WHY AND HOW WOMEN AND MEN ACQUIRE
GLOBAL CAREER EXPERIENCE:
A STUDY OF AMERICAN EXPATRIATES IN EUROPE

Accepted for publication in

INTERNATIONAL STUDIES OF MANAGEMENT AND ORGANIZATION

Yvonne McNulty, Ph.D.

Shanghai University

Sydney Institute of Language and Commerce

20 Chengzhong Road

Jiading District, Shanghai, 201800

PR China

Email: ymcnulty@expatresearch.com

Telephone: +65.9107.6645

CHARLES M. VANCE AND YVONNE MCNULTY

Why and How Women and Men Acquire
Global Career Experience
A Study of American Expatriates in Europe

Abstract: *Building on prior research on expatriation, this qualitative study applies the Vance (2005) pre-expatriation international career development model to examine the experiences arising from women undertaking self-initiated expatriation. Utilizing a mixed sample of female and male expatriates, we interviewed 45 American expatriates in five major cities in Western and Central Europe to determine similarities and differences across gender in the selection and effective utilization of the SIE track to acquire international competencies and career development. Findings show that female expatriates: (1) experience fewer encounters with gender bias in the international business environment than prior research suggests; (2) have a tendency towards self-initiated expatriation over assigned expatriation as a way to obtain valuable international work experience; (3) rely heavily on entrepreneurship and on-site networking to further their self-initiated expatriate experience; (4) experience dual career couple issues; and (5) often gain important sources of support from local close personal relationships in the host location. Our study, with important implication for both women and men in guiding international career planning, also addresses three limitations of the original Vance (2005) model upon which the study is based, by: (1) extending the model beyond East Asia to another region (Europe) in order to enhance its generalizability; (2) broadening of the concept of 'expatriate' from the traditional narrow parent country national characterization to include in our sample both company-assigned and self-initiated expatriates; and (3) significantly increasing female sample representation.*

Charles Vance is a professor at Loyola Marymount University, 1 LMU Drive, MS 8385 Los Angeles, CA 90045, USA; tel.: +1.310.338.4508; fax: +1.310.338.3000; e-mail: cvance@lmu.edu. Yvonne McNulty is a visiting scholar at Shanghai University, 20 Chengzhong Road, Jiading District, Shanghai, 201800 PR China; tel.: +65.9107.6645; e-mail: ymcnulty@expatresearch.com.

Current research emphasizes the importance of developing international competencies for enhancing individual career success within an increasingly global marketplace (Cao, Hirschi and Deller 2012). Organizations similarly place a premium on acquiring staff with these competencies in order to compete effectively in global and domestic markets and to enhance multinational firm performance (Maddux, Galinsky and Tadmor 2010). There is nonetheless some evidence that organizations generally do an inadequate job in helping their employees develop these important skills (McNulty, De Ceiri and Hutchings 2013). As a result, individuals are assuming more personal responsibility in the development of these competencies, consistent with a broader, growing trend in boundaryless and protean careers (Arthur 2008; Biemann and Andresen 2010; Inkson 2006), and self-initiated expatriation (Andresen, Biemann and Pattie 2012).

The purpose of this qualitative study is to apply the Vance (2005) pre-expatriation international career development model to examine similarities and differences across gender in the selection and effective utilization of self-initiated expatriation to acquire individual international competencies and expatriate career development. Furthermore, we aim to determine whether women are successful in acquiring international competencies as a result of pursuing self-initiated expatriation, and to identify particular approaches they may use to overcome the challenges and barriers they face in pursuit of their goal. We contribute to extant literature by broadening our sample to include all professionals working abroad (i.e., not restricted to traditional expatriates), and by significantly increasing female representation to overcome women's disproportionate representation in past traditional expatriate research (Lansing and Boonman 2011; Tharenou 2010). In doing so, we address three limitations of the original Vance (2005) model upon which this study is based, namely: (1) extending the model beyond East Asia

3

to another region (Europe) in order to enhance its generalizability; (2) broadening of the concept of 'expatriate' from the traditional narrow parent country national characterization to include other types of expatriates; and (3) significantly increasing female sample representation. With this increase of women in our sample, we could begin to explore such questions as "How do men and women compare in their preparation for and obtaining expatriate experiences," and "How does the nature of the expatriate experience differ for men and women?" Overall, this study presents an opportunity to gain new perspectives and insights associated with preparing for and obtaining expatriation opportunities for women, and particularly related to the self-initiated expatriation experience.

International career development

Past research on international careers predominantly focused on organizational perspectives for pursuing companies' performance objectives in selecting, preparing, training, managing, and repatriating expatriates relative to "international assignments" (e.g., Selmer 2000). Recent departures from this limited organizational perspective consider both company and individual needs, acknowledging that employees' self-interest in personal career development is a major reason for the acceptance of an international assignment (Altman and Baruch 2012; Welch 2003; Zeitz et al. 2009). Other recent studies focus on self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) who, unlike company assigned expatriates (CAEs), act as free agents traveling on their own initiative to a foreign work environment to seek and secure employment for both economic and personal career development reasons (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry 2013; Biemann and Andresen 2010; Cao, Hirschi and Deller 2012). This shift beyond the control of the

corporation to individual self-initiated international career opportunity acquisition and management for developing critical global career competencies is consistent with increasing attention in career theory and practice to the individual's role and responsibilities in career management (Briscoe et al. 2006; Inkson et al. 2012; Inkson and Arthur 2001).

Although the recent SIE literature examining this new international career development paradigm provides a more flexible and relevant break from past research focusing exclusively on the traditional CAE context, it tends to provide primarily a general conceptualization of this growing SIE career trend, including justification, motivations, demographics, working arrangements, and personal economic outcomes (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry 2013; Biemann and Andresen 2010; Jokinen, Brewster and Suutari 2008; Selmer and Lauring 2012). Yet there has been relatively little research of either SIE or CAE paradigms that may provide guidance for individuals interested in strategies for obtaining international career development experience through expatriation. The existing literature on specific self-initiated approaches or strategies that can contribute to future international career development via some form of secured expatriation is largely represented by fragmented anecdotal accounts recommending such activities as foreign language study, study abroad, sponsoring foreign exchange students, international travel, international internships, participating in the home country in international economic partnership associations or societies (e.g., the German-Chinese Business Association in Cologne, Germany), humanitarian or missionary service, or having a special international focus in higher education (Bachner and Zeutschel 1994; Emanoil 1999; Rappleye 1996; Thompson 2000; Toncar and Cudmore 2000; Vance et al. 2011).

Work by Vance (2005) represents a notable exception to the lack of research on career strategies leading to valuable and transformative expatriate experiences. Based on interviews of American expatriates in five major countries and cities in East Asia, Vance (2005) developed a self-initiating, pre-expatriation three-phase career-planning taxonomy for individuals in securing valuable international work experience to facilitate international competency development. In addition, Vance (2005) found that for eventually obtaining their valuable overseas work experience, individuals typically followed either a traditional CAE career track or an independent SIE career track. In the SIE track, individuals would go abroad on their own in whatever way possible and then try to work locally (e.g. in international internships, part-time English instruction) and network actively before securing a more stable foreign work arrangement. In the more traditional CAE track, individuals would gain employment within a multinational corporation (MNC) in their home country and typically work several years, networking within the MNC and guiding their career path toward finally obtaining a desired expatriate assignment abroad.

Although the traditional CAE track provides greater security and organizational support, including typically a much more attractive overall compensation package, such a foreign assignment opportunity is never certain to present itself, and even if eventually offered may require 10-15 years of building internal credibility and trust before an MNC is willing to invest in such a costly endeavor. Vance (2005) therefore concluded that the SIE track was much more timely and reliable for gaining international work experience and to build valuable global career competencies. Furthermore, an SIE approach appears to be particularly pertinent and flexible for individual career planning, as well as feeding into organizations' increasing demand for alternative staffing options (e.g. host-country

nationals, foreign local hires) to replace the costly traditional CAE approach (*The Economist* 2006; Vance, Paik and Chow 2011).

Women and international career development experience

Women continue to be greatly outnumbered among the ranks of traditional CAEs (Shortland 2011). Linehan and Walsh (1999) have identified several unique obstacles that women face in breaking through the corporate "glass border" in being selected by their firms for an international assignment and effectively coping with the international experience. Several scholars contend that the lack of expatriate women providing valuable leadership influence in foreign operations, often due to bias favoring males, represents not only a breach of ethics and fairness, but also represents an inefficient use of a multinational firm's talent pool in the face of increasing global competition (Leonard 2010; Tharenou 2010). In fact, in extending the argument for better utilization of available company talent, researchers have identified various leadership behavioral styles engaged in more frequently by women CAEs that may contribute to their achieving greater performance in foreign subsidiaries than their male CAE counterparts (Cole and McNulty 2011; Varma, Toh and Budhwar 2006). On an individual level, the prevailing bias favoring the selection of men for traditional expatriate assignments represents missed opportunities for women to gain significant international work experience for building valuable international career competencies (Vance et al. 2006).

Abetted by a continuing worldwide shortage of professionals and international managers (Ready et al. 2008), women appear to be passing on the heretofore frustrating CAE career track, seeking instead more SIE options for gaining international experience to advance their careers (Tharenou 2008). Several recent studies show that women are

working abroad far more frequently due to self-initiation than being sent by an employer, and are participating as SIEs at similar levels to men (Doherty et al. 2007; Thorn 2009). Thus, it appears that the SIE alternative represents a very viable option for women in gaining international work experience for building important global career competencies (Tharenou 2008). Nonetheless, there has been very little research examining career development strategies for women, compared to men, in preparing for and obtaining international work experience, and particularly as SIEs. Furthermore, while Vance (2005) examined pre-expatriation career development strategies, his study included few interviewees who had elected the SIE track and only a small representation of women expatriates, resulting in CAEs greatly overshadowing the representation of SIEs, thereby shortchanging the study of the SIE experience and possible associated gender differences.

Method

Sample

As with Vance (2005), to control for possible confounding effects of nationality and regional economic differences, the sample of participants in our study was limited to American expatriates presently engaged in for-profit business activities in Western and Central Europe. Field interviews regarding past forms of career preparation prior to their current expatriate working experience were conducted with 45 American expatriates (29 women, 16 men) working and living in Prague, Budapest, Vienna, Berlin, and Rome. We defined an expatriate broadly as someone who has left his or her home country to live or work in another country for an extended period of time (generally between one and five years on the CAE track, but often longer for SIEs), who does not take up citizenship of the country where they are living and working. Although differing from the more

8

commonly used expatriate definition of someone assigned by a company to work in a foreign subsidiary (e.g. Brookfield, 2012), our definition is more inclusive of SIE strategies.

Expatriates worked in professional services, energy, and high technology firms, ranging widely from *Fortune* 500 multinationals to one-person consulting companies. Forty-five percent of female expatriates worked in local small businesses and newly formed ventures, 34 percent were self-employed, and 21 percent worked for MNCs. The corresponding employment category percentages for the men were 25, 25, and 50 percent respectively. All of those working for MNCs were on a traditional expatriate assignment from their home country, except for two of the women and one of the men, who had left their original American firms as traditional expatriates and now worked as local hires for different MNCs (a US and two non-US companies) The percentage of men in our sample working in traditional CAE positions was well over twice the percentage of that for women. The average age of the men was 44.4 years and all but one (94%) were married, while the average age for the women was 37.8 years and 73 percent were married. Sixty-nine percent of the men and 55 percent of the women had a post-graduate education. The majority of the men and women were on their first international working experience, although some had previous international assignment experience. Men and women were predominantly Caucasian and spent similar average total time working abroad, at 8.7 years and 8.8 years respectively. For both men and women in the CAE track, the average time in their present assignment was 3.5 years (as would be expected on company contracts), whereas those on the SIE track in local and self-employment arrangements frequently extended beyond 7-10 years.

The CAE participants in our convenience sample were obtained through American companies located in the various cities of this study. To gain access to these companies we made e-mail and telephone contact with American Chambers of Commerce and US Consulate offices located in those cities. Numerous letters were then e-mailed to a number of American companies requesting their assistance in locating American expatriates for this study. Specific expatriate contacts were subsequently provided by these companies and institutions. A second approach was used for reaching our SIE participants through existing personal connections with one of the authors and colleagues in the US. For example, a particularly useful source for locating women for our sample was through international professional women's networking organizations located in each city (e.g. American Women's Association of Vienna). Once identified through this largely referral method, individual expatriates then were contacted primarily through e-mail communication from the US, and interview appointments arranged. The interviews were part of a larger faculty-led small group field research project of an MBA capstone course, which included a three-week business studies tour of the five countries in this study.

Procedure

A semi-structured interview lasting approximately 40 minutes was conducted with each expatriate by a three-person interview team. The overall research cohort comprised eight team members divided into three research teams consisting of three MBA students per team, with one of the authors as a third member of one of the teams. The interviews were audio-recorded to help capture the richness and detail of each participant's response. As with Vance (2005), each interview began with the gathering of descriptive data about the expatriate and his/her company, followed by questions related to activities, factors, or

strategies from the past (as far back as high school if necessary) that were believed to

have affected or contributed in some way to the expatriate's current international business

experience in Europe. This approach is consistent with techniques used in grounded

theory (Glasser and Strauss 1967) and described as "discovering theories, concepts,

hypotheses, and propositions directly from data rather than from a priori assumptions,

other research, or existing theoretical frameworks" (Taylor and Bogdan 1998, 137).

Participants were then shown the 30 categories identified in Vance (2005) of potentially

influential self-initiating activities and strategies that can contribute to gaining

international business experience. The list of categories was used primarily to help evoke

all relevant memories of participants' actual preparatory experiences, as well as to assess

their reactions about the appropriateness of the 30 categories. Finally, participants were

asked about particular challenges they faced in their current assignments, including

perceptions of gender bias affecting the expatriate experience.

Analysis

Problems associated with internal validity due to single-response bias were addressed by

using an inter-rater procedure (see King 1994). After the interviews were conducted, each

three-person team separately listened to all audio-recorded interviews and made notes on

key observations and potentially illustrative quotes (McLellan et al. 2005). They then

collectively discussed and analyzed their notes from each interview and formed

consensus regarding each participant's previous activities and experiences in relation to

developing international career competencies leading to their current expatriate work

experience. The three research teams then came together and combined their data using

procedures of domain and theme analysis in taxonomy development (Carney 1972;

Spradley 1980). With active participation of all research team members in this process, each observation from the notes was assigned a descriptive category of some type of activity, strategy, or challenge in relation to obtaining future business experience abroad.

Findings

Our findings provide support within Western and Central European contexts for the 30 pre-expatriation career path strategies and activities of the Vance (2005) international career development model, with no new categories identified. It is important to note that support for this model came from a sample of expatriates who predominantly were following the SIE track. Thus, the Vance (2005) three-phase model apparently can serve as a career path guide in preparation for either a traditional CAE experience or the SIE track. A minor elaboration from the Vance (2005) model involved the importance of determining and developing marketable skills for work abroad in a targeted location. For example, it was noted in the preparation of several participants, both men and women and particularly in Prague, Berlin, and Budapest, that in considering their marketable skills development they also considered the question of market timing, and clearly acted upon perceived new venture and professional consulting opportunities with the transformation of local economies and emergence of new markets in Central Europe.

Beyond confirming and extending the geographic generalizability of the Vance (2005) model, a further contribution of this study is the gaining of new perspectives relative to the expatriate experience for women. Of particular importance in our results is the identification of several insights and trends relating to self-initiated expatriation and the development of global competencies and career development approaches for both women and men, including: (1) women's minimal encounters with gender bias once *in* the

international business environment, (2) the selection of the SIE track for obtaining valuable and more immediate international work experience, (3) entrepreneurship related to the SIE experience, (4) the critical role of on-site networking, (5) the challenge of dual career couple issues, and (6) the connection between SIE career choices and local close personal relationships.

Minimal encounters with gender bias

It was striking that women in our sample did not personally experience any gender bias in the hiring process with local European employers, company self-ownership, or providing consulting services once in the international business environment, as one woman explains:

> As a foreign woman working in Europe, I had to fight, certainly, but it was not really a problem. It was more fighting against the government structure of trying to set up a business. Really, nobody was out to trip me. Quite the opposite, people wanted to help me because I was providing a service that was needed.

That the women in our sample generally found an open and receptive market for participating in business is consistent with interviews with women SIEs working in the Cayman Islands (Fitzgerald and Howe-Walsh 2008), suggesting that various major economic regions of the world are more open and accepting of American woman as expatriates than the prevailing male-dominated perspective at MNC headquarters. Thus, the biggest obstacle that women in our study faced in building international career competencies appeared to be back in their home-country work environment where CAE international assignment career decisions were made. Like Varma, Toh and Budhwar (2006), wherein Indian host-country nationals (HCNs) preferred American female expatriates as co-workers significantly more than more aggressive American male

expatriates, several women in our sample believed that in some aspects, such as in team and employment-based relationship building, women expatriates may actually outperform their male expatriate counterparts. One woman in our study working as an independent consultant in Prague expressed this sentiment well when she stated:

> I absolutely believe that women can be just as successful. They may have more trouble making as much money or may have more trouble getting in. But the interpersonal skills women can bring in to the international environment, where you are trying to network and communicate are of profound advantage.

Another woman, working in Berlin, was equally adamant:

> Women are more sensitive to issues beyond the typical male perspective, which tends to be more financial in nature. Women see deeper and broader issues that can be an advantage in an international setting.

Our findings mirror those of other studies in which female expatriates have been shown to have better interactional and work adjustment compared to males (Cole and McNulty 2011).

In contrast, we noted that although some of the men interviewed believed that women expatriates could be as successful in their international work assignments as their male counterparts, over three times the percentage of men in our sample (31%) compared to women (10%) believed that women could not be as successful. As one male American accounting firm expatriate in Budapest remarked:

> Due to the hard-hitting and aggressive nature of international business and lingering sexism, women definitely tend to not perform as well as men.

Thus, a bias among males against the appropriateness of women in international assignments still apparently persists, including among males in the field. This unfounded stereotyping held by American males at headquarters and abroad is part of a deep and pervasive cultural artifact that is felt even in higher education, and which may contribute to the bias (Leonard 2010).

Several women in our study commented upon commonly held misperceptions as barriers in their home-country to receiving international assignments. As reported in the literature (e.g. Tharenou 2008; Varma, et al. 2006) these include women's lack of interest in undertaking international assignments, lack of ability to compete with aggressive and male-dominated foreign environments, and foreigner prejudice in accepting women as international assignees. One woman we interviewed in Berlin had previously been a lawyer for a large US-based international law firm before she decided to move abroad and open her own practice. In discussing the glass ceiling phenomenon facing women in the corporate world, she asserted that more and more:

> Women are not bothering with the glass ceiling, but are leaving the
> building altogether to pursue their own opportunities in international
> business.

This telling comment points to our next identified trend of the propensity for women to engage in self-initiated expatriation.

Traditional CAE versus SIE track

There is considerable evidence that, from earlier years of high school and undergraduate study, women display a much stronger interest in traveling and living abroad than men. In its study of US university student participation in Study Abroad Programs between 1998-2008 (of students who were predominantly of junior-year standing), the Institute of International Education (2009) found a very consistent trend of nearly twice as many female students electing to study abroad as male students (the average percentage of students choosing to study abroad during this 10-year time frame was 65.12% female and 34.88% male). This seemingly stronger latent interest in gaining international experience, combined with the above awareness of obstacles to an international assignment faced in

the traditional CAE track at MNC headquarters, may help explain our finding that the great majority (79%) of the women in our sample (compared to 50 percent of the men) had chosen the SIE track over the traditional CAE track. This trend is consistent with the results of a much larger recent survey of 193 expatriates from 39 different nationalities and working in 46 different countries (Andresen et al. 2012).

With the women in our sample about 7 years younger than the men on average, there is evidence that the SIE track provided them with valuable international developmental experience at an earlier age than for men. This finding is consistent with Vance (2005), which noted in its predominantly male expatriate sample that expatriates commonly had to wait 10-15 years or more as part of the traditional CAE track before receiving their first international assignment. Even without the stultifying influence of gender bias, men who limit their international experience opportunities to those provided by their company in the traditional CAE approach may delay the development of important international career competencies that support their career advancement.

Entrepreneurship and the SIE experience

Although a clear option for the SIE track is to find local work with a large multinational firm, the majority of the men and women in our study who were hired locally worked for smaller firms, and often found themselves in entrepreneurial roles of new business development. Several also were involved in new ventures with local business partners. One graduate in physical therapy from Michigan State University who greatly desired to get closer to her grandfather's Hungarian roots, simply moved abroad to Budapest, initially on a tourist visa. She connected early in her SIE experience by working with a local entrepreneur in Budapest to open a very successful private physical therapy clinic,

16

where she had worked as general manager for five years at the time of the interview. The interviewee strongly believed that if she had followed a traditional CAE career track in the USA she would not have learned nearly as much during this time as she had done through her SIE experience. As she remarked:

> I often have thought about my friends who remained in the USA while I left to come here over five years ago, and what they are doing today. I continue to be amazed at the kinds of major developmental experiences and the significant management responsibility that I have been able to gain in this relatively short amount of time. There is no way I could have achieved this level of experience by now if I had stayed in the USA following graduation.

A significant percentage of the women were self-employed as consultants or small business owners (34% for women versus 25% for men), suggesting this particular entrepreneurial pursuit is viable in the SIE track, and particularly for women. This choice of self-employment is consistent with the emerging trend in the USA of women entrepreneurs as among the fastest growing groups of new business owners, often explained, again, as being due to their perceived obstacles in the continuing male leadership dominated environment of the large corporation (Hackler et al. 2008).

On-site networking

As noted in Vance (2005), key to the success of an SIE career strategy is active networking in the local working environment to find or change employment. Consistent with this finding, and with a great majority of women in our study compared to men opting for the SIE career track, women were quite dominant in the identification and use of on-site networking as a successful international career strategy. Sixty-two percent of the women interviewed, compared to 56 percent of men, mentioned networking either as a major career path strategy or as a personal tool used to find employment abroad. In the case of the previous example of the young American woman arriving in Budapest, fresh

17

from the completion of a US undergraduate degree in physical therapy, the significant

contact leading to the start-up of a successful new venture was through her new

roommate's mother, who worked at a local childcare center, and who knew that the father

of one of the children cared for there was interested in developing a new private physical

therapy clinic.

   Our finding of expatriate women's very positive regard for and active involvement in

formal and informal networking activities is consistent with the interview findings of

women SIEs of various nationalities and in multiple locations (Fitzgerald and Howe-

Walsh 2008; Napier and Taylor 2002), as well as of women on the CAE track, as noted

by Shortland (2011). Besides more general chamber of commerce and trade association

activities as opportunities for networking, several women in our study were also active in

their city's local American women's club or professional women's association, often

citing those dedicated support groups for women as particularly helpful in enabling them

to secure local employment, as one woman consultant in Vienna explains:

> After I arrived here over eight years ago I immediately contacted our local
> American Women's Association of Vienna, which served as a wonderful source of
> general support for me as a newcomer, as well as helped me begin to build my
> consulting business.

Many of these women's organizations, initially organized to provide social support for

the traditional male expatriate's accompanying spouse, have expanded to include and

even emphasize professional networking forums for women (including single

unaccompanied women) following the SIE track, thereby serving as a valuable portal for

business connections and opportunities. These active and sometimes informal "support

groups" appear to provide an advantage to women following both CAE and SIE tracks

compared to men who seem to be limited to the more general chamber of commerce and

trade association forums for networking, or to their formal company-sponsored

networking and mentoring arrangements. Although others (e.g. Shen and Kram 2011) point to the rather limited role of formal networking and mentoring efforts in expatriates' (both male and female) overseas adjustment and relocation success, our findings contradict this view.

Dual career couple issues

The great majority of men and women expatriates in our study were married. However, the traditional stereotype of a non-working "trailing spouse" was clearly not evident among our sample, with the accompanying spouse being only temporarily unemployed in the new foreign location. In fact, in three instances men had left their jobs in the US to accompany their wives abroad on their international assignment, and upon arriving in the foreign country searched and found local employment. In our joint and separate interviews with a husband and wife in Rome, the husband stated:

> It is like we are a tag team here living and working abroad. We are able to help each other and provide emotional and professional support.

Thus, in contrast to the image of a passive accompanying spouse, the analogous image that we perceived among the married couples was that of a very active and professional "dynamic duo" where each partner shared separate but common international professional identities and goal orientations and worked together as "allies" to assist one another in their respective international career development experiences (Budworth, Enns and Rowbotham 2008).

Using the strength of one spouse's employment base in the foreign location, most couples worked together to secure eventual employment for the other. One woman in our study, who was a management consultant, indicated that years before in Los Angeles, when her husband was offered an attractive job opportunity in Berlin by his international

architectural firm, he had initially considered rejecting the offer due to not wanting her to quit her job and interrupt her career. As she shared with us:

> When my husband told me that he was planning to reject the offer but wanted to check with me first, my immediate reaction was, 'Are you crazy? This is my ticket to Europe!'

She quickly convinced him to accept the assignment, suggesting that the international experience would not only be good for her and their two children (as noted by Richardson 2006), but that in essence his traditional (and stable) CAE opportunity would provide her with an excellent SIE opportunity, and place her in a dynamic international context for pursuing employment and developing important international career competencies.

SIE and close personal relationships with locals

Three women in our study who were young, single and employed with local firms that required a considerable amount of travel mentioned that their busy work schedules interfered with their ability to form close personal friendships and relationships, a trend also noted in a recent study of Finnish women expatriates by Mäkelä, Suutari and Mayerhofer (2011). In contrast, the men in our study were all married except one, older, and predominantly followed the CAE track, and many also traveled for work. Yet in our interviews fewer males voiced concerns about an unfulfilling personal life, suggesting that those on the CAE track had access to more extensive MNC support than those on the SIE track working in local firms, where larger corporations are increasingly adopting more family-friendly policies and practices as they recognize the competitive advantage of effectively managing a diverse global workforce (Brookfield 2012). Additionally, women have long faced a greater challenge with the apparent reality that

they must choose between a successful professional career or a meaningful and fulfilling personal and family life, but cannot pursue both (Waumsley and Houston 2009). This may explain why the young, single women in our study, who purposely bypassed the CAE track for a more immediate international experience on the SIE track, recognized that they were potentially paying a higher price in the area of work-life balance and personal relationship support in order to do so.

It could also be the case that being married or having a close long-term personal relationship, as was the case with most of the men in our sample, facilitates a greater level of emotional support than instead being single and not having a partner or spouse to rely on. Indeed, we found that many in our sample had married a spouse from the foreign country in which they were working, particularly among those men and women who had followed the SIE track and who were abroad for more than four years. In fact, the formation of close personal relationships with locals likely was a major reason why the SIEs in our sample, predominantly women, had been in their present job and associated location much longer than those pursuing CAE. This observation is consistent with the recent work of Tharenou and Caulfield (2012), whose study of the intention to repatriate of 546 Australians found that these and other local ties constituted a form of "community embeddedness" that was positively related to host country satisfaction and negatively related to repatriation.

This frequent association of spouse nationality or cultural background with the foreign location in which expatriates are assigned was also noted in the predominantly male CAE track sample of the Vance (2005) study. Perhaps it should come as no surprise that those who would self-initiate a seemingly unconventional career track abroad would also feel unrestricted in forming a somewhat unconventional, close personal and emotionally

supportive relationship with a local individual not of their home country culture. Entering into a marriage or long-term relationship with a local national may represent for the individual on a SIE track an effort to "self-initiate" a greater and more satisfying personal social support system (Selmer and Lauring 2011). Arp, Hutchings and Smith (2011), in their study of foreign executives in local organizations (FELOs), found that doing so helps to overcome issues of dual-career adjustment that are common amongst expatriate couples, as well as facilitating a perception of greater allegiance to host-country interests, all of which may be more conducive to work performance effectiveness and overall quality of life.

An alternative view suggests, however, that issues relating to expatriates' satisfaction with their socialization and personal life could also be explained by female expatriates' greater propensity towards relationship building compared to males. For example, Haslberger (2010) found that female expatriates are better adjusted than males because they pay more attention to building and maintaining relationships with host country nationals. Cole and McNulty (2011) similarly found that female expatriates attribute more importance to values such as benevolence and universalism in the form of higher levels of self-transcendence, which manifests in a desire to seek out and be in healthy relationships with others in their personal as well as work environments (see also Schwartz and Rubel 2005). By contrast, they found that male expatriates had higher levels of self-enhancement wherein they attributed more importance to power and achievement values, i.e. achievement through ambition and competence, and a preference for hierarchy orientations and power over others. Thus, female expatriates on a SIE track in our study appear to desire personal relationships more so than men, which could

explain why they expressed the lack of an opportunity to do so as a significant gap in their development and socialization.

Discussion

This qualitative field study sought to extend the generalizability of the Vance (2005) taxonomy of self-initiating career path strategies for gaining international business experience. The Vance (2005) study was conducted in five major cities of East Asia with an American sample of mostly males who had followed a traditional CAE career track for obtaining their current international work experience. Our study replicated much of the methodology of the Vance (2005) study in five major cities of Western and Central Europe, yet also broadened the definition of expatriate to include all those who leave their home country to work in a foreign country, whether sent as a traditional company-assigned expatriate or as a self-initiated expatriate. It was found that broadening the expatriate definition greatly increased the representation of women in the European sample, who predominantly worked on their own or in a local businesses achieved through a SIE international career development strategy compared to the men in the sample who, as expected, had much higher representation as traditional CAE expatriates.

Notwithstanding the fact that no significant change or refinement of the Vance (2005) taxonomy resulted from our study, a serendipitous outcome was the generation of important new insights and observed trends pertinent to the SIE career track, particularly associated with women who appear to more frequently rely on self-managing the development of their international career competencies. These insights and observed trends provide direction for future research on the SIE experience for both men and women. The apparent penchant for women to gain international experience, based on

23

their significantly greater involvement in earlier study abroad activities, combined with a perceived home country bias against women being selected for expatriate assignments as part of the traditional CAE international career track, may explain why women expatriates tend to more readily select and be found in the SIE track. However, this trend should be studied more carefully, including an analysis of possible deterrents that may be obstructing men's choice of the SIE track.

Another important insight relates to the influence of supportive relationships in dual career couples in securing and managing international work experiences. Much of the past research has examined challenges for the accompanying spouse (e.g., Cole 2011), and where that spouse is a male (e.g., Selmer and Leung 2003). Future research should examine the dynamics of their relationship when both are actively pursuing international professional experience in a mutually supportive manner. It also appears that in the SIE track active social and professional networking appears to be much more common for women expatriates. Future research of women's professional networking organizations and associations should be conducted to gain a clearer picture of how they contribute to expatriate adjustment and the building of international career competencies, beyond providing mere social support for accompanying spouses. Such research needs to consider these support mechanisms as being viable opportunities for career development within the SIE track, particularly in local and self-employment roles.

Future research could also begin to explore in greater detail the personal life aspects of expatriates in marriage and long-term close personal relationships with local nationals, which potentially adds stability and support for the success of a longer-term SIE career track beyond the typical three to five year assignment in one location. These close personal relationships with local nationals are likely at the heart (and literally so) of why

the SIEs in our sample tended to have been in their present work (and location) much longer than the CAEs. This possible significant source of support for SIE career track success provides an interesting contrast to previous literature on traditional CAE adjustment that identifies the accompanying spouse as a primary factor underlying expatriate assignment difficulties and failure to achieve assignment performance expectations (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. 2005).

Besides the present study, the phenomenon of close long-term personal relationships with local nationals was noted in Vance (2005) as well as in other recent research on FELOs (Arp, Hutchings, and Smith 2011). However, this intrusive look into the SIE's personal life has been rare in a growing body of SIE research (e.g. Andersen, Rasmussen and Scheuer 2010). It seems quite inconsistent that despite the significant transition of focus on career management from organizational to individual self-determining activities, SIE research would not also thoroughly explore such personal factors as marriage and personal relationship decisions as part of the overall coping mechanisms that expatriates employ to facilitate greater international career success.

In addition, the longer-term nature of the SIE track that we frequently noted begs the question of how this career orientation differs from that of skilled migrants, which has been a growing area of discussion in recent research as a way to promote clarification (Al Ariss and Crowley-Henry 2013). The distinction between SIEs and migrants, if any, is still far from clear but has critical implications at both micro- (e.g., personal career planning) and macro-levels (e.g., national and global labor supply). For example, although it is unclear when an SIE becomes a migrant, most of the SIEs we interviewed intended to travel abroad due to interest in international traveling and gaining foreign work experience, and never expected to remain abroad as many did. Indeed, some of

these SIEs are so comfortable and embedded in their foreign environment that they may never return to the US, likely placing them in the category of quasi-migrants.

The present exploratory study employed a convenience sample as in Vance (2005), however, with a more inclusive view that welcomed SIEs. As expected, this broader definition of "expatriate" resulted in an increased representation of women in our sample, allowing an opportunity for identifying and examining important issues surrounding women within the more common SIE context. Nevertheless, although yielding potentially valuable insights, our convenience sampling approach has major limitations in terms of generalizability. Therefore, future research is needed to examine the issues identified here using larger and more representative sampling approaches.

Based on an analysis of our field interviews, we concluded that the Vance (2005) pre-expatriation career-planning model also applies for American expatriates working in the Central and Western European context. However, despite the effort of the present study to overcome important limitations of Vance (2005), a continuing major limitation is the inclusion of only American expatriates in the sample. In fact, in serving as a prescriptive model for non-US and non-English fluent students, the Vance (2005) taxonomy has credibility problems with its reference to previous military experience abroad or a career development strategy of teaching English abroad. To further extend possible generalizability of the Vance (2005) taxonomy, future research should examine the pre-international career path experiences of expatriates from other countries and regions, including those that are currently under-studied, e.g. Australia, North East Asia, South America, and Africa. Although the results of additional research involving non-US expatriates may not conflict dramatically with the components of the Vance (2005) taxonomy, they may serve to indicate different patterns and approaches (e.g.,

significantly more and earlier experiences of international travel for Europeans) leading to self-initiated international career development.

According to our literature review and results, a bias among males against the appropriateness of women in international assignments still apparently persists, including among males in the field. This unfounded stereotyping held by American males at headquarters and abroad is part of a deep and pervasive cultural artifact that is felt even in higher education, and which may contribute to the bias (Leonard 2010). Therefore, efforts in education at all levels, and in corporate training, staffing, and international support should be improved and increased to help counter continuing and unfounded bias against women serving as expatriates, which serves as an obstacle to women's individual career development as well as optimal organizational utilization of talent in global staffing decisions.

Practical implications

Insights gained from our study have important implications for enhancing the relevance of international education by providing improved guidance to support students' planning and success in building global career competencies through expatriation, and particularly within the SIE direction where opportunities are expanding. This guidance would be potentially beneficial for both male and female students, particularly those in graduate school. Examples where improvements in teaching and learning can be made include: (a) informing both male and female students of the SIE career development option and the opportunities it presents in comparison to CAE, including its advantages and challenges; (b) preparing students for the SIE career development approach using various entrepreneurial and self-employment options with case illustrations to provide

realistic, tangible guidance to assist with individual career planning; and (c) considering dual career couple status as not a liability but as potentially having distinct advantages over single status, such as in emotional and expanded resource support, provided that investments in training and ongoing spousal support in career development and job placement are put in place.

There also are important implications of our results within the corporate context related to both traditional CAE and SIE approaches. First, it is important that companies consider their talent acquisition and management opportunities for foreign assignments among both employees in the firm as well as among potential local hires that have become available due to their previous self-initiated expatriation (Howe-Walsh and Schyns 2010). Second, by understanding the motivation for women to pursue SIE opportunities over CAE experiences, HR professionals can widen their talent pool. Third, the provision of support mechanisms that enable expatriate dual-career couples to undertake CAE, and in particular, female accompanying spouses to fulfill their international career development aspirations via SIE opportunities, will likely begin to address one of the most significant barriers to mobility that has existed over the past three decades (see Harvey, Novicevic and Breland 2009). Lastly, once on an assignment, coaching or mentoring to facilitate partners' SIE career development opportunities is likely to enhance overall expatriate adjustment through spillover effects and, in turn, their performance.

Conclusion

Aside from a few recent qualitative and survey studies (e.g. Crowley-Henry and Weir 2007; Tharenou 2010), there has been very little work examining women as self-

initiating expatriates. The research reported here contributes to an important area of international career development neglected in previous studies that has predominantly focused on men as traditional company-assignment expatriates. Insights gained from our study are potentially valuable for guiding future research, as well as for enlightening the SIE career path option and associated conditions and experiences for both men and women who otherwise are facing a decline in the opportunity to secure a traditional AE expatriate experience, and thus decreasing opportunities vital for building global career competencies.

References

Altman, Y., and Y. Baruch. 2012. "Global Self-Initiated Corporate Expatriate Careers: A New Era in International Assignments." *Personnel Review* 41(2): 233-255.

Al Ariss, A., and M. Crowley-Henry. 2013. "Self-Initiated Expatriation and Migration in the Management Literature: Present Theorizations and Future Research Directions." *Career Development International* 18(1): 78-96.

Andresen, M., T. Biemann, and M. Pattie. 2012. "What Makes Them Move Abroad? Reviewing and Exploring Differences Between Self-Initiated and Assigned Expatriation." *International Journal of Human Resource Management* (29 March, 1-16). DOI: 10.1080/09585192.2012.669780.

Andersen, T., E. Rasmussen and S. Scheuer. 2010. "Towards Global Careerists: Expatriate Danish Engineers." Presented at the 11th International HRM Conference, Birmingham, UK, June.

Arp, F., K. Hutchings, and W. Smith. 2011. "Different from Expatriates: Foreign Executives in Local Organizations (FELOs)." Presented at the 2011 Academy of Management Annual Meeting, San Antonio, Texas, August.

Arthur, M. 2008. "Examining Contemporary Careers: A Call for Interdisciplinary Inquiry." *Human Relations* 61(2): 163–186.

Bachner, D.J., and U. Zeutschel, 1994. "Utilizing the Effects of Youth Exchange: A Study of the Subsequent Lives of German and American High School Exchange Participants." *Occasional Papers on International Educational Exchange*, 31. New York: Council on International Educational Exchange.

Bhaskar-Shrinivas, P., D. Harrison, M. Shaffer, and D. Luk. 2005 "Input-Based and Time-Based Models of International Adjustment: Meta-Analytic Evidence and Theoretical Extensions." *Academy of Management Journal* 48(2): 257-81.

Biemann, T, and M. Andresen. 2010. "Self-Initiated Foreign Expatriates Versus Assigned Expatriates: Two Distinct Types of International Careers?" *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 25(4): 430-448.

Briscoe, J., D. Hall, and R. DeMuth. 2006. "Protean and Boundaryless Careers: An Empirical Exploration." *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 69(1): 30-47.

Brookfield Global Relocation Services. 2012. *Global Relocation Trends Survey Report*. Woodridge, IL.

Budworth, M., J.R. Enns, and K. Rowbotham. 2008. "Shared Identity and Strategic Choice in Dual-Career Couples." *Gender in Management: An International Journal* 23(2): 103–119.

Cao, L., A. Hirschi, and J. Deller. 2012. "Self-Initiated Expatriates and Their Career Success." *Journal of Management Development* 31(2): 159-172.

Carney, T.F. 1972. *Content Analysis: A Technique for Systematic Inference from Communications.* Winnipeg: University of Manitoba Press.

Cole, N. 2011. "Managing Global Talent: Solving the Spousal Adjustment Problem." *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 22(7): 1504-1530.

Cole, N., and Y. McNulty. 2011. "Why Do Female Expatriates 'Fit-In' Better Than Males?" *Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal* 18(2): 144-64.

Crowley-Henry, M., and D. Weir. 2007. "The International Protean Career: Four Women's Narratives." *Journal of Organizational Change Management* 20(2): 245-258.

Doherty, N., M. Dickmann, and T. Mills, T. "Are You a Hero or a Heroine? An Exploration of the Expatriation Journey." Report by the Cranfield University School of Management, Bedfordshire, UK.

The Economist. 2006. "Traveling More Lightly: Staffing Globalization." 99-101.

Emanoil, P. 1999. "Study Abroad Expands Cultural View, Life Skills, and Academic Experience." *Human Ecology Forum* 27(3): 10-14.

Fitzgerald, C. and L. Howe-Walsh. 2008. "Self-Initiated Expatriates: An Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis of Professional Female Expatriates." *International Journal of Business and Management* 3(10): 156–174.

Glasser, B.G., and A. Strauss. 1967. *The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research*. Chicago: Aldine.

Hackler, D., E. Harpel, and H. Mayer. 2008. "Human Capital and Women's Business Ownership." *Small Business Research Summary, Small Business Administration Office of Advocacy*. Retrieved from http://www.sba.gov/advo/research/rs323.pdf on July 31, 2010.

Hall, D.T. 2002. *Careers In and Out of Organizations*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Hall, F.S. and D.T. Hall. 1979. *The Two Career Couple*, Addison-Wesley, Reading, MA.

Harvey, M., M., Novicevic. and J. Breland. 2009. "Global Dual-Career Exploration and the Role of Hope and Curiosity During the Process." *Journal of Managerial Psychology* 24(2): 178-97.

Haslberger, A. 2010. "Gender Differences in Expatriate Adjustment." *European Journal of International Management* 4(1/2): 163-83.

Howe-Walsh, L., and B. Schyns. 2010. "Self-Initiated Expatriation: Implications for HRM." *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 21(2): 260-273.

Inkson, K. 2006. "Protean and Boundaryless Careers as Metaphors." *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 69(1): 48–63.

Inkson, K., and M.B. Arthur. 2001. "How To Be A Successful Career Capitalist." *Organizational Dynamics* 30(1): 48-61.

Inkson, K., and M.B. Arthur. 2002. "Career Development: Extending the "Organizational Careers" Framework. In *Adult Career Development: Concepts, Issues, and Practices*, ed. S.G. Niles, 285-304. Columbus, OH: National Career Development Association.

Inkson, K., H. Gunz, S. Ganesh, and J. Roper. 2012. "Boundaryless Careers: Bringing Back Boundaries." *Organization Studies* 33(3): 323-340.

Institute of International Education. 2009. *Open Doors 2009 Report on International Educational Exchange*. Retrieved from: http://opendoors.iienetwork.org/?p=150839 on July 31, 2010.

Jokinen, T., C. Brewster, C., and V. Suutari. 2008. "Career Capital During International Work Experiences: Contrasting Self-Initiated Expatriate Experiences and Assigned Expatriation." *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 19(6), 979–998.

King, N. 1994. "The Qualitative Research Interview". In *Qualitative Methods in Organizational Research: A Practical Guide,* ed. C. Cassell & G. Symon, 14-36. London: Sage.

Lansing, P., and P. Boonman. "Selecting Candidates for Expatriation: Is It Unethical for Companies to Use Gender as a Factor?" *Employee Relations Law Journal* 37(2): 2-15.

Leonard, P. 2010. *Expatriate Identities in Postcolonial Organizations*. London: Ashgate Publications.

Linehan, M., and J. Walsh. 1999. "Senior Female International Managers: Breaking the Glass Border." *Women in Management Review* 14(7): 264-272.

McLellan, E., K.M. MacQueen, and J.L. Neidig. 2003. "Beyond the Qualitative Interview: Data Preparation and Transcription." *Field Methods* 15(1): 63–84.

Maddux, W.W., A.D. Galinsky, and C.T. Tadmor. 2010. "Be a Better Manager: Live Abroad." *Harvard Business Review* 88(9): 24.

Mäkelä, L., V. Suutari, and H. Mayerhofer. 2011. "Lives of Female Expatriates: Work-Life Balance Concerns." *Gender in Management* 26(4): 256-274.

McNulty, Y., H. De Cieri, and K. Hutchings. 2013. "Expatriate Return on Investment in Asia Pacific: An Empirical Study of Individual ROI versus Corporate ROI." *Journal of World Business* 48(2): 209-221.

Napier, N. K., and S. Taylor. 2002. "Experiences of Women Professionals Abroad: Comparisons Across Japan, China and Turkey." *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 13(5): 837-851.

Rappleye, W.C. 1996. "Utah: Unique, Powerful Elements Enrich Business Climate." *Financial World*165(14): 72-78.

Ready, D. A., L. Hill, and J. Conger. 2008. "Winning the Race for Talent in Emerging Markets." *Harvard Business Review* 86(11): 63–70.

Richardson, J. 2006. "Self-Directed Expatriation: Family Matters." *Personnel Review* 35(4): 469-486.

Schwartz, S., and T. Rubel. 2005. "Sex Differences in Value Priorities: Cross-cultural and Multimethod Studies." *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 89(6): 1010-1028.

Selmer, J. 2000. "Usage of Corporate Career Development Activities by Expatriate Managers and the Extent of Their International Adjustment." *International Journal of Commerce & Management* 10(1): 1-23.

Selmer, J., and J. Lauring. 2011. "Marital Status and Work Outcomes of Self-Initiated Expatriates." *Cross Cultural Management* 18(2): 198-213.

Selmer, J., and J. Lauring. 2012. "Reasons to Expatriate and Work Outcomes of Self-Initiated Expatriates." *Personnel Review* 41(5): 665-684.

Selmer, J. and A. Leung. 2003. "Provision and Adequacy of Corporate Support to Male Expatriate Spouses: An Exploratory Study." *Personnel Review*, 32(1): 9–21.

Shen, Y., and K. Kram. 2011. "Expatriates' Developmental Networks: Network Diversity, Base, and Support Functions." *Career Development International* 16(6): 528-552.

Shortland, S. 2011. "Networking: A Valuable Career Intervention for Women Expatriates?" *Career Development International* 16(3): 271-292.

Spradley, J.P. 1980. *Participant Observation*. Fort Worth: Harcourt Brace.

Taylor, S.J., and R. Bogdan. 1998. *Introduction to Qualitative Research Methods: A Guidebook and Resource* (3rd Ed.), New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Tharenou, P. 2008. "Disruptive Decisions to Leave Home: Gender and Family Differences in Expatriation Choices." *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, 105(2): 183-200.

Tharenou, P. 2010. "Women's Self-Initiated Expatriation as a Career Option and Its Ethical Issues." *Journal of Business Ethics* 95(1): 73-88.

Tharenou, P., and N. Caulfield. 2010. "Will I Stay Or Will I Go? Explaining Repatriation by Self-Initiated Expatriates." *Academy of Management Journal* 53(5): 1009-1028.

Thompson, M.A. 2000. *The Global Resume and CV Guide.* New York: John Wiley & Sons.

Thorn, K. 2009. "The Relative Importance of Motives for International Self-Initiated Mobility." *Career Development International* 14(5): 441-464.

Toncar, M.F., and B.V. Cudmore. 2000. "The Overseas Internship Experience." *Journal of Marketing Education* 22(1): 54-63.

Vance, C.M. 2005. "The Personal Quest for Building Global Competence: A Taxonomy of Self-Initiating Career Path Strategies for Gaining Business Experience Abroad." *Journal of World Business* 40(4): 374-385.

Vance, C.M., Y. Paik, and I. Chow. 2011. "Expatriate vs. Local Staffing of Foreign Operations." In *Going Global: Implementing International Business Operations, International Business in the 21st Century, ed.* V. Kannan, Vol 2, 47-65. Westport, CT: Praeger Publishing.

Vance, C.M., G. Sibeck, Y. McNulty, and A. Hogenauer. 2011. "Building Global Competencies Through Experiential Coursework in International Travel and Tourism." *Journal of International Education in Business* 4(1): 30-41.

Varma, A., S.M. Toh, and P. Budhwar. 2006. A New Perspective on the Female Expatriate Experience: The Role of Host Country National Categorization." *Journal of World Business* 41(2): 112-120.

Waumsley, J.A., and D.M. Houston. 2009. "Flexible Working, Professional Success, and Being Female: Are They Incompatible?" *Review of European Studies* 1(2): 39-53.

Welch, D.E. 2003. "Globalization of Staff Movements: Beyond Cultural Adjustment." *Management International Review* 43(2): 149-169.

Zeitz, G., G. Blau, and J. Fertig. 2009. "Boundaryless Careers and Institutional Resources." *International Journal of Human Resource Management* 20(2): 372-398.