Factors influencing the adjustment of women on global assignments

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Abstract This study tests a four-factor model proposed by Caligiuri and Cascio (in press) for predicting the cross-cultural adjustment of female expatriates. The four factors tested in this paper were family support, personality characteristics, organizational support and host nationals' attitudes towards female expatriates. Structured phone interviews with thirty-eight American female expatriates from US-based companies were conducted. The responses were content analysed and regression was conducted. The results suggest company and family support are significantly related to cross-cultural adjustment. Thus, suggestions are given for future research on female expatriates using the theoretical model of social support. Practical recommendations for how to maximize the likelihood of success for women on global assignments are also given.

Keywords Expatriates, global assignments, cross-cultural adjustment, women in management, cross-cultural leadership, host nationals.

Over the past decade, research on women in global assignments has been increasing (e.g. Adler, 1987, 1993a, 1993b; Caligiuri and Tung, 1998; Punnett *et al.*, 1992; Taylor and Napier, 1996; Westwood and Leung, 1994). The focus of these previous studies can be categorized into three distinct (and equally important) issues. The first issue has examined differences between men and women with respect to the procurement of global assignments (Adler, 1984a, 1984b, 1984c): are companies as likely to send a qualified woman as they would be to send a qualified male on a global assignment? And, if not, why not? The second issue has addressed the differences between men and women in the outcome of their global assignments (Caligiuri and Tung, 1998): do men and women succeed (or fail) at the same rate? Who is more effective? The third (and least studied) issue has examined the difference between men and women in the antecedents of their global assignments (Caligiuri and Cascio, in press): are the predictors of success the same for men and women? What predictors are unique to women (compared to men) on global assignments? After briefly reviewing the literature on the first two issues, this paper will focus on the third issue – the factors influencing success for women on global assignments.

Gender differences in the procurement of global assignments

The first issue raised in the research on female global assignees addresses whether a gender bias exists against sending women on global assignments. This issue is worthy of investigation given that the number of female global assignees is proportionally low in relation to the overall size of the qualified female labour pool. For example, in Australia, approximately 6.5 per cent of global assignees are women, compared to the

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22 per cent of women who are in management (Hede and O'Brien, 1996). In the United States and Canada the statistics are similar. Between 12 and 14 per cent of global assignees are women, compared to the 45 per cent of women in management. A worldwide study of over 200 expatriates by Florkowski and Fogel (1995) found that 11 per cent of the expatriate respondents were female. More recently, 13.9 per cent of the respondents in Tung's (1997) study of over 400 expatriates and inpatriates into the United States were female.

What factors account for this continued under-representation of women in global assignments? Nancy Adler's (1984a, 1984b, 1984c, 1987) pioneering research has addressed the under-representation of women on global assignments. Her research has identified myths perpetuated by organizations that inhibit women from procuring global assignments. In brief, one myth is the assumption by decision makers that women are not motivated to seek international assignments. With regard to this myth, she conducted a large-scale study of MBA students and found no significant differences in male and female interest in accepting international assignments (Adler, 1984a). Another myth that inhibits women from procuring a global assignment is that host-national men will not transact business with women. To address this concern, Adler (1987) obtained responses from expatriate women regarding their perceptions of host-nationals' attitudes towards them. The study found that only 20 per cent of the respondents perceived any negative attitudes from the host nationals. In addition, 42 per cent of the women reported that being female was an asset in the host-national environment.

Despite this empirical evidence, companies may still be unwilling to send women on global assignments. In a study conducted fifteen years ago, Adler (1984c) surveyed sixty multinational companies, more than half of which indicated that they were hesitant to send women overseas. It is unlikely that, in today's litigious society, companies would readily admit that they would not send women on global assignments – just because they are women. Other reasons, such as the myths suggested by Adler, may account for the difference.

Gender differences on the outcome of global assignments

The research conducted on the outcome of women's global assignments has indicated that female expatriates are successful in their global assignments (Caligiuri and Tung, 1998; Adler, 1987; Taylor and Napier, 1996). While this research has provided valuable insights into the experiences of female expatriates, certain concerns remain regarding the assessment of the 'success' of these assignments. For example, Adler (1987) reported a 97 per cent success rate for women expatriates. As Adler (1987) admits, one plausible explanation for the women's high success rate is that the data were self-reported. Although, as another indicator of success, Adler (1987) reports that many women in her sample were promoted based on their performance internationally.

To begin a more systematic discussion on understanding female expatriates' success, it is first necessary to define 'success on a global assignment'. Caligiuri (1997) has identified the following three criteria: desire to terminate the expatriate assignment, cross-cultural adjustment and performance on the job. While past research has blurred the definition of success, it is important to identify which of the three criteria is under investigation and develop models accordingly (Caligiuri, 1997).

A preliminary study by Caligiuri and Tung (1998) compared male and female expatriates on each of these three criteria of success. The results indicated that men and women did not differ on their desire to terminate their global assignments. Men and women also did not differ on supervisor-rated performance on the global assignment.

The study did find, however, that women were less *cross-culturally adjusted* than men in countries with low female workforce participation and a lower percentage of women managers (Caligiuri and Tung, 1998). Given the difference in cross-cultural adjustment, they recommend that future research should investigate the differential predictors of cross-cultural adjustment. The present research study addresses this issue by investigating the factors which influence the cross-cultural adjustment of women on global assignments.

Gender differences and the predictors of global assignee success

In a review of the literature, Caligiuri and Cascio (in press) have proposed a model for predicting the success of female global assignees. Their model consists of the following four antecedents: (1) personality traits, (2) organizational support, (2) family support and (4) host nationals' attitudes towards women expatriates. While Caligiuri and Cascio (in press) recognize that these four antecedents would be applicable to both male and female expatriates, the context of the global assignments may be different for men and women. As Adler (1984a, 1984b, 1984c, 1987), Napier and Taylor (1995), Punnett *et al.* (1992) and others have recognized, this different context for female expatriates warrants further investigation. Female expatriates are in a unique work situation. The present study is a test of this model of factors predicting female expatriates' success. Each of the four predictors in the model is discussed in greater detail below, highlighting the way in which these predictors are unique in the context of a female expatriate's experience.

Personality characteristics

For both male and female expatriates, personality traits have been associated with cross-cultural adjustment (Abe and Wiseman, 1983; Black, 1988; Mendenhall and Oddou, 1988). Mendenhall and Oddou (1985) suggest there are three personality orientations in adjusted global assignees. These three personality dimensions are broadly categorized as self-orientation (stress reduction, technical competence and reinforcement substitution), others-orientation (i.e. the ability to form relationships and the willingness to communicate with host nationals) and perceptual orientation (i.e. the ability to understand the behaviours of others).

Self-orientation Self-orientation may be especially important for female expatriates because, as Adler (1984b, 1987) notes, female expatriates must have an extraordinary level of technical competence. This is supported by Kanter's (1977) research which indicates that, in a situation where women are regarded as 'tokens', they have to demonstrate exceptional competence to be accepted by colleagues. Given the under-representation of women in overseas assignments, this observation seems especially relevant for female expatriates. In addition, female expatriates must possess the stress-management skills that may result from being the only female in a given work setting. The ability to handle stressful situations and confidence in one's abilities have been found to be positively related to cross-cultural adjustment (Abe and Wiseman, 1983; Black, 1988; Mendenhall and Oddou, 1988).

Others-orientation It has been noted that women tend to rely on co-operation to achieve goals, and adopt an indirect style of communication (Tung, 1997). This trait may be particularly useful for female expatriates conducting business in high-context cultures (Asia, Latin America), where the social values dictate indirect communication

styles. The primacy of co-operation in forming global strategic alliances has also been recognized (Tung, 1995). Thus, the ability to form relationships with host nationals as colleagues, superiors, subordinates and clients may be integral to performing the assignment for expatriate women, and may be facilitated by certain traits that women are known to possess (Tung, 1997). Further, in a domestic context, Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) have pointed out that forming interpersonal relationships at work plays a key role in the career advancement of women. By forming relationships with superiors, subordinates and peers, women derive mentoring, support and networking opportunities (Ragins and Sundstrom, 1989). In an international context, others-orientation may enable women to form such relationships, hence enabling better cross-cultural adjustment.

Perceptual orientation   Given that women are often working in host countries which have a lower rate of women as managers (Caligiuri and Tung, 1998), the perceptual orientation of women may be particularly important. Women need to understand not only cultural differences, but also the *gender* differences that might be present in cultures that see a more traditional role for women in society (Caligiuri and Cascio, in press). Thus, female expatriates may be placed in situations where these cultural differences have a more direct impact on their performance on the job, and the ability to be open to differences in values norms and behaviours may be all the more important. Research has indicated that expatriates (both male and female) who are flexible in their attitudes towards cultural differences and are willing to learn from different cultural contexts are better adjusted to overseas assignments (Harvey, 1985; Abe and Wiseman, 1983; Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985).

Hypothesis 1:   Women who report more of the personality orientations (self, other and perceptual) will be more cross-culturally adjusted than women who report fewer personality orientations.

Family support

The process of moving to an international location often involves the family of the expatriate. Past research has noted that the inability of the family to adjust to the move overseas is related to the ability of the expatriate to adjust and succeed on the global assignment (Harvey, 1985). In a longitudinal study of families on global assignments, Caligiuri *et al.* (1998) found that family characteristics, such as support, were related to expatriates' adjustment to the work assignment.

While this expatriate research suggests that family support is important for global assignees' cross-cultural adjustment, family support may be *especially* important for female adjustment, given the non-traditional position of male trailing partners and the involvement women tend to have in raising children (Caligiuri and Cascio, in press). Male spouses may feel isolated in an overseas location since most other trailing spouses may be women. Further, difficulties associated with obtaining work permits may force the male spouse to relinquish a career and accept a more non-traditional role as homemaker (Punnett *et al.*, 1992). While these concerns are relevant for female spouses as well, male spouses may have the additional burden of coping with societal norms dictating a 'bread-winner' role for men. Given these additional concerns, the need for family support (especially from the 'trailing' husband) may be accentuated for female expatriates.

Hypothesis 2:   Women who have support from a spouse and/or children will report greater cross-cultural adjustment than women who do not have support from a spouse and/or children.

Company support

The Federal court's ruling in Diaz v. Pan American World Airways (1971) indicated that companies can no longer use host national clients' preference for working with men as a basis for not selecting female expatriates (Diaz v. Pan American World Airways, 1971). Further, the increasing demand for expatriates has outstripped the supply of male candidates, forcing organizations to consider women for expatriate positions (Napier and Taylor, 1995). Thus, companies now need to better utilize their talented women employees for global assignments and ensure their success globally.

In her seminal work, Kanter (1977) found that there were significant differences among men and women as to the resources, information sources and support available from organizations. Ragins and Sundstrom (1989) have noted that the failure of organizations to provide these elements deprives women of avenues for success in organizations. In an international context, organizational support may be a critical predictor of whether a woman will succeed in her global assignment. This support can be in terms of training their female expatriates on the host-national cultural values and norms relating to women and possible problematic situations that women may encounter (Feltes *et al.*, 1993). Organizational support could also be in the form of projecting female expatriate managers as being most suitable and highly qualified for the job. Support may be provided in the form of sponsors or in-country consultants (Feltes *et al.*, 1993).

Hypothesis 3:   Women who perceive greater support from their organizations will report more cross-cultural adjustment than women who perceive less support from their organizations.

Host nationals' attitudes

Caligiuri and Cascio (in press) noted that, while the first three factors have received attention from researchers, the fourth factor, host nationals' attitudes, has been relatively ignored. Research indicates mixed findings on the host nationals' attitudes toward female expatriates. In a study of North American female expatriates, Adler (1987) found that only 20 per cent perceived negative attitudes from host nationals. Further, over 40 per cent of these women felt that they were in an advantageous position as women in the host national environment. On the other hand, studies that have obtained responses directly from the host nationals have found that a majority of the host nationals preferred men rather than women on expatriate positions (Stone, 1991). In Stone's (1991) study, 64 per cent Australians, 53 per cent Asians and 59 per cent expatriates agreed that women were not suitable for expatriate positions in certain countries. This result supported an earlier study by lzraeli, Banai and Zeira (1980) suggesting that a majority of host-national males were reluctant to accept women in expatriate positions. Once a woman is on a global assignment, the attitudes of host nationals towards female expatriates is relevant only if they affect a woman's ability to perform her job and, thus, lower her adjustment to working in the host country.

Hypothesis 4:   Female global assignees who perceive positive attitudes toward them from their host-national colleagues will be more cross-culturally adjusted than those who perceive negative attitudes towards them.

A related factor that may influence the attitudes of host nationals towards female expatriates is the perceived status of women in the organization (Caligiuri and Cascio, in press). Studies on inter-group relations suggest that groups that are perceived to have more status or power in society are viewed more favorably by others outside the group (Sachdev and Bourhis, 1991; Stahelski and Payton, 1995). In the case of female expatriates, those who are more senior and are perceived to be more powerful may be viewed more favourably by host nationals. Thus, Caligiuri and Cascio (in press) propose that the experience of female expatriates may differ on the basis of their power status in the organization.

Hypothesis 5:   Female global assignees with greater position power will report greater cross-cultural adjustment than female global assignees who have less position power.

Method

Participants

Structured phone interviews were conducted with American female expatriates on global assignments in Europe, Australia and Asia. Two US-based multinational organizations provided the initial lists of their female global assignees. The first organization is a computer-products organization with twenty-three women on global assignments at the start of the research project. The second organization is an information-technology organization with nineteen female global assignees at the start of the research project. All women who were contacted were willing to be interviewed. We were unable to contact eight women due to travel schedules, wrong phone numbers, etc. In total, sixteen women from the first organization and sixteen from the second organization were interviewed. In addition, we used a snowball technique to contact six additional women. Thus, the total sample size was thirty-eight female expatriates.

Fifty-three per cent (n=20) of the participants were married and 28 per cent (n=10) of the women had children accompanying them. The average age of the children was 5 years. For those women with children, they had an average of two children accompanying them. The participants averaged 38 years of age. Eighty-one per cent of the respondents spoke the language of the host country. This was a first global assignment for 86 per cent of these women. The women had been on their assignments for an average of two years and had ten years average tenure with their organization. The women were located in the following countries: France, Belgium, Italy, Switzerland, Austria, Philippines, Australia, New Zealand, Puerto Rico, Norway, United Kingdom, Germany and Singapore.

Interview procedure

The respondents were contacted individually by the researchers, after a list of female expatriates and their phone numbers had been obtained through the participating organizations. The three authors conducted the interviews with the female expatriates via telephone. At the start of the interview the interviewers ensured respondents that their responses would be confidential and that their participation was voluntary. While the participant was responding, the interviewers took detailed handwritten notes of the interview. Responses were not matched to names in order to maintain anonymity of the respondents.

The structured interview questions corresponded to each of the four factors associated with female expatriate cross-cultural adjustment. The interview began with demographic questions: age, marital status, tenure, level within the organization, number and ages of children, years on the assignment and whether this was the first assignment. In addition, respondents were asked whether they could speak the language of the host country.

The next four open-ended questions corresponded to the independent variables in the study. The first question was 'How do aspects of your personality positively or negatively affect your global assignment?' The second question was 'What were the steps taken by the company to help you make the move overseas?' The third question was 'What aspects of your family life do you think positively or negatively affect your performance on the job?' The fourth question was 'How do you perceive the attitudes of the host nationals toward you?' (The other independent variable, level within the organization, was asked at the beginning of the interview with the demographic variables.)

To assess the dependent variable, the respondents were then asked a question about their overall adjustment to the global assignment: 'How would you describe your overall experience on this assignment?' The interviews averaged twenty-five minutes in length.

Coding procedures

Responses were content analyzed by two raters who were doctoral candidates in the human resource management department at Rutgers University. The raters independently rated the interview responses on two code sheets: the first sheet was used to code the independent variables and the second sheet was used to code the cross-cultural adjustment dependent variable. On the code sheet for the independent variables, personality characteristics were coded on a 3-point scale, 1 = evidence of self-orientation, 2 = evidence of others-orientation and 3 = evidence of perceptual-orientation. Family support was coded on a 3-point scale: 1 = more/all negative comments, 2 = both positive and negative comments, 3 = more/all positive comments. Organizational support and host-national attitudes were also coded on a similar 3-point scale. Position power was coded as moderate/high. The code sheet for the dependent variable, cross-cultural adjustment, consisted of a 3-point scale relating to low/moderate/high adjustment. (See Appendices A and B for the code sheets.) Coders made their ratings for the independent and dependent variables separately and had no knowledge of how they corresponded. After the ratings were made, the two raters' code sheets were compared for inter-rater agreement. When there was a discrepancy between the two raters, they discussed the ratings with reference to the handwritten notes to achieve consensus.

Coded responses

Independent variables

Personality characteristics   The raters read each response and determined which of the three personality orientations (if any) were present in the interviewee's response. The authors ensured that the raters were familiar with the dimensions discussed earlier by requiring the raters to read the article by Mendenhall and Oddou (1985) before assessing the responses. The average number of personality orientations detected in the

interviews was 1.3. The inter-rater agreement, prior to the consensus meeting, was 73 per cent. Some examples that were coded as evidence of the *self-orientation* were:

> A lot of people here don't like Americans, but one has to tolerate negative comments and not respond negatively, even if one feels upset.

> My sense of humour sees me through tough situations.

Some examples that were coded as evidence of the *others-orientation* were:

> I have always had a great interest in learning about the cultural practices of this country.

> I enjoy working with people and assisting them in their work.

Some examples that were coded as evidence of the *perceptual-orientation* were:

> Appreciating the cultural differences between New Zealand and the US helps me.

> People here are not used to working with women as there aren't that many career women. ... I understand why they might have a harder time accepting me.

Family support   The responses for this item were rated on a 3-point scale, with 1 = little or no family support, 2 = a moderate amount of family support and 3 = much family support. 'Support' was operationalized in terms of positive or negative comments regarding the family. An example of a positive comment was:

> *Positive comment*:   I wouldn't have been as successful had I been single or without him [my husband].

The inter-rater agreement for this item was 100 per cent. Surprisingly, all of the married expatriates had *only* positive comments regarding support from the family (in particular their spouses). All of the single expatriates in our sample stated that they had *no* family support on the global assignment. (This would make logical sense given that it would be highly unlikely that a parent, sibling, etc., would be on a global assignment with an expatriate.) Thus, this 'family support' variable is a proxy for the 'marital status' of the respondents. For the purpose of data analysis, 'marital status' was used because it better reflects the true nature of the response and is a more objective variable.

Company support   This item was coded on the basis of positive and negative statements that were made regarding the policies and practices of the company relating to global relocation. The responses were coded on a 3-point scale with 1 = mostly/all negative comments, 2 = both positive and negative, and 3 = mostly/all positive comments. The mean score for company support was 2.5 ($S.D=.76$). The inter-rater agreement was 83 per cent. Some examples of positive and negative comments were:

> *Positive comment*:   The company was for the most part very supportive and did the best they could.
>
> *Negative comment*:   I was literally thrown into the assignment ... when I reached here I found that the company had not even processed my work permit!

Host nationals' attitudes   This item was also coded on a 3-point scale based on positive and negative comments of the respondents. The scale range was 1 = mostly/all

negative comments, 2 = both positive and negative comments and 3 = mostly/all positive comments. The mean score for this item was 2.4 (*S.D*=.79). The inter-rater agreement prior to consensus was 76 per cent. Some examples of positive and negative comments were as follows:

Positive comment: I was surprised how willingly they [host nationals] accepted us ...
                      both personally and professionally.

Negative comment: They [host nationals] seem to resent my presence, 1 feel like an
                      outsider ... it's tough getting acceptance.

Position power This variable was not coded, rather determined through the interviewee's response to the demographic question, 'What is our level in your organization?' Those who stated that they were in a higher level of management described themselves as having, for example, director or VP titles. Those who described themselves as 'mid-level' were either managers or individual contributors. Sixty-eight per cent (n=26) of the respondents identified themselves as middle-level managers, while 32 per cent (n=12) identified themselves as high-level managers. There were no low-level managers in the sample.

Dependent variable

Cross-cultural adjustment The criterion in this study was the cross-cultural adjustment reported by these women during the interviews. The responses were rated on a 3-point scale (1 = low cross-cultural adjustment, 2 = moderate cross-cultural adjustment and 3 = high cross-cultural adjustment). The mean score for cross-cultural adjustment was 2.4 (*S.D*=.79). The inter-rater agreement for this item was 95 per cent. Some examples of low, moderate and high cross-cultural adjustment are:

Low: Wouldn't call myself completely comfortable here. ... It's heavy duty work
            so there's no time to blend in or make friends.

Moderate: Life here is frustrating at times ... but we do have a good time overall.

High: Overall it's a great experience, both personally and professionally. ... It
            opens our minds. ... We really enjoy it.

Results

Table 1 presents the means, standard deviations and correlations for each of the six variables included in this study. According to the correlational analyses, preliminary support was found for four out of five of the hypotheses proposed by the study. A significant positive relationship was found between cross-cultural adjustment and marital status (r=.38, p<.05), company support (r=.38, p<.05), perceptions of host nationals' attitudes (r=.38, p<.05) and position power (r=.36, p<.05). However, presence of personality dimensions was not significantly related to cross-cultural adjustment.

Next, one-way ANOVA was used to test the hypotheses. (Given that there was no linear support for personality, it was dropped from subsequent analyses.) In support of hypothesis 2, significant differences in cross-cultural adjustment were found between married (M=2.7) and unmarried respondents (M=2.1), with unmarried women being less cross-culturally adjusted than the married respondents (F=5.9, p<.05). Women who received high levels of support from the company (M=2.5) were better cross-culturally adjusted in comparison to women who received the least amount of support from the company (M=1.67), thus supporting hypothesis 3 (F=3.72, p<.05). Female

Table 1 *Means, standard deviations and correlations*

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1 Personality	1.31	.66					
2 Position power	1.31	.47	.02				
3 Marital status	1.57	.55	.22	.42**			
4 Host attitudes	2.39	.79	−.14	.16	.08		
5 Company support	2.53	.76	−.12	.05	.24	.18	
6 Adjustment	2.42	.79	−.00	.36*	.38*	.38*	.38*

Notes
*$p<.05$; **$p<.01$.

expatriates with high position power ($M=2.8$) were more cross-culturally adjusted than those with moderate position power ($M=2.2$), lending support to hypothesis 4 ($F=5.2$, $p<.05$). Finally, hypothesis 5 was also supported, as women with the most positive perceptions of host national attitudes ($M=2.6$) were more cross-culturally adjusted than women with more negative perceptions of host nationals' attitudes ($M=1.7$, $F=3.97$, $p<.05$). The ANOVA results are presented on Table 2.

Regression analysis was then conducted to test the model of factors predicting women's cross-cultural adjustment. Again, given the small sample in this study, in an effort to improve power, it was decided to include only those variables with a significant zero-order correlation in the regression analysis. Thus, the personality variable was dropped from this analysis. A multiple regression was conducted with family support, company support, position power and perceptions of host nationals' attitudes entered as the independent variables and cross-cultural adjustment as the dependent variable.

The regression analyses indicated overall support for our model with an R^2 of .33 with an adjusted R^2 of .27 ($F=5.56$, $p<.01$). Company support was a significant predictor of cross-cultural adjustment ($\beta=.32$, $p<.05$, $t=2.23$). Position power was also

Table 2 *Summary of the ANOVA results*

Independent variables	N	M (SD)	F
1 Marital status			
Unmarried	18	2.11 (.90)	5.92*
Married	20	2.70 (.57)	
2 Position power			
Moderate	26	2.23 (.86)	5.29*
High	12	2.83 (.39)	
3 Company support			
Low	6	1.66 (1.03)	3.73*
Moderate	6	2.50 (.55)	
High	26	2.57 (.70)	
4 Host nationals' attitudes			
Low	7	1.71 (.76)	3.96*
Moderate	9	2.56 (.73)	
High	22	2.60 (.73)	

Notes
*$p<.05$; **$p<.01$.

a significant predictor of cross-cultural adjustment ($\beta=.30$, $p<.05$, $t=2.09$). Perceptions of host nationals' attitudes approached significance as a predictor of cross-cultural adjustment ($\beta=.27$, $p<.10$, $t=1.84$). Marital status was not found to be a significant predictor of cross-cultural adjustment ($\beta=.20$, *ns*, $t=1.25$).

Discussion

The goal of this paper was to examine those factors which influence the cross-cultural adjustment of female expatriates. Using a framework outlined by Caligiuri and Cascio (in press), this study tested the extent to which personality, family support, company support, host nationals' attitudes and position power affected female expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment. The findings for each will be discussed below in the context of both the present study and the existing literature.

Personality characteristics   With respect to hypothesis 1, the study found no support for the relationship between the personality dimensions proposed by Mendenhall and Oddou (1985) and cross-cultural adjustment. One interpretation could be that personality characteristics do not matter for women's global assignments. The other, more likely, concern was that the method for measuring personality was inadequate in this present study. A more appropriate assessment would be a reliable paper and pencil measurement of personality characteristics. In this study it should be noted that 72 per cent of respondents showed evidence of self-orientation and 56 per cent showed evidence of others-orientation. However, only 5 per cent showed evidence of perceptual-orientation. These results may suggest that perceptual-orientation dimensions are less often recalled when a person self-describes her personality. We had no theoretical justification for believing that one personality characteristic would be more important than the others, and therefore combined them in a composite. *Post hoc* analysis of variance suggested that none of the personality orientations was independently related to the cross-cultural adjustment of women.

Family support   Hypothesis 2 was supported, as married female expatriates did experience greater cross-cultural adjustment than single female expatriates. As was described earlier, however, we had originally expected to be measuring family support. Data coding revealed that indicators of support were categorized as either married or non-married women. We had hoped to make a finer distinction. Before drawing the conclusion that all married female expatriates are supported by their spouses, additional research should examine the level and nature of the support in the marital relationship. Future studies could examine the way in which spouses are supportive (e.g. doing more of the work domestically, providing moral support).

These findings do suggest that spousal support was a key element in the ability to adjust to the overseas assignment. This result is consistent with past research (Black and Gregersen, 1991; Black and Stephens, 1989; Fukuda and Chu, 1994; Schneider and Asakawa, 1995; Caligiuri *et al.*, 1998), that found that family support was significantly related to the expatriates' ability to adjust overseas. It has been noted that research of male expatriate spouses has been limited (Punnett *et al.*, 1992). Future research might focus on male spouses and their adjustment to the move. Given that there is an increase in dual-career marriages (Colwill and Temple, 1987; Punnett *et al.*, 1992; Wiggins-Frame and Shehan, 1994) and an increase in women on global assignments, this research might provide interesting insights.

Company support   The most significant result of this study is the importance of company support as a predictor of cross-cultural adjustment (hypothesis 3). The legal compulsions dictated by Title VII, which made unlawful in the US any employment discrimination on the basis of sex, and the exigencies posed by a lack of qualified male labour pool have underlined the necessity of selecting women for expatriate positions (Caligiuri and Cascio, in press). But selection alone is not enough. The results of this study suggest that the companies should persist in their efforts to facilitate the cross-cultural adjustment of their female expatriates throughout the entire period of their overseas assignments. Responses indicated that there is a recognition among companies that policies aimed at supporting their expatriates are important for the success of the global assignment. Cross-cultural training and relocation assistance were the most commonly cited policies aimed at supporting the female expatriates. These results support past research that indicates a positive relationship between cross-cultural training and cross-cultural adjustment (Earley, 1987; Fiedler *et al.*, 1971; Black and Mendenhall, 1990). The lack of support for hypothesis 1 and the support for hypotheses 2 and 3 suggests that, rather than individual's personality characteristics, support from the company and family are important in the experience of female expatriates overseas.

Perceptions of host nationals' attitudes   Hypothesis 4 was supported in this study. Perceptions of host-national attitudes were significantly related to cross-cultural adjustment. The results of this study based on a subjective measure of host-national attitudes are consistent with Adler's (1987) research suggesting that successful female expatriates did not perceive 'being female' as a disadvantage. The results indicate that positive perceptions of host nationals' attitudes was related to higher cross-cultural adjustment. Both this present study and the Adler (1987) study use the assessment of perceptions, as opposed to direct assessment of attitudes. Future studies should employ more objective measures of attitudes through direct responses from the host nationals regarding a given female expatriate. These data, while difficult to collect, may prove to be very interesting in advancing our knowledge regarding the perceptions of women as global assignees.

Position power   Caligiuri and Cascio (in press) proposed that female expatriates who enjoy higher status within an organization may be more cross-culturally adjusted than those who are employed at lower levels. The results of this study are consistent with this proposition. In support for hypothesis 5, the results indicated that position power is a significant predictor of cross-cultural adjustment. High-level female expatriates had overall more positive experiences on the assignment than lower-level women. Thus, depending on their status within the organization, women experience the move overseas differentially. Our results are consistent with research on group impressions of minorities (in this case female expatriates), which states that perceptions of status and power within the organization influence attitudes and behaviours (of host nationals) towards minorities (female expatriates) (Carson *et al.*, 1993; Stahelski and Payton, 1995).

Limitations and future research

As with all studies, this study has its limitations. The three most salient concerns are (1) collecting data only on female expatriates without a comparison group, (2) possible common source bias and (3) the limited generalizability of these results. Each of these,

however, may be less of a concern than originally expected. In the following sections is described in greater detail, the reasons why they may be less of a concern are given and recommendations for future research are made.

Collecting data only on women   One criticism of this study could be that we do not provide comparison data – comparing male and female global assignees. This restriction of the sample to 'women only' was done for both theoretical and methodological reasons. Theoretically, the variables selected in this study were chosen because of their unique relationship to women in global assignments. While future studies may examine the comparison between men and women, the present study was designed to examine the issues most relevant to women on global assignments. Methodologically, it would be inappropriate to compare women's responses to a phone interview with men's responses to a phone interview, given that there may be differences in the tendency to disclose personal information (Papini *et al.*, 1990; Davidson and Duberman, 1982) and communicate by phone between men and women (Steckler and Rosenthal, 1985). Thus, if such a comparison between men and women was conducted, any difference found might be a function of communication style and not a true difference in the antecedents of cross-cultural adjustment. Future research should employ a survey methodology comparing men and women on global assignments.

Common-source bias   Given the nature of this study, one could be concerned that an overall positive affect variable would produce a common-source problem in this study. There are several indicators in the pattern of relationships that suggest that this was not a concern. First, the near zero relationship between the personality characteristics variable and cross-cultural adjustment suggests that common-source bias may not be a problem in this study. We believed that this variable (more so than the others) would be especially susceptible to subjective method bias. Second, two of the independent variables, marital status and position in the organization, were both considered objective variables and both were significant in this study. The concern of common-source bias would be with the latter two remaining independent variables, company support and perceptions of host-national attitudes. The third indicator that common-source bias may not be a concern is found in the correlations between these variables and cross-cultural adjustment. The magnitude of the correlation for these was not higher than the magnitude of the correlation between the objective variables and cross-cultural adjustment. The fourth indicator that common-source bias may not be a concern is the lack of significant relationships within the independent variables. Again, if an overall positive affect variable was influencing both the independent variables and the dependent variable, then the independent variables should be intercorrelated. None were. Lastly, the interviewers were asked, *post hoc*, if they found that the women were responding to the questions with a generalized tendency. The interviewers said that, as they recalled, the women had answered the questions independently. These five indicators in combination suggest that the common-source problem may not be as great as might be expected in an interview study. Future studies, however, should employ different measures from multiple raters (e.g. spouse's rating or leader's ratings) at different times to reduce the possibility of common-source bias.

Generalizability of the results   The sample included a group of American women, thus limiting the generalizablity of this study. As with past research on female global assignees, this research tends to be conducted on Canadian, Australian and American

women. Restricting a sample to Anglo-women may reflect the nationalities of the researchers and therefore the companies to which they have access. This tendency may also reflect the fact that there are more women from these countries being sent on global assignments. The reason is not clear. Future research should expand the sample to include women from other nationalities.

Overall, the study makes an interesting contribution to the understanding of female expatriates' experience overseas while providing some support for the model proposed by Caligiuri and Cascio (in press). Perhaps a major contribution of the study is that, within the population of expatriate women, there may be differences in cross-cultural adjustment based on level of company support, family support and position power within their organizations. Hence, researchers, as well as global HR professionals, should consider the unique context and complexity of being a female expatriate.

Practical recommendations

The findings of this study have practical implications for global organizations. Clearly this study suggests that the more a woman is supported by the company and her spouse, the greater the likelihood will be that she will be cross-culturally adjusted. Companies, therefore, must determine how they could improve the support that their female expatriates are given.

The results of this study indicate that company support could be improved through offering cross-cultural training and relocation assistance. The women in this study described how helpful policies that assisted them in finding suitable schools and day care for their children, in the host country, had been. Women also described cross-cultural training (including language training and spending time with host nationals prior to leaving for the assignment) as having been beneficial for them.

The study found that high-level women had more positive experiences on the global assignment. Lower-level expatriates had lower cross-cultural adjustment. Often companies focus support on higher-level expatriates while minimizing the needs of lower-level employees. The differences in the level of support were evident in the responses of women. A senior director of finance mentioned that she always had an in-country consultant to help her with matters of protocol in the host country. On the other hand, a lower-level manager felt that her company had failed to inform her that, in her host country, the newcomer was obliged to call upon colleagues and introduce herself, rather than the host nationals welcoming her. As a result, it took her a long time to get acquainted with her co-workers, depriving her of support networks in the initial part of her assignment. The study indicates that companies might benefit by taking into account the needs of lower-level employees by providing them with adequate support.

Since spousal support has a significant role to play in the cross-cultural adjustment of female expatriates, companies should dedicate some resources to the spouses of their global assignees. The women in this study mentioned that they had been given cross-cultural training along with their spouses and that had been beneficial in making the move. However, some of the spouses were unable to continue with their careers as a result of the move overseas; thus companies could also offer spouses opportunities to gain employment or pursue educational programmes while on the overseas assignment.

In conclusion, the aims of Title VII as well as the need among multinationals for a talented pool of expatriate candidates, has mandated the full utilization of the potential of female global assignees. The research presented here has shown that support, from both the company and the family, is a key component in female expatriates' success.

Also, the experiences of women may be different depending on their level in the organization. Thus, the message is clear – companies must act promptly to ensure that their female expatriates, both senior and junior, along with their families, have company backing while successfully completing the international assignment.

Appendix A

Code sheet for structured interviews: independent variables

Interview Code # _____
Personality characteristics
   Evidence of a self-orientation is present
   Evidence of the others-orientation is present
   Evidence of the perceptual-orientation is present
   No evidence of any personality orientations

Company support
   All or mostly all positive comments
   Both positive and negative comments
   All or mostly all negative comments

Family support
   Little, if any, support from family
   Moderate support from family
   Much support from family

Position power
   Low
   Moderate
   High

Host national attitudes
   All or mostly all positive comments
   Both positive and negative comments
   All or mostly all negative comments

Appendix B

Code sheet for structured interviews: dependent variable

Interview Code # _____
Cross-cultural adjustment
   Low adjustment
   Moderate adjustment
   High adjustment

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