



Why do female expatriates “fit-in” better than males?

An analysis of self-transcendence and socio-cultural adjustment

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of the paper is to assess the relevance of the personal value called self-transcendence as an explanatory factor regarding gender differences in the socio-cultural adjustment of expatriate employees.

Design/methodology/approach – A sample of 37 male and 31 female expatriates responded to an online questionnaire concerning their self-transcendence value and their adjustment as expatriate employees.

Findings – Self-transcendence of the expatriate predicted interactional and work adjustment. Perceived expatriate-local difference in self-transcendence was a negative predictor of work and interactional adjustment. Females had higher (non-significant) self-transcendence than males. Further gender differences in the impact of self-transcendence and perceived expatriate-local differences in self-transcendence were found.

Research limitations/implications – Further research into the effect of expatriate levels of the personal value of self-transcendence, its two components, universalism and benevolence, and gender differences therein appears warranted. Statistical techniques to establish causality should be used.

Practical implications – Knowledge regarding the self-transcendence values of candidates for expatriate assignments may assist global human resource managers to make more effective selection decisions regarding expatriate assignments.

Originality/value – The study described in this paper is among the first to assess potential explanations for the better interactional and work adjustment of female expatriates compared to males. This study replicates earlier findings regarding the relationship between perceived expatriate-local differences in self-transcendence and expatriate socio-cultural adjustment and provides new knowledge regarding gender differences in this relationship.

Keywords Women, Expatriates, Individual psychology, Gender

Paper type Research paper



The growing need for expatriate talent

The demand for expatriate employees, both long and short term, is growing rapidly as it becomes increasingly necessary for firms to expand globally in response to the internationalisation of markets, competition, and technology (Beechler and Woodward, 2009; Smerd, 2007). In today's global economy, it is critical to attract, develop and retain employees with global knowledge and experience. These employees represent the human capital that is a key resource for creating and sustaining a company's worldwide competitive advantage.

At times, however, it may become difficult to find employees willing to accept international assignments, for host-location, professional, and/or personal reasons. For instance, concerns about safety and security have increased in a post-9/11 world (Cox *et al.*, 2007; Suder, 2004). Employees are also concerned with the stress of cross-cultural relocation on their family and on the education and social development of their children (Haslberger and Brewster, 2008). In addition, the increasing prevalence of dual-career families presents unique challenges for many employees considering global postings (Harvey *et al.*, 1999; Permits Foundation, 2009). Skills developed during international assignments are also often underutilized upon repatriation, and in some cases career development is hindered rather than enhanced by the time spent on assignment (Suutari and Brewster, 2003; Lazarova and Cerdin, 2007).

In light of these difficulties, it may be necessary to expand the pool of candidates being considered for international assignments. Looking beyond traditional expatriates who were almost always exclusively male (Vance *et al.*, 2006; Taylor *et al.*, 2002), female expatriates may be an additional and important source of talent in global firms. Indeed, there is growing acceptance that gender diversity can be a corporate performance driver (Desvaux *et al.*, 2007; Catalyst and The Conference Board, 2002). For example, empirical evidence has shown that females more commonly exhibit personality characteristics associated with expatriate success (Guthrie *et al.*, 2003). Both Adler (1979) and Fisher (1999) concluded that women may have exceptional faculties for managing internationally, including a preference for co-operating, reaching consensus, and leading via egalitarian teams; an ability to work on several tasks simultaneously; emotional sensitivity; and a talent with words. Often referred to as *The Female Advantage* (Helgeson, 1990) or the “feminine-in-management” (Calas and Smircich, 1993), this style reflects those of successful men as well as women in most parts of the non-Western world (Adler, 2002).

Yet, recent reports (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2010) and studies (Tung, 1997) show that female expatriates represent, at best, only 20 percent of the total number of expatriates deployed in global firms, despite representing nearly 50 percent of the available pool of female managers in North American MNCs (Caligiuri and Tung, 1999). Furthermore, Scullion (1995) found in his study of 45 British and Irish international firms that, despite shortages of international managers, there was no evidence of any serious attempt to increase the percentage of female managers selected for international assignments. Hence, female expatriates have been under-represented in disproportion to the size of the qualified female labour pool (Caligiuri *et al.*, 1999; Guthrie *et al.*, 2003; Hardill, 1998; Linehan and Scullion, 2004). Furthermore, although estimates of the percentage of expatriates that are female has increased over the last two decades – from 3 percent in the early 1990s (GMAC, NFTC and SHRM Global Forum, 2004; Stone, 1991) to 20 percent in 2009 (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2009), female expatriates nonetheless remain an under-utilized resource in international staffing, and therefore represent an untapped source of human capital for international assignments (McKeen and Bu, 2005; Selmer and Leung, 2003a). As noted by Stroh *et al.* (2000, p. 251):

[...] we can assume that qualified women may continue to be left out of the pool of candidates being considered for international assignments. As a result, the probability of choosing the best candidate may also be diminished. This, in turn, could lead to ongoing unsuccessful or only modestly successful international projects and assignments and seriously limited careers.

A number of reasons have been suggested in an attempt to explain the low percentage of female expatriates on long-term international assignments. Adler (1984) explored three “myths” that were not found to represent reality:

- (1) that women do not want to be international managers;
- (2) that companies refuse to send women overseas; and
- (3) that foreigners’ prejudice against women renders them ineffective, even when they are interested and sent.

In contrast, Lowe *et al.* (1999) found that gender was a significant predictor of willingness to accept an international assignment with specific referent countries being less appealing to females (based on level of cultural distance and political risk, but not on degree of economic development). Thus, location of assignments may provide some explanation. Furthermore, Linehan (2002) found four difficulties unique to women managers working internationally which include: creating options for the male trailing spouse; difficulty in balancing career with personal relationships and child-raising; overt and covert biases associated with international appointments; and the negative impact of gender on female managers’ international careers.

Numerous studies have concluded that unfounded bias against selecting females for global assignments is a persistent phenomenon (Forster, 1999; Inch *et al.*, 2008; Kollinger, 2005; Paik and Vance, 2002; Varma *et al.*, 2006). Recent research suggests that the most promising theoretical explanation of women’s low participation as expatriates is gender stereotyping reinforced within an isomorphic institutional framework (Shortland, 2009; Fischlmayr, 2002). For example, in a series of studies on career aspirations of female expatriates, Selmer and Leung found evidence that female expatriates occupy lower positions than males despite having equal tenure with the organization and equal previous expatriate experience (Selmer and Leung, 2003b). They also found evidence of gender bias on the part of employers in that female expatriates, compared to males, had less availability of fast-track career programs, less individual career counselling, and less availability of career planning workshops (Selmer and Leung, 2003d). As a result, female expatriates regarded expatriation as a somewhat less successful career path than men because they were less often able to meet their career goals compared to males (Selmer and Leung, 2002).

Yet, Varma *et al.*’s (2006) study showed that employees in India actually preferred to work with female expatriates from the USA rather than their American male counterparts. Additionally, a PWC (2008) study examining the expectations of work amongst 4,271 “Generation Y” university graduates found that 78.5 percent of the approximately 2,000 female graduates surveyed aspired to work outside their home country during their career, with 94.8 percent of these expecting to work across geographic borders more so than their parents did. It has even been suggested that female expatriates may be “model global managers” based on their ability to balance the need to cultivate good relationships with local employees while simultaneously maintaining strong ties to headquarters (Tung, 2004).

The exclusion of females from consideration for expatriate assignments is ill-considered because female expatriates have been found to be equally successful to male expatriates in the performance of their international assignments (Caligiuri and Tung, 1999; Napier and Taylor, 2002; Sinangil and Ones, 2003). Indeed, a recent review of 25 years of research on women and international assignments concluded that

“mounting recent evidence confirms that women adapt better than men in cross-cultural business situations” (Altman and Shortland, 2008, p. 210). These findings are considered somewhat surprising given that women are exposed to additional work and non-work challenges on expatriate assignments (Mayrhofer and Scullion, 2002), such as working with host nationals whose cultural values and beliefs make it difficult for them to accept women as coworkers or managers (Janssens *et al.*, 2006; Paik and Vance, 2002; Westwood and Leung, 1994); and child care and dual-career conflicts which may lead to more difficulty in cross-cultural adjustment than males (Fischlmayr and Kollinger, 2010). Further evidence suggests that the situation is exacerbated in that female expatriates perceive less organizational support than males (Hutchings *et al.*, 2008).

This counter-intuitive finding presents an intriguing research question, namely:

RQ1. Why female expatriates are just as successful as males in spite of these additional challenges.

To investigate this paradox more fully, we examine literature on the socio-cultural adjustment of expatriates which has been shown to be a major factor in expatriate work success.

Socio-cultural adjustment

Success on expatriate assignments, specifically supervisor-rated performance, has been found to be related to adjustment to the new work setting (Kraimer *et al.*, 2001; Puck *et al.*, 2008). Furthermore, it has been suggested that socio-cultural adjustment is “the vital construct underlying the rewards and costs of expatriate experiences to individuals, their families, and their firms” (Bhaskar-Shrinivas *et al.*, 2005, p. 257). Defined as the degree of comfort or absence of stress associated with being an expatriate, Black (1988) identified three types of adjustment relevant to cross-cultural expatriate assignments: general or cultural adjustment, work adjustment, and interactional adjustment. Importantly, the construct of expatriate adjustment has been both operationalized (Black and Stephens, 1989) as well as validated (Shaffer *et al.*, 1999). General adjustment relates to the general living conditions and culture of the foreign country, such as climate, health facilities and food. Work adjustment refers to the expatriate’s psychological comfort with respect to the job tasks of the foreign assignment, their performance standards, and their job and supervisory responsibilities. Interactional adjustment relates to interacting with the host-country nationals.

Criticisms of the original work by Black and colleagues notwithstanding (Hippler, 2006; Thomas and Lazarova, 2006), Black and Stephens (1989) found that work adjustment had direct positive effects on task performance, and interactional adjustment had direct positive effects on contextual performance (good relationships with local employees and other host nationals such as customers and suppliers). In addition, interactional adjustment was found to have direct positive effects on general adjustment.

Selmer and Leung (2003c) found that female expatriates have the same general adjustment as male expatriates, but with higher levels of work adjustment and better interaction adjustment. A replication study by Haslberger (2010) confirms that the adjustment patterns of male and female expatriates are different. Specifically, female expatriates are better adjusted than males overall and significantly so in the areas of building and maintaining relationships with host nationals. Haslberger concluded that

“it would be an injustice and a waste of talent to continue sending only a small portion of female expatriates” (p. 177).

To date, the question as to the reason or reasons why female expatriates are better adjusted – particularly with respect to interactional and work adjustment – has not been answered. Hence, this gap in the literature is worthy of investigation because our understanding of the ways in which female expatriates adjust may inform efforts to assist all expatriates to manage the adjustment process. To address this gap, we explore the theory of personal values as one potential explanation for why female expatriates exhibit greater work and interaction adjustment than male expatriates.

The impact of self-transcendence value on socio-cultural adjustment

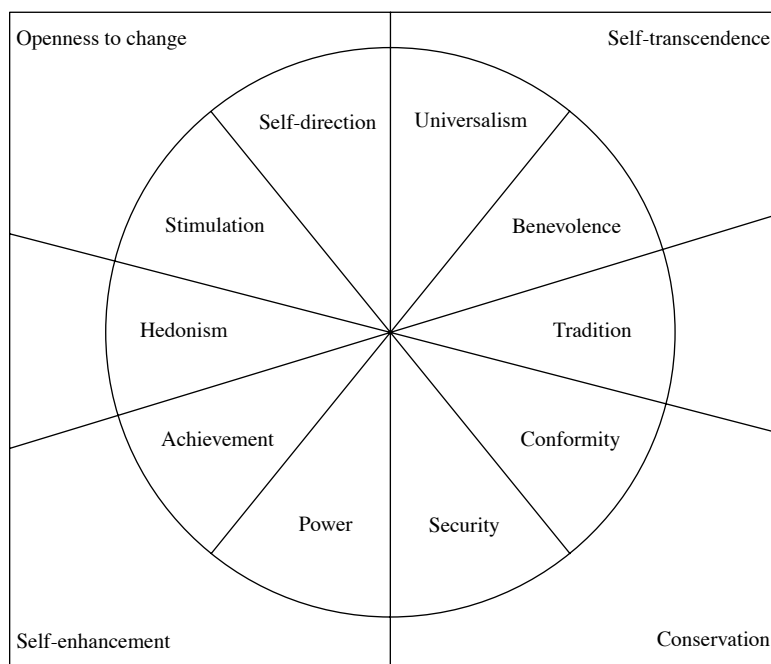
An important aspect of cross-cultural adjustment relates to differences in values, as these differ significantly across cultures and provide the basis for many perceptions of cross-cultural dissimilarity (Selmer, 2001; Van Vianen *et al.*, 2004). Given that female expatriates must be able to manage in situations where cultural differences in attitudes to women in business could have a negative impact on their performance on the job, the ability to be open to differences in values, norms and behaviours may be particularly important (Paik and Vance, 2002). Research has indicated that expatriates who are flexible in their attitudes towards cultural differences and are willing to learn from different cultural contexts are better adjusted to overseas assignments (Caligiuri, 2000; Mendenhall and Oddou, 1985; Peltokorpi, 2008).

Values are desirable goals, varying in importance, that serve as guiding principles and act as basic motivations in people’s lives (Schwartz, 1992). Personal values are trans-situational and guide the way people select actions and how they evaluate people and events. Schwartz (1992, 1994) developed a theory of cross-cultural universals in the content and structure of basic values which is based on two dimensions:

- (1) openness to change vs conservation; and
- (2) self-enhancement vs self-transcendence, along with ten specific values as shown in Figure 1.

Widely tested across more than 200 samples, including multidimensional scaling analysis to verify the distinctiveness of the ten cultural values (see Schwartz’s, 1992 review), the self-enhancement – self-transcendence dimension has been found to have some relevance to the understanding of expatriate adjustment. Self-enhancement values include power over others and achievement through ambition and competence. In the cross-cultural domain, self-enhancement values are linked to cultural mastery and hierarchy orientations (Schwartz, 1992). Organizational status has been shown to be important to those who value self-enhancement because they see their career as a means to further their status (Roccas, 2003; Sagiv and Schwartz, 2007).

The self-transcendence value dimension is comprised of universalism and benevolence (Sagiv and Schwartz, 2000, 2007). Universalism encompasses understanding, appreciation, tolerance and protection for the welfare of all people and for nature. It also is associated with broadmindedness, wisdom, social justice, equality, a world at peace, a world of beauty, unity with nature, and protecting the environment. Benevolence encompasses preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom one is in frequent personal contact. It is associated with being helpful, honest, forgiving, loyal, and responsible. When organization members share an emphasis



Source: Schwartz and Huismans (1995)

Figure 1.
Theoretical model
of relations between
types of values

on self-transcendence values, the organization is likely to develop egalitarian norms and practices that encourage tolerance, cooperation, mutual support, and concern for others.

The nature of self-transcendence may influence expatriate adjustment in a number of ways. First, people with high levels of self-transcendence are considered to be understanding and broadminded (Sagiv and Schwartz, 2000). Hence, these characteristics may predispose them to accept that coworkers from other cultures may have quite different values, thereby necessitating more adaptive approaches in working relationships. Individuals with high self-transcendence may therefore seek out information about coworkers' values, and in doing so better plan the ways to deal with the impact of these differences in the workplace so as to minimize their effects on working relationships. Doing so suggests an inherent recognition that even when working in similar cultures, minor but distinct cultural differences can make adjustment just as difficult as in dissimilar cultural settings (Selmer and Lauring, 2009). They may also seek out instrumental and expressive ties with host country nationals, where instrumental ties have been found to enhance adaptation and job performance (Chiu *et al.*, 2009). All of these actions would likely pave the way for adjustment to the new work setting and for adjustment to novel interactions with coworkers.

In addition to the above, people with high levels of self-transcendence are also considered to be loyal and forgiving (Sagiv and Schwartz, 2000). Hence, these characteristics may lead them to be more tolerant and accepting of the differences in values, attitudes and behaviours of others who are not similar to themselves. By being

focused on the preservation and enhancement of the welfare of people with whom they are in frequent personal contact, the fact that their coworkers have different values may not be as salient as the focus on enhancement of the welfare of coworkers generally, particularly when the manager is an expatriate. These actions could therefore lead to enhanced interaction adjustment.

Given the nature of self-transcendence, it would appear that individuals with high levels of self-transcendence may be so understanding and broadminded, as well as loyal and forgiving, that they can work quite effectively in cross-cultural situations with local co-workers whose values may be quite different. Thus, the first hypothesis is:

H1. Self-transcendence is a positive predictor of work and interaction adjustment.

A second way self-transcendence may influence expatriate adjustment is the extent to which gender differences in personal values may influence the socio-cultural adjustment of expatriates. Recent research shows that some gender differences in personal values have been found. For example, in a series of four studies involving 127 samples in 70 countries ($n = 77,528$), Schwartz and Rubel (2005) found that females attribute more importance to benevolence and universalism values, whereas males attribute more importance to power and achievement values, among others (it must be noted, however, that these gender differences were small, with effect sizes from 0.15 to 0.32, and decreasing as the prosperity of the country increased, to the point where no differences were found in richer countries with more autonomous and individualist cultures). Hence, if female expatriates exhibit higher levels of self-transcendence compared to males, it could provide some explanation for females' higher work and interaction adjustment. The second hypothesis is:

H2. Female expatriates have higher levels of self-transcendence than male expatriates.

A third way self-transcendence may influence expatriate adjustment is that congruence between people's values and their environment has been found to promote well-being regardless of the particular values held; that is, people are likely to experience a positive sense of well-being when they emphasize the same values that prevail in their environment (Sagiv and Schwartz, 2000). For expatriates, this may not be easy to achieve, given that by definition expatriates work in cross-cultural environments where the values of the society and of their coworkers may differ from their own. A study by Van Vianen *et al.* (2004) investigated this question by focusing on expatriate adjustment and the role of surface-level and deep-level cultural differences. Surface-level cultural differences were variations in general living conditions, everyday customs, health care facilities, available quality and types of goods, climate, general housing conditions, transportation systems, recreational activities, and cultural/arts opportunities. Deep-level cultural differences were values not immediately visible and only revealed to expatriates after extended interactions with host country nationals, specifically the ten basic values identified by Schwartz (1992).

Results of the Van Vianen *et al.* (2004) study showed that work and interaction adjustment of expatriates increased as differences between themselves and host nationals in the self-transcendence value decreased. Importantly, neither surface-level differences, nor any of the other Schwartz (1992) values, were related to work and interaction adjustment. Self-transcendence was the critical value: expatriates whose

values related to self-transcendence were similar to the self-transcendence values of their host country coworkers had better work and interaction adjustment than expatriates whose self-transcendence values were very different than their host-country coworkers.

These results suggest that expatriates have less difficulty adapting to a new environment if they perceive that others in that environment share self-transcendence values such as helpfulness, protection, loyalty, equality, and social justice to the same extent that they do. The fact that female expatriates have higher work and interactional adjustment, which has been found to be related to high congruence between locals and expatriates on the self-transcendence value, provides the basis for the third hypothesis that females perceive more congruence with locals on the self-transcendence value:

- H3.* Perceived differences in expatriate-local self-transcendence are lower for female expatriates than for male expatriates.

Method

Participants

Male and female expatriates were sourced in Canada, Australia, Southeast Asia (Singapore, Philippines) and China (including Hong Kong) by contacting a variety of organizations including associations of expatriates, multinational companies, non-governmental organizations, chambers of commerce, embassies and consulates. The study was described and the organization was asked to forward an invitation to expatriate employees to participate. Participants were directed to the researchers' web site, where they could review a summary of the research, and then complete and submit the questionnaire electronically. A total of 72 expatriates responded. Four of the questionnaires were missing data on the dependent variable and were excluded. Therefore, there were 68 participants in the study.

Measures

Expatriate adjustment. The expatriate adjustment scale created by Black and Stephens (1989) was used to measure adjustment. The 14-item, seven-point Likert-type scale (1 – not at all; 7 – very well) measures the three components of expatriate adjustment – general adjustment (seven items), interactional adjustment (four items) and work adjustment (three items). A sample item for interactional adjustment is “Please indicate how adjusted you are to socializing with host nationals.” The coefficient α reliabilities for the scale components were 0.82 for general adjustment, 0.88 for interactional adjustment, and 0.89 for work adjustment. Work adjustment ($M = 5.88$, $SD = 1.01$) and general adjustment ($M = 5.85$, $SD = 0.77$) were close to “six – well adjusted” and interactional adjustment ($M = 5.33$, $SD = 1.15$) was closer to “five – somewhat adjusted”.

Self-transcendence/perceived difference in self-transcendence. Self-transcendence was measured using the 18-item scale developed by Schwartz (1992). Values were rated on a nine-point Likert-type scale ranging from – 1 to 7, anchored at – 1 (opposed to my values), 0 (not important), 3 (important), 6 (very important), and 7 (of supreme importance). Coefficient α reliability was 0.92. Coefficient α reliability for the universalism sub-scale (nine items) was 0.86 and for the benevolence sub-scale (nine items) was 0.87. Responses were averaged to form a self-transcendence score. Participants also rated each of the 18 values as a guiding principle in the life of the local people in their organization (coefficient α reliability was 0.96). Self-transcendence scores for participants ranged from 1.72 to 6.72 and were high on average ($M = 5.05$, $SD = 0.99$). Perceived difference

in self-transcendence was calculated by taking the difference between the expatriate's self-transcendence score and their score for self-transcendence for local staff. Almost all perceived differences were positive, meaning that expatriates perceived themselves to have higher self-transcendence values than the local staff. Perceived difference scores ranged from -0.76 to 6.61 and were low on average ($M = 1.61$, $SD = 1.35$).

Gender. Gender was self-reported by participants. There were 31 female and 37 male participants. Gender was coded as 1 for males and 2 for females.

Cultural origin and host country. Cultural origin was also self-reported using the 10 GLOBE project societies of Anglo, Latin Europe, Nordic Europe, Germanic Europe, Eastern Europe, Latin America, South Asia, Confucian Asia and Middle East (House *et al.*, 2004, p. 191). Host country was recorded by the researchers. The largest cultural origin group was Anglo. For the purposes of analysis, cultural origin categories with small numbers of participants were combined and this variable was coded as 1 – Anglo; 2 – European; 3 – Asian. There were six host countries with the largest number of participants being hosted in China and Australia. For the purposes of analysis, host countries with small numbers of participants were combined and this variable was coded as 1 – Anglo (Australia/Canada); 2 – Southeast Asia; 3 – China. A cross-tabulation of participants by cultural origin and host country is shown in Table I.

Results

Correlations

The correlation matrix for study variables is shown in Table II. Interactional adjustment was positively correlated with self-transcendence ($r = 0.35$, $p < 0.01$). Work adjustment was negatively correlated with perceived difference in self-transcendence ($r = -0.30$, $p < 0.05$). General adjustment did not correlate with any of the independent variables.

Self-transcendence was positively correlated with perceived difference in self-transcendence ($r = 0.27$, $p < 0.05$). As self-transcendence increased, so did the perception of differences in self-transcendence between expatriates and local employees. Perceived difference in self-transcendence was positively correlated with gender ($r = 0.28$, $p < 0.05$). Female expatriates perceived greater differences in self-transcendence between themselves and local employees than male expatriates.

The three forms of adjustment were highly intercorrelated. Although female expatriates had slightly higher levels of the three forms of adjustment than males, a one-way MANOVA indicated that there were no significant gender differences on any of the three forms of adjustment.

| Cultural origin | Host location | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|----------------------|---|-------------------|---|-------|----|-----------------|---|-------|----|
| | Australia/ Canada | | Southeast Asia | | China | | Not reported | | Total | |
| | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F |
| Anglo | 13 | 4 | 4 | 6 | 5 | 13 | 2 | 1 | 24 | 24 |
| European | 6 | 2 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 0 | 0 | 7 | 6 |
| Asian | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 0 | 0 | 1 | 6 | 1 |
| Total | 21 | 6 | 4 | 7 | 10 | 16 | 2 | 2 | 37 | 31 |

Table I.
Participants by gender,
cultural origin and host
location

| | Mean | SD | Gender | ST | ST diff. | Univ. | Univ. diff. | Benev. | Benev. diff. | Gen. adj. | Int. adj. | Work adj. |
|--------------|------|------|--------|---------|----------|---------|-------------|--------|--------------|-----------|-----------|-----------|
| Gender | 1.46 | 0.50 | – | | | | | | | | | |
| ST | 5.05 | 0.99 | 0.15 | (0.92) | | | | | | | | |
| ST diff. | 1.61 | 1.35 | 0.28* | 0.27*** | – | | | | | | | |
| Univ. | 4.98 | 1.05 | –0.19 | 0.35*** | 0.25 | (0.86) | | | | | | |
| Univ. diff. | 1.74 | 1.49 | 0.29* | 0.31* | 0.93*** | 0.35*** | – | | | | | |
| Benev. | 5.13 | 1.06 | 0.16 | 0.94*** | 0.26 | 0.77*** | 0.24 | (0.87) | | | | |
| Benev. diff. | 1.48 | 1.44 | 0.22 | 0.19 | 0.92*** | 0.11 | 0.71*** | 0.24 | – | | | |
| Gen. adj. | 5.85 | 0.77 | 0.07 | 0.21 | 0.04 | 0.15 | 0.15 | 0.26* | 0.15 | (0.82) | | |
| Int adj. | 5.33 | 1.15 | 0.01 | 0.35** | –0.12 | 0.35** | –0.11 | 0.31* | –0.11 | 0.35** | (0.88) | |
| Work adj. | 5.88 | 1.01 | 0.01 | 0.21 | –0.30* | 0.19 | –0.30* | 0.19 | –0.30* | 0.36** | 0.35*** | (0.89) |

Notes: Significance at: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$; ST, self-transcendence; Univ., universalism; Benev., benevolence; ST diff., expatriate-local difference in ST; Univ. diff., expatriate-local differences in universalism; Benev. diff., expatriate-local difference in benevolence; Gen. adj., general adjustment; Int. adj., interactional adjustment; work adj., work adjustment

Table II.
Correlation matrix

Hypothesis testing

Regression analyses of self-transcendence on each of the three forms of adjustment showed that self-transcendence was a significant positive predictor of interactional adjustment ($\beta = 0.46, t = 3.65, p < 0.001$) and work adjustment ($\beta = 0.31, t = 2.39, p < 0.05$) but not of general adjustment (Table III). Thus, *H1* was supported.

An independent samples *t*-test showed that although females had higher levels of self-transcendence than males, the difference was not statistically significant, and *H2* was not supported. Results of an independent samples *t*-test indicated that perceived expatriate-local differences in self-transcendence was significantly higher ($t = -2.13, df = 55, p < 0.05$) for female expatriates than for male expatriates. This result was the opposite of the hypothesized relationship, and *H3* was rejected.

Further analysis also showed that perceived difference in self-transcendence was a significant negative predictor of interactional adjustment ($\beta = -0.25, t = -1.97, p < 0.05$) and work adjustment ($\beta = -0.39, t = -2.99, p < 0.01$), providing a replication of the Van Vianen *et al.* (2004) results (Table III). The finding that females had higher perceived expatriate-local difference in self-transcendence would suggest that female expatriates could be expected to have lower interactional and work adjustment than males. Since this was not the case, further analysis was conducted for each gender separately.

Additional analysis of gender differences

For male expatriates, self-transcendence remained a significant positive predictor of interactional adjustment ($\beta = 0.37, t = 2.07, p < 0.05$) but the significance level as a predictor of work adjustment fell to a marginal level ($\beta = 0.35, t = 1.88, p < 0.07$). For female expatriates, self-transcendence was a positive predictor for interactional adjustment only ($\beta = 0.54, t = 3.05, p < 0.01$).

Perceived difference in self-transcendence was a negative but non-significant predictor of interactional and work adjustment for males. For females, perceived

| | Dependent variables | | |
|-------------------------|---------------------|--------------------------|-----------------|
| | General adjustment | Interactional adjustment | Work adjustment |
| ST | 0.20 | 0.46*** | 0.31* |
| ST diff. | -0.02 | -0.25* | -0.39** |
| R ² adjusted | 0.00 | 0.18 | 0.15 |
| F | 1.10 | 7.17** | 5.72** |
| <i>Males</i> | | | |
| ST | 0.24 | 0.37* | 0.35 |
| ST diff. | -0.26 | -0.29 | -0.01 |
| R ² adjusted | 0.02 | 0.10 | 0.06 |
| F | 1.37 | 2.67 | 1.91 |
| <i>Females</i> | | | |
| ST | 0.18 | 0.54** | 0.25 |
| ST diff. | 0.12 | -0.23 | -0.59** |
| R ² adjusted | -0.03 | 0.24 | 0.28 |
| F | 0.68 | 4.86* | 5.60* |

Table III.
Regression analysis

Notes: Significance at: * $p < 0.01$, ** $p < 0.001$; standardized regression coefficients are reported, ST, self-transcendence; ST diff, expatriate-local difference in ST

difference in self-transcendence became a large and significant negative predictor of work adjustment ($\beta = -0.59$, $t = -3.28$, $p < 0.01$), and was a negative but non-significant predictor of interactional adjustment.

The two components of self-transcendence – universalism and benevolence – were also investigated in regard to possible gender differences in relationships with work and interactional adjustment. Universalism values ranged from 1.44 to 6.78 (on a scale from -1 to 7) and were high on average ($M = 4.98$, $SD = 1.05$). Benevolence values ranged from 2.00 to 7.00 and were higher on average ($M = 5.13$, $SD = 1.06$). Perceived difference scores in universalism ranged from -1.00 to 6.22 and were low on average ($M = 1.74$, $SD = 1.49$). Perceived difference scores in benevolence ranged from -0.76 to 7.00 and were also low on average ($M = 1.48$, $SD = 1.44$).

Interactional adjustment of the expatriate participants was positively and significantly correlated with both their universalism value ($r = 0.35$, $p < 0.01$) and their benevolence value ($r = 0.31$, $p < 0.05$), but work adjustment was not correlated with either (Table II). There was a significant negative correlation between work adjustment and expatriate-local differences in benevolence ($r = -0.30$, $p < 0.05$), but no other correlations between either form of adjustment and differences in universalism or benevolence. Regression results showed that both universalism values and benevolence values of the expatriates were positive but non-significant predictors of both interactional adjustment and work adjustment, and that expatriate-local differences in both universalism and benevolence were negative but non-significant predictors of both interactional and work adjustment.

When male and female expatriates were analyzed separately, females had significantly higher ($t = 2.28$, $df = 55$, $p < 0.05$) perceived differences in universalism values than males, but there were no significant differences in benevolence values. Expatriate-local difference in benevolence was negatively correlated with both interactional adjustment ($r = -0.46$, $p < 0.05$) and work adjustment ($r = -0.53$, $p < 0.01$) for females (Table IV) but not for males (Table V). Separate regression analyses by gender showed no predictive relationships for either type of adjustment by either universalism or benevolence for either gender, or by differences in universalism and benevolence.

Discussion

One of the most interesting results of this study seeking to explain gender differences in adjustment of expatriates was the lack of significant gender differences in the dependent variable of socio-cultural adjustment or in the independent variable of self-transcendence for this group of participants. Although female expatriates had higher levels of socio-cultural adjustment and of self-transcendence, neither difference was statistically significant. The only significant gender difference was higher perceived expatriate-local difference in self-transcendence by the female expatriates. This difference is consistent with previous findings that self-transcendence values are more important for females than males (Schwartz and Rubel, 2005), and thus females may be inherently more cognizant of any differences.

The major result of the study was the finding of a strong relationship between personal levels of the self-transcendence value and the work and interaction adjustment of expatriates. Both correlation and regression results attest to the significance of this relationship. This finding suggests that higher levels of this personal value will facilitate higher levels of expatriate adjustment, which are important for assignment success.

Table IV.
Correlation matrix –
females

| | Mean | SD | ST | Univ. | Benev. | ST diff. | Univ. diff. | Benev. diff. | Int. adj. | Work adj. |
|--------------|------|------|---------|-----------|--------|----------|-------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|
| ST | 5.22 | 1.03 | (0.92) | | | | | | | |
| Univ. | 5.11 | 1.09 | 0.93*** | (0.85)*** | | | | | | |
| Benev. | 5.32 | 1.12 | 0.94*** | 0.75*** | (0.88) | | | | | |
| ST diff. | 2.02 | 1.55 | 0.20 | 0.19 | 0.19 | – | | | | |
| Univ. diff. | 2.22 | 1.59 | 0.30 | 0.35 | 0.21 | 0.94*** | – | | | |
| Benev. diff. | 1.82 | 1.70 | 0.10 | 0.02 | 0.15 | 0.95*** | 0.77*** | – | | |
| Int. adj. | 5.34 | 1.10 | 0.46* | 0.45* | 0.42* | –0.12 | –0.02 | –0.46* | (0.89) | |
| Work adj. | 5.89 | 1.28 | 0.14 | 0.10 | 0.16 | –0.53*** | –0.46* | –0.53* | 0.28 | (0.94) |

Notes: Significance at: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$; ST, self-transcendence; Univ., universalism; Benev., benevolence; ST diff., expatriate-local difference in ST; Univ. diff., expatriate-local differences in universalism; Benev. diff., expatriate-local difference in benevolence; Int. adj., interactional adjustment; Work adj., work adjustment

| | Mean | SD | ST | Univ. | Benev. | ST diff. | Univ. diff. | Benev. diff. | Int. adj. | Work adj. |
|--------------|------|------|---------|--------|--------|----------|-------------|--------------|-----------|-----------|
| ST | 4.92 | 0.95 | (0.93) | | | | | | | |
| Univ. | 4.87 | 1.02 | 0.95*** | (0.87) | | | | | | |
| Benev. | 4.97 | 0.99 | 0.94*** | 0.79 | (0.86) | | | | | |
| ST diff. | 1.28 | 1.08 | 0.29 | 0.26 | 0.28 | - | | | | |
| Univ. diff. | 1.34 | 1.30 | 0.26 | 0.30 | 0.20 | 0.90*** | - | | | |
| Benev. diff. | 1.20 | 1.13 | 0.25 | 0.16 | 0.32 | 0.88*** | 0.59*** | - | (0.88) | |
| Int. adj. | 5.32 | 1.20 | 0.26 | 0.28 | 0.21 | -0.18 | -0.25 | -0.06 | 0.47** | (0.77) |
| Work adj. | 5.87 | 0.74 | 0.32 | 0.35 | 0.27 | 0.09 | 0.02 | 0.13 | | |

Notes: Significance at: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$; ST, self-transcendence; Univ., universalism; Benev., benevolence; ST diff., expatriate-local difference in ST; Univ. diff., expatriate-local differences in universalism; Benev. diff., expatriate-local difference in benevolence; Int. adj., interactional adjustment; Work adj., work adjustment

Table V.
Correlation matrix – males

Self-transcendence appears to be of particular importance for interactional adjustment, as it was predictive for both males and females, and less so for work adjustment. Therefore, the inclusion of an assessment of self-transcendence in the expatriate selection process may be warranted. Candidates with a high self-transcendence value may experience better interactional adjustment, which is suggested to be an important facilitator of job performance and, in turn, assignment success.

The findings of this study replicate Van Vianen *et al.*'s (2004) results showing that perceived expatriate-local differences in self-transcendence are negative predictors of work and interaction adjustment. This knowledge has been extended here with findings indicating significant gender differences in the relationships between perceived differences in self-transcendence and expatriate adjustment. Perceived difference in self-transcendence was a strong negative predictor of work adjustment for female expatriates, but had no significant impact on work or interactional adjustment for males. Thus, it appears that the strong negative impact of differences in self-transcendence for females may be driving the overall finding in mixed-gender participant studies of a negative impact of these differences on work adjustment.

The finding that females have higher perceived differences in self-transcendence than males, yet did not exhibit lower socio-cultural adjustment than males, is puzzling. This result appears inconsistent with Van Vianen *et al.*'s (2004) finding (in a participant group that was 86 percent male) showing that perceived differences in expatriate-local levels of self-transcendence have a detrimental effect on interactional and work adjustment. It appears that something different occurs with females when they are on an international assignment. The results indicate that although female expatriates find that differences in self-transcendence make it difficult to adjust to the work environment, they still manage to make that adjustment successfully. One possible explanation is that the higher level of self-transcendence exhibited by female expatriates increases their interactional adjustment to such an extent that it enables them to overcome the negative effect of expatriate-local differences in self-transcendence on their work adjustment. Another explanation could be the existence of a more favourable foreign business environment for female expatriates than prior research has suggested or reported (Paik and Vance, 2002). It is also possible that further development of the Black and Stephens (1989) measurement scale could help to identify differences in the perception of adjustment between male and female expatriates. At this point in time, however, the specific process involved in overcoming this highly negative effect on their work adjustment is unclear, and further research on this topic is required.

For males, their personal level of self-transcendence was found to be most predictive of their work adjustment. They perceive fewer differences between themselves and local employees in self-transcendence, perhaps because this value is not as important to them as self-enhancement and is thus less salient in their cognitive processes. Any differences they do perceive appear to have little impact on their work adjustment.

For females, a very strong and significant negative correlation between perceived differences in benevolence values and both interactional and work adjustment was found. However, there was no predictive relationship found in the regression analysis. These preliminary non-hypothesized results indicate a need for more theoretical and empirical study on the impact of the components of self-transcendence on socio-cultural adjustment.

Together, these findings have clearly established the personal value known as self-transcendence as particularly worthy of further investigation with respect to its role

in the socio-cultural adjustment of expatriates overall, and on gender differences specifically as it relates to differences in socio-cultural adjustment amongst male and female expatriates.

Limitations

This study has several limitations. Common method variance may affect the results as both the independent and dependent variables were self-reported by participants. Although self-transcendence relates to personal values, measures from other people close to the expatriate could also be gathered for triangulation purposes (such as supervisors, coworkers, home-country managers). In a similar way, performance appraisal data could serve an additional purpose of enabling decision makers to compare and contrast the job performance and perceived assignment success of male and female expatriates. Further insights might also be gained by examining expatriates across the same organization, industry, or country/location to control for intervening variables.

The study was also cross-sectional in nature and thus causality cannot be determined from the results. Future research utilizing longitudinal designs and statistical methods that can establish causality are therefore required to overcome this limitation. Finally, although the sample size met minimum requirements for statistical validity, studies with a larger number of both male and female participants would strengthen confidence in the results.

Theoretical and practical significance

Despite these limitations, this study represents one of the first empirical investigations to extend our understanding of differences in self-transcendence and socio-cultural adjustment between male and female expatriates. The theoretical significance of the results is that importance of the self-transcendence value included in Schwartz's (1992, 1994) value model with respect to differences in socio-cultural adjustment by expatriates has been demonstrated. The self-transcendence values of expatriates have been found to be significant predictors of both interactional and work adjustment. Furthermore, there are gender differences in the relationship between the self-transcendence value and expatriate adjustment which represents a fruitful area for further theoretical and empirical work. One specific contribution of improved understanding of gender-related factors that may influence socio-cultural adjustment is that these factors will facilitate job performance and in turn, will enhance assignment success.

The practical significance of the results is that it indicates a further potential selection criterion for expatriate assignments. Rather than limiting the pool of candidates by excluding groups such as females, when gender has been shown to be irrelevant to job performance success (Caligiuri and Tung, 1999), the selection process for international managers could be further enhanced by establishing a more impartial process which focuses on additional "soft" skills such as personal values in the form of self-transcendence. Assessment of the level of self-transcendence, in terms of universalism and benevolence traits, could be included in the selection process so that those with low scores (whether male or female) can be flagged as potentially requiring more assistance with adjustment prior to undertaking an assignment.

Benefits to the expatriate performance appraisal process may also be gained, by including in job performance success criteria an assessment of self-transcendence and its attendant characteristics (such as tolerance, helpfulness, honesty and loyalty

amongst others) towards stated objectives (such as team work, collaboration, morale and so on). Hence, once on the assignment, perceived differences in self-transcendence could be assessed to allow expatriates with higher perceived differences to be coached and/or mentored or receive more cross-cultural training. Indeed, recent research espousing the value of mentoring for global female managers suggests that female expatriates receive less mentoring than males, where increased on-assignment mentoring for female expatriates could serve as an important competitive advantage as well as provide an important support system (Harvey *et al.*, 2009). Additionally, mentoring has been shown to facilitate employee socialization (Payne and Huff, 2005) which in the expatriate context, could enhance socio-cultural adjustment.

Conclusion

This study is among the first to assess potential explanations for better interactional and work adjustment of female expatriates compared to males. The results of this study demonstrate that the personal value of self-transcendence is an important variable related to the interactional and work adjustment for both male and female expatriates. The study has replicated earlier findings where perceived expatriate-local differences in self-transcendence were shown to make interactional and work adjustment more difficult for all expatriates. The results also reveal that differences in self-transcendence are perceived more strongly by females, and negatively affect work adjustment more strongly for female expatriates. On this basis, understanding the reasons why the adjustment of female expatriates is not lower than that for males is all the more intriguing and requires further investigation.

Overall, the study has contributed to the research on expatriate's socio-cultural adjustment to account for gender differences and the influence of personal values, which represents a timely addition to a neglected topic.

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