flatmates who were terrible 'pigs', sick of living in party houses, sick of seeing the mould crawling across bedroom ceiling and living like that just so I could have money to travel". This respondent came home partially because she wanted a "nice house" to live in and couldn't afford one overseas.

Along these lines, another lifestyle-related reason for returning home was the desire to settle down. It was apparent from the interviews that if OE travellers move cities as part of their OE, or change jobs repeatedly to allow for travel in between, they may eventually be "over moving to a new place and meeting new people." Whilst respondents reportedly appreciated the development and learning experience of establishing a new life overseas, some questioned the need to undertake this process repeatedly and therefore eventually decided to return home to build their "next life". The timing for building this 'next life' tended to be based on age, the need to establish a career, or the desire to start a family. This was especially true of those respondents reaching or passing 30 years of age. As one respondent pointed out, "Now it's time to grow up. I'm 30 now, my friends are married with kids and I'm not even thinking about children... We see building a house as a good achievement now; we've had our party times." Although other respondents may not have stated categorically that their age was a contributing factor to their return, they subtly indicated that their OE lifestyle was not sustainable with comments

like: “I didn’t want to wake up at 40 and still be on an OE”; “I needed to start being mature”; and “I’ve been an idiot overseas, done everything I needed to do... now I want a job to focus on. It’s time to get some brain cells back.” Another respondent summarised this pressure of aging:

I went to the New Zealand Food and Wine Festival in London, and met a lot of people having kids, getting married, and moving on. I thought ‘I can’t keep living life in limbo, I need to make some practical decisions’... I felt I wasn’t getting any younger, and other people were making big calls... sometimes you need to make a big call rather than just doing same old thing. So I made the spontaneous decision to come home.

Moreover, some repatriates specifically mentioned the desire to start a family at home, for example one respondent who, though she didn’t have a partner at the time, ultimately wanted to settle in New Zealand: “It’s where I can imagine having a family and bringing up kids... I enjoyed my childhood here and that’s what I would want to pass on.” For these respondents, the desire to settle was the motivating reason for returning.

In addition to the desire to settle down, some respondents reported simply that they were ready to return home. These respondents described how they had returned home before any feelings of discontent developed, as they had “achieved what [they] wanted to do”, and “ticked all the boxes.” In other words, they were satisfied with their experiences overseas and saw no reason for staying away.

#### 4.1.3 Career Prospects

As well as returning for friends and family or lifestyle reasons, some respondents, especially those without ‘career advancing’ jobs overseas, made the conscious decision to return home for career prospects. Interestingly, the majority of respondents changed career upon returning home, although one respondent found this high incidence of career change unsurprising:

A lot of people go to university still unsure of what they are going to do. You are 17 when you decide what to do at university based on your seventh form papers. Let’s say you’re 21 when you come out, you might work for a couple of years, but you’re doing that job because you need a job and you’ve got a job. Then you travel and you do whatever it takes –

you apply the stuff you've got in a job overseas, then come back at 28 or 30, and that's when you're finally sitting down and thinking, 'What am I actually doing with my life?'

These respondents came home to pursue a more structured career and some respondents saw the return home as a unique opportunity to “start afresh” on a “clean canvass” in terms of working opportunities at home. For example, five of the twenty-four respondents returned to start their own businesses in New Zealand. Moreover, other respondents mentioned their readiness to establish a career at home, to stop “treading water” or “biding time” overseas, “not getting anywhere apart from the enjoyable experience.” As mentioned earlier, the OE lifestyle is significantly different from that at home and for some respondents, the return home represented a chance to establish a new career or to progress their existing career.

In terms of career progression at home, some respondents were headhunted or offered jobs prior to arrival in New Zealand with the advantage of a guaranteed income upon repatriation, while others reported that they had been offered interviews or a partial commitment to “sort the details out later.” On the whole, most respondents agreed that the possibility of a job on repatriation would be an enticing prospect for returning OE travellers.

#### ***4.2 The Transition Period Upon Return Home***

Although respondents returned home for a variety of reasons, most experienced to some degree a period of ‘transition’. This concept of a transition period emerged as a common theme among the reported personal repatriation experiences of respondents, and was not anticipated as a specific objective of this research. The transition period is divided here, for the purpose of reporting results, into five distinct phases; however, in reality, the repatriation experience exhibits more fluid phases of transition. These five phases comprise: First impressions and noticing changes that have occurred while the respondent was away; comparing home to overseas; deciding what to do next and questioning the decision to return; adjusting to home and ‘planting roots’; and finally changing

priorities and behaviours, in conjunction with a complete adaptation to home, as the respondent's memory of the OE fades.

These phases of transition can be loosely applied to the W-curve theory of repatriation, because following the excitement of coming home after an extensive sojourn abroad, OE travellers, who have become used to a significantly different lifestyle overseas, are reportedly surprised and sometimes shocked by misremembered aspects of home. For example as one respondent indicated:

The pace of life is slower here than I remembered. It's frustrating. It's good place to settle with family, but it's not good for single people. I didn't think it would be this difficult but I guess I have changed too.

These unexpected changes unleashed reverse culture shock for some respondents, described by the W-curve theory as the shock phase, whereby the "sense of joy [of being home]... dissipates quickly" (Foust et al., 1981, p.22), as the sojourner realises that the home environment is not as remembered. In conjunction with these first impressions is a comparison between home and overseas with a "surprisingly critical view of the home culture" (Smith, 2002, p.256), which reflects the recoil stage of the W-curve, illustrated by this comment:

I was very excited about coming home, I just couldn't wait. But once I was home, after about three weeks, I think I was ready to go back... I was just bored, there was nothing to do here and no-one to play with.

Eventually, returnees noticed a period of adjustment or adaptation as their lifestyle reverted to a day-to-day routine, as their OE seemed "like a dream", and as their attitudes and behaviour were modified to suit the home culture. This synthesis with the home culture reflected the final phase in the transition period, and for some repatriates it was a period of growth as new values and attitudes acquired on OE, like eating new foods, were integrated with the home values and attitudes and a comfortable life was constructed.

However, before describing these generalised phases of transition, it should be noted that the intensity of the transition period varied significantly among respondents from severe depression, to annoyance

and frustration with home, to complete and immediate acceptance of the home culture and way of life. At the extremes of the transition experience, some respondents experienced severe depression, for example as one respondent reported: “I came home and just flipped. I was screaming, swearing, and acting like a six year old under any pressure... it was eight months and a couple of months of counselling before I had any memories of my OE.” For another respondent, “Coming home was so painful; it was terrible trying to get a life when everyone else had a life”. In contrast, at the other extreme, some respondents experienced few or no issues on arrival at home, for example as one respondent reflected, “This is where I’m from... where I want to be”, or they adopted a get-on-with-it attitude to cope with and distress: “You just stick it out and think it can only but get better”, and therefore reported few repatriation issues. Clearly, the intensity of the transition period differed among respondents; section 4.4 will discuss some possible reasons for this variety in experiences.

#### 4.2.1 First Impressions

Regardless of whether respondents experienced a distressing or trouble-free transition, most respondents reported having ‘first impressions’ or noticing changes that had occurred while they were away, like new buildings or tea-rooms changed into a trendy café. As well as physical changes, respondents noticed aspects of New Zealand, which they had forgotten about, and which contrasted with their life overseas, like the fresh air, the “friendly people in the shops” and the beautiful New Zealand scenery, for example “When I first got back the New Zealand scenery blew me away. I remember driving down the Napier-Taupo road and even just driving along the road was just amazing. The scenery was spectacular... beautiful.” These pleasant aspects of home were welcomed by most respondents, for example as one respondent commented: “When I first got home, I stayed with my sister... and woke up every morning to look out at the sea. I had really missed that overseas.” In addition, roads they travelled frequently before they left were now reportedly marvelled at by most respondents, which illustrates how even attractive aspects of home can be forgotten:



The prettiness of the scenery was taken for granted before. I remember driving on the road south and thinking “this is actually quite pretty” and never having stopped to think about it before, it was just somewhere you drive past on the way to somewhere else. But I appreciate the scenery more now and look at it more through tourist eyes having been a tourist somewhere else.

However, other respondents reported noticing aspects of home that they didn't expect and that were therefore difficult to accept, for example:

Although I wanted to come home, I couldn't handle living in a small city, where I felt nothing had changed... I went out to the chemist and the same girl was working there as when I left... Then I went out driving and where before there was nothing but paddock, there were now new houses... I started hyperventilating; I had a mini panic attack. I couldn't accept the changes. I wanted it to change, but when it did I reacted quite badly to it.

These returnees had forgotten the undesirable aspects of the home culture. Their image of home was reportedly biased or excessively optimistic, and on their return they had to deal with the discrepancies between the real and imagined home. Home had changed from that which these repatriates 'fondly' remembered.

An additional undesirable aspect of home that emerged as a common theme of first impressions was the perceived expense of living in New Zealand and the concept that it is “hard to get ahead in New Zealand”. For example, one respondent is “emailing everyone I know overseas saying ‘don't come home until you have plenty of money; it's so expensive””, and another commented that “all my friends work hard but they find it hard to get ahead. They are not where they thought they would be at this age”. This perception of expense was attributed by some respondents partially to the difference in exchange rate, for example “In the UK you buy a beer for £2; here it is NZ\$5. That may equate to about the same, but just the fact you're handing over a fiver makes it seem more expensive”. Another reason given was the difference in disposable income, for example, as one respondent reported, “In the UK I got paid twice as much and our house prices are so high, you don't feel like you are getting ahead.” Other respondents' lifestyle choices influenced their perceptions of expense, for example the choice to live in a smaller city and

therefore receive a smaller remuneration, owning a car, and saving for a house. One couple with a single income and small child commented:

It's expensive here; we can't save on one income. We need to check our bank balance each month just to make sure our automatic payments will go through. Overseas, I was able to pay 200 pounds a month off my student loan and save money after that. Even groceries are expensive here, which is disturbing considering we grow so much fruit and vegetables in New Zealand. But we came home for the free space so our son could run around and play outside, and for that we are grateful.

Indeed, most respondents noticed the relative free space compared with overseas and some perceived New Zealand as 'empty'. These impressions of space and 'emptiness' were viewed as desirable or objectionable by different respondents. Those with partners or families tended to appreciate the space for children to play and romantic settings not overrun by people, for example, "We went to the waterfront for dinner and saw the people walking along the beach. In Spain, it would be jam packed with people. It's nice to come home to fewer people here." On the other hand, single repatriates were reportedly keener to socialise and continue their partying lifestyle, and tended to be disappointed by the "sad and empty" ambience. While some respondents appreciated the slower pace of life, for example the respondent who enjoyed the fact that "people aren't stressed here about catching transport on time", others found the perceived lack of population unnerving, for example:

A few weeks before Christmas, the streets were empty and everyone was saying, 'It's so busy in town' and 'Boy town was packed today', and I was thinking, (*whispered*) 'There's nobody in the streets; it's dead'. It was scary. I was having panic attacks about it.

In terms of transport more specifically, respondents felt both frustrated by the lack of public transport and relieved by the relative lack of congestion. Most respondents condemned public transport, for example, one respondent trying to find a job found that it was "hard to get to job interviews as bus routes across town are non-existent." On the other hand, in smaller centres, the lifestyle without traffic jams was valued, for example "Mum and Dad work five minutes down the road and they are

home by five past five. Sometimes they complain about traffic jams and I say 'don't ever complain about traffic jams'." These aspects of home had been forgotten by respondents overseas who had reportedly become accustomed to a different lifestyle overseas of not owning a car in most cases and therefore relying on public transport.

In addition to changes noticed about home and aspects forgotten then remembered, some respondents noticed when they got home that they had in fact changed themselves. "The individual realizes [sic] that the foreign culture has produced new behaviours, attitudes and values in himself or herself" (Foust et al., 1981, p.22). For example, some respondents commented that the mundane daily issues that gripped people at home no longer interested them:

When I got home, people were complaining about the pod decorations on the roundabout... For almost an entire week it was in the newspaper on the front page and in letters to the editor. I thought, 'Who cares? People in the world have no power or food or water and we're concerned about stupid pods.'

Potentially, whereas before the OE these respondents may have happily conversed at length about such local issues, their newly acquired broader perspective reportedly precluded them from wanting to join such conversations.

Some respondents also noticed that friends and family who had stayed at home were not interested in their travel stories and conversations of abroad. For example, as one respondent reported: "I was telling stories at the pub about how I once went to India, and looking at people who were staring at me blankly, then started talking about mowing their lawns and painting their fence." This enthusiasm to tell their stories of OE, combined with the non-travellers lack of understanding and appreciation of such stories reportedly surprised and disappointed them, for example as one respondent generalised: "It's lonely; you feel isolated. You want to talk and show your photos, but it's hard to get any appreciation from people who haven't done it."

As Hurn (1999) aptly summarise:

Returnees expect to be able to move back into the community, renew friendships, re-establish both business and social contacts and fit easily into their former life-style... [But] friends may have moved and people are often not at all interested in what the returnees have experienced... [overseas] experiences are often seen as remote and even challenging to the comfortable life of those who stay home (p.225).

Moreover, the newly acquired attitudes and beliefs sometimes caused a conflict to occur between the image returnees had of themselves and the expectations of friends and family. People at home expected the returnee to be the same and exhibit 'normal' or pre-sojourn behaviour (Sussman, 1986), but the returnee had changed through increased independence and broader experiences. "They have often operated with more responsibility... been freer in making decisions and, as a result of greater autonomy, have developed their confidence" (Hurn, 1999, p.225). This broader experience reportedly caused some returnees to question cultural values and compare the lifestyle at home to that abroad.

#### 4.2.2 Comparing Home to Overseas

In conjunction with the first impressions of home, respondents developed an appraisal of those aspects of home that had been forgotten or that had changed while they were away, and respondents reported a "natural tendency to compare home to overseas". For example, as part of the evaluation of conversations at home one respondent commented, "I wish everyone in New Zealand would do some travel to get out of little clicky groups and meet someone from a different culture." Another stated that she "[doesn't] understand people who don't want to travel." For these respondents, travel was like "seeing the light" and they wanted everyone else to "come on board."

However, these attitudes and comments were sometimes misunderstood by those at home as they reportedly sounded snobby and arrogant, as one respondent summarised:

I was surprised by my negative feelings towards my own county. I expected to feel joy at coming home and seeing family and friends, but

thought, “Where’s all the traffic? Where’re all the people?” I have heard these comments from other people, and it sounds ugly, like name dropping. It makes kiwis feel stink about New Zealand... If you’ve been somewhere bigger and brighter, you feel bigger than your country.

According to the literature, this “surprisingly critical view of the home culture” (Smith, 2002, p.256), can damage relationships with friends and family when the criticisms are verbalised, and add to the stress of the transition. By inadvertently challenging the comfortable life of those at home with their new behaviour and values, these respondents were consigned to the ‘outgroup’ of the home country – a repatriate (Sussman, 2000). They reported experiencing feelings of isolation and rejection, which were expected to some extent in their sojourn abroad but not on their return home, as this respondent commented:

You are disconnected from everything you have known for so long, and all of a sudden you have to come back and start your life again. It’s not easy to come back, especially if what you were coming back for has changed. It can be quite a weird and lonely feeling, especially if you don’t have someone you can share it with.

Furthermore, the OE was often ‘put on a pedestal’, as the lifestyle overseas was carefree whereas life at home held more responsibility and pressure, for example “The OE was a good break from feeling obliged to plan for the future. Here I am building a future, whereas over there I was just living at the time.” As two other respondents reflected, the return home signified a loss of freedom and ‘carefree liberation’ which the overseas lifestyle provided:

The biggest responsibility we had overseas was doing laundry each week... if you wanted to, you just picked up your backpack and walked out on your life just like that. The hardest thing about coming home is that you’ve built such a life and such a network; you can’t just walk out on that. And that gives you a feeling of entrapment. I wanted it, I wanted to come home and get the car, the job, the nice lifestyle etcetera... but the further I got enmeshed in it, the more trapped I felt. My backpack became this thing that lived under the bed; then it shifted to the wardrobe, then the hall cupboard. It never came out, it grew mould on it... That used to be my freedom. That backpack was my ticket to anywhere in the world I wanted to go, and now I’m stuck, and I can’t even go away for a weekend because I have a goat and cat to feed.

I have thought about tour guiding in New Zealand... but I don't know if I could go back to being a snail and having my house on my back again. It is good fun, but I am 26 and I have to start being a bit mature. I have got a partner and will probably get married in the next couple of years. *How does that make you feel?* It's a bit scary because for so long I've run around doing my own thing, having a lot of fun and taking off whenever and all of a sudden I can't do that anymore. I have to think about other people. I'm not a selfish person by nature, but for me it was good to be able to take off whenever. So while it's really nice to have a great partner, it's hard too because I can't be selfish anymore.

#### 4.2.3 The Thought of "What's Next?"

Alongside these comparisons between home and overseas, respondents reported a period of questioning their decision to return, questioning their OE, and ultimately having to decide "What to do next?" This phase of uncertainty and indecision was revealed by respondents in terms of for example, making decisions about accommodation, choosing a career, and rebuilding relationships with friends and family. The OE had reportedly been a part of respondents' lives for so long, from saving for the OE to planning their trip and eventually leaving, that when they got home, many felt they had nothing to look forward to or plan for. One respondent commented:

When we were at University, we knew we were going overseas after that, but no-one ever talked about what we were going to do when we got back from overseas... all the adventures were over when we got back. One friend of mine used to say, 'Is this it? Is this what my life is going to be like?'

Especially for those respondents, who hadn't thought about their repatriation, the transition in this regard was reportedly harder.

Indeed, many respondents had not decided what to do when they got home or even which city to live in, and now that they were home they reportedly had to start thinking about the next phase of their life. Some repatriates were deciding in this phase of their transition whether to stay home or leave again, and questioning their decision to return home, as

one respondent encapsulated: "I thought 'Oh no, I wonder if I've made the right decision'.... It's like with any change you do, it has anxiety with it." In contrast, others questioned the value of their OE during this unsettling phase of transition:

I thought, 'This is me... I'm going to come back and settle back into life in Hamilton and all the experiences and things I've done will amount to nothing. I might as well not even have left.' People would say, "No, but it's the experience you had", but what do they amount to in New Zealand? They don't mean anything. They won't help me get a job, won't get me a boyfriend, won't get me a nice car, a career, or any of the things I wanted to come home to. Now they're history...

Because of these high levels of uncertainty, many respondents found it difficult to settle at first. For example, one respondent reported feeling "nomadic for the first four months" and wanted to "pack up and go off again."

What is more, during this phase of questioning their choices and deciding what to do next, some respondents felt lonely and isolated due to a perceived inadequate support network, and difficulties with friends and family not understanding the transition period. For example, the expectations of those at home reportedly put pressure on the respondents who were not used to people expecting them to "sort their life out", as these two respondents described:

Moving on with the next phase of your life can be pretty hard to deal with, especially if people around you have expectations on what you should be doing... All of a sudden you have to cope with people's expectations on where you should be with your life, and you're not there yet.

There's a lot of pressure in New Zealand. People ask, "What are you doing with your life? What do you do? Where are you living? Have you got a job? Have you got a car?" It's a lot more pressure than overseas, where you were anonymous. You could be anybody doing whatever you want and there was no pressure to achieve.

As these respondents had returned from their OE indefinitely, friends and family at home expected them to settle down and make long-term decisions, but this new responsibility, in contrast to their carefree and

liberated lifestyle overseas, could be quite distressing for some, for example:

It was difficult when I came back because I was looking at permanent jobs... I'd been temping for three years overseas, so to get my head around doing something permanent was quite hard for me... because it sounded so serious.

Consequently, pressure was exerted on these returnees to conform to the home society, to give up the 'strange' behaviours and new interests, and return to the predictable person of before (Sussman, 1986). These respondents struggled with the transformation of increased independence and "little desire to accept the family or community supervision which played such a large role in their lives before departure" (Foust et al., 1981, p.22). They reportedly had to consciously or subconsciously decide how to behave, just as they did when they migrated abroad.

In contrast, other respondents felt more fortunate to have friends at home who had already returned from their OE, or the unconditional support of parents, who empathised with their transition distress, for example:

I was an island amongst normal people and I was the abnormal one. I had no life, no job prospects, no car (I borrowed my parents'), and no credit rating. I was completely lost. The things I wanted... a job, career, and car seemed so unattainable. I was in limbo. I was lucky, I had friends who'd come back and felt the same thing. They helped me get settled.

#### 4.2.4 Adjustment to home

As respondents reflected on the direction of the next phase of their life, and as they made specific decisions about what to do next, they reportedly started adjusting to the new lifestyle at home. This adjustment phase was signified in some cases by repatriates comparing their lifestyle with the lifestyle of those who stayed at home and realising that they wanted the same things, for example a house, car, phone and to drink from nice wine glasses rather than cheap 'Argos'<sup>1</sup> glasses. For example, as one respondent summarised, "I didn't buy anything nice overseas because I

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<sup>1</sup> Argos is a budget chain store in the UK equivalent to The Warehouse in New Zealand.



wasn't staying there and it was a waste of money... When I came back I wanted to spend more on a car and wanted nice things." This desire to change from the transient lifestyle overseas to a more settled life at home reportedly enabled an easier adjustment to home, for example:

I lived in a cold, drafty, tiny room in London, and the rain came into the house... but you put up with it because it's temporary and just a flat - a base to doss in ... now I have my own place and I want to do more things around home... I get more pleasure and take more pride in it.

As part of this adjustment to home, apart from the material changes, respondents reported a need to reconcile their differences with significant others and reach a compromise by modifying some behaviour. Examples included accepting that those at home aren't interested in stories from abroad, realising that criticisms of home cause misunderstandings, and curbing the verbalisation of comparing home to overseas, as one respondent explained:

It can be hard to adjust to home without being snobby and looking down on your own country. From my experience, if you stick it out, you do accept it and get back into 'kiwi mindset'... that takes about six months.

At one extreme of the 'adjustment to home' phase of transition, one respondent, who had depression, wanted to fit back into life desperately and not stand out as a repatriate:

I just want to be the same. When I went overseas I wanted to be different... you go and you're different, but you get sick of being different. You come home and want to be the same, but you're not the same. I want to be like everyone else – get a job, a house... live the kiwi dream. I don't want to be different... I have been different for four years.

However, it could be argued that the expectation to fit in completely is also unrealistic as the returnee has indeed changed and so has his or her perception of home, as another respondent commented:

You can't just try to fit back in and not be different because you are. You have had the experiences, and you can't pretend you haven't. It's changed you, and you can't change back, and if you do try, you'll be miserable.

Regardless of these extreme philosophies regarding adjusting to home, respondents reportedly started to “plant roots” at home after approximately one year at home. For example, respondents home for a year reported purchasing a house, changing to a more permanent job, changing cities, establishing more concrete friendships or beginning a new relationship. Overall, respondents who had been back for more than 18 months recognised this transitional phase of adjustment, for example, “once you find a job and have a few friends around you, you soon get back into it. And I think that’s part of it – a natural transition”. As another respondent stated, “after a while, you get used to your surroundings again... It takes easily a year.”

In saying this, although they were settling down at home, some respondents still occasionally felt the urge to leave again, for example “There are days when I think ‘Aaargh, I want to leave and go back to China’.” These ‘roots’ they had planted did not necessarily guarantee that they felt tied to home or that their “passport was closed”, as this respondent summarised:

It’s scary to have to come home and be mature... buying houses etcetera. Sometimes I want to pack up my bag again so I don’t have to deal with it. Once you’ve got a job and know a few people though, home becomes a completely different place. Plus, I get to travel a lot through work, so I am lucky.

Overall, respondents who had been back for two years or more generally settled back into a routine life at home and said they appreciated the lifestyle at home, for example “I might work harder here, but I can run along the beach after work... even in winter.” Most acknowledged that, “the grass is always greener on the other side”, and that if they returned, overseas wouldn’t be the same either. On reflection, they admitted that overseas also had its difficulties, which were often forgotten on the return home, for example, “when I first arrived in London it was tough too... you forget about that and just remember the good times. The perception of overseas is always better, but actually we were whinging over there too.” Moreover, some realised that while overseas offered a certain lifestyle, the

benefits of home could also be valued, for example, “you don’t get different cultures and different foods here, but I still love that bit of sand outside Mum and Dad’s house at the beach.” Others who were ready to return home “wouldn’t go back permanently for anything” as they preferred the lifestyle they had built at home.

#### 4.2.5 Changing Priorities and Behaviours

In the final phases of transition, those respondents who were satisfied with the more settled lifestyle at home, found that their priorities had changed with time, for example:

Now I want nicer things. My priorities have changed over time. When I first went overseas my priority was to travel, and work to get money for travel. Towards the end of my OE I was saving money. Now it’s like another focus – I’ve started to buy nice things, and I want to work on my own property...

Your priorities change as you get older... the quality of time of staying home is so much more valued... you have different priorities on what to spend your money on.

In conjunction with a change in priorities, respondents reported a change in their behaviour. For some, this change was an inadvertent adoption of behaviour similar to those at home, for example the previously mentioned respondent who complained about the conversations at home revolving around mowing lawns and painting fences when she first got home, reflected later in her interview that, “eventually you get the job, car and catch up, and now we own a house and I talk about lawns and what the neighbours have done.” Another example was the respondent who adopted attitudes of those at home and caught herself doing it:

I noticed people complaining about congestion when I first got home and I thought ‘this is nothing’, but now I find I’m in that same pattern. I was in traffic today and thought “Aargh!”, but then I thought, ‘hang on...’

Other respondents recognised that their behaviour and attitudes had reverted to old pre-sojourn habits and accepted this change as part of the transition, for example, “when someone walks past with a funny hairstyle,

if I'm just back from overseas I don't look twice, but if I've been back for a while I probably find it a bit more unusual."

Eventually, as their lifestyle reverted to a routine of structured daily life, respondents felt their memory of OE fading, making their travels "seem like a dream." One respondent summarised these feelings: "My OE seems so long ago, like five or ten years ago. It feels like a bit of a dream, I ask myself, 'Did I really do it?' which is silly as I've only been back for two years." Overall, most respondents who had been home for a significant period of time were satisfied that they were "where [they] want to be" and "doing what [they] want to do."

According to Martin (1984), "awareness of change is a prerequisite for a reentry [sic] experience characterized [sic] by growth" (p.123), and repatriates who aim to learn from their transitional experience will grow from the experience of repatriation. In this adaptation phase, the new behaviours exhibited by the respondents were either adjusted to more closely align with expectations of those at home, tolerated and accepted by those at home, or discarded completely. For example, some returnee's challenging and critical attitudes were moderated when the returnees realised the negative effect it had on those at home. For others, the independent and broader outlook was tolerated and accepted by those at home as a natural part of personal development following a sojourn abroad. In contrast, accents or colloquial expressions picked up overseas were discarded as the respondents adapted to the home environment. In some cases, the new behaviour was even adopted by those at home, for example discussing global issues or trying new foods. Achieving this equilibrium or compromise based on the mutually acceptable expectations of the returnee and those at home enabled comfort to be restored in the home environment.

### ***4.3 In-Depth Personal Experiences***

While the previous section outlined the overall transitional phases of repatriation, this section details the in-depth, personal experiences of OE

repatriates more specifically in terms of relationships with friends and family, working in New Zealand and personal development, which are the key themes corresponding to the research objective: To examine the personal repatriation experiences of returned OE travellers (see chapter one, page 12).

With reference to these in-depth and personal experiences of repatriation in general, commonality existed among respondents regarding their reported initial experiences at home, like living with parents, finding a job, and establishing friendships. The process of repatriation was also consistent among respondents in terms of a feeling of re-establishing life and “starting over.” However, the individual coping styles and the way respondents dealt with repatriation from severe depression to a “get on with it” attitude depended on the individual. This section will describe these individual experiences, using individual examples and quotes to illustrate key themes.

#### 4.3.1 Relationships with Family

The first common theme that emerged regarding personal experiences was that most respondents lived with parents or immediate family initially on returning to New Zealand, and spent the first few weeks visiting friends and extended family. This period of reconnecting with family was valued by respondents as a time to rebuild relationships and “get to know each other again.” As one respondent summarised, “It felt good to be back amongst family and to be part of something you’d been away from for so long.”

However, repatriates who had been away for longer or who may not have kept up contact with their family to the same extent as when they lived at home reported feeling like an outsider as if they had lost the connection with their family, for example “They were talking about things they were doing or had done and I wasn’t involved.” Moreover, although most parents were reportedly ecstatic to see their children home safely and wanted to hear their news, the routine lifestyle of parents was more

established than that of the repatriate, which in some cases left the returnee feeling lost and isolated, for example:

The day I arrived, they picked me up from the airport and invited a couple of friends over for lunch. Then I went out to the Viaduct with friends, Mum went and played bridge and Dad went to work. It was like I had been at camp or something ... apart from the initial first few hours, there was no significance really. Every now and then Mum would give me a big hug because I was home.

In other cases, extenuating circumstances contributed to uneasy family relationships for example one respondent, who had depression and whose brother had introduced his fiancé to the family while the respondent was away, reported feeling usurped by the fiancé and unwanted by her parents:

For the first month my parents didn't understand what I was going through. My brother had just got engaged and he'd met his fiancé while I was away. I am the only daughter and I came home and suddenly there was this girl turning on the TV, making herself at home, and jumping in on family discussions. It was very hard for me to deal with... On top of that I needed my parents, and they have always been very supportive of me, but they didn't understand and told me to buck up my ideas. I felt like the 'bad cop' because I was arguing with everyone and they all loved her. I just wanted to go back, I felt I wasn't needed here and thought, 'They've got the daughter they always wanted; nobody likes me'. It was really difficult, but it's all fine now [one year later].

Another circumstance that contributed to uneasy family relationships and created discord for some respondents was when living with parents of immediate family continued with levels of discomfort, for example:

All the wardrobes and drawers are full, and there's not really room for our suitcase on the floor. It's pretty hard not being able to unpack for two months and all our boxes from the UK are still in the shed. We can't unpack them, can't find anything... it'll be nice to have our own place.

In addition, the longer respondents stayed at home the more likely the discomfort was to increase, for example:

My partner's parents had their own systems and had lived together by themselves. They said they wanted us there but there were a few issues... We had a huge blow-out, moved out and didn't speak for a

while and are only just back on talking terms now [one year later]. We were there for nine months... it was too long but it was free and we were saving.

On the other hand, some repatriates found their parents very supportive, perhaps because the parents empathised with the transition, or because they supported the repatriate in their transition without pressure, for example:

My parents were brilliant; they knew it was a big transition. They asked me how I was getting on each day, supported me in my decisions... they were really positive and behind me, encouraging me to do things I wanted to do, helping get my gear organised when I moved away. They were like great mates at the time. It was fantastic.

One respondent's parents lent him their campervan to live in until he found a permanent job, another respondent's parents allowed the repatriate to live at home long-term with no pressure to move out while she set up her own business, and a third respondent's parents helped her in her distress to re-establish her life by taking her outside the house and helping her find a job. As these examples illustrate, the support of family can significantly ease or exacerbate the personal repatriation experience.

#### 4.3.2 Relationships with Friends

Regardless of the length of stay at the parent's house, respondents reported that they eventually became too independent to live at home with parents and decided to move on. However, respondents found that socialising at home is significantly different to the intense but carefree party lifestyle overseas, especially in the UK and Ireland. As one respondent described: "Guys and girls are much more promiscuous in London. No-one knows you, and no-one thinks of you as the 'town bike'. You can be yourself over there and will find a group of friends to fit you." Overseas, OE travellers reportedly "automatically had things in common" as "everyone is in the same boat and more inclined to make friends." In addition, the social crowds were reportedly "far freer" and "there was always someone doing something somewhere to tag along with". For example as one respondent stated, "Whether you are a cowboy or a

metaller, there are huge groups of everybody over there – you'll be accepted.”

In contrast, the mechanics of socialising back home are significantly different according to respondents. As one respondent commented, “it is weird to come back to a small place and not have rent-a-crowd friends.” As everyone at home had a well-established routine, repatriates reported they suddenly had to plan a social occasion in advance, and could usually only see a few friends at a time, as opposed to the mass-socialising they had become accustomed to overseas, for example:

Any hour of the day or night if you wanted to do something in London, there'd be someone who'd be up for anything, and here the friends who were already back were already quite settled. And I've had a few friends who have been trickling back as well, and they were all keen to do stuff with me, but you get involved in your little lives and you plod along and you realise we live in a really small place, but I still haven't seen friends for three weeks or even a couple of months.

Some respondents had heard about this difference in socialising before they returned and it worried them, as one respondent described:

Before I left London, we were worried and talked about it. 'Oh my God, all my friends are married with kids and we're still going out, partying, clubbing and we don't even own anything'... how were we going to have anything to relate with them other than that they were friends before?

Others expressed disappointment regarding the difference in the phase of life of friends at home compared to those overseas. For example one respondent who was enticed home by advertising in the UK and wanted to live and work in Auckland where his friends were living, was disappointed and unsettled at the time of the interview because home was different to what he expected:

Everything has changed in two years. Most of my friends have moved on, left for overseas or settled down, which I'm not ready to do. Everyone is buying houses and I'm not really interested in that. They don't want to hear about my OE; obviously they stayed home because they weren't really interested in travelling. I wish I'd come back to Auckland for a visit to remind myself what it was like. I'm thinking of going back again... it's more difficult than I thought it would be.



Moreover, respondents who were not at that stage themselves reportedly found the “narrow conversations of babies and weddings” by friends who had stayed at home “frustrating” and “boring”, for example as one respondent commented: “With people we talk to who haven’t been overseas, we don’t have much to talk about. They just talk about children, marriage, the mortgage and watching people who go past.” Returnees said they preferred to discuss wider issues as they felt they had developed a broader perspective through living in a foreign country. As one respondent noted, “There was a time when people talked about overseas and I didn’t really know what they were talking about. Now I do.”

Certainly, coming home and finding new friends was especially difficult for the early returnees, whose own friends were still overseas. Especially in areas with a low percentage of OE repatriates, early returnees generally found it difficult to meet new people, as “everyone is in cliques.” Therefore, unless the respondents had friends who had returned before them, or close open-minded friends they had left at home, they found socialising difficult. “Luckily my friends live close by, have done their OE, and came home before us, which made it easy to fit in.” Overall, having a support network of friendships with fellow OE repatriates appeared to help in the transition process, for example as one respondent commented: “I didn’t really have any difficulties, but maybe that’s because I am hanging out with people who’ve been overseas.”

Indeed, respondents found they related better to people who had been overseas, for example “It’s amazing the way you meet people who’ve travelled and instantly connect with them.” This instant connection was reportedly due to a variety of factors, for example a greater understanding of current events, more interest in the world around them, enthusiasm to talk about their OE with someone who understands, or because they had the confidence to talk to people about anything, for example:

My OE has given my more confidence in meeting new people... I feel more comfortable making conversation with somebody who I don’t know, whereas before I would’ve just shied away and not really said anything if

I didn't necessarily have to... I feel more aware of others... am more interested in other people... and more able and willing to put myself out there and go and make conversation with a stranger, whereas before I wouldn't bother.

Moreover, respondents felt they had met so many people overseas from such diverse backgrounds that they now tended to "make more of an effort to be more open to meeting whomever, whenever."

#### 4.3.3 Working in New Zealand

Although initially most respondents spent time visiting friends and extended family on their return home, relaxing and "seeing home again", they eventually felt the need to start working. This need arose at varying intervals for different respondents from almost immediately (for one repatriate who had travelled for six months on the way home and "needed the money") to waiting for almost a year (for one repatriate with severe depression who gets panic attacks at the thought of working). Generally, respondents, who hadn't organised jobs prior to their return, tended to look for work within a few months of arriving home.

When the time came to start working, most OE repatriates without pre-arranged jobs preferred to wait for the "right job" that met their conditions. In contrast to their transient lifestyle overseas, where they were more willing to take on short term contracts, repatriates viewed their job at home more seriously, and as a longer term commitment, for example as one respondent commented:

I went temping at first to see where I'd like to work and keep my options open... Jobs at home are more serious and you have to be committed. You actually had to take on a job and think about it seriously.

The conditions respondents required in their job at home varied between repatriates, depending on their profession and personality. Some repatriates reported that they had chosen a job for personal reasons, like a more satisfactory work/life balance after the working conditions overseas, where "transport to and from work was a huge factor in the quality of life... you were stuck with it every day." Similarly, others had learnt to value

their spare time, for example “since coming back I sought positions where I wouldn’t need to work all day and night.” Furthermore, other respondents chose their job because of its long-term implication, for example “This is my life for 10 to 20 years, I want to do something that’s rewarding” and “Now that I am in New Zealand, I need to get promotions at work, and get to a level where I want to be.”

An additional theme that emerged from the respondents regarding working in New Zealand related to the working conditions. Respondents often compared New Zealand to overseas when discussing working conditions, and felt that better flexibility in terms of the work/life balance was needed in New Zealand. As one respondent stated:

The working environment is getting better in New Zealand, but there seem to be more benefits overseas, for example more holidays, more breaks. They look after their staff better, and we don’t look after our workers as well as we could. Even just offering back rubs once a week, the flexibility on glide time and promoting healthy living. We need to be more personal in our working environment.

As respondents had experienced working conditions in different countries, they were reportedly more likely to see opportunities for improvement in their working environment at home.

However, despite their self-reliance, confidence, and eagerness to work, some returnees reported that they felt forced into less than satisfactory jobs, because they didn’t have the “right skills” and were “undervalued” by New Zealand agencies, for example:

I got really big knocks to my confidence because I got turned down for lots of jobs. I was thinking ‘What’s going on here? Was I really that bad in the interviews?’ I ended up getting a job through Winz on the worktrack course... I was in the job for six months with a horrible boss. The Winz staff even laughed when I had to take the job because he’s a difficult employer. He stressed me out... I started crying a lot... it was depressing to come back to New Zealand and have a boss like that... we would have gone back overseas if my partner had been in the same situation.

Moreover, others chose unsatisfactory jobs, because they put pressure on themselves to work even though they knew they wouldn't enjoy the position, for example:

I didn't work for the first couple of months, and then panicked a bit... and felt I had to take the first job that arose... I don't know if I would have taken it under normal circumstances, if I hadn't just come back.

These less satisfactory jobs reportedly made it harder for OE repatriates to settle at home and some respondents speculated that it may be part of the reason why many leave again.

On the other hand, some repatriates found good jobs easily, especially if they had formal qualifications and valuable experience in their field, for example "Finding a job was easy... I was lucky; I came home at the last boom of Asian students so I got a job teaching ESOL quite quickly." Certainly, qualified repatriates tended to see plenty of opportunity in their field with the low unemployment rate, for example: "There were lots of jobs I could've applied for"; "they are desperate for engineers"; and "there is lots of government support for artists."

However, other respondents reported a surprising difficulty in finding "the right job" if they were qualified but looking for a career change. Some attributed these difficulties to the "narrow mindedness" of the employment agencies, for example:

Some recruitment agents shoved about 10 accountancy roles in front of me and said 'You can take your pick but we don't have any analytical roles for you', but that's what I wanted. Other people said 'You won't earn as much if you do analysis, you have experience in accounting, we can get you a job earning whatever you want', but I didn't want those.

Moreover, in a tighter job market, repatriates felt they would have difficulty proving themselves against those applicants, who stayed career-focussed at home. Some felt their relative broad-mindedness acquired on OE was under-valued by agents and offered them little or no competitive advantage over candidates who had stayed at home. According to respondents, the perceived main value of the OE by agencies in New Zealand is that the repatriate won't leave again "and that's about it." As

one respondent commented, her self-reliance and inter-cultural skills acquired on OE were under-valued by her agencies, who seemed mainly interested in her typing speed and computer skills:

When I was in the UK, I was an office manager dealing with contracts worth millions of pounds... but when I got home, I was told I was unemployable because I couldn't type fast enough, hadn't worked for the previous six months (I had been travelling) and because I didn't know how to work a spreadsheet. They weren't interested that I had the initiative to travel through India alone, or that I wanted to settle down into a good job and would be motivated to stay there. I used to come home from the employment agencies crying... Here, the companies overseas don't mean anything. All my references were from England. I had some New Zealand references but they were five years old. I thought I was eminently unemployable.

In addition, the opportunities in New Zealand were reportedly often not as extensive as those overseas and many returnees had jobs overseas that were rare or simply do not exist in New Zealand, for example:

I know a kiwi guy who was working as a Chief Operating Officer in a London bank. It took him six months to find a job here, and that was just a temping job... because of the size of the economy... there're fewer of those jobs available... you have to wait for someone to retire... it's a smaller scale in New Zealand.

Overall, it was felt among respondents that while a non-traveller may have the knowledge and experience pertinent to the specific job, the wider life-experience of the OE should not be underestimated. Some felt their OE had provided them with "a set of skills that help them deal with unusual situations in the workplace", that it had taught them to "embrace the thought of change rather than being frightened by it", and that through their broader perspective they were no longer "stuck in a small-town, narrow-minded outlook", for example as one respondent commented:

I worry that kiwis are too narrow-minded. I never would've thought that before I went travelling, but now that I'm back it's something I see quite a bit. My boss came to work the other day with a pink shirt on and a pink tie... It looked really awesome. He said he was walking up the road and some kiwi was yelling at him 'Oi, what are you wearing a pink shirt for?'... It's just a shirt and there's some kiwi yelling at him. It's like 'get

over it'... You can still be yourself, but need to realise the person has every right to do what they're doing as well. You don't have to agree with it, or do it yourself, but be ok that they are doing it.

In general, respondents felt such broad-minded and change-accepting attitudes should enhance their employability over someone, who has remained at home, "especially in a small country like New Zealand that deals with trade a lot and other cultures".

#### 4.3.4 Personal Development

Such perceived broad-minded and change-accepting attitudes reportedly stemmed from a personal development acquired on the OE. Consistent with findings by Inkson & Myers (2003), Inkson et al. (2004a), and Bell (2002), most respondents reportedly felt they had changed, become "more worldly", confident, and independent after their OE. Their character had reportedly developed through exposure and they had a broader and more global perspective, for example as one respondent put it, "You can't help but grow from knowing different cultures and meeting people who have grown up in a different country from you." In addition, they developed an interest in the world around them by drawing on their experiences overseas and appreciating diverse cultures, for example "I will take aspects of other cultures and societies and incorporate them into my life... like going to a flamenco dancing class or a tapas restaurant."

Moreover, through their exposure to foreign countries and different living standards overseas, some repatriates learnt to appreciate New Zealand's culture and way of life. While some called it "over-privileged", most OE returnees realised how lucky they were to be able to return to New Zealand, where "we don't wake up with a tank outside our house or a soldier with a machine gun". Even the "little things" were valued like having modern toilets or being able to walk children to school and "play in a park without worrying about syringes". Many reported that they wouldn't have learnt to appreciate New Zealand fully if they hadn't left, for example one respondent compared overseas to New Zealand in terms of access to natural resources:

I've been to places like Bali and Mombassa, that have since been bombed. We feel safe in New Zealand and removed... We don't have any poisonous animals... we have free land with access to every resource in New Zealand – the sea, lakes, mountains and rivers. We're so lucky; we have all the best things from around the world here. When you go overseas, you appreciate it even more. Overseas you might think 'that's a beautiful mountain', but we have the mountain and a lake right beside each other in New Zealand. Over there you might have to travel for a day to get to the next beautiful scene. We've got them everywhere here. We have no pollution, smog, traffic, poverty...

In addition to the natural resources and relative safety of New Zealand, many repatriates talked of the effect seeing poverty had on their perspectives, values and attitudes, comparable to that reported among volunteer tourist experiences (Wearing, 2001). For some, poverty made them thankful for their own life, for example "Because I was exposed to it, I can appreciate it and say I'm quite lucky to have the lifestyle we've got." This respondent "realised things happen for a reason overseas and they're out of your control; there's not a lot you can do about them." In contrast, other respondents developed a conscience through their exposure to poverty, for example:

It was difficult looking at poverty and people in despair. I took an outsider's stance, I felt helpless, and there was nothing I could do. I didn't fully empathise then... I didn't delve deep enough to understand it. We glanced at everything on a surface level... It didn't inspire me to any action at the time but I think that it will in the future. *How so?* Seeing different people's circumstances opens the mind to the fact that there are other worlds, and that maybe if you are in a privileged position that you have the opportunity to assist those who want it. I think that would be a rewarding experience.

Through this exposure to other countries and cultures travelling offered some respondents the opportunity for insights into their own cultural identity and preconceptions, for example:

I didn't think the Maori culture offered anything before I left, but when I explained New Zealand to foreigners, I told them about the haka and taught them some Maori words. It gave me a sense of identity for what New Zealand is.

Respondents who hadn't realised it before they left reported recognising that New Zealand has a "rich culture", which they wanted to "embrace." In conjunction with this racial identity, they also noticed racial tension more on returning to New Zealand than they did before they left, for example:

I've been shocked a few times by comments made by my parents' generation regarding racial concerns in New Zealand. I feel sad about the future of New Zealand and the way some of those people are stuck in their ways and they can't seem to think about what's happened before what's happening now. I don't know much about it, but some of the comments have not impressed me. I do worry about racial harmony and I don't know how we'll ever meet in the middle. I think we've got a really rich culture and I'd like to embrace that more, and there are things I'd like my son to learn and talk about the Maori culture like basic words, and I know his grandparents wouldn't be impressed at all, which I think is really sad.

Moreover, the same respondent was "worried about gang problems" in New Zealand, and felt intimidated in the local shopping mall, saying, "It's not nice to feel like that at home."

On the whole, respondents felt they had become more open minded through their travels, from no longer noticing "funny hairstyles", to developing more empathy for both sides of, particularly religious or ethnic-based, arguments, and realising "people are the same wherever you go." Although as one respondent pointed out "it's hard to measure, it's not like running a race, I'm not a minute faster", in general travellers felt they could "talk to anyone now" and perceived themselves as more accepting of other cultures. In addition, respondents described how they realised that New Zealand is just a small part of a much bigger world, for example "I couldn't comprehend before my OE that major news here wouldn't be major news over there. It made me realise how small and insignificant we are."

Finally, respondents felt that the situations they faced on their OE made them stronger, for example having to sleep on the side of the road due to scarce accommodation, not having a shower for six days, or being in a situation where death was a distinct possibility. As one respondent commented:



Travelling isn't for everybody; there are lots of hard times. I thought I was going to die sometimes, but it evens itself out depending on how you deal with it. It makes you a stronger person and teaches you a lot about yourself.

Overall, respondents reported that they learnt to recognise their limits, their strengths and weaknesses, and their individual tolerance levels.

In contrast, some repatriates said they had not changed personally or would have changed anyway by “just maturing”. Some respondents “don't think of OE as changing life, just part of life” and felt they would have grown regardless, thereby playing down the impact of OE on their life: “You see a bit of the world and that's about it.” This difference in attitude towards OE was attributed to a variety of factors by respondents, for example the ease of their OE: “Scotland is similar to New Zealand. Coming home wasn't like one extreme to another. Galashiels was like living in a small town in New Zealand”, their personality: “I don't get worked up by these things; I just get on with it rather than analysing the hell out of it”, or their coping style: “You just stick it out and think it can only but get better”. For others, their ‘growth’ experiences were tied up with other aspects of their lives like a relationship break-up, dealing with a major injury while overseas, or the death of a family member. This diversity of views regarding repatriation is further explained in the next section with regards to the way respondents reflected on their repatriation experience.

#### ***4.4 A Reflection of Repatriation***

Although respondents generally viewed returning home as an indication that “play time” was over and that a period of settling down was imminent, their perception of this settling period was quite diverse, for example, some considered repatriation the “end of the road”, while others talked of a “fresh start.” For some deciding what to do next was a “scary prospect”, while for others it was viewed as an exciting opportunity. These preconceptions of the return home therefore impacted the way respondents reflected on their repatriation experiences.

Three themes seemed to emerge with regards to the way respondents viewed repatriation. These themes are comparable to those summarised by Sussman (2001) in her explanation of repatriation distress, and while no clear evidence exists to establish one theory ahead of any other, all three were described by the respondents when reflecting on their OE:

- That repatriation is a unique experience unlike anything else they had experienced.
- That repatriation is similar to overseas transition and is a response to an unfamiliar environment.
- That repatriation is simply an adjustment to a stressful environment where coping strategies emerge as with any other transition, like the first year of college.

Many repatriates viewed their return from OE as a unique and life-changing experience, and found that their return from OE caused them to reassess their lives, based on the broader perspective they had developed through travel. This reassessment and questioning of values and direction in life caused for some respondents transitional issues that were largely unexpected. A few respondents even experienced severe depression due to their repatriation experience and were surprised by the strength of their distress, for example as one respondent shared: "My depression shocked me and other people. I didn't realise it would be harder to come home than to leave." However, no matter how difficult their return was, and despite the emotional turmoil they experienced on return, these respondents indicated they would go again and they appreciated the experience of repatriation. Overall, most respondents felt more mature and had a deeper awareness of themselves and other cultures through their travel experiences and subsequent repatriation.

In contrast, others reflected on their return as being similar to integrating in a foreign environment overseas. These repatriates actively sought entertainment, like joining sports teams, and developed new interests in order to meet people at home, just as they did overseas, for example:

You use the same skills coming home as you use when you land overseas, like finding a supermarket and barber, meeting people, playing

sport... you get out there and make it happen. I think we underestimate it. When you think about it, us kiwis get a bag, go to the other side of the world and settle in – kiwis just do it.

Although they may have found aspects of the return difficult, their attitude was to “get on with it” and they actively integrated with the society and culture of home, just as they had done overseas.

Still others viewed the OE as “just another life event” that enhanced their maturation, which would have occurred regardless. When asked about his expectations of returning home, one respondent stated that he didn’t have any expectations:

It was just another phase of life... you just carry on... life would have taken a different path without the OE but it still would’ve changed somewhere along the line... it’s just part of life’s experience. Even if you don’t travel anywhere, you still get life experience.

However, such an easy-going attitude was certainly not the norm amongst respondents.

This difference in reflections on repatriation is further illustrated by the variety and change in attitude towards travel within New Zealand. For example, when asked how their return from OE impacted their travel patterns and priorities, some respondents were “itching” to see New Zealand again, while others were unmotivated to travel within New Zealand at all, reporting that they had their “whole life ahead to see New Zealand” and feeling they had “seen it all anyway”. Many stated they would rather tour overseas than in New Zealand, for example, “I am interested in New Zealand, but I think now while I can and have the money to I would rather go to Vietnam or Hong Kong.” Moreover, those who did want to revisit New Zealand rarely carried out their plans, for example as one respondent described, “Our plan went by wayside... we thought about a job and cash first, even though we didn’t really need cash then... it’s definitely a regret.” While some recognised they were taking New Zealand for granted, they explained that when they did travel, often to visit friends and family, they were “on a mission to get there” and had no time to stop for tourist activities. Certainly a transition seemed to occur from extensive travel initially visiting friends and family, to a period of settling in and being

“tired of travelling”, to a reversion to old habits of “going places you’ve been before”, as this respondent summarised:

I said to myself, ‘When I came back to New Zealand, I wanted to travel quite a bit around New Zealand; I wanted to do more of that’. They were all good intentions, but within six months, that plan seemed to die and dwindle, and every now and then I still think I’d still like to. I feel like I don’t get to do all the things I said I was going to do.

#### 4.4.1 Explanations for the Degree of Repatriation Distress

This diversity in reflections of repatriation, from “just another life event” to a unique and unexpected transitional experience, may be explained by the individual circumstances surrounding each respondent’s return, for example whether the respondent had returned home during the OE and therefore knew what to expect. As repatriation is a complex phenomenon influenced by a variety of events and situations, repatriation experiences are individual by nature and therefore subjective. The events surrounding repatriation are interconnected and overlapping; therefore, can not easily be separated or categorised. Nevertheless, for the purpose of drawing conclusions and attempting to explain the diversity in repatriation experiences, the following reasons are hypothesised as to why OE repatriation may be easier for some people than others, as elicited from the in-depth interviews:

- The readiness for return: Respondents keen to return home reportedly found repatriation easier.
- Expectations of the repatriate: Those with ‘low’ or ‘no expectations’ found the transition home easier.
- The personality of the respondent: Respondents who described themselves as ‘laid back’ reportedly found the transition easier than those who felt either external or self-imposed pressure.
- Visiting home during the OE: Respondents who had visited home during their OE found the transition easier due to more realistic expectations of home.
- Taking time and reflecting: Those who did not take time out tended to find the transition harder.

- Support systems at home: Those with good support of friends and family found repatriation easier.
- The length of the OE: Respondents who took shorter OEs found transition easier.

These conclusions are validated here and elaborated in the sections below using respondent's quotes and supported by the published literature; however, further deductive research may be needed to confirm these conclusions in terms of OE travellers generally.

#### **4.4.1.1 The readiness for return**

On the whole, those repatriates who reported that they had been keen to return appeared to find it easier to settle quickly at home. For example, those who returned to be with family or specifically for the lifestyle reasons reported less repatriation distress. On the other hand, as Foust et al. (1981) argue, "An individual who approaches the return home with foreboding will no doubt become an alienated re-enterer" (p.25). Some respondents reported that they had been not quite ready to return, but returned due to external circumstances, for example an expired visa or a wedding. As these respondents were not ready to return, they found repatriation more difficult. The following quote demonstrates this:

I wasn't ready to come home. I came home for a friend's wedding as it was close to my four years finishing, but it wasn't worth me going back over for three months... And I came home for that and thought, "What am I going to do?" I felt really lost.... Probably another six months and it would've been sweet, I'd have had enough... But I made that decision to come back for a wedding... I just had to get on with it really.

#### **4.4.1.2 Expectations of the repatriate**

In addition to being ready to return, those respondents who stated 'low' or 'no expectations' about returning home tended to find the transition easier. As Rogers & Ward (1993) point out, "Realistic expectations facilitate adaptation... undermet high expectations result in adjustment problems... and... overmet low expectations lead to better adaptation" (p.186). The respondents with low expectations based on what their friends had told

them about their own repatriation home were pleasantly surprised by the ease of their transition, as the following examples illustrate:

I was quite nervous about coming home, because everybody said, “You will find it really quiet and you won’t cope”, and I do have friends who came home because they thought they were ready, got bored and went back to UK, but realised it’s not how they remembered it, so came home again. I didn’t want to be one of those people – unsettled and wasting money on flights... But I felt ready to come home, because I wanted contact with family again... and the New Zealand lifestyle; I wanted a BBQ and a garden (we always lived in flats above shops over there). So I have all that now, it’s exactly how I expected, and I love it.

I was anxious about coming home. I knew my friends were finding it hard over here, I knew we’d have to start at the bottom with farming, I knew financially it would be difficult and that the working conditions for teachers are better over there in the UK. I was a real mess... we stopped in Australia to visit friends on the way home and I spent most of the time crying. But I think it was more the anticipation than anything. Once we got home, I was fine. I haven’t spent much time being upset like I thought I would. I don’t regret coming home.

Due to their ‘low’ expectations turning out to be inaccurate, these respondents found repatriation easier.

In contrast, respondents with high expectations found adaptation more difficult, as the following quote illustrates:

Some people think that it’s just them, that nobody else understands what they are feeling, and wonder why they can’t associate every day life with what has happened. They’ve come back on a great big high because “you’re coming home and it’s going to be great”, and then you get here, and you either plateau or you plummet and have to work your way back up again... because you were so excited about coming home and seeing everyone, but then once you get here, you realise that nothing has really changed. They thought they would come home and click back into normal life, but clicking back into your social circle is just unrealistic.

#### **4.4.1.3 Visiting home during the OE**

One way to set realistic expectations is by visiting home during the OE. Overall, respondents who had visited home during their OE reportedly

found the transition easier, as they felt they had more “realistic expectations of home.” This finding is also supported by Brabant et al. (1990), who found that “visits home alleviate potential problems both with family and friends” (p.398), and by the respondents’ comments, for example:

The visit home was refreshing. It made us think, ‘We’ll definitely be coming back here’, but at same time, we didn’t think we were ready to come back then. We thought, ‘It’ll be cool to come back to when we are ready, but we’ve got heaps of stuff to do yet.’

On the other hand, another respondent wished he’d come home to visit and remind himself what home was like before deciding to return indefinitely.

#### **4.4.1.4 The personality of the respondent**

Another aspect which influences the ease of repatriation is the personality of the returnee. According to Foust et al. (1981), “the person who has difficulty coping with difference, change, and uncertainty will most likely have difficulty with cross-cultural adjustment” (p.9). In terms of the results of this research, respondents who described themselves as ‘laid back’ reportedly had few expectations and found the transition easier than those who felt either external or self-imposed pressure. As one respondent summarised, “I don’t get worked up by these things; I just get on with it.”

On the other hand, the respondents who tended to exert pressure on themselves tended to have more difficulty adjusting, for example, “I tried to do too much at once – catching up with people, getting a house, job, phone, car. I didn’t give myself enough time.” As another respondent described, “It was quite a shock when I got here... initially I liked it, then reality set in. I had visions and expectations... I put pressure on myself.”

#### **4.4.1.5 Taking time and reflecting**

Regardless of the personality, it is important for returnees to take time out for reflection. Again, this finding is supported by the literature, as scholars recommend that repatriates reflect on the changes in personality and put

them into perspective for others to understand (Smith, 2002), consider the changes in the home environment to facilitate readjustment (Foust et al., 1981), and research the self before searching for a job to avoid poor decision-making (Irish, 1986).

In terms of these findings, most respondents took time to visit friends and extended family on their arrival home, relaxing and “seeing home again”. As one respondent stated, “You need time out when you get home to process the experience. It really helps.” In contrast, those respondents who did not take time for reflection found the transition harder, for example, some who immediately applied for jobs without giving themselves time to rest found themselves ‘burnt out’:

I finished work and flew straight home, had two weeks at the beach, and went straight back to work again. I knew I’d miss overseas, but thought it would be easier being preoccupied with work. In hindsight, I should have rested. I felt zonked out when I got home... really excited then flat. I thought, “This is reality!” People said it would take a while to adjust and that I’d feel flat, but I didn’t think it’d be that bad.

#### **4.4.1.6 Support systems at home**

This time for reflection needs to be supported by those at home who, in some cases, reportedly put pressure on respondents to ‘sort their life out’. As Foust et al. (1981) point out, “absence of contact with others who can share the cross-cultural experience, or lack of personnel who can help with readjustment, can inhibit growthful integration upon re-entry” (p.26). Respondents with friends, who had returned home earlier, considered themselves “lucky” to have friends who had “felt the same thing”, and who therefore reportedly helped ease their transition. On the other hand, respondents whose parents told them to “buck their ideas up” or with friends who had “moved on” in the time the repatriate was away found it more difficult to settle as they had to build new relationships and “start again from scratch” without the support mechanisms needed to encourage them.



#### 4.4.1.7 The length of the OE

Respondents commonly felt that a shorter OE enabled an easier transition as not as much had changed within the traveller nor at home. This reason for ease of repatriation is implied in the literature though not stated specifically. Indeed, Sussman (2001) raise the question, “could the home environment have changed so radically as to plunge the repatriate into culture shock?... in the case of lengthy 20 year sojourns..., perhaps so... but for the... adult sojourners who move between countries for moderate periods... the unfamiliar cultural environment... may not be sufficiently explanatory” (p.112). Findings of the research revealed one respondent believed he “wasn’t away long enough for things to change much” and compared his repatriation to friends, who had been away for four or five years as follows:

My friends find it difficult to settle into a career, which is full time for the rest of their lives and starting at the bottom of the ladder in their job in New Zealand, whereas I came home and got stuck into the workforce between OEs. Some of my friends left around the same time as my first OE (in 1997) and have just come home. They have come home with cash but find it difficult settling into a career, region or province.

Overall, some repatriates were ready to return home and saw their return as a unique opportunity to start something new or settle into a “good life”; attitudes that enabled an easier transition. Others visited home first and set realistic expectations for the eventual return, or had few expectations and therefore experienced few difficulties or surprises. Moreover, those respondents with reportedly ‘laid back’ personalities and those who exhibited proactive coping styles found repatriation easier than others, who exerted pressure on themselves to get things done. Furthermore, respondents who felt pressure from others to settle down and didn’t take time out to reflect on their transition experienced more difficulty adjusting to home.

#### 4.4.2 The Impact of Life Events on OE Repatriation

In addition to these possible explanations for the degree of repatriation distress, OE and repatriation experiences can also be affected by personal life events. Questions like, “What made you come home?”, “How do you feel about being home overall?”, and “In what ways has your life has changed since your overseas experience?” yielded responses that moved beyond the traditional transition experiences, of comparing home to overseas and appreciating the home culture only after being away, to more in-depth personal experiences, relating to how the repatriation was shaped by personal events such as a death in the family, an operation undergone overseas, or a relationship break-up. These real life events influenced the OE and repatriation experiences of the individuals.

However, as the following extracts from interviews illustrate, the impact of life events on repatriation is again an individual and subjective experience. Therefore, as with the explanations for repatriation distress, various factors like the recency and intensity of the event, the repatriate’s personality, readiness to return, and opportunities on arrival, affected the impact of life events on repatriation experiences to varying degrees and should thus be considered in a holistic sense, as they are both personal, interconnected and thus complex.

##### **4.4.2.1 Life’s Events Can Impact the Transition Experience**

Findings of the research revealed that, for some, life’s events had significant impacts on the repatriation experience. For example, respondents who had surgery overseas, came home due to a relationship breakup, or came home then fell pregnant, found the transition home unsettling because they weren’t ready to return permanently but “needed to be home at that time”. These personal life events and their impact on repatriation are illustrated in the following researcher observation notes.

One respondent came home because her “relationship fell apart”; she felt lonely and completely reassessed her life and what she wanted to do. “I got into a negative frame of mind and couldn’t see the opportunities that I

can see now”, but “that was all part of needing to come home and heal and move on.” The concept of home was tied up in her partner, because “being with him felt like another home”, and when that fell apart, “I missed home because suddenly I didn’t have that home with him anymore”. When asked if she was ready to come home, she said she “needed to be home”. She justified her return with big plans and goals, because she’d “given up so much... like a good job in my career for a prestigious company”, and with these big goals and plans she put pressure on herself. Now, after a year, this respondent says she “had those dreams then and the dreams have changed” to more realistic goals. When asked how she feels about being home now, she said “I don’t see it as the end of the road but as part of the road and the road might lead back”:

When I was overseas, I thought New Zealand was for settling down, but now maybe I won’t settle down anymore. Maybe I don’t see myself in any place for a long period of time... I’m quite curious to see more of the world and have no-one in my life at the moment that would make me want to settle down. Although, if I met someone and had children, I would do that in New Zealand with the support systems I have here.

Six months later in a casual conversation, she revealed that she intends to stay in New Zealand after all. In terms of how her life has changed since her OE, this respondent attributes the changes to being “wiser through experiencing the pain of a broken heart” and says “all travel broadens horizons, not just OE”. “I don’t think of OE as changing my life, it’s just part of life... whether I’d been on an OE or not, my life would be really different.”

Another respondent injured himself before he left, and his injury got worse overseas. He visited home for a month to seek medical advice, and was told he could leave again. He had an operation in London, but his injury still didn’t improve and was expensive to treat. He came home for the “local knowledge of better medical services... knowing where to go and who to see.” He wasn’t ready to come home and “didn’t achieve what I wanted to do in terms of socialising and travelling”. He may go back once his injury recovers. He feels “frustrated” here: “Overseas I was having a

great time, whereas here I'm living with my parents and have an unchallenging job", but on the other hand, his injury is improving:

For me there are lots of other things going on, like my injury... it might be arthritis... I can't play sport... last time I was in New Zealand, I used to play lots of sport, so it's frustrating... so my return from OE can't be isolated from the problems with my injury.

A third respondent returned home from China because her father and grandfather were both very sick. She planned to leave again for Asia and "more dangerous, politically unstable countries", but fell pregnant and had to stay home. "There are days when I think aaargh, I want to leave and go back to China." She plans to take her child to China or Thailand to live when the child gets older, "but I don't think my partner is keen on China". "I'm glad I came back; I wasn't planning on going overseas forever but I was going to come back a bit later. Now I might go again, but I would come back. New Zealand is a good place to live."

These individual circumstances influenced the experience of the OE and repatriation for each respondent, especially because the repatriates struggled to separate the life event from the transition experience. Their OE was cut short due to extenuating circumstances, and in terms of their wider life courses, they indicated they may leave again, once their reason for return is no longer limiting their travel opportunities.

#### **4.4.2.2 Readiness for Return and Opportunities on Arrival Can Impact Repatriation More Than Life Events**

For others, it wasn't so much the events of life, as their readiness for return and opportunities on arrival that impacted the repatriation experience. For example, two respondents mourned the death of a close family member while they were overseas. However, their repatriation experiences varied from great difficulty to complete happiness, due more to the job opportunities and readiness for home than to the bereavement, as the following researcher observation notes illustrate.

One respondent went overseas to be with a Scottish guy she'd known for two months. "I may have gone eventually anyway, but wasn't saving for it and would've taken at least another year, if I went at all." They broke up overseas.

I got a bit depressed in Scotland on my own, but felt I had to stick it out...

I talked to Mum every night, and she convinced me to stay... so I moved to London, and lived with my best friend from high school.

She had a "great OE – partying, temping, a van tour" and later "a career job." She met another guy, who had "overstayed in London for more than two years. It was time for him to leave, and I decided he was worth coming home for." However, she had a difficult first six months at home. "I found it difficult to get my first job, and we stayed with my partner's parents for nine months to save for a house, which was absolutely terrible", due mainly to her relationship with her partner's mother. "I would have left again except that my partner was in a good job and wanted to stay". In addition, her father died in an accident while she was overseas. She broached this subject initially in relation to money in terms of the flight home for the funeral. However, she did not mention how or whether his death impacted her repatriation experience more specifically except to say that "my estate through his death helped me to get ahead", and "it brought the family closer together". Though she had a difficult transition, after a year at home she is "feeling better now".

I miss it, but think I am in the best place. I left when everything was great and we've come back to hard times, and things just don't come to you easily here... but I feel that's just part of growing up... We are waiting for other friends to come back, which will be really cool, but London will always be a part of us.

Another respondent came home to plan her wedding with her family, and because "I missed my family – birthdays, Christmases, and people passing away".

My Aunty who I was close to passed away while I was overseas. It was hard when I knew she was ill and I couldn't visit her when she was here, and then when she was gone I couldn't be here with the rest of the family for support. I thought about returning for the funeral but decided there was no point coming home to celebrate death.

After a few weeks at home, another aunty died whose funeral she was able to attend. “I was glad I could go to this funeral... I would’ve liked to go to my other aunt’s funeral, but it’s just one of those things.” She’s been back for two months and, despite her difficult accommodation circumstances of “living out of a suitcase in a small and cluttered room at my partner’s parents’ house”, she is “enjoying it... planning my wedding, buying a house and planting a garden”, plus she had a “guaranteed job on arrival which suits my career”. She says if she’d had trouble finding a job, she would’ve been “very tempted” to go back overseas, but overall she was “ready to come home”. “I wanted contact with my family and the New Zealand lifestyle. I have all that now, it’s exactly what I expected and I love it.”

Both of these respondents endured difficult living conditions on arrival, staying with partner’s parents in uncomfortable circumstances. However, the repatriate with the guaranteed job, wedding plans, and a new house to look forward to found repatriation much easier than the respondent, who came home for her partner, struggled to find a good job or save for a house, and would have returned if not for her partner wanting to stay. While the loss of the family member was distressing for both repatriates, the transition experience was more influenced by job security and future prospects than by the event of the death itself.

#### **4.4.2.3 Regardless of Readiness to Return Repatriation Can Result in Severe Distress**

In contrast, regardless of their readiness to return and whether specific life events were evident or not, some repatriates were so distressed by the trauma of repatriation, they experienced despair, dejection, and even depression. They felt isolated, lonely and in some cases misunderstood, as these summaries illustrate.

One respondent struggles with arriving in new countries; she “cried uncontrollably” when she first arrived in Bali then London, and “stayed in the house for two weeks solid when I first arrived home”. She came home

to “settle down with a car and a career”, and because she was “sick of living illegally in London in cheap and crappy accommodation”. Also, her partner influenced her decision to come home and settle, “although he didn’t know it at the time... I thought I was coming home to wait for him. I had no plan of my own; I was just waiting for him to come home too. But she had difficulty acquiring a job and felt “eminently unemployable... I couldn’t even get a phone as I had no credit rating in New Zealand”. She questioned the value of her OE when she saw the “same girl at the local chemist” as four years before, and thought:

This is me . . . I’m going to come back and settle back into life in Hamilton and all the experiences and things I’ve done will amount to nothing. I might as well have not even left... Coming home was so painful, it was terrible... trying to get a life when everyone else had a life... People would say “No, but it’s the experience you had”, but what do they amount to in New Zealand? They don’t mean anything. They won’t help me get a job, won’t get me a boyfriend, won’t get me a nice car, a career – any of the things I wanted to come home to. They’re history. I was telling stories at the pub about how I once went to India, and looking at people staring at me blankly; then they’d start talking about mowing their lawns and painting their fence...

Eventually she “got the job, the car and caught up.” Her partner returned and they got back together, and now they “own a house, a cat and goat, and I am talking about lawns and what the neighbours have done.” She is “happy to be home”, and has all the things she returned for. “But now that I have built a life and a network that I can’t just walk away from”, she also sometimes feels “entrapped”.

Another respondent was ready to come home, and “had had enough”. She was “tired and worn out, sick and run down... I never gave myself a holiday”. She was “always either travelling or working, and had a demanding job that I needed a break from”:

I couldn’t be bothered finding another job and another place to live in London... I thought if I want to put down roots, I’d rather do it in New Zealand... but when I came home, I barely gave myself a break... I tried to do too much at once – catching up with people, getting a house, a job, a phone, a car. I didn’t give myself enough time... Knowing that I would miss overseas, I felt the transition would be easier if I was preoccupied,

so I went straight back to work. But my body was tired and I overloaded myself with work and stress... The wheels came off... I went heavily into depression, which shocked me and many other people... I didn't realise it would be harder to come home than to leave.

She realises in hindsight that she "should have rested". She has had eight months off work, and at the time of the interview planned to return part-time to the same job "with the support of people who know what I went through and can support me over the next hurdle". When asked, "How do you feel your life has changed since your OE", she replied, "It's been changed by the depression."

A third respondent had a difficult OE dealing with different cultures, and studying in an American bible college run by Spaniards. It was "very strict, there was little appreciation of privacy, and no support for foreigners":

When you live in different place, you need your own space. My room was the only place that was kiwi. It was a place I could retreat to with everything else being new. When it's threatened, it really pushes you and I had that constantly with visitors to the college staying in our apartment while we were trying to study. It pushed me over the edge.

She planned to stay indefinitely, but "almost had a breakdown after two years". She came home for a holiday and "just flipped... screaming, swearing, and acting like a six year old under any pressure." After much deliberation, she "decided to return and complete the semester, a decision I later regretted due to stress and sickness", the magnitude of which almost gave her a stomach ulcer at 24 years of age:

I was getting nausea through stress... I got a stomach bug three times in one month despite repeated visits to the doctor... I lost a lot of weight... I was emotionally exhausted through trying to take care of myself... I was walking around like a zombie... I was having panic attacks... and came home a few weeks earlier than planned.

She had a "tendency to put pressure on myself", like applying for jobs above her level of expertise, so she "crashed out, got suicidal, had panic attacks" when she got home, which was "hard for a self-sufficient kiwi girl." Initially, her family "didn't understand and told me to buck my ideas up... it took six months for me to realise I was depressed." This respondent likens culture shock to period pain, "you can describe it, but you don't know what it's like until you've had it." In addition, she is questioning her



values in life in terms of missionary work and her church. She now feels “more excited about life” but is “taking each day one step at a time... I don’t regret having gone, but in some ways I do because of emotional trouble I’m having now... daily life is so difficult.” When asked if she would go if she had the chance again, she replied, “Yes, it’s in my blood... I just wish I was clicking back in like other people seem to do.” When she came home, she “wanted familiarity and was sick of being different... Now I just want to be the same, I want to be like everyone else, get a job, a house, and live the kiwi dream.”

These respondents’ extreme reactions to the transition often surprised both themselves and significant others as they didn’t believe they were prone to such severe distress, and considered themselves self-sufficient and confident in ‘normal’ circumstances. With support from friends and family, and in some cases with professional help and medication, they recovered. However, their distress may continue to influence their future life choices, behaviour, and interpretation of repatriation.

#### **4.4.2.4 Others Experience Much Smoother Transitions**

On the other hand, repatriates who do not experience extenuating circumstances, are ready for return, consider the OE simply a stage of life, or are not “ruffled” by cultural changes, experience much smoother transitions, as these interview summaries illustrate:

One respondent had no intention of going overseas, but was awarded a ballot visa for Canada, “so I decided to leave”. He returned because his subsequent UK visa expired and “I was living an unhealthy lifestyle overseas”. He wanted to “come home and start afresh career-wise, although I had no idea what I wanted to do”. “I didn’t have any expectations of home” and therefore experienced “few surprises or difficulties”. He was still relatively unsettled at the time of the interview, living in a caravan park with a temporary job, but was “happy to be home and getting into gear for a good life and settling down again.”

Another respondent was eager to come home as she “missed my family, the culture, the accent, the beautiful beaches, people not wearing shoes... and I felt like an imposition overseas... I was in someone else’s country, and wanted to be back in mine.” She had no difficulties in returning:

I found a job and accommodation easily... my friends had returned to Auckland before me... my family live within three hours drive... and I actively sought out things to do like doing wine tastings and joining a touch team over summer.

She is “happy every day” she is home, but feels sorry for people who haven’t done an OE, as “you learn a lot from the experience.”

A third respondent saw his return from OE as a “unique opportunity to pick up life and restart again... to set up my own business”. He believes “if I’d stayed home, I would have simply followed a career path and would not have pulled the pin on my career to try something different”. He had visited home prior to returning, which made his eventual homecoming easier because “I knew what to expect”. He has “no regrets, is where I want to be... I think we got the timing pretty right” (with his partner) for returning.

A fourth respondent experienced two OE’s, the second one being a “more cultural experience”, living in Holland and “socialising with the Dutch”. He came home to “be with my partner”, and “had no difficulties settling back in, as I wasn’t away long enough for much to change.” As he was away for only nine or ten months on each OE, he says he “found it easier to settle than my friends, who are returning after more than five years away”. “I picked up old friendships easily as most had been overseas... I lived in the same place I had left... and I was offered a good job on my return”. He acknowledges his OE for opening his mind and for making him appreciate his lifestyle:

You realise things happen for a reason overseas... they’re out of your control and there’s not a lot you can do about them, like poverty and people’s living standards.

*How has that changed you personally?*

Because I was exposed to it, I can appreciate it and say I’m quite lucky to have the lifestyle we’ve got and appreciate it more.

Completing his OE “reinforced the importance of getting ahead in life, rather than being a tourist”. He is “happy to be home doing what I want to do and have no regrets...If I hadn’t experienced it for myself, I’d be more restless and want to go.”

In summary, life’s events certainly impacted repatriation experiences for some respondents, for example one respondent came home because of a break up overseas and another returned due to an injury. These respondents tended not to be ready to return and were therefore quite unsettled at the time of the interview, thinking they might leave again. However, it was evident from other respondents that readiness for home and opportunities on arrival may impact repatriation more than the life experiences. This was illustrated by the two respondents, who experienced a death in the family while they were overseas, and who had quite different repatriation experiences because of their readiness to return and their job opportunities on arrival. Moreover, some respondents experienced severe depression on repatriation while others experienced no significant issues, implying that while life events can impact repatriation experiences, there are more influential factors involved specific to the repatriation and transition period, like readiness to return, the respondent’s individual coping style, and personality.

#### **4.5 Summary of the Chapter**

In summary, respondents tended to return home for family and romantic relationships, lifestyle or career based reason. Some of these decisions to return were based on significant life events, like a break-up overseas, while other decisions were viewed as simply the ‘next phase of life’. However, regardless of their reason for return, the findings of the research showed that the repatriation experience seems to be a curve of transition with phases of repatriation that were identified in terms of first impressions, comparisons of home and overseas, thoughts of ‘what’s next?’, adjustment to home, and changing priorities and behaviours.

In terms of their personal individual experiences, most respondents lived with immediate family on arrival home, but eventually became too independent to live with parents and turned to friendships instead. However, socialising at home was distinctly different from the intense but carefree partying lifestyle overseas. To exacerbate the issue, the phase of life and therefore conversations of those at home were also different, centering on marriage and mortgage rather than on current events and travel, and repatriates therefore found they connected better with other repatriates. Unless the repatriate had a support network of returned friends, socialising in New Zealand was reportedly difficult.

In terms of careers and work opportunities, respondents without previously arranged jobs preferred to wait for the “right job” due to the long-term implications of working at home. However, some respondents felt they were ‘forced’ into unsatisfactory jobs, because they exerted pressure on themselves to work. Others found they didn’t have the “right skills” and were “undervalued” by New Zealand agencies, making it harder to settle at home. Respondents reflected that in a tighter job market, they would struggle to compete with career-focussed applicants who had stayed at home, because they felt the OE was undervalued. They felt that they had become more confident and independent with a greater global outlook, but that these competencies were not acknowledged by those at home.

In reflecting on their return home, respondents’ attitudes varied widely from viewing repatriation as a unique and difficult transition, to an adjustment similar to going overseas, to “just another life event”. They also reflected that while personal life events may have impacted upon the ease of repatriation, opportunities on arrival and readiness for return seemed to have more impact on repatriation than the life event itself. Overall, repatriation was found to be an individual experience, with some respondents reporting severe depression and distress, and others experiencing no distress at all. Certainly, the security of a good job, stable accommodation, and supportive friends and family alleviated transition distress for repatriates overall.

## 5 Conclusion

In contrast to previous tourism studies, which have subdivided tourists into quantifiable typologies, produced generalist accounts of the tourism experience, and in many cases neglected to hear the individual tourist's voice (Wickens, 2002), this thesis aimed to report the in-depth and personal experiences of tourists, and more specifically of OE repatriates. As this thesis has demonstrated, the return home is a significant phase of the travel experience. It offers an opportunity to reflect not only on the travel experience itself, but also on its impact on wider life courses and one's overall direction in life, and therefore, it influences returnees' future choices, attitudes and behaviours. Especially in relation to longer-term sojourns like the OE, backpacking and volunteer tourism, this long-term effect on life is an important, though often neglected, aspect of tourism research. Therefore, the research design and interpretive paradigm used in this research were justified by the need for in-depth personal responses from interviewees to gather a holistic perspective of the tourism experience, including their emotions, unique experiences and instances and both the positive and negative impacts on the tourists' lives subsequent to the return home, thereby generating a greater understanding of the tourism experience overall, that is, in the wider context of individual lives.

Indeed, the objectives of this research called for an interpretive approach to the research design; due mainly to the need for subjectivity to gather in-depth personal responses and the assumption of multiple realities. A fundamental technique of the interpretive paradigm is demonstrating empathy, and, through this understanding, establishing rapport with the researched. By establishing a rapport with each interviewee, this researcher gathered insiders' perspectives of OE repatriation through in-depth conversational style interviews, drawing out individual realities and the personal narrative. Rapport was created by the researcher understanding the topic, offering her own personal experiences and keeping the conversation informal, by using techniques like funnel

questioning, sharing personal stories and active listening, and by creating a comfortable interview setting. These rapport-building techniques encouraged the respondents to feel relaxed and comfortable while discussing their personal thoughts and experiences and enabled the conversations to flow smoothly and naturally. This allowed the researcher to gather the in-depth and personal experiences of respondents, gaining insights into the experiences and emotions they encountered on their return home and reflections on their repatriation experience, for example, whether they considered the OE just another phase of life, or whether it was a life-changing experience. This thesis thereby proffers that empathy and rapport are essential skills for researchers in seeking a more holistic and personal perspective of tourism; one that gives priority to the lived experiences of individuals throughout their own life course, rather than the narrow limiting frameworks of most historical tourism research.

Critics of the interpretive approach would argue that the integrity and reliability of qualitative research is questionable as data cannot be extrapolated to the wider population and because the researcher may create bias in the results by following a particular line of questioning. However, the grounded in-depth approach to data collection adopted in this study, whereby data was systematically evaluated and compared against conceptual categories, enabled the researcher to generate common themes that emerged from the respondents' own 'stories'. Moreover, a qualitative researcher has to participate in the experience of the researched to understand participants from their own frame of reference (Howe, 1991); at least with in-depth interviews, the influence of the researcher is acknowledged and accepted.

Indeed, all research includes an element of judgement and assumption on the part of the researcher, but reflecting on the impact of these judgements creates validity or trustworthiness of the research results. "Self-reflexivity allow[s] researchers to acknowledge themselves as living, breathing, embodied human beings, who [bring] their previous experiences and worldviews to their project of enquiries" (Ateljevic et al.,

2005, p.9). Therefore, to understand her impact on the results, the researcher reflected on the research process and her impact on that process, for example, how her own ideologies drove the research conceptualisation, how her own repatriation experience enabled her to build rapport with respondents, and how the common age, background and ethnicity with respondents enabled her to empathically understand the repatriation experience described by the respondents. Such reflections are important for generating new, more holistic tourism knowledge, where in the past a positivistic and scientific method has prevailed.

In fact, this methodology differs from many traditional tourism-related studies, which have been positivistic in nature, relying on structured surveys and quantification (Decrop, 2004) to produce 'reliable and valid' research that can be replicated and therefore applied to wider populations. However, it has been argued that emic research helps researchers "explain the life, attitudes, motives, interests, responses, conflict, and personality of specific actors... [whereas] the etic approach... hinders the ability to deal with... these phenomena [because they] cannot be rigorously investigated" (Pike, 1954, cited in Walle, 1997, p.529). In other words, quantitative research struggles to investigate the personal experience due to its sterile and detached approach with experiential settings, an assumption of causal relationships and the objective, impersonal and deductive approach of the researcher.

In contrast, an interpretive approach enables the researcher to gather an insider's and therefore a more holistic perspective of tourism, including positive and negative aspects of the travel experience. For example, this research found that a number of factors, like readiness for return, personality, expectations of the returnee, support systems at home, and length of the sojourn, can influence the perception of the OE repatriation experience. It is unclear whether these factors also occur in the return home from other types of travel; however, what is clear is that the tourism experience, from a holistic and personal perspective is not always the happy, relaxing, hedonistic pursuit that is often portrayed in tourism

literature. For example, Harris & McIntosh (2006) found that sorrow, security and stress could also be used to describe tourism experiences, and they argue that only by taking a holistic perspective will we “move beyond narrow and limiting frameworks, developing and building theory to gain a more realistic and inductive understanding of tourism; privileging the lives of individuals to present grounded realities shaping our thinking around tourist experiences” (Harris & McIntosh, 2006, p.7). In contrast, other OE literature has limited the description of the OE by forcing typologies onto data, and has failed to consider personal factors that influence the OE like personality, coping style and individual life events. For example, Myers & Inkson (2003) clearly state that the OE is a “unique experience” (p.47), then proceed to “fit” their results into patterned typologies (p.49), thereby disregarding the deeply personal nature of the experience. A more holistic approach would allow the individualistic factors of travel to emerge, like a relationship break up or an injury overseas, which then impact the perception of the travel experience. Similar to the emotional self-change through backpacking (Noy, 2004) and the cathartic nature of volunteer tourism experiences (Zahra & McIntosh, 2006), this acknowledgement is important for generating a greater understanding of the tourism experience outside of the traditional limiting frameworks.

Within the research paradigm described above, the specific objectives of this thesis were to investigate why OE travellers return home and the in-depth repatriation experiences of returned OE travellers. Previous OE literature has highlighted some of the economic issues OE returnees face, for example career opportunities in New Zealand being insufficient in terms of interest, responsibility and remuneration (Myers & Inkson, 2003), and wider repatriation literature specifies the broader issues like socialising at home (for example, Foust et al., 1981). However, the OE literature fails to suggest strategies for overcoming the transition distress many repatriates experience. Therefore, this research is important to also gain insight into considerations for minimising transition distress of OE returnees.



The common themes emerging from the findings of this research revealed that, consistent with the findings of Inkson & Myers (2003), OE travellers return for family and romantic relationships, lifestyle reasons or career prospects. Moreover, these findings discovered that OE repatriates tend to live with family initially, and that they find socialising with those who stayed at home difficult due to “narrow” conversations, their newly acquired “broader” outlook and their different stage in life compared with those at home. Indeed, similar to the findings of Bell (2002), respondents reported feeling ‘more worldly’ with greater tolerance of other cultures, more confident and more ‘self-aware’. In contrast to previous academic literature on the OE and career (for example, Myers & Inkson, 2003), many respondents of this study returned for career prospects in New Zealand, and interestingly, a significant number (17 of 24 interviewees) changed their career upon returning home and therefore tended to prefer to wait for the ‘right’ job. However, they also sometimes felt ‘forced’ into less than satisfactory roles, because of the perceived lack of appreciation by employers and recruitment agencies of the skills they had reportedly acquired on OE. This finding will be discussed in more depth later in this chapter.

An additional common theme that emerged from this research was the fluid period of transition returnees experienced, from first impressions and a comparison of home and overseas, followed by the thought of ‘what’s next?’, to a readjustment to home and an adaptation of priorities and behaviours until the OE became ‘like a dream’. These findings can be loosely applied to the *W*-curve of transition which suggests that repatriates experience phases of transition from shock and recoil to adjustment to home and full adaptation or synthesis with the home culture (Freedman, 1986). While such transitional theories have not previously been applied to OE travellers in academic literature, this research has attempted to contribute to tourism knowledge by describing the broader view of the return home from the OE, grounding the theory of the return home from a lengthy sojourn, and identifying the phases of transition that OE

repatriates, specifically, experience. Overall, the return home is a significant phase of travel experience, because of the implication of its long-term effect on life choices (see also Zahra & McIntosh, 2006); though is barely researched in tourism literature. Thus, this thesis generates insights regarding the repatriation experiences of OE travellers. Moreover, as repatriation distress was found in some cases to be a real problem for OE returnees, and as so many different factors can impact the repatriation experience, it is important to acknowledge and understand the phases of transition if future returnees' repatriation experiences are to be eased.

As well as reporting the common themes of OE repatriation, for example the phases of transition, this thesis discovered that the intensity of these experiences varies from severe culture shock, alienation, and in some cases depression, to seeing repatriation as an opportunity for learning and change, and integrating aspects of the foreign culture into life at home. These findings are consistent with other transitional studies, which also describe the extremes of repatriation experience from alienation to learning and growth (for example, Freedman, 1986; Foust et al., 1981). However, as section 4.4 illustrated, this research moves beyond other repatriation studies by suggesting that the diversity of experience is based on circumstances which are subjective and individualistic in nature, like personality, the level of support and opportunities on arrival, readiness and reason for return, and the impact of individual life events on the travel experience. Therefore, while common themes emerged though the research, the findings also suggest that the repatriation from OE is an individual, subjective, highly personal experience.

One could argue that the subjective and personal findings reported may be caused by the biographic nature of the in-depth interviews, whereby each interviewee describes his or her personal and therefore biographic experiences, and that a more collective construction of the repatriation experience, for example, through focus groups, may have been more effective for drawing conclusions and generalisations. However, the individualistic version of reality is fundamental to understanding the tourist

experience, and acknowledging that multiple realities exist is important for generating a holistic perspective on which to build tourism theory from an insider's perspective. Moreover, the deeply personal experiences may not have been as easily shared in the more formal group environment like focus groups, as participants of focus groups would not easily build rapport with one-another and would therefore be less willing to share their personal experiences than in an in-depth conversational style interview. On the other hand, this limitation could be overcome by setting the focus group in an informal environment to establish rapport both across respondents and with the researcher. Therefore, this thesis supports the argument by Harris & McIntosh (2006) that, "it is time to revisit how we as scholars conceptualise the subtleties of tourism experience to capture people's experiences as tourists" (p.2), and argues that travel is an individual experience that can only be truly understood by reporting the personal and qualitative nature of the tourism experience, and by default, the approaches and methods we consider as researchers.

Practical considerations to recommend strategies to ease repatriation experiences can also be drawn from the findings of this research. In particular, the individualistic nature of repatriation would suggest that individual strategies could be applied by repatriates to ease their own transition distress. These individual strategies are discussed in academic literature in terms of reflecting on the OE, repatriation experiences and changes that have occurred at home, recognising that adjustment home is in some cases more difficult than leaving (for example, Irish, 1986), and understanding that consciously aligning goals with the newly acquired skills and experience can facilitate further personal growth (Smith, 2002).

Firstly, it can be concluded from the research findings discussed in chapter four that the reflection period requires thinking about the people and experiences that have impacted the OE, considering the changes within oneself, reassessing values and goals based on these changes, and examining how these changes influence one's decisions regarding the 'next phase' of one's life. Repatriates also need to reflect on the changes

that have occurred at home and prepare themselves for home by keeping abreast of changes at home, thereby setting realistic expectations. Keeping “close contact with significant others at home and sharing with them the people, events, changes, and emotions as they happen makes talking about experiences much easier upon returning home” (Smith, 2002, p.255). In conjunction with this, repatriates need to recognise that some relationships may have to be abandoned if the distance between parties has grown too wide, and instead seek out others who have had similar experiences. Overall, individuals need to understand that travel can affect one’s life both negatively and positively, that they may encounter distress on return from OE or that, conversely, they may discover an unanticipated personal growth. Considerations of how returnees may be so enlightened are further speculated later in this chapter.

Secondly, to learn and grow from the repatriation experience, travellers also need to recognise that adjustment to the return home is in some cases more difficult than leaving, and understand that like adjustment to the new culture, re-entry “takes time and occurs in stages” (Smith, 2002, p.256). The return home can be challenging and at times traumatic, and scholars agree that adjustment to home can be more difficult than adjustment overseas (for example, Smith, 2002; Irish, 1986) due to the unexpected nature of repatriation distress. For example, the ‘honeymoon’ phase of initial excitement on arrival is shorter with re-entry than with leaving, as everything is new and exciting overseas, whereas at home expectations are not met, and the unexpectedness of repatriation problems “can turn a pleasant overseas experience into a traumatic new beginning back home” (Sussman, 1986, p.250). If repatriates expected these transitional difficulties, they may experience less shock and recoil in their transition home. Moreover, it has been argued that to grow through repatriation requires significant reflection by both the returnee and those at home; therefore, perhaps the period of questioning and challenging home may be necessary to achieve true growth and should not be viewed as a ‘snobby’ criticism of home after all.

Thirdly, the OE and subsequent return can also be life-changing and lead to self-discovery. “OE changes young New Zealanders’ lives through the learning that they do” (Myers & Inkson, 2003, p.51). Like backpacking (Noy, 2004) and volunteer tourism experiences (Zahra & McIntosh, 2006), OE repatriation can have a long-lasting effect in terms of attitudinal, behavioural and personal changes, whereby “the experience becomes an ongoing process which extends far beyond the actual tourist visit” (Wearing, 2001, p.3). As the OE is a “spiritual journey of discovery of the world and of the self” (Bell, 2002, p.144), repatriates need to understand that consciously realigning goals to match the new skills, experience, and sense of self they have acquired overseas can be “tremendously satisfying and empowering” (Smith, 2002, p.258). Moreover, by understanding the changes within themselves, OE repatriates may capitalise on their newly acquired skills and apply them in life situations at home.

The OE is part of New Zealand’s culture (Bell, 2002; Myers & Inkson, 2003), and with 50% of expatriate New Zealanders wanting to return home at some stage and a further 29% undecided (KEA, 2006), understanding and supporting the repatriation experiences of returnees is fundamental to easing their transition home. The first step is to value the ‘soft’ competencies that OE travellers develop, like intercultural tolerance, a broader outlook and self-awareness. These competencies correlate to those identified by Inkson & Myers (2003) as skills needed in a global career, are listed by global corporations as desired capabilities of Master of Business Administration graduates (Goleman, 1999), match the traits of emotional intelligence, which “keeps us employable” (Goleman, 1999, p.4), and correspond to the competencies needed in the predicted ‘boundaryless’ careers of the 21<sup>st</sup> century (Inkson et al., 1999). Previous OE literature has counselled companies to recognise the value of the OE (Inkson & Myers, 2003; Inkson et al., 2004a; Myers & Inkson, 2003); however, respondents of this study reported a perceived lack of appreciation by New Zealand agencies and companies in their newly

acquired skills from the OE, and lamented the lack of initiatives to support repatriates to New Zealand.

While recruitment agencies in the UK have started to set realistic expectations of home with returnees (South, 2006), little evidence exists of such support from New Zealand based companies, agencies or policy makers. Yet 'global thinking' is a proficiency of increasing importance in New Zealand as industries attempt to capitalise on creative and innovative products rather than more traditional commodity-based products (Heeringa, 2006). Thus, there are practical considerations here for the wider industry too in generating awareness of transitional issues, understanding how travel can affect one's life, and enlightening repatriates and those at home of strategies to overcome transitional distress. As this is a wider issue than pertaining solely to the travel industry, New Zealand companies, recruitment agencies, policy makers and organisations who recognise the value of expatriates and returnees, for example in terms of their ability to build relationships between individuals, communities and countries in an increasingly interconnected world, i.e. those organisations promoting diaspora initiatives, could perhaps adopt a more proactive approach to making the transition easier for returning OE travellers, and generate a greater understanding of repatriation transition.

The incentive for implementing such a proactive approach may be promoted through the advantage to be gained from a labour force with a broader outlook, maturity and confidence, with the skills commensurate to global perspective needed in New Zealand industries; a labour force of highly proactive individuals who identify opportunities and take action on them, demonstrate initiative, and persevere in the face of setbacks; and a labour force of individuals who develop broad and flexible skill and knowledge bases that contribute to the organisation and individual development and that are transportable across organisation (and national) boundaries (McConnell, 2004). As the return home is noted as challenging and at times traumatic, and with so much investment in networking expatriate New Zealanders and attempting to entice them

home, easing their repatriation experiences is the next logical step in retaining them once they arrive. Although diaspora initiatives recognise the value of expatriates, who “play a pivotal role in strengthening of relationships between individuals, communities and countries in the highly interconnected world economy” (Lidgard, 2001, p.11), they fail to understand the importance of the smooth transition of these self-directed global careerists between overseas and home. This thesis argues that the industry and New Zealand central and local governments need to be creative in addressing this issue and proactively consider factors like repatriation distress, phases of repatriation, coping styles and repatriation preparedness, which are crucial in addressing repatriation issues. How easy this would be to foster, remains open to debate.

Indeed, it would appear that overall a wider awareness and understanding of the transition period is needed to ease repatriation experiences for OE travellers, especially as “sojourners who have the least preparation for repatriation and therefore presumably the least understanding of what is about to transpire when they return home, experience a repatriation more distressful than those who have a better understanding of the repatriation process” (Sussman, 2001, p.119). Therefore, setting realistic expectations is fundamental to easing repatriation distress and ultimately, the responsibility for enacting such initiatives may remain with the individual. These expectations could perhaps be achieved through promoting a network of returnees, whereby repatriates may mentor those arriving home as they understand the transition experience and can minimise the surprise (and in some cases shock) of returning home. “Providing opportunities for [returnees] to establish contact with others who can provide support... helps facilitate readjustment” (Foust et al., 1981, p.25). Such a network would have the added affect of educating returnees regarding the phases of transition and notifying them that “their adaptation experiences comprise a typical pattern and not an individual aberration” (Sussman, 1986, p.245).

This awareness of transition could also be achieved through practical initiatives like websites, seminars and programmes, which would help repatriates with the logistics of returning home (for example, job opportunities and accommodation). Such initiatives could also encourage OE travellers to start thinking about their life at home before they return and start planning the 'next phase' of their life, thereby overcoming many of the difficulties returnees encounter on arriving home. Scholars have developed programmes and strategies for students, corporate repatriates and repatriates in general to overcome transition distress (for example, Rogers & Ward, 1993; Hurn, 1999; Werkman, 1986; Smith, 2002). However, while these strategies could be effectively applied to the OE repatriation experience, no information or training sessions are currently available for returning OE travellers specifically. It also should be noted here that broader issues exist for OE returnees, for example, tax incentives, remuneration, and 'getting ahead in New Zealand'; however, these issues present a far bigger concern than this study could attempt to discuss.

In summary, increasingly, scholars have noted that to undertake an OE is life-changing on a personal level, and to encourage OE travel remains vital for remote countries like New Zealand, Australia and South Africa for creating global thinkers with broad perspectives. Moreover, the OE generates a learning experience and personal development which should be appreciated by recruitment agencies, employers, and supported by friends and family at home. The return home from an OE is individualistic and subjective in nature, and can be a difficult transitional experience. Certainly, the security of a good job, stable accommodation, and supportive friends and family alleviated transition distress for the respondents of this study. In general, understanding repatriation, the effect travel has on the return home, and the phases of repatriation transition is important for not only policy makers, but also those at home, and returnees themselves if repatriation is to be eased for future generations of returning OE travellers. For this to eventuate, multi- and interdisciplinary perspectives of tourism may lend the greatest effort,



especially the understanding of individual psychology of tourists and how personality impacts tourist experiences and perceptions, so that realistic and effective strategies may be initiated, and discussions about who may be most responsible for facilitating these strategies, may be opened for debate in the pursuit of recommendations for easing repatriation distress.

### ***5.1 Opportunities for Further Research***

Previous OE literature has centred around descriptions of OE within the tourism discipline and the impact of OE on careers at home in a wider business context. However, the academic literature to date has not considered the broader issues of OE repatriation, the long-term impact of OE on an individual, nor the impact of life events on the OE repatriation. The findings of this thesis show that that the return from OE is a significant phase of the travel experience, as it is often an important factor in the life of an individual, and can influence future travel behaviour. Yet this stage of the tourism experience is rarely considered in the published tourism literature, nor the associated emotional impact upon the return from travel. Therefore, this research adds to the tourism literature by examining the in-depth personal experiences of OE returnees, the individual circumstances that impact OE repatriation, and returnees' reflections on repatriation and its impact on their lives, for example, changes in personal development. Further research could build upon the personal aspect of these results to further the understanding of the personal dimensions of tourism, and more specifically, the factors that impact repatriation experiences. For example, interviewing friends and family of OE returnees may validate or rescind the findings of this research, for example the way people socialise at home.

Moreover, in-depth interviews with OE travellers who have tried to repatriate and returned overseas may further substantiate the findings regarding the phases of transition and the factors that impact the repatriation experience, like readiness for return and visiting home before returning indefinitely. In conjunction with this, in-depth interviews with OE travellers who are still overseas and thinking about repatriating may build on the findings regarding the reasons for return and the preparedness of

OE returnees for their 'next phase' of life. Additionally, it remains disputed whether changes like those to one's personal development would have occurred despite the OE; therefore, a comparative study, for example, focusing on specific aspects like personal development, of those who stayed at home and those who undertook an OE would be useful in identifying the similarities and differences between these two groups. As mentioned above, personality and wider psychological study is perhaps important in future research seeking to understand the personal and more holistic nature of tourist experiences.

Furthermore, while, this research adds to the repatriation literature by capturing the repatriation experiences of OE travellers specifically and identifying possible practical considerations for easing repatriation for OE travellers, the research was limited by only one interview per respondent, and therefore didn't capture the subsequent transition phases and life-long effect of OE and repatriation for each respondent. As the results implied a long-lasting effect, at least in terms of personal development, future research could build upon these results to advance the understanding of the effect of the return home from a long sojourn abroad. Further research could comprise a longitudinal study of repatriating OE travellers, encompassing a before, during and after repatriation temporal approach. This research could consider the wider phases of repatriation by collecting data from respondents at key intervals. "Longitudinal surveys have the unique ability to illustrate causal direction and processes of change" (Ladkin, 2004, p.240). As the extent to which the OE changes people's lives remains disputed, a longitudinal study could seek to validate or refute such suggestions.

To further verify the changes that OE travellers reportedly experience and to overcome the possible biographic nature of in-depth interviewing, a more collective methodology could be used, for example focus groups to verify or refute the individual comments or recall or memory work. This is a collective construction of memories based on a common understanding, whereby participants must document their memories and compare them

with other group members to create collective account of the phenomenon being studied (Small, 2004). However, it should be noted that the individualistic nature of repatriation might possibly prevent an agreement among group members and hinder a common account being produced.

Indeed, this research has validated the individualistic nature of tourism research, in particular regarding the impact of individual personality and individual life circumstances on the repatriation experience. As with the overseas experience itself, individual life circumstances like job opportunities on arrival or a relationship break-up can impact the perception of the travel experience, and therefore the return home. These experiences may be validated quantitatively to test whether such findings can be generalised. It could be argued that negative emotions, life events and relationships can influence travel no matter how long the sojourn lasts, who the individual is, or what the motivations for travel are.

In fact, perhaps there is scope for a whole research agenda that advances on the approach taken here to examine the holistic nature of tourism in relation to wider life courses in other contexts, both in travel and business practice, as well as the impact of live events in the service delivery of tourism products. For example, future research could compare longer trips, such as the OE, to shorter or different trips, like a package holiday, to investigate how different factors, like personality and individual life circumstances, influence the return home overall. Are all types of tourism experience qualitatively the same? Is the return home from a package holiday the same as the return from OE? What are the personal experiences and emotions associated with business travel? Are they the same as holiday travel? Such a perspective might also yield a more realistic account of service delivery and quality and the underlying factors affecting tourist and customer satisfaction. For example, a waitress who has recently experienced a life-changing event might not appear as 'service friendly' as someone who has not. It might also provide a more grounded understanding of the experiences of tourism operators, of small family-owned tourism businesses, of hosts, or of lifestyle entrepreneurs.

These questions pose a new agenda for tourism research; a challenge for researchers to seek a more holistic and personal account of tourism. Increasingly, studies are starting to address some of these facets (see for example, Harris, 2002; Getz, Carlsen, & Morrison, 2004; Ateljevic & Doorne, 2000). However, as, historically, the tourism industry seems only concerned with the satisfaction of particular products or parts of the tourism system, scholarly tourism research has perhaps a responsibility to address wider questions of the return home in order to more realistically understand the tourism experience and the relative positioning of the travel experience within the significant life events or life courses of individuals.

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## 7 Appendices

### 7.1 Appendix I – Examples of Correspondence

Initial email sent to all travelling contacts of the researcher: N=183

**From:** Walter, Naomi

**Sent:** Tuesday, 26 April 2005 3:35 p.m.

**To:** Confidential

**Subject:** OE travellers returning home - dissertation topic

Hi Everyone

I am thinking about doing my dissertation next semester on the repatriation of OE travellers to New Zealand, and I need to determine whether I can find enough people to interview.

**Have you, or has anyone you know, returned to live in New Zealand after being away from home for longer than three months? If so, would you (or they) be willing to discuss your experiences with me in the second half of this year?** This also includes people, who will have returned by July / August of this year.

I will need a significant number of people to interview, so could you please forward this message to anyone you think will be able to help, and email me at this address ([njw3@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:njw3@waikato.ac.nz))?

Thanks in advance for your assistance, I really appreciate it! I hope I will be able to conduct useful research, and make it easier for future generations of repatriating OE travellers to settle back home :)

Have a good day.

Naomi

Follow-up email sent to respondents of initial email: N=68

**From:** Walter, Naomi

**Sent:** Tuesday, 12 July 2005 4:38 p.m.

**To:** Confidential

**Subject:** Dissertation - OE travellers returning home

Hello

Thanks for offering to help me with my dissertation project regarding OE travellers returning home. I am looking forward to canvassing your opinion on what it's like to return to New Zealand after being away for an extended period of time.

I will be ready to interview you sometime over the next few weeks, and would really appreciate your help - I just couldn't do it without you ☺ The interview should take less than an hour; I am flexible in terms of timing, and just need to arrange a time that would suit you best.

Therefore, could you please send me the following information, so I can arrange the interviews over the coming weeks.

**Your city of residence:**

**The year and month you left:**

**The year and month you returned:**

**Your preferred interview time (delete the ones that wouldn't suit):**

Mon-Fri during the day

Mon-Fri evening

Sat / Sun during the day

Sat / Sun evening

**Your phone number/s** (landline is preferred if possible) to arrange an interview time:

Thanks again for your time

Have a good day

Naomi

Examples of responses

**From:** Confidential

**Sent:** Friday, 29 April 2005 5:21 p.m.

**To:** Walter, Naomi

**Subject:** Dissertation

Hi there Naomi,

I received an email from a friend of a friend of a friend.... of yours (you know how it goes) regarding your disseration. I've just returned from living in Europe and would be more than happy to talk to you.

I also have a brother and a sister in law who have also both been overseas

and returned (about four years ago, if that counts).

Have a nice day,

Confidential

---

**From:** Confidential

**Sent:** Friday, 15 July 2005 5:14 p.m.

**To:** Walter, Naomi

**Subject:** FW: Dissertation - OE travellers returning home

Hi Naomi,

Glad to be of help. Please find the answers to your questions below. I have a few friends who also may be of interest to you. Let me know if you need to talk to any more people.

Have a great weekend!

xxx

Your city of residence: Hamilton

The year and month you left: January 2003

The year and month you returned: For good - November 2004

Your preferred interview time: Mon-Fri during the day

Your phone number/s: Confidential

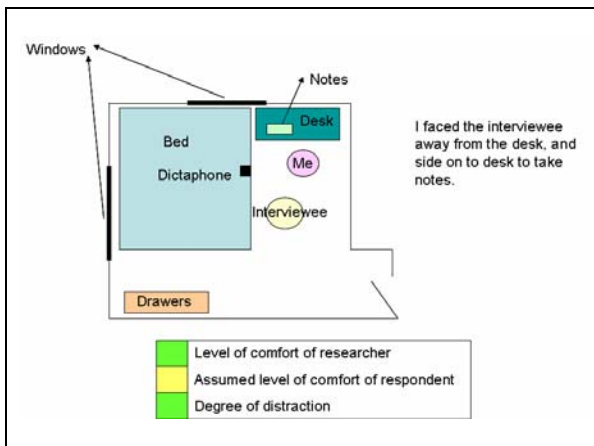


## 7.2 Appendix II – Interview Settings

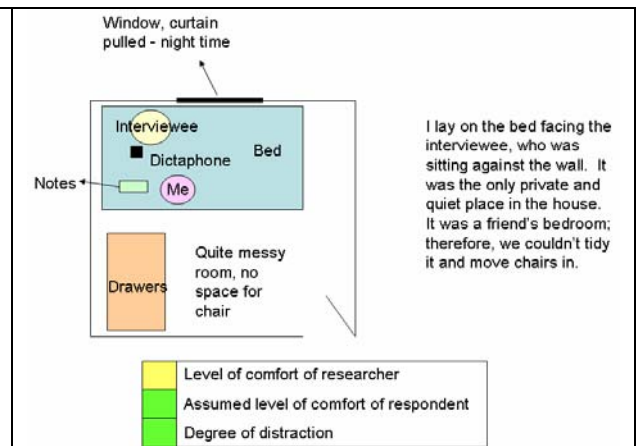
The following settings provide pictorial detail of each interview, with a key detailing the level of comfort for both the researcher and the researched and degree of distraction that each setting presented. Interview dates and specific locations are not included for reasons of confidentiality; however, all interviews took place in the North Island of New Zealand between 12<sup>th</sup> August 2005 and 10<sup>th</sup> January 2006.

Key regarding comfort and distraction levels:

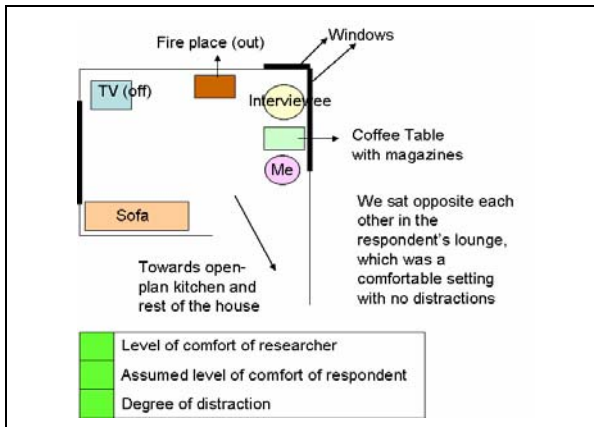
	Uncomfortable / High degree of distraction
	Acceptable comfort / Medium degree of distraction
	Comfortable / Low degree of distraction



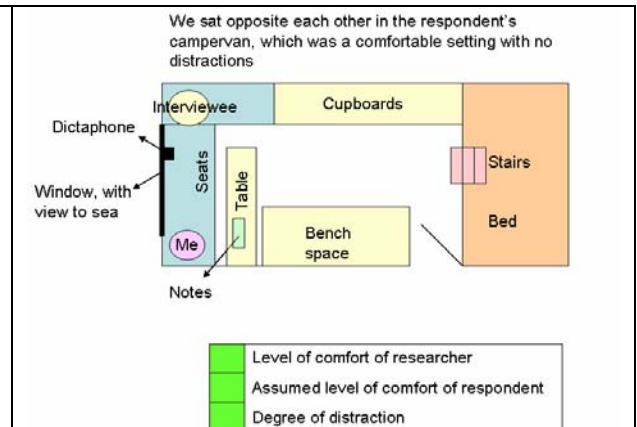
Interview 01: Friday: 7pm in my room at my flat



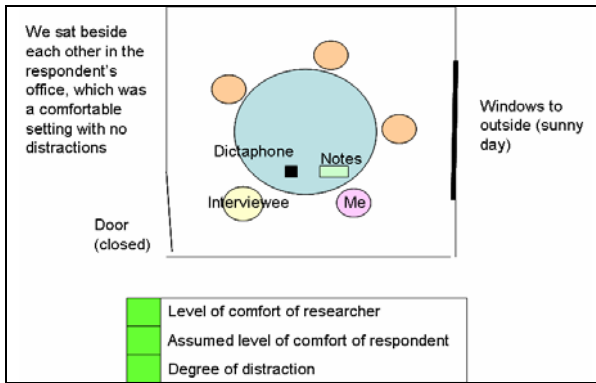
Interview 02: Saturday: 9pm at mutual friend's house



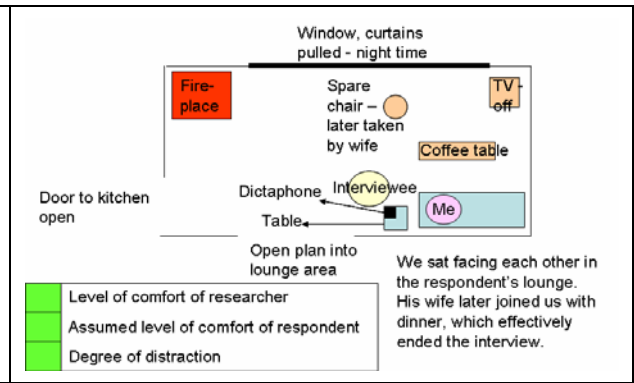
Interview 03: Sunday: 10am in respondent's lounge



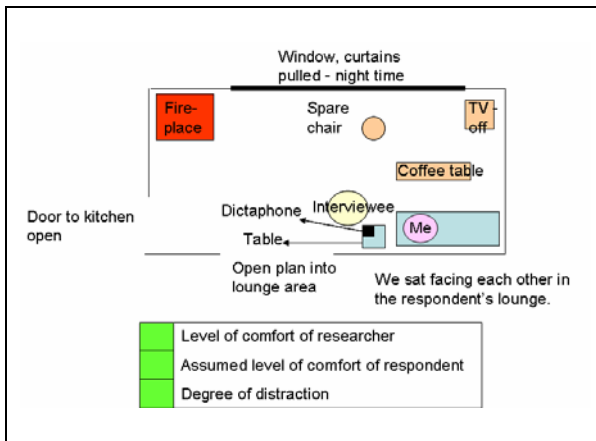
Interview 04: Thursday: 8pm in respondent's residence (campervan in caravan park)



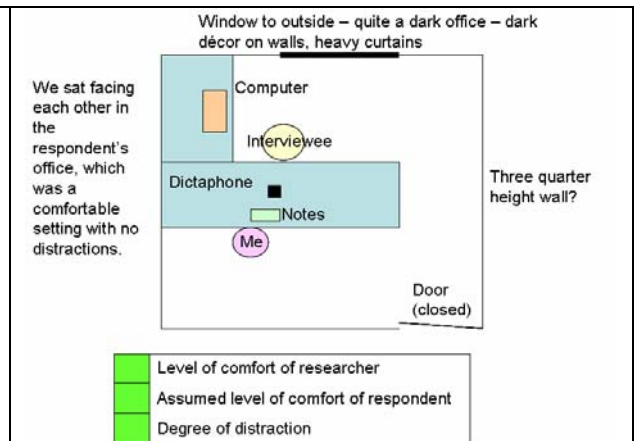
Interview 05: Wednesday: 1.30pm in respondent's meeting room at his office



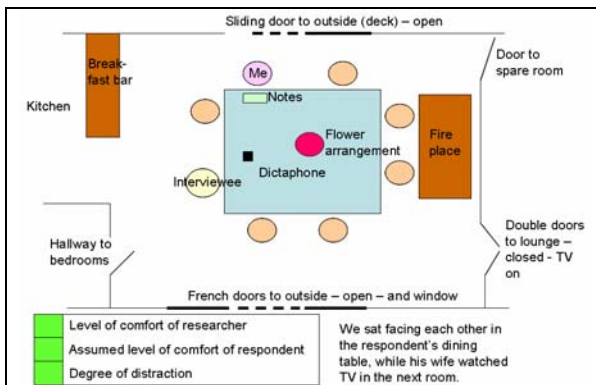
Interview 06: Wednesday: 9pm in respondent's lounge



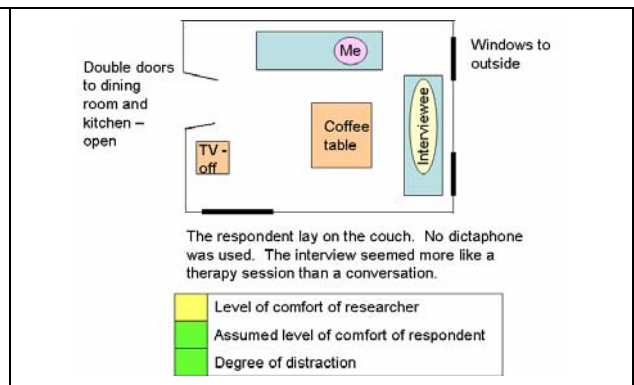
Interview 07: Wednesday: 8pm in respondent's lounge



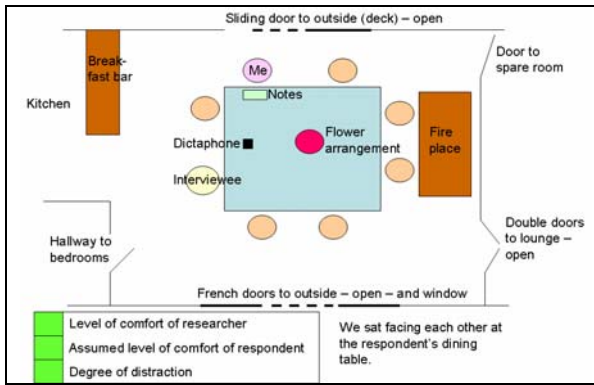
Interview 08: Friday: 11.30am in respondent's office



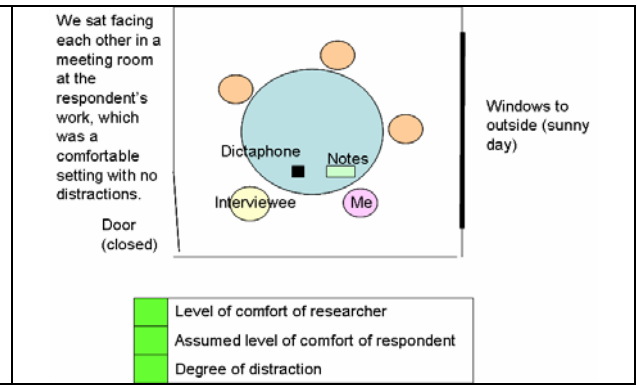
Interview 09: Saturday: 7.30pm in respondent's dining room



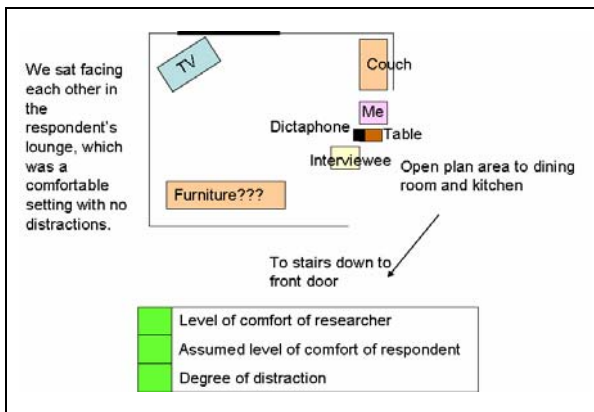
Interview 10: Sunday: 10am in respondent's friend's lounge



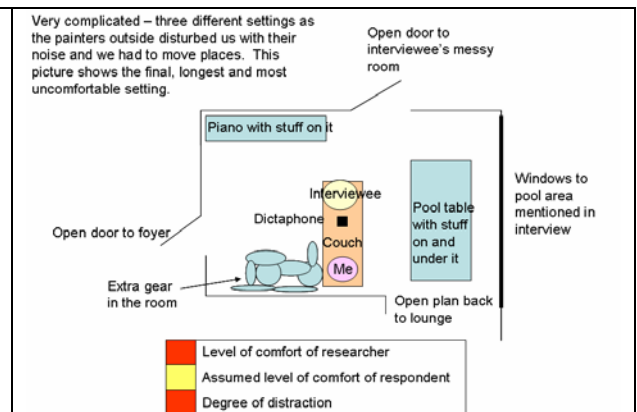
Interview 11: Sunday: 11.30am in respondent's dining room



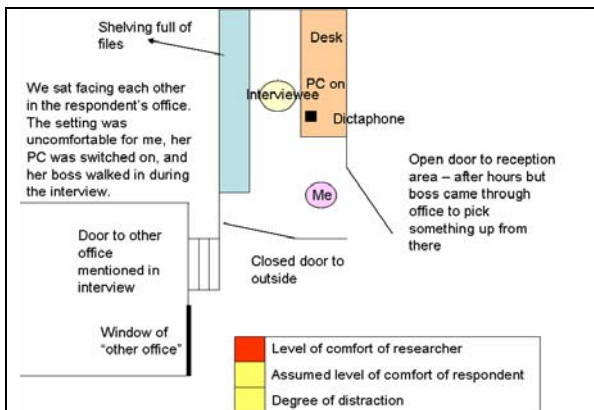
Interview 12: Tuesday: 12 noon in meeting room at her office



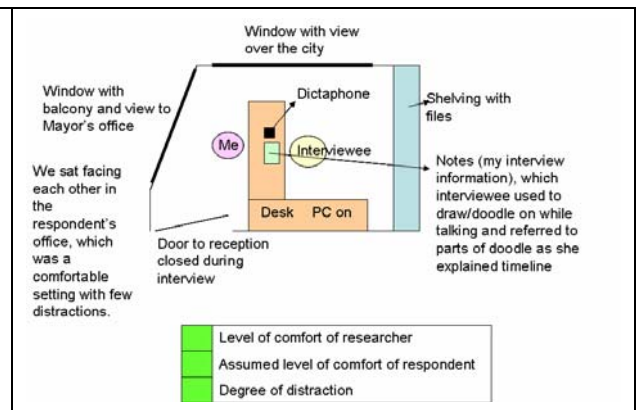
Interview 13: Monday: 6pm in her parent's lounge while they were away



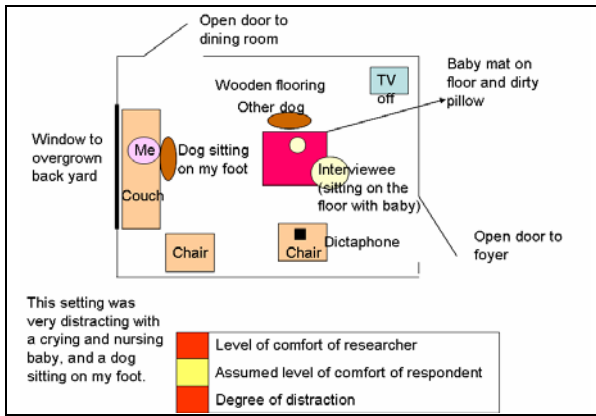
Interview 14: Wednesday: 2pm in her parent's lounge with painters outside



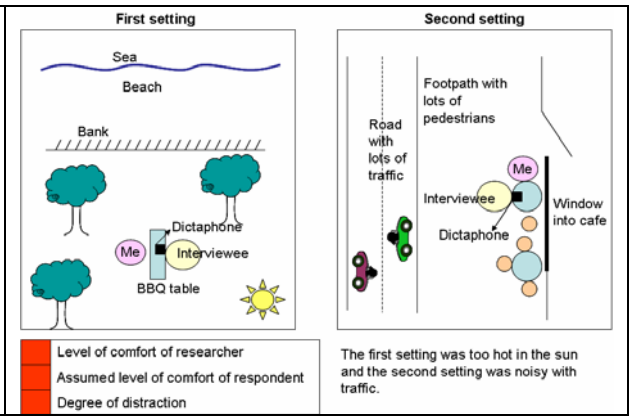
Interview 15: Thursday: 5.30pm in her office at work



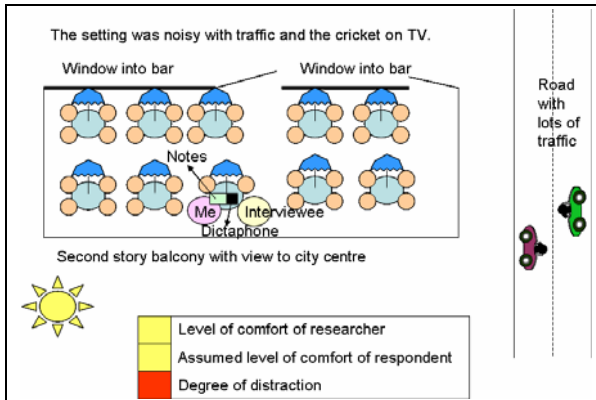
Interview 16: Friday: 12 noon in her office at work



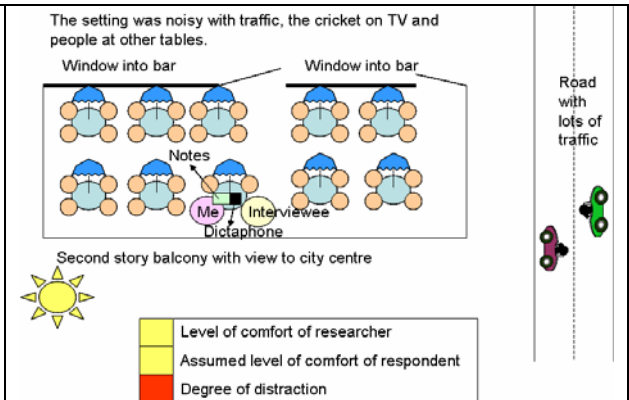
Interview 17: Friday: 3.30pm in her lounge at home with the dog on my foot and baby crying



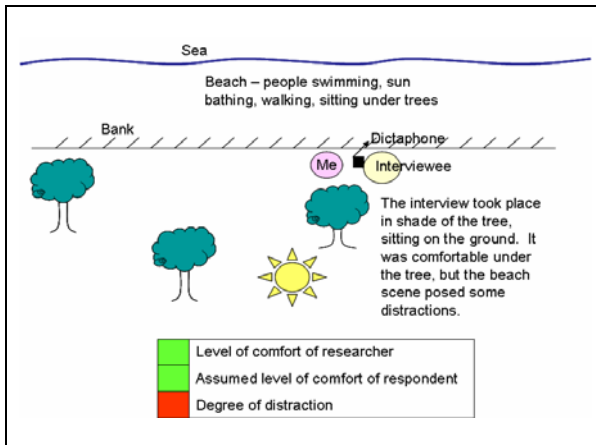
Interview 18: Sunday: 1pm at a park in Auckland – moved to a café when it became too hot



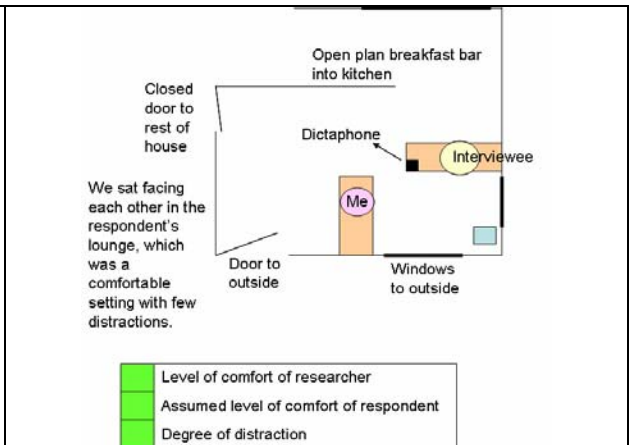
Interview 19: Sunday: 1pm at a pub in Auckland – outside on the deck



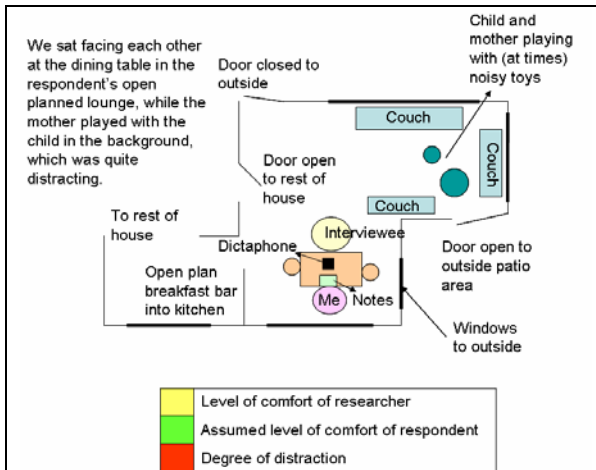
Interview 20: Sunday: 2.30pm at a pub in Auckland – outside on the deck



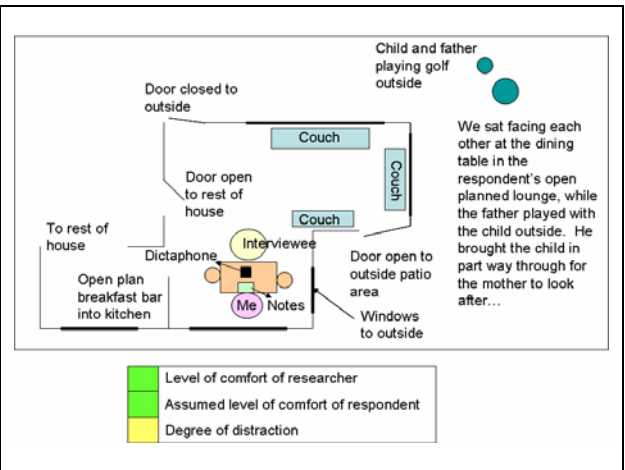
Interview 21: Monday: 10am at a park – under a tree overlooking the beach



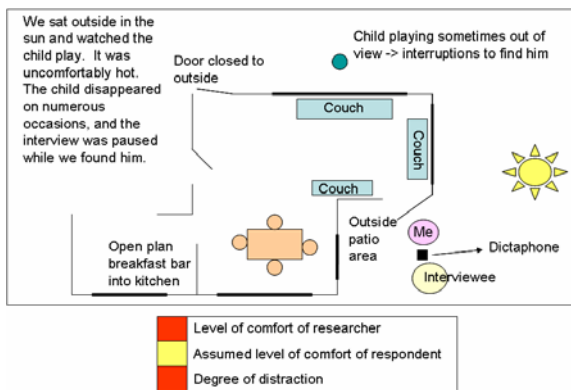
Interview 22: Monday: 12noon in respondent's lounge



Interview 23: Tuesday: 12.30pm in their dining room



Interview 24 – First Setting: Tuesday: 1.30pm in their dining room



Interview 24 – Second Setting: Changed setting to sit outside in the sun to watch the baby play

### 7.3 Appendix III – Information Sheet for Participants

#### ***An investigation into travellers repatriating to New Zealand, having completed their OE.***

Thank you for participating in this study. Please be aware that all responses and data gathered are confidential. You are welcome to withdraw from this study at any time.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the experiences of repatriating New Zealanders, who have completed their overseas experience (OE). The aim is to determine the factors that entice New Zealanders to return home from an OE, and establish recommendations to make the homecoming more attractive and the transition into to the home culture easier. I will produce a dissertation summarising the results of up to 40 interviews and academic literature. You are welcome to a copy of the dissertation, which I will send you if you email me on [njw3@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:njw3@waikato.ac.nz). Additional journal articles may be produced from the results and articles may be sent to leading New Zealand organisations like the Ministry of Economic Development. While direct quotes will be used from the interviews, they will not be associated with any personal or identifying information.

During the approximately one hour conversation, you will be asked questions regarding the memorable aspects of your OE, the factors that enticed you to return home and your travel behaviour on arrival. You will also be asked to compare your expectations with your actual experiences on returning to New Zealand, especially regarding friendships, job opportunities and your housing situation.

This “interview” is designed to be open and conversational, with you “taking the floor” in explaining your experiences and impressions of life back in New Zealand. Therefore, while we are talking, please feel free to raise any additional topics regarding the experiences you encountered on your return. These may relate for example to your relationship with family members, partners, spouses or your impression of the New Zealand culture on returning to New Zealand. These insights into your personal experiences and any lessons you learned from them may help to make the “transition” back home easier for future generations of OE repatriates.

As the ideas occur to you, please also feel free to recommend ways we could entice New Zealanders back home from their OE.

***At the end of the “interview”, I will ask you some demographic information, which will help with categorising responses and explaining any differences between your experiences and another interviewee’s experiences.***

Researcher’s Name and contact information: Naomi Walter 15 Kelly Place Hamilton Phone: 021 763606 Email: <a href="mailto:njw3@waikato.ac.nz">njw3@waikato.ac.nz</a>	Supervisor’s Name and contact information: Dr Alison McIntosh Department of Tourism and Hospitality Management Waikato Management School The University of Waikato Private Bag 3105 Hamilton Phone: +64 7 838 4962 Email: <a href="mailto:mcintosh@mngt.waikato.ac.nz">mcintosh@mngt.waikato.ac.nz</a>
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#### **7.4 Appendix IV – Consent Form for Participants**

*An investigation into travellers repatriating to New Zealand, having completed their OE*

I have read the **Information Sheet for Participants** for this study and have had the details of the study explained to me. My questions about the study have been answered to my satisfaction, and I understand that I may ask further questions at any time.

I also understand that I am free to withdraw from the study at any time, or to decline to answer any particular questions in the study. I agree to provide information to the researchers under the conditions of confidentiality set out on the **Information Sheet**.

I agree to participate in this study under the conditions set out in the **Information Sheet** form.

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Name and contact information:

Naomi Walter  
15 Kelly Place  
Hamilton  
Phone: 021 763606  
Email: [njw3@waikato.ac.nz](mailto:njw3@waikato.ac.nz)

Supervisor's Name and contact information:

Alison McIntosh  
Department of Tourism Management  
Waikato Management School  
The University of Waikato  
Private Bag 3105  
Hamilton  
Phone: +64 7 838 4962  
Email: [mcintosh@mngt.waikato.ac.nz](mailto:mcintosh@mngt.waikato.ac.nz)

## 7.5 Appendix V – The Interview Guide

### Interview questions – Version 4

**Conversation! Don't jump in! Silence is golden. Don't move on until they have finished!**

1. Background information - OE:
  - i. How long did you travel for?
  - ii. Where did you live?
  - iii. Where did you work?
  - iv. Who did you socialise with?
- b. Had you been overseas before this OE?
2. What made you come home to NZ? Details
  - i. If visa, why not another country (eg Ireland, Australia etc)?
  - ii. If family, what about family ties?
  - iii. If lifestyle, what about life in NZ?
  - iv. Detail wanted, eg age = settle down = kids = NZ
- b. Were you ready to come home?
3. How do you feel about being home overall?
4. What expectations did you have about returning, and what did you find different to what you expected?
  - a. What didn't you expect that **surprised** you?
  - b. What did you find **difficult**?
  - c. Let them set themes, and include these:
    - v. Social networks and friendships? "How well do you mix with people who have travelled compared to those who stayed at home?" "Do you notice any differences and if so, what are they?"
    - vi. Job opportunities and perceived value of the OE by potential employers?
    - vii. Housing situation, for example living with parents / family?
5. Tourism / travel questions
  - a. "What were your travel patterns after arriving home?"
6. In what ways has your life has changed since your overseas experience?
7. Do you have anything else to add about your experiences when you got home?
8. I would like to make some recommendations in my dissertation about making the transition home easier for people returning from their OE. What ideas do you have to make it easier for future generations of returning OE travellers to come home and stay here?
9. Do you have any ideas about how we can entice them to return to New Zealand?

**Demographic sheet...**



## 7.6 Appendix VI – Demographic Sheet

For categorisation purposes, please could you complete the following questions? This data will be kept confidential with no personal information or identification attached.

1. What year and month did you **leave** New Zealand? \_\_\_\_\_
2. What year and month did you **return** to New Zealand? \_\_\_\_\_
3. Where did you live in New Zealand **before** you left (city)? \_\_\_\_\_
4. Where did you live **while overseas** (city/ies)? \_\_\_\_\_
5. Where do you live **now** (city)? \_\_\_\_\_
6. What job did you have before you left New Zealand? \_\_\_\_\_
7. What job/s did you do while you were overseas? \_\_\_\_\_
- 7a. Would you consider your overseas job/s a career advancement?  Yes  No
8. What job do you have now in New Zealand? \_\_\_\_\_
- 8a. Would you consider your current job/s a career advancement?  Yes  No
9. What is your current salary range?
 

Less than \$20,000	\$20,001 to \$40,000	\$40,001 to \$60,000	\$60,001 to \$80,000	\$80,001 to \$100,000	More than \$100,000
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10. What was your housing situation **before** you left?
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Flating	<input type="checkbox"/> Living with partner	<input type="checkbox"/> Living with parents
<input type="checkbox"/> Own house	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please specify)	_____
11. What was your housing situation **overseas**?
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Flating	<input type="checkbox"/> Living with partner	<input type="checkbox"/> Living with parents
<input type="checkbox"/> Own house	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please specify)	_____
12. What is your housing situation **now**?
 

<input type="checkbox"/> Flating	<input type="checkbox"/> Living with partner	<input type="checkbox"/> Living with parents
<input type="checkbox"/> Own house	<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please specify)	_____
13. Did you leave New Zealand with a partner?  Yes  No
14. Did you return with a partner?  Yes  No
- 14a. If yes, was it the same person?  Yes  No
17. What is your current age? \_\_\_\_\_ years
16. What is your gender?  Male  Female