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**The Expatriate Spouse**  
**A Study of Their Adjustment to Expatriate Life**

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

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in

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New Zealand.

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## **Abstract**

In today's global industrial and commercial marketplace, a workforce of expatriates is frequently cited as a competitive necessity. However, upon undertaking an international assignment, the expatriate is often faced with a raft of new challenges and opportunities. Failure of expatriates to successfully adjust to these changes sees international organisations potentially facing a number of direct and indirect costs.

Surprisingly, despite the contributory role that the expatriate spouse plays in the expatriate's adjustment process, investigation into the unique adjustment of the spouse themselves has, to date, received little empirical attention. This thesis has therefore sought to further bridge this conceptual gap and provide additional knowledge for enhancing the outcomes of international assignments by examining two key areas of association, namely the unique relationship between spouses' adjustment and (a) their perceived availability of social support, and (b) their subjective well-being. Seventy seven expatriate spouses successfully completed an online questionnaire which asked participants to think about their available social support, their adjustment to their host country, their life satisfaction, and their recent feelings and emotions. Qualitative data was also collected around what spouses found to constitute stressful and satisfying aspects of expatriate life.

The results of this study indicated that spouses' perceived availability of socio-emotional and instrumental support is important for their general adjustment outcomes, irrespective of the influence of personality and socio-demographic variables. The study also endorsed the proposition that expatriate spouse adjustment holds positive significance for affective balance,

even after controlling for the contribution of support and personality variables. Findings from the content analysis revealed the need for more research into the relevance of current organisational initiatives and their effects on adjustment outcomes, such as, foreign language training, employment assistance/career maintenance, and the processes surrounding relocation and resettlement.

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“Ask me, what is the greatest thing of this world?  
And I will reply, it is people, it is people, it is people”

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## Chapter 1: Expatriate Assignments

In their meta-analysis of expatriate experiences, Harrison, Shaffer & Bhaskar-Shrinivas (2004) defined expatriates as “employees of business organizations who are sent overseas on a temporary basis to complete a time-based task or accomplish an organizational goal” (p. 203). Generally speaking, an expatriate assignment is considered as lasting anywhere from six months to five years (De Cieri, Dowling & Taylor, 1991). However, Harrison et al. (2004) also recognise that the expatriate umbrella encompasses various other categories of expatriates, for instance, self-initiated foreign workers. Unlike company assigned expatriates, self-initiated expatriates personally make the decision to work and live overseas, and are hired on a “contractual basis and not transferred overseas by parent organizations” (Lee, 2005, p. 173). Given the poor representation of this second category of expatriates (Harrison et al., 2004), for the purposes of this assignment, an expatriate will therefore be broadly defined as an individual who has temporarily relocated to another country on the condition of guaranteed employment.

The direct and indirect costs that organisations face as a result of failed overseas assignments, for example early return and poor performance, has, over the past 50 years, led to a plethora of research being generated around expatriate assignments (Harrison et al., 2004). Despite the recent global economic downturn and drop in the expatriate population (Brookfield GRS, 2010), as the economic situation improves and the globalisation of business continues, the number of employees involved in company assigned expatriation activities will most likely rise.

For businesses wishing to feature in the competitive global marketplace, expatriate employees are increasingly seen to be an important part of an organisation's arsenal (Guzzo, 1996). In fact, Selmer (2001) explicitly refers to an expatriate workforce as a competitive necessity. However, the financial costs organisations incur as a result of investing in expatriate ventures is described by Black & Gregersen (1999) as costing an organisation two to three times more than that which it would have, had the employee remained in a comparable role in their home country. Specifically, it is estimated that costs arising from an expatriate assignment total anywhere between US\$300,000 to US\$1 million annually (Selmer, 2001). Additionally, while not to the same extent as company assigned expatriates, self-initiated expatriates also require substantial financial investment, in terms of both the time and money organisations expend on the recruitment and training of these individuals (Lee, 2005).

### **1.1 The Expatriate Spouse**

An expatriate spouse, as conceptualised in this study, refers to any individual in a marital-equivalent relationship who has accompanied an expatriate employee on their overseas assignment. According to Black and Gregersen (1991b), approximately 80% of expatriates are married, with consultancies estimating that spouses/partners accompany around 60% of expatriates (Haslberger & Brewster, 2009). In light of this, it is not surprising to note that research on expatriate adjustment over the last two decades, has highlighted the importance of the role that the expatriate spouse plays in this adjustment process (Dowling & Welch, 2004). Specifically, the adjustment of the expatriate spouse has been found to positively and significantly influence the expatriate's adjustment, and thus outcomes such as expatriate success or failure (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer & Luk, 2005; Black & Gregersen, 1991b; Black & Stephens, 1989; Chew, 2004; Shaffer & Harrison, 1998; Takeuchi, Yun & Tesluk, 2002). For instance, Tung (1982) found the inability of the spouse to adjust, to be the

most common reason reported by both United States, and West European firms, in relation to expatriate failure or poor performance. Such results are also echoed by the more recent findings of Brookfield GRS (2010), wherein responding companies indicated family adjustment to be one of the top three critical family-related expatriate issues for their company. Family concerns also featured as a key reason for assignment refusal.

Given the potential for a wide range of work and non-work related outcomes to arise from expatriate adjustment or maladjustment, there is a need to investigate, understand and subsequently manage the aforementioned facet of spousal adjustment, in order to facilitate the personnel issue of expatriate adjustment (Black & Gregersen, 1991a). Accordingly, because of the relative neglect from a research view point, it is spousal adjustment, rather than expatriate adjustment, which forms the focus of this thesis.

## **1.2 Aims of the Present Study**

The above highlights that adjusted spouses can serve as a valuable asset to an international assignment, particularly by functioning as a source of support for the expatriate, and thus facilitating the expatriate's job performance (Selmer, 2001). It is therefore important to ensure that the factors important to spouse adjustment are more clearly understood and built upon, in order to enhance the likelihood of successful expatriate adjustment.

Using an expatriate spouse population, the first, and principle aim, of this study was to assess the unique relationship between perceived available support and adjustment, by controlling for personality and specific demographic variables. Satisfaction with the socio-emotional and instrumental support available, and the frequency with which each of these types of support was used, was also explored so as to gauge the relative adequacy and importance of each type of support. However, as Adler and Gundersen (2008) recognise, "adjustment is only half of the challenge; it brings a potentially negative experience to neutral,

not to positive...it does not provide inspiration, motivation, direction, and meaning to daily life abroad” (p. 328). Accordingly, Mohr and Klein (2004) propose that a transitional step to investigating how spousal adjustment is linked to expatriate adjustment may be to ascertain how a spouse’s adjustment relates to their individual well-being during an international assignment. However, as argued by Aryee and Stone (1996), with regard to research on international adjustment, the well-being of expatriates has generally been ignored. This finding also appears to hold true for research directed at expatriate spouses.

In light of the above, a second aim of this study was to investigate how expatriate spouses’ adjustment related to their subjective well-being. This unique relationship was assessed by specifically controlling for the potential confounding effects of personality and social support. Unlike existing expatriate research, which often appears to use the terms adjustment and well-being synonymously, for the purpose of this study, adjustment and subjective well-being will therefore be explored as two distinct but conceptually linked constructs.

Open-ended questions were also utilised as a means of exploring the most satisfying and most stressful aspects associated with expatriate life. In particular, surveying those aspects which are most stressful may serve to provide insight into areas of apparent concern for spouses and, perhaps guide future directions for expatriate spouse research.

## Chapter 2: Adjustment

Despite the literature on expatriates utilising various conceptualisations of adjustment, for the purposes of this study, subjective spouse cross-cultural adjustment will be operationalised as “the degree of psychological comfort with various aspects of a host country” (Black & Gregersen, 1991b, p. 463). Since the terms acculturation, adaptation and adjustment have been used fairly inconsistently throughout the literature on expatriate experiences (Harrison et al., 2004), a review of current literature is made more complex due to this lack of conceptual differentiation.

The following dialogue, provided by Harrison et al. (2004), serves as a useful insight into responses that have been considered demonstrative of either a well adjusted or poorly adjusted expatriate. Interestingly, these abridged accounts have come from the same person, employed by the same company, but in relation to two separate assignments.

How long did it take to adjust to living in the Netherlands? About 37 seconds. Unlike other people who came on assignment – we knew where we were, I already knew enough of the language to get by, we knew quite a bit about the culture, and we had good friends there, so it was a relative easy adjustment. Also, the Netherlands is very much Western-working and that is very close to what it is like here.

- A well adjusted expatriate (Harrison et al., 2004, p. 199)

How long did it take to adjust to living in Italy? I never did. Living there, existing there, is not a problem. It's the level of frustration that you either sublimate or put up with or opt to not put up with. It's a frustrating existence because of the way the society works. Some of the most beautiful stuff in the world is there, including some of the most beautiful country. Everybody should go there for a month as a tourist – but you don't want to live there. I can assure you that if you poll my colleagues you would get the same answer.

- A poorly adjusted expatriate (Harrison et al., 2004, p. 200)

## **2.1 Facets of Adjustment**

Although this multidimensional construct is commonly conceptualised as a state of psychological comfort across three domains: adjustment to work, the general environment, and interacting with host nationals (Harrison et al., 2004), in light of the fact that work adjustment is not generally seen as central to the spouse, this study seeks only to focus on the level of spouses' general and interaction adjustment. General adjustment is defined by Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005) as “comfort associated with various nonwork factors such as general living conditions, local food, transportation, entertainment, facilities, and health care services in the host country”, with interaction adjustment referring to “comfort associated with interacting with host country nationals both inside and outside of work” (p. 257). While not adopted in this study, interestingly, Mohr and Klein (2004) also proposed adding an additional dimension to Black and Stephens (1989) two-component model of spousal adjustment, being that of role adjustment.

## **2.2 Adjustment: its Outcomes for Expatriate Assignments**

Upon undertaking an international assignment, expatriates are often faced with a raft of new challenges and opportunities which can affect their ability to successfully adjust to a number of facets of relocation; for instance, food, work, climate, culture, facilities and interaction with host country nationals (Hechanova, Beehr & Christiansen, 2003).

Spurred on by the gravity of expatriate maladjustment, numerous studies have investigated adjustment outcomes, primarily reporting associations with a variety of work-related outcomes, for example, job satisfaction and performance, withdrawal cognitions (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Harrison et al., 2004), and premature returns (Black & Gregersen, 1999). Notwithstanding the discrepancy in the operationalisation of the term “expatriate failure”, for instance as early return or poor performance, a review of the literature

suggests that expatriate failure rates have been estimated at lying anywhere between 25% to 70% (Grainger & Nankervis, 2001). More recently Chew (2004), conducted structured interviews with human resource managers, or their representatives, from 15 Western Australian companies. Of the participating companies, 67% had up to 5% of their expatriates return prematurely from their assignments, 6% reported a 10% premature return rate, and 13% reported a 25% premature return rate.

While there are various, individual, organisational and contextual factors which may be implicated with cross-cultural adjustment/maladjustment (see Figure 1), spousal adjustment constitutes a significant predictor of the expatriate's adjustment (see Table 1), and thus subsequent assignment outcomes.

Table 1

*Reported Significant Associations Between Spouse Adjustment and Dimensions of Expatriate Adjustment*

Study	Expatriate spouse	Expatriate	Relationship
Black & Stephens (1989): second order partial correlational analysis of spouse and expatriate adjustment (controlling for time since arrival and either general or interaction adjustment)	General adjustment	General adjustment	$rp = 0.69^{***}$
	General adjustment	Interaction adjustment	$rp = 0.21^{**}$
	General adjustment	Work adjustment	$rp = 0.33^{**}$
	Interaction adjustment	Interaction adjustment	$rp = 0.62$
Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005): meta-analytic estimate of the spouse adjustment–expatriate adjustment connection	Spouse adjustment	General adjustment	$est. p = 0.60^{**}$
	Spouse adjustment	Interaction adjustment	$est. p = 0.43^{**}$
	Spouse adjustment	Work adjustment	$est. p = 0.26^{**}$
Black & Gregersen (1991a): results of a multiple regression analysis	General adjustment	General adjustment	$\beta = 0.56^{***}$
	Interaction adjustment	Interaction adjustment	$\beta = 0.29^{***}$
Shaffer et al. (1999): spouse adjustment as a predictor of the dimensions of expatriate adjustment	Spouse adjustment	General adjustment	$\beta = 0.34^{**}$
	Spouse adjustment	Interaction adjustment	$\beta = 0.13^{**}$
Nicholson & Imaizumi (1993): spouse adjustment as a predictor of the dimensions of expatriate adjustment	Spouse adjustment	General adjustment	$\beta = 0.54^{***}$
	Spouse adjustment	Interaction adjustment	$\beta = 0.29^{**}$
	Spouse adjustment	Work adjustment	$\beta = 0.18^*$

Note.  $rp$  = partial correlation;  $est. p$  = estimated  $p$  (the weighted mean of correlations individually corrected for unreliability);  $\beta$  = standardised regression coefficients.

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ . \*\*\*  $p < .001$ .

### Antecedents

#### Pre-Departure: Antecedents

- Level of motivation for making the adjustment<sup>[8]</sup>/pre-move attitude<sup>[28]</sup>/willingness to communicate<sup>[36]</sup>
- Pre-departure preparation and training: quantity and quality<sup>[1][8][37]</sup>
- Pre-departure organisational support (logistic and social)<sup>[1]</sup>
- Host country language ability<sup>[6][18][20][26]</sup>
- Previous and similar international/cross-cultural experience<sup>[1][6][26]</sup>
- Realistic expectations (a function of training and previous international experience)<sup>[12][25]</sup>
- Psychological contract<sup>[14]</sup>
- Type of expatriate: organisational or self-initiated<sup>[18][19]</sup>
- Organisational selection mechanisms<sup>[25]</sup>

#### Post Arrival: Individual and Non-Work Factors

- Expatriate characteristics: personality (Big Five traits<sup>[1][4][11][18][30]</sup>, self-efficacy<sup>[6][15][25]</sup>, self-oriented dimension/others-oriented dimension/perceptual dimension/cultural-toughness dimension<sup>[3]</sup>); relational/interpersonal skills<sup>[1][6][15][25]</sup>; acculturation attitudes<sup>[1]</sup>; cultural flexibility<sup>[1]</sup>/cultural acceptance<sup>[13]</sup>; coping strategies<sup>[1][21]</sup>
- Spouse adjustment e.g. interaction and general adjustment<sup>[1][2][6][8][15][17][22][23][25][26][28][29]</sup>, spouse satisfaction<sup>[24]</sup>, family adjustment<sup>[1][9][10][15]</sup>
- Time on assignment<sup>[8]</sup>; culture novelty<sup>[7][8][15][25][26]</sup>; social support<sup>[7][25][31][33]</sup>; socialisation/interaction with host country nationals<sup>[1][4][15]</sup>

#### Post Arrival: Organisational Factors

- Ongoing organisational support e.g. communication and assistance (at home and abroad)<sup>[1][7][16][17][25][26]</sup>
- Job factors: role clarity/discretion/conflict/ambiguity/novelty<sup>[7][8][15][25][26][43]</sup>
- Psychological contract<sup>[14]</sup>

### Potential Positive Outcomes Arising From Adjustment

#### Organisational Level

- Compete at a global level<sup>[1]</sup>
- Opportunity for organisation to develop social & intellectual capital<sup>[14]</sup>
- Market penetration/share; knowledge transfer from host country; subsidiary performance<sup>[35]</sup>
- Organisational commitment arising from perceived organisational support<sup>[1]</sup>
- Effective performance e.g. task based and relationship based<sup>[1][6][16][34]</sup>

#### Individual Level

- Career capital<sup>[14]</sup>; career advancement/development<sup>[1]</sup>, personal development<sup>[27]</sup>
- Job satisfaction<sup>[1][15][28]</sup>
- Increased opportunities, challenges and prestige<sup>[5]</sup>
- Greater access to personal resources e.g. time, effort, emotional investment<sup>[5]</sup>; increased ability to function effectively in numerous domains e.g. work and social life<sup>[1][6]</sup>
- Satisfaction and self worth<sup>[6]</sup>
- Affect: no preponderance of negative emotions<sup>[32]</sup>

### Potential Negative Outcomes Arising From Maladjustment

#### Organisational Level

- Financial costs and non-financial costs: failed assignments: premature return, turnover<sup>[41]</sup>; leaving the company within a year of repatriation<sup>[42]</sup>; costs associated with productivity, client relations, poor performance and operations efficiency<sup>[3]</sup>; damaged company reputation and brand<sup>[8][38]</sup>; disrupted relationships with the host country<sup>[4]</sup>; lost business opportunities, market, or competitive share<sup>[8][38]</sup>; weakened ability to attract top candidates to overseas assignments<sup>[8]</sup>

#### Individual Level

- Lowered self-esteem and self confidence in one's ability<sup>[3]</sup>
- Loss of prestige among co-workers<sup>[3]</sup>/damaged careers<sup>[40]</sup>
- Demand-resource incompatibility<sup>[5]</sup>
- Cognitive and attitudinal elements: psychological withdrawal cognitions<sup>[24]</sup>; early return and poor performance<sup>[9][16]</sup>; work and nonwork satisfaction<sup>[2][24]</sup>
- Crossover effects (reciprocal relationship between expatriate adjustment and spouses adjustment)<sup>[2]</sup>; spill-over effects<sup>[2][39]</sup>

Figure 1. Antecedents/determinants of expatriate adjustment, and the ensuing positive and negative outcomes of expatriate adjustment/maladjustment.

*Figure 1. (continued)*

([1] Aycan, 1997; [2] Takeuchi, Yun & Tesluk, 2002; [3] Mendenhall & Oddou, 1985; [4] Caligiuri, 2000; [5] Shaffer, Harrison, Gilley & Luk, 2001; [6] Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; [7] Black, 1990; [8] Black & Gregersen, 1991a; [9] Black, 1988; [10] Caligiuri, Hyland, Bross & Joshi, 1998; [11] Huang, Chi & Lawler, 2005; [12] Caligiuri, Phillips, Lazarova, Tarique & Biirgi, 2001; [13] Friedman, Dyke & Murphy, 2009; [14] Haslberger & Brewster, 2009; [15] Hechanova et al., 2003; [16] Kraimer, Wayne & Jaworski, 2001; [17] Caligiuri, Joshi & Lazarova, 1999; [18] Peltokorpi, 2008; [19] Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009; [20] Puck, Kittler & Wright, 2008; [21] Selmer & Leung, 2007; [22] Selmer, Ebrahimi & Mingtao, 2000; [23] Black & Stephens, 1989; [24] Shaffer & Harrison, 1998; [25] Black, Mendenhall & Oddou, 1991; [26] Shaffer, Harrison & Gilley, 1999; [27] Stahl, Miller & Tung, 2002; [28] Stroh, Dennis & Cramer, 1994; [29] Tung, 1982; [30] Ward, Leong & Low, 2004; [31] Fontaine, 1986; [32] Haslberger, 2008; [33] Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002; [34] Parker & McEvoy, 1993; [35] Takeuchi, 2010; [36] Takeuchi, Yun & Russell, 2002; [37] Waxin & Panaccio, 2005; [38] Yavas, 2001; [39] Harvey, 1985; [40] Tung, 1981; [41] Black & Gregersen, 1999; [42] Black, 1992; [43] Nicholson & Imaizumi, 1993.)

Evidently, the apparent powerful influence that the spouse and the expatriate exert upon one another requires careful consideration when attempting to understand and manage expatriate cross-cultural adjustment. The likelihood of cross-over effects in particular is magnified during an expatriate assignment, due to a probable reduction in available psychosocial and physical support systems, resulting in a greater frequency and degree of interaction between partners, and consequently the influence they exert upon one another (Takeuchi, Yun & Tesluk, 2002, p. 658). Understanding, acknowledging, and managing the unique role of the expatriate spouse, will no doubt assist organisations in their resolve to enhance expatriate assignment success, and thus compete more effectively in an ever competitive and demanding global marketplace.

### **2.3 Spousal Adjustment**

In light of the above, it is surprising that the expatriate spouse adjustment process has received comparatively little attention (Andreason, 2008). This is particularly interesting given that literature surrounding the expatriate spouse seems to converge on the idea that, in comparison to the expatriate, the spouse is faced with a greater number of adjustment challenges and overall losses as a result of expatriation (Ammons, Nelson & Wodarski, 1982; Andreason, 2008; Harvey, 1985). In particular, while the expatriate and accompanying dependents are afforded familiar structure and stability through the continuation of work and school, the spouse frequently incurs a change to everyday aspects of their life, be it work,

friends, or social activities (Adler & Gundersen, 2008). Unfortunately, to date, continued investigation into the unique adjustment of the spouse has however been minimal, with only a few researchers having recently investigated the adjustment process solely from the spouses' point of view (see, for example, Ali, Van der Zee & Sanders, 2003; Mohr & Klein, 2004; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001).

Following the identification of potentially important sources of adjustment, and integrating these findings within a social identity theory framework, Shaffer and Harrison (2001) developed and tested a model of spouse adjustment to international assignments. Specifically, Shaffer and Harrison (2001) posit that the formation of one's overall identity stems from three sources: from within oneself, from interactions with others and from interactions with one's environment. Based on the need to maintain congruence between their identity standard and environmental inputs, the authors suggest that expatriate spouses undergo some form of identity reformation to facilitate their adjustment. Their model was tested by analysing data obtained from questionnaires which were completed by 252 spouses and 452 expatriates, resulting in a matched data set of 221 couples, who were currently overseas with American multinational corporations. The authors found that aside from their accompanying dependents and their own spouse, certain remnants of a spouse's previous identity had no beneficial impact on their subsequent adjustment; rather, it is those aspects which help redefine their identity which are important. Given that the above dimension of adjustment is of a more personal nature, Mohr and Klein's (2004) suggestion to add the dimension of 'role adjustment' to the spouse adjustment construct seems warranted. Additionally, drawing on expatriate family adjustment, and intercultural adjustment models, Ali et al. (2003) propose that spouse adjustment be understood through a three part model comprising personality dimensions, family characteristics and expatriate work life.

A summary of the assorted variables proposed to influence spousal cross-cultural adjustment are provided in Figure 2.

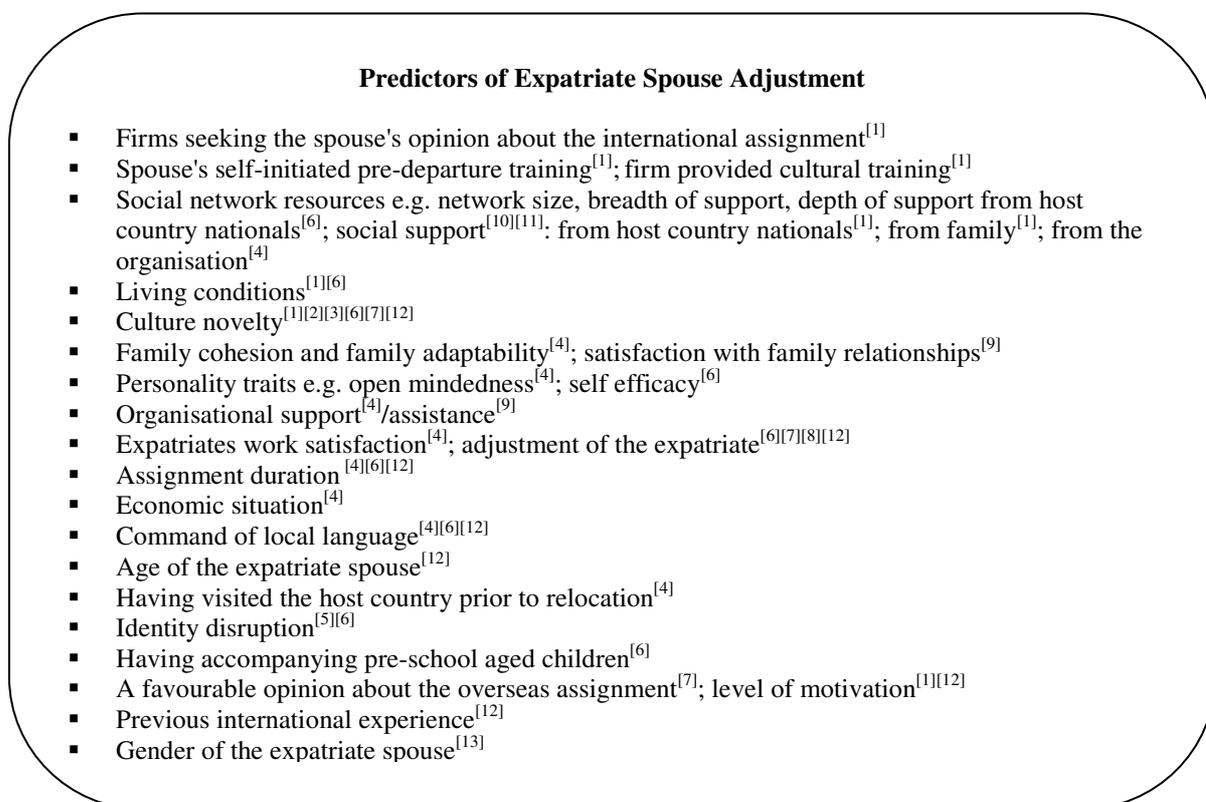


Figure 2. An overview of the predictors of spousal cross-cultural adjustment.

([1] Black & Gregersen, 1991b; [2] Black, 1990; [3] Fontaine, 1986; [4] Ali et al., 2003; [5] Andreason, 2008; [6] Shaffer & Harrison, 2001; [7] Black & Stephens, 1989; [8] Takeuchi, Yun & Tesluk, 2002; [9] De Cieri et al., 1991; [10] Copeland & Norell, 2002; [11] Herleman, Britt & Hashima, 2008; [12] Mohr & Klein, 2004; [13] Punnett, Crocker & Stevens, 1992.)

## 2.4 Subjective Well-Being

Regarded as an index of life quality (Keyes, Shmotkin & Ryff, 2002), and comprising an area of positive psychology, the subjective well-being construct is a multidimensional one, consisting of a cognitive component (life satisfaction judgements) and an affective component (hedonic balance), both of which are stated as being moderately, if not occasionally highly, correlated with one another (Larsen & Eid, 2008). Specifically, Pavot (2008) refers to life satisfaction judgements as “broad, cognitively based evaluations of one’s life as a whole”, and affective responses as “ongoing or ‘online’ readouts of subjective experience” (p. 125).

Accordingly, Keyes et al. (2002) define subjective well-being as an “evaluation of life in terms of satisfaction and balance between positive and negative affect” (p. 1007).

A review of the structural relations among the cognitive components of subjective well-being indicates that studies have generally lent their support to bottom-up, rather than top-down theories (Schimmack, 2008). In accordance with a bottom-up view, satisfaction in life domains is considered the basis for life satisfaction judgements. However, a top-down approach reverses this direction of causality, arguing that an evaluation of life domains is based on life satisfaction judgements (Diener & Lucas, 1999). It is therefore maintained that a combination of both top-down and bottom-up processes are important for a comprehensive theory of cognitive well-being, thus recognising the importance of both environmental and personality factors (Ryff, 2008; Schimmack, 2008).

With regards to the affective components of subjective well-being, positive affect and negative affect are considered to be structurally independent (Bradburn, 1969, as cited in Schimmack, 2008), for example, the presence of high positive affect does not necessarily equate to low negative affect, thus underlining the unique contribution of both positive and negative affect to the subjective well-being construct (Schimmack, 2008). It is therefore of great importance to recognise that both positive and negative affect constitute distinct aspects of well-being, and are not merely “opposite ends of a bipolar continuum” (Chamberlain, 1988, p. 586). Accordingly, it is in fact the balance between positive and negative affect, that is, affective balance, which gives rise to happiness (Keyes et al., 2002).

While it has previously been suggested that major life events or situations do not tend to affect the stability of subjective well-being, for example the hedonic treadmill model (Brickman & Campbell, 1971, as cited in Larsen & Prizmic, 2008), research has also begun to argue for greater consideration of the impact, minimal or not, of situations on subjective well-

being. Accordingly, among Diener's (1996) explanations regarding predictors of subjective well-being, it is stated that the influence of situations remains important given that not all individuals adapt to all conditions. Additionally, Lucas (2008), postulated that over extended periods of time the percentage of stable variance in well-being measures is fairly minimal (around 30%), most likely due to the influence of life events. This recognises that some individuals may incur significant and long-term changes to their subjective well-being (Diener, 2008).

In light of the numerous factors that may influence subjective well-being, Diener (1984) argues that it would be naive to assume that subjective well-being is determined by one or two key variables. As Larsen and Eid surmise (2008), while certain characteristics or conditions, for instance positive social relationships and personality factors, are important and/or correlated with subjective well-being, they constitute necessary but not sufficient contributors to subjective well-being. It is therefore believed that a broader approach to the importance of influences may be required, recognising the potential weight of both long-term personality factors and shorter-term situational factors when considering the stability of subjective well-being (Diener, 1984; Diener, 1996). Accordingly, when evaluating the determinants of subjective well-being, Larsen & Eid (2008) acknowledge Diener's call for a "recipe" for subjective well-being, rather than a single ingredient, because "there is no single key ingredient that, by itself, produces the outcome; instead one needs to have multiple ingredients put together in the right way" (p. 8).

## **2.5 Importance of Subjective Well-Being**

Happiness is described by Larsen and Eid (2008) as not only "a goal of life but also a means for reaching other goals and for facilitating desirable behaviors and outcomes....happy people are more social, altruistic, active, like themselves and others more, have strong bodies and immune

systems, and have better conflict resolution skills” (p. 8). In essence, subjective well-being is used as a means of evaluating an individual’s and/or a society’s quality of life (Diener, Oishi & Lucas, 2003), functioning as both a predictor and by product for the outcomes in these domains (King, 2008). Additionally, given that subjective well-being may be considered a positive emotional state, if such positive emotions are increased it might, as Fredrickson’s (1998) Broaden-and-Build model suggests, facilitate the broadening of an individual’s cognitive tendencies and the range of potential behaviours they engage in, thus serving to build their intellectual, physical, psychological and social resources. Lyubomirsky, King and Diener (2005) further emphasise the importance of happiness for successful outcomes by suggesting that happiness may not only correlate with, but also cause successful life outcomes.

As the above highlights, the influence of shorter-term situational factors, such as life events, hold relevance for an individual’s subjective well-being. Given the significance of subjective well-being to an individual, it would seem important to investigate how a spouse’s adjustment relates to their individual well-being.

*Hypothesis 1:* Spouses’ general and interaction adjustment will be positively related to their subjective well-being.

Evidently, there are a number of variables which either facilitate or hinder the adjustment process, with an individual’s available resources and personal characteristics influencing the extent to which the challenges arising from adjustment are overcome (Haslberger, 2008). Accordingly, the following two chapters will cover two predictors of spouse adjustment, namely, social support (Chapter 3) and individual differences (Chapter 4).

## Chapter 3: Social Support

“No one is rich enough to do without a neighbour”

-Traditional Danish Proverb-

Provided by social networks, social support is referred to as the perception of the value of available social interactions that provide “critical” provisions such as love, esteem, value and social affiliation (Barrera, 1986; Cobb, 1976; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Additionally, according to Albrecht & Adelman (1987), social support denotes the “verbal and nonverbal communication between recipients and providers that reduces uncertainty about the situation, the self, the other, or the relationship, and functions to enhance a perception of personal control in one’s life experience” (p. 9). While there remains an absence of a commonly agreed upon definition of social support, resulting in varying operationalisations of the concept and its measurement (Hupcey, 1998), the consensus of opinion appears to congregate around the concept of positive interactions. The complexity and depth of the field of social support is further captured in Table 2, which provides an outline of the factors that may influence the effects of social support.

Table 2

*A Summary of the Factors Influencing the Effects of Social Support (source: Shumaker & Brownell, 1984, p. 25)*

Influencing factors	Outcome
Person-environment fit	The effectiveness of support can vary depending on the “fit” between recipients’ needs, and resources provided.
Perceptions of the exchange	The similarity between recipients’ and providers’ perceptions of an exchange can influence the effects of support.
Resources exchanged	The effects of support will be influenced by the specific resources provided, and the functions they subsequently serve.
Short versus long-term effects	Social support effects can change as a function of time: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ effects may alter from positive to negative, and from negative to positive</li> <li>▪ effects may weaken</li> <li>▪ effects may strengthen.</li> </ul>

The following sections will discuss the role of social support in relation to subjective well-being, cross-cultural adjustment, and expatriate assignments. The closing sections will review the nature, types, and measurement of social support.

### **3.1 Social Support and Subjective Well-Being**

Throughout the literature, there is a wide-ranging consensus that social support is positively related to subjective well-being, with some even postulating that it contributes to the improvement and long term subjective experience of wellbeing (Diener & Oishi, 2005). Specifically, social support is described by Cohen et al. (2000, as cited in Gallagher & Vella-Brodrick, 2008), as enhancing well-being “by influencing emotions, cognitions and behaviours in a way that promotes positive affect” (p. 1552). It has also been proposed that social support may perhaps not only benefit subjective well-being, rather, it may also be essential for it (Diener & Oishi, 2005).

Knowledge surrounding the nature of the relationship between social support and well-being is further expanded upon by the work of Gallagher and Vella-Brodrick (2008) who examined the predictive value of social support on subjective well-being, beyond that variance already accounted for by personality and socio-demographic variables. While exploratory hierarchical multiple regression analyses found social support to add unique predictive value in explaining negative affect and satisfaction with life, Gallagher and Vella-Brodrick (2008) cautioned that social support may not always be necessary for subjective well-being. Nevertheless, the importance of social support as a predictor of subjective well-being was felt more strongly in Lu’s (1999) longitudinal analysis of the relationship of environmental factors (life events and social support), and personal factors to happiness, wherein it was found that of these variables, only social support was significantly related to overall happiness. Lu (1999) concluded that “social support not only enhances an individual’s absolute level of happiness but also contributes to a positive change in the level of happiness”

(p. 88). Social support is subsequently described by Lu (1999), as contributing to the versatility in subjective well-being.

*Hypothesis 2:* Perceived social support will be positively related to spouses' subjective well-being.

### **3.2 Social Support in Cross-Cultural Adjustment**

Evidently, social support is a multifaceted concept, and as such is understood from within a number of theoretical perspectives, for instance, the social constructionist perspective and the relationship perspective. However, given the nature of this research, the sole focus will be on social support from the perspective of cross-cultural adjustment.

When embarking upon life in a new culture, one's ability to form cognitive schemas and accurate, functional, attributions can prove to be fairly complicated (Adelman, 1988). Social support can provide individuals with assistance, information, and feedback for reducing uncertainty about difficult experiences, and the uncertainty they feel about themselves in relation to others (Adelman, 1988; Albrecht & Adelman, 1984).

Having sufficient information for understanding a situation or for effectively evaluating alternatives in decision making moves one from a position of dependency on others to a point of independent resourcefulness and enhanced self-esteem. (Albrecht & Adelman, 1987, p. 26)

Within this perspective, social support is therefore conceptualised in terms of behaviours that act to heighten a recipient's perceived mastery and sense of control (Adelman, 1988; Albrecht & Adelman, 1984). Furthermore, according to Albrecht & Adelman (1984), with regards to the communication aspect of social support, supportive communication from both strong and weak social ties can function to:

- reduce uncertainty;

- provide companionship, resource assistance and information;
- assist mental and physical recovery;
- meet a recipient's needs for venting feelings;
- express messages that provide acceptance or reassurance;
- improve recipients' interpersonal communication skills for seeking aid.

Relocating to another country, and entering a new culture, can cause disruption to an individual's home country support systems, evoking the need for the formation of new supportive relationships (Adelman, 1988). While support may be disseminated from a wide range of providers, support from similar others is suggested as being of great importance. In essence, this source of support can provide individuals with situation specific suggestions and a reassurance that one is not alone, in effect, offering a source of social comparison and a pathway through which one can move beyond feelings of redundancy and boredom (Adelman, 1988; Copeland & Norell, 2002). In relation to cross-cultural transitions, Adelman (1988) states that a "social support perspective on cross-cultural adjustment embeds the uncertainty of this transition within the social landscape of human assistance" (p. 199). Moreover, Adelman (1988) argues that an interactional framework such as this is equipped to consider (a) various units of analysis, (b) temporal and situational needs, and (c) various phases of the transition period. Viewing cross-cultural adjustment from within a social support perspective is also said by Adelman (1988) to increase the psychological treatment of this concept because of its links to social cognition theory.

### **3.2.1 Social support and expatriation.**

A number of studies have investigated the role of social support, in relation to overseas assignments, and found it to significantly facilitate adjustment (Ataca & Berry, 2002; Black &

Gregersen, 1991b; De Cieri et al., 1991; Fontaine, 1986; Johnson, Kristof-Brown, Van Vianen, De Pater & Klein, 2003; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). Exploring the role of social support in relation to expatriation is important; firstly, because of the disruption relocating causes to existing social support networks and thus one's "fund of sociability", and secondly, due to the ensuing challenges this poses for expatriates and their spouses (Copeland & Norell, 2002). In essence, Copeland & Norell (2002) suggest that disruption to, and the development of new, social support networks can be particularly stressful for expatriate spouses due to the additional challenges expatriate life presents, for example competing family responsibilities, social isolation, changes in the spouse's social and/or work status, and socio-political constraints. Interestingly, Caligiuri and Lazarova's (2002) model of female expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment adopts a relationship perspective for understanding how social support may act as a buffer against stress, and thus as an antecedent to expatriate adjustment, in doing so defining social support as a facet which helps to mobilise "psychological resources and ...provide feelings of reinforcement, recognition and affirmation" (p. 762).

A number of sources of support and types of support have also been investigated in relation to spouse adjustment. Sources of support have generally focused on organisational support, familial support and host country national support (Ali et al., 2003; Black & Gregersen, 1991b; Copeland & Norell, 2002; De Cieri et al., 1991; Herleman et al., 2008), thus categorising them into two general domains: work and non-work sources (Black, 1990). With regards to types of support, broadly speaking, the areas of functional social support that have been commonly researched in relation to expatriates have generally tended toward the emotional and instrumental support functions (Ataca & Berry, 2002). While Weiss (1975, as cited in Copeland & Norell, 2002) maintains that the provisions afforded by social support; namely, the disclosure of private feelings, impersonal discussion, practical aid, positive feedback, advice, and social participation, are critical for personal adjustment, plenty of one

type of function will not necessarily compensate for shortfalls in another type. Rather, it is in fact the aggregate of functions which is important. Furthermore, Ong & Ward (2005) argue that the type of support provided tends to vary as a function of the social tie:

- Overseas ties: serve more personal needs such as the provision of spiritual, emotional, moral, and psychological support.
- Local ties: aid with the management of day-to-day events, and the provision of practical, physical assistance (p. 639).

According to Copeland & Norell's (2002) study on 194 women who had moved temporarily to a new country, largely because of their husband/partners' jobs, spouses with more addressed functions of social support had higher levels of adjustment, as did spouses with more local rather than distant sources of support. All three dimensions of support; availability, actual use, and need for support, were also all related to adjustment in at least some support domains; for instance, women who reported having needed more people with whom to discuss private feelings with, and receive positive feedback from, had poorer adjustment. Copeland and Norell (2002) further propose that as a result of disruption to the expatriates' social support providers, for instance former colleagues, the primary person to which the expatriate turned to for discussions about work became their accompanying spouse. They go on to suggest that this may intensify the expatriate spouse's feelings of lack of social support, due to a perceived disparity in the "recipient-provider roles of social support" (Copeland & Norell, 2001, p. 258). However, as De Cieri et al. (1991) discuss, the opportunities for the expatriate spouse to engage in social relationships with host country nationals is far more limited than it is for the expatriate worker. This is proposed as arising due to the spouse facing difficulties in obtaining permission to work, or having the opportunity to be involved with some other form of social organisation. This aligns with the finding that participants reported

having more social support prior to expatriation than they did either during or after their relocation (De Cieri et al., 1991). In light of their research, De Cieri et al. (1991) argue that, given social supports essential role to the success of international assignments, and because the costs associated with assignment failure outweigh those in relation to support assistance, companies must seriously consider providing adequate support for not only the expatriate but also for the expatriates' accompanying family members. Given that this research employed a retrospective analysis, it is however important to note that participants may have had difficulty recalling relevant information, with their reports potentially suffering from retrieval effects.

According to Ali et al.'s (2003) study of intercultural adjustment among expatriate spouses (N= 247), while participants did not report being overly satisfied with the support they received from their partners' companies, the overall received support; for instance, intercultural training and information sources, contributed not only to both the psychological and sociocultural adjustment of expatriate spouses, but also to the amount of intercultural interaction they engaged in. While those expatriate spouses in the higher income groups displayed lower intercultural interaction, that is, they were more likely to turn to other expatriates for contact and support rather than host country nationals, interestingly, Copeland (2004) found that adjustment was not a function of whether a woman's social support network was comprised primarily of either their own nationality or the host nationality.

While Shaffer and Harrison's (2001) model of spouse adjustment touched on the adequacy and availability of social support, rather than focusing exclusively on social support functions, they also explored objective features of participants' supportive interactions i.e. network size. In relation to interpersonal-social bases of identity, the results of this study indicated that, except for the depth of support from non-host-country nationals and extended

family support, all other social support network resources (network size, breadth of support and depth of support from host country nationals), were important to at least one dimension of spouse adjustment, further highlighting the key role social support plays in international relocation.

The expatriate literature is replete with recommendations for organisations to employ spouse support policies, or to include spouses in company run support activities as a means of increasing spouse adjustment, initiatives which are both timely and costly to implement (Punnett, 1997). However, while it is frequently suggested that support is an important determinant for expatriate adjustment, and although a small number of studies have supported such associations with an expatriate spouse population, the extent of this research is comparatively minimal. The empirical evidence for the influence of social support on expatriate spouses is therefore fairly meagre (Herleman, Britt & Hashima, 2008).

Nonetheless, in essence, it is argued that if an organisation can increase the likelihood of successful spouse adjustment, for example through understanding the problems encountered by expatriate spouses and providing appropriate support, it is likely to increase the associated probability of expatriate adjustment and resulting positive assignment outcomes. However, the apparent reported lack of overseas support for expatriate spouses (McNulty, 2011), suggests that this advice may not have been widely heeded. Specifically, Cartus's (2010) Global Mobility Policy and Practices Survey of 196 Human Resources practitioners reported a 6% decrease in spouse/family assistance between the years 2007 and 2010. This finding is especially interesting given that the percentage of married assignees accompanied by their spouse or partner also decreased from 53% in 2007 to 38% in 2010 (Cartus, 2010). While Cartus (2010) acknowledges that this reverse trend may reflect the additional expenses faced by organisations when allowing spouse accompaniment, it is particularly surprising when

considered alongside Selmer et al.'s (2000) study of Chinese mainland business expatriates in Hong Kong, wherein expatriates that were accompanied by their spouses while on assignment displayed greater levels of adjustment than those who were unaccompanied. This only further supports the need to investigate the value of human assistance from the perspective of the expatriate spouse.

*Hypothesis 3:* Perceived social support will relate positively to both spouses' general and interaction adjustment.

### **3.3 The Nature of Social Support: Perceived vs. Received Social Support**

In brief, social support concepts have been separated into three distinct categories: perceived social support, enacted social support, and social embeddedness (Barrera, 1981). However, it is important to note that while the above represent distinct concepts of social support, they do share certain interrelationships (Barrera, 1986). While a plethora of literature exists regarding the definition of these concepts, the following attempts, in part, to capture the general understanding surrounding these notions:

- Perceived social support: “the perception that support would be available if needed” (Lett et al., 2005, p. 870). Perceived support, also referred to as functional support, is concerned with an individual's perception regarding the availability of, and their satisfaction with, social support (Barrera, 1986).
- Received social support: “actions that others perform when they render assistance to a focal person” (Barrera, 1986, p. 417). Received social support, which may also be referred to as structural support, addresses the size, type, density and frequency of contact with network members. By focusing on the structure of relationships, it is proposed that this may neglect the nature, that is, the supportiveness, of relationships (Lett et al., 2005).

- Social embeddedness: “connections that individuals have to significant others in their social environments” (Barrera, 1986, p. 414). Generally measured by assessing the structure of social networks or by searching for indicators of social ties, such as contact with friends or marital status (Barrera, 1986). However, Wellman (1981) cautions that the presence of social ties does not necessarily equate into the provision of support from the identified network members.

Historically, traditional models of social support conceptualised perceived support as revealing the actual enacted supportive behaviours of others; for instance, individuals perceiving high levels of support had better mental health as they either received more, or better, enacted support (Lakey & Drew, 1997). However, the relationships between enacted and perceived social support, and their respective mechanisms, were poorly understood. In fact, enacted support was only said to account for around 10% of the variance in perceived support (Lakey & Drew, 1997). As such, Lakey and Drew (1997), argue that perceived support is most likely to be affected by a number of factors. An analysis of how social support functions therefore requires a clear understanding of how social support has been operationalised, for instance, as social embeddedness, enacted support, or perceived support. Pierce, Lakey, Sarason, Sarason and Joseph (1997) also noted that as research into these measures increased it was found that those measures oriented toward respondents’ perceived support were more often aligned with outcome variables than were those geared toward assessing received support. Because perception of support is deemed important, the function and quality, rather than the structure and quantity, of one’s support is emphasised in this study.

### 3.4 Types of Social Support

In relation to the notion of social interactions, such exchanges are said to provide individuals with different types of functions of social support. These different functions are classified into three main categories: emotional, informational, and tangible support. While they are conceptually different, according to Cohen & Wills (1985) they are not usually so independent when considered together in a naturalistic setting. Nonetheless, these three types of support have various and distinct mechanisms for influencing expatriate cross-cultural adjustment, and can be provided by any one of the social relationships one has, for instance from work and/or non-work sources (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002).

- Emotional support: emotional connections which provide feelings of reassurance, affiliation, and companionship (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002). The following is provided by Caligiuri and Lazarova (2002) as an example of emotional support within a cross-cultural context: “a sympathetic colleague who listens to a new female expatriate vent her feelings, uncertainties and problems. This interaction would provide some psychological comfort and can also compel the female expatriate to articulate clearly her most critical concerns – and, once such concerns are identified, she can begin developing solutions” (p. 768).
- Tangible support/instrumental support: providing direct assistance and/or services (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002). The following is provided as an example of instrumental support within a cross-cultural context (Caligiuri and Lazarova, 2002): “if a neighbourhood grocer agrees to deliver groceries to a female expatriate’s home because she cannot get to the store before it closes, then the grocer is providing instrumental support (i.e. her need for groceries after the store closes). Emotionally, the fact that the grocer would be willing to do this for her makes her feel more connected to the broader

host-national community” (p. 769). Instrumental support is therefore also described as facilitating the development of deeper levels of support (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002).

- Informational support: providing information, clarifying situations, and/or giving feedback about the appropriateness of one’s behaviour (Caligiuri & Lazarova, 2002).

Within an expatriate assignment, Caligiuri and Lazarova (2002) state that tangible support “helps clarify the situation and provides feedback regarding appropriate behaviours and, in turn, helps the expatriates develop sensitivity towards the cultural norms by creating an understanding and appreciation for the host culture” (p. 768).

### **3.5 Measuring Social Support**

As the above highlights, there are many differing perspectives surrounding social support, which clearly influences its resultant operationalisation. However, Lett et al. (2005) surmise that although integration of the various theories remains sparse, there is growing agreement as to the structure of social support. In particular, Hupcey (1998) argues that in general, social support research tends to centre around the most simple models of social support: “that of one or more providers giving ‘helpful’ support to a recipient” (p. 1238). With regards to the relative contributions that support makes to adjustment, it is thus the subjective side of social support, that is, perceived, rather than received, social support, which has been found to be most closely and consistently related to adjustment (Sarason & Sarason, 1995). This is most likely linked to the fact that the actual perception of support would seem to have an effect, independent of its actuality (Vaux, 1988). As such, when measuring perceived support, instruments generally address the perceived adequacy and availability, and thus function of social support, rather than the objective features of supportive interactions such as their structure and quantity (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Sarason & Sarason, 1995). As Cohen and Wills (1985) reasoned, focusing on the number of supportive ties does not necessarily provide an

index of support availability. Evidently, the concept of social support and its measurement remains fairly complex.

## Chapter 4: Individual Differences

### 4.1 Personality: an Overview

According to Weiten and Lloyd (1994), personality is “an individual’s unique constellation of consistent behavioral traits” (p. 36), used to explain:

- the stability in a person’s behaviour over time and across situations (consistency);
- the behavioural differences among people in reaction to the same situation (distinctiveness) (p. 36).

Adopting the parsimonious attitude of science meant that personality psychology sought a taxonomy which would assist with the collation and review of findings by permitting researchers to study a small number of fundamental traits, rather than the plethora of all personality traits (John, Naumann, & Soto, 2008; Weiten & Lloyd, 1994). While there is contention regarding the best representation of the basic dimensions of personality, and hence the associated theoretical interpretations (see, for example, Eysenck, 1992); for instance, Eysenck’s 3-factor model, Goldberg’s trait-descriptive adjectives, and Costa and McCrae’s NEO-PI-R, the factor-analytic study of traits has proved increasingly popular (Weiten & Lloyd, 1994).

Drawing from earlier work by pioneering personality theorists, a higher-order factor structure of personality evolved, otherwise known as the Five Factor Model of personality (John et al., 2008). This five factor model, commonly referred to as the “Big Five”, was not assumed to embody the quintessence of personality difference, rather, these broad overarching dimensions were designed to represent and abridge the plethora of all personality traits (John et al., 2008). While various conceptualisations of the five factor model exist, such

widely recognised models are more or less comparable in factor-analytical alignments (Barrick & Mount, 1991), yet differ at the level of nomenclature and theoretical basis (Guenole & Chernyshenko, 2005). Nevertheless, the general Big Five structure has afforded personality trait research with a widely understood and integrated framework (John et al., 2008). While adding to the existing support for the validity of the Big Five, research has also shown this model to display a high level of cross-cultural consistency, demonstrated for instance by the work of McCrae, Terracciano and members of the Personality Profiles of Cultures Project (2005). This five factor model will therefore provide the foundations for the personality component of this thesis.

The following provides an overview of the type of related traits associated with each of the factors within the five factor model of personality (Barrick & Mount, 1991; Hellriegel & Slocum, 2009):

- Extraversion: outgoing/gregarious, assertive; versus introversion: withdrawn/shy, unassertive.
- Emotional stability: relaxed, poised, resilient, calm in demanding situations; versus neuroticism: anxious, self-doubting, moody, insecure.
- Agreeableness: courteous, flexible, trusting, warm, co-operative, tolerant.
- Conscientiousness: reliable, careful, thorough, responsible, organised, hardworking, achievement oriented.
- Openness to experience: imaginative, cultured, inquisitive, original, broad-minded, intelligent.

The following sections will discuss personality in relation to expatriate adjustment outcomes, subjective well-being and perceived social support. However, in the interests of brevity and

relevance, only the personality traits of extraversion, emotional stability, agreeableness, and openness are measured in this study.

#### **4.2 Personality and Adjustment**

As part of their study on the determinants of intercultural adjustment among 247 expatriate spouses, Ali et al. (2003) investigated the relationship between spousal adjustment and personality characteristics. Using the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ), the intercultural traits that were incorporated in this study were cultural empathy, open-mindedness, emotional stability, flexibility and social initiative. They concluded that, in relation to cultural adjustment, personality variables were the strongest predictors, with open-mindedness being related to both expatriate spouses' intercultural interaction, and their psychological and sociocultural adjustment.

The results of Huang et al.'s (2005) investigation into the relationship between Taiwan based American expatriates' (N=83) personality traits and their adjustment to international assignments, further showed that general living adjustment was positively related to extraversion and openness to experience, with interaction adjustment being positively related to extraversion and agreeableness. Likewise, based on their investigation of a model of intercultural adjustment, Parker and McEvoy (1993) found the trait of extraversion to display a significant and positive relationship with interaction adjustment. Ward et al. (2004) have also reported greater extraversion, agreeableness and conscientiousness, and less neuroticism as important predictors of sociocultural adjustment among sojourning populations.

Interestingly, while all the Big Five dimensions are described by Ones and Viswesvaran (1997) as being relevant to overseas success, in relation to expatriate behaviour research, the trait of open-mindedness is in fact described as being one of the most commonly investigated personality traits for expatriate success (Ones and Viswesvaran, 1997).

*Hypothesis 4:* The personality traits of extraversion, agreeableness, openness and emotional stability will relate positively to both spouses' general and interaction adjustment.

### **4.3 Personality and Subjective Well-Being**

Given the relatively stable nature of happiness, researchers have proposed that personality may be associated with, and potentially underlie, this factor (Diener & Lucas, 1999). In relation to the associations that exist between subjective well-being and personality, two explanations are offered: temperamental and instrumental (Lucas, 2008). Firstly, temperamental explanations propose a direct association between traits and affect, that is, their relationship “does not flow through life events or life experiences” (Lucas, 2008, p. 186). Alternatively, instrumental explanations posit an indirect link, with certain traits affecting subjective well-being “through choice of situations or the experience of life events” (Lucas, 2008, p. 186).

Drawing from research into the personality correlates of happiness, Costa and McCrae (1980) construe such literature as tending toward the conclusion that more extraverted and more adjusted people are happier. Additionally, Diener & Seligman (2002) found extraversion and low levels of neuroticism “to form necessary, but not sufficient, conditions for high happiness” (p. 83). This greater level of happiness experienced by extraverts is purported as being a factor of their enjoyment and increased participation in social activities (Argyle & Lu, 1990). In essence, while not easing the adversity of some situations, extraverted traits have therefore generally been found to positively affect one's satisfaction in life, with neurotic traits often predisposing individuals to be more affected by their misfortunes, without necessarily reducing their overall positive enjoyments (Costa and McCrae, 1980).

While happiness has often been investigated in relation to the presence of both a positive and negative construct (i.e. extraversion and neuroticism), Hills and Argyle (2001) however argue for a change of emphasis, that is, to focus on the presence of two positive qualities, namely extraversion and emotional stability. Following this change of emphasis Hills and Argyle (2001) propose that while both extraversion and emotional stability are important correlates of well-being, when compared to extraversion, it is in fact emotional stability which is the stronger predictor of overall happiness and satisfaction with life. This finding is also supported by DeNeve and Cooper's (1998) meta-analysis of the relationships between 137 distinct personality traits and subjective well-being, which found emotional stability to be the stronger correlate of subjective well-being. While extraversion therefore remains to be considered a chief correlate of subjective well-being, as Emmons and Diener's (1986) study recognises, it is the sociability, rather than the impulsivity, component of extraversion which is important. The overall strength of the personality/subjective well-being relationship is further said to be captured by Magnus and Diener (1991, as cited in Diener & Lucas, 1999, p. 215), whose longitudinal analysis found Time 1 personality to predict Time 2 life satisfaction, beyond the influence of life events. In fact, Magnus and Diener (1991, as cited in Diener & Lucas, 1999, p. 220), found that over a four year period, scores on the traits of extraversion and neuroticism were able to predict life satisfaction.

Both extraversion and neuroticism are also well documented as being associated with the regulation of positive and negative moods respectively (Austin, Saklofske & Egan, 2005; DeNeve & Cooper, 1998). This pattern of association is suggested by Costa & McCrae (1980) as occurring due to differences in temperament, that is, "extroverts are simply more cheerful and high-spirited than introverts whereas emotionally unstable individuals are naturally more prone to negative affect" (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998, p. 199). The two personality traits of extraversion and neuroticism are therefore seen to "work in reciprocal fashion to influence the

hedonic component of subjective well-being” (Larsen & Eid, 2008, p. 6). Aside from extraversion, the trait of agreeableness has also been shown to predict positive affect (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998). Notwithstanding these findings, it is important to bear in mind that while personality is documented as strongly influencing, and potentially determining one’s subjective well-being (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998), subjective well-being does not arise wholly as a result of a person’s temperament (Diener, Suh, Lucas & Smith, 1999).

In light of the fact that little research has investigated the role of personality in relation to the adjustment of the expatriate spouse, it will be hypothesised that all of the four specified traits will relate positively to the two dimensions of adjustment.

*Hypothesis 5:* The personality traits of extraversion, agreeableness, openness and emotional stability will relate positively to spouses’ subjective well-being.

#### **4.4 Personality and Social Support**

In their review of research supporting either main effect or buffering models of social support on health, Cohen and Wills (1985) proposed that some effects which have been attributed to support may in fact be partially or wholly attributable to an individual’s personality traits, in particular, those traits which are known to correlate with support. In order to control for any competing explanations for observed social support effects, and thus empirically test for possible confounders, Cohen and Wills (1985) subsequently argue for longitudinal prospective designs to consider including variables such as extraversion and neuroticism. This perspective seems to be echoed by a number of researchers, such as Wills and Shinar (2000), who also point out the potentially confounding effects of extraversion and neuroticism on support outcomes.

Personality characteristics have also been proposed as being linked to both support receipt and support perception (Procidano & Smith, 1997), particularly when the characteristics associated with these traits appear to influence social interactions (Swickert, Hittner & Foster, 2010). Pierce et al. (1997) refer to this as “reactive interaction” (p. 6), whereby the same social stimulus (i.e. supportive behaviour) is responded to differently by different people. Pierce et al. (1997) go on to suggest that “evocative interaction” (p. 7), that is, the process whereby one’s personality characteristics may influence the reactions one evokes in others, might also implicate the subsequent support one obtains from others. Extraversion in particular has been found to be associated with the above two dimensions of support, most likely as a result of an extravert’s comfort with social situations, and thus their diminished tendency to display behaviour which may result in them estranging themselves from the provision of support (Procidano & Smith, 1997; Russell, Booth, Reed & Laughlin, 1997). Further, Baumeister and Leary (1995) suggest that the personality trait of extraversion, and its accompanying factors such as sociability and gregariousness, is likely to increase the possibility of one both establishing and maintaining, social relationships. Tong et al. (2004) also found that relative to those low in the traits of openness and extraversion, those high on these traits were more inclined to perceive support from individuals beyond the family circle. Conversely, neuroticism has been found to have a negative relationship with perceived support, with those high in neuroticism reporting lower levels of social support (Russell et al., 1997). This association is proposed as potentially arising as a result of the dispositional tendency linked to neuroticism, a tendency which may lead these individuals to negatively appraise aspects of their lives and their relationships with others, and experience difficulty in both obtaining support and forming positive interpersonal relationships.

More recently, in a study by Swickert et al. (2010), it was found that of the Big Five personality traits, extraversion, neuroticism and openness to experience predicted both overall

social support, and interacted with one another to predict perceived support. Specifically, through hierarchical regression analyses, it was shown that extraversion was positively related to perceived availability of social support, whereas neuroticism was negatively related to perceived availability of social support (Swickert et al., 2010). Interestingly, in relation to main effects, while agreeableness and conscientiousness contributed minimal predictive power over and above the variance already accounted for by extraversion and neuroticism, openness to experience, while just shy of statistical significance, shared a surprisingly strong relationship with perceived social support. This pattern of results aligns with work by Tong et al. (2004), wherein both perceived support and satisfaction with support were found to relate negatively to neuroticism, and positively to extraversion (Tong et al., 2004). This demonstrates that research into the relationship between personality traits and perceived social support, has produced fairly consistent findings, in doing so, reiterating the important interactions that appear to exist between these two constructs.

In effect, it can therefore be seen that, among other things such as demographics, cultural, and social roles, individuals' personality characteristics can influence the supportive behaviours of others, one's satisfaction with, availability of, requirement for, and the receipt and perception of, support (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Hupcey, 1998; Pasch, Bradbury & Sullivan, 1997; Sarason, Levine, Basham & Sarason, 1983).

*Hypothesis 6:* The personality traits of extraversion, agreeableness, openness and emotional stability will relate positively to spouses' perceived social support.

As Chapters 2-4 highlight, both shorter-term situational factors, and long-term personality factors all appear to be related to subjective well-being. However, while previous research has encouraged investigation into the relationship between expatriate adjustment and subjective

well-being, the unique relationship between these two variables remains unclear. In light of this, it will be hypothesised that both general and interaction adjustment will add unique predictive value in explaining expatriate spouse subjective well-being, even after controlling for perceived support and personality.

*Hypothesis 7:* General and interaction adjustment will both explain additional variance in spouses' (a) life satisfaction, and (b) affective balance, over and above that which has already been accounted for by support and personality.

#### **4.5 Previous International Experience, Accompanying Dependents, Gender and Status of Employment as Correlates of Adjustment**

##### **4.5.1 Previous international experience.**

Through the accrual of knowledge and coping strategies, previous international experience can help to reduce uncertainty, guide expectations, and facilitate the anticipation of potential problems in a new environment. However, while previous international experience has been found to have a positive influence on expatriates' cross-cultural adjustment, this has been a very weak association (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). Nevertheless, and despite this variable receiving little attention in relation to expatriate spouses, according to research by Mohr and Klein (2004), previous international experiences were viewed by expatriate spouses as being highly advantageous in adjusting to their current situation.

*Hypothesis 8:* Expatriate spouses with previous international experience will report significantly different mean levels of general and interaction adjustment to those spouses with no previous international experience.

#### **4.5.2 Accompanying dependents.**

In a study by Shaffer and Harrison (2001), having accompanying school-aged children “provided some stability in social expectations and served as a vehicle for forming relationships with others” (p. 243). Accompanying spouse who had children tended to report a more positive international experience than those who did not have parental responsibilities, possibly due to the fact that children are described as providing an enduring source of identity (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001).

*Hypothesis 9:* Relative to those with no accompanying dependents, expatriate spouses with accompanying dependents will report significantly different mean levels of both general and interaction adjustment.

#### **4.5.3 Gender.**

Copeland and Norell (2002), stated that while male and female expatriate spouses “undoubtedly share some of the same concerns... they also approach a relocation with special gender- and role-specific issues” (p. 260). Moreover, given that the majority of business expatriates are male, spouse support groups, for instance, may be female dominated and/or oriented, potentially leaving male spouses to feel more isolated (Caligiuri et al., 1999). This aligns with Selmer and Leung’s (2003) work which recognises that male expatriate spouses have distinct needs and concerns, and tend to receive an inadequate level of corporate support. Additionally, Fontaine (1986) suggested that difficulties can arise when the sex-role expectations in the host country are not aligned with those of one’s own culture.

*Hypothesis 10:* Female expatriate spouses will report significantly different mean levels of both general and interaction adjustment compared to male expatriate spouses.

#### **4.5.4 Status of employment in host country.**

Because work can provide individuals with a sense of identity and source of support, if spouses are unable to obtain a job or a work permit, this may contribute to feelings of “a loss of power, self worth, and identity” (Selmer & Leung, 2003, p. 11). Accordingly, among other facets, changes in employment status are likely to become important identity issues for spouses (Harvey, 1985). While the effect of employment status would seem most disruptive to those who were employed prior to relocation and/or are career oriented, ultimately work may provide a source of support for spouses and “opportunities to learn behaviors that can help them adapt to their new culture at faster rates than spouses who have little interaction with others” (Pellico & Stroh, 1997, p. 230).

*Hypothesis 11:* Expatriate spouses who are currently employed in their host country will report significantly different mean levels of interaction adjustment to those spouses who are not currently employed in their host country.

As Chapters 3-4 highlight, social support and individual difference variables all appear to be related to expatriate adjustment. However, while previous research has emphasised the importance of support to the successful adjustment of the expatriate spouse, the unique relationship between the perceived availability of social support and adjustment remains unclear. In light of this, and in order to investigate the principle aim of this study, it will be hypothesised that perceived social support will help explain additional variance in adjustment, over and above that which has already been accounted for by individual difference variables.

*Hypothesis 12:* Social support will add unique predictive value in explaining both spouses' (a) general and (b) interaction adjustment, even after controlling for personality and socio-demographic variables.

## **Chapter 5: Method**

### **5.1 Research Approach**

In order to gain a more detailed understanding of issues pertaining to the expatriate spouse, this research used and analysed both quantitative and qualitative items, thereby adopting a more holistic focus and comprehensive approach to understanding the phenomena under study. Specifically, this study employed a quantitative dominant mixed methods approach, and in doing so recognised the importance of including qualitative data in an otherwise quantitative research project (Johnson, Onwuegbuzie & Turner, 2007). Given the dominance of the quantitative approach, the philosophical underpinnings of this research were therefore primarily drawn from the deductive assumptions of the quantitative paradigm (Simons & Lathlean, 2010).

Prior to conducting this research ethical approval was sought and approved by Massey University Human Ethics Committee: Northern (approval number MUHECN: 10/072). Participants were informed of their rights as research participants, and reassured that their responses would remain both anonymous and confidential. Consent to participate was given by completing and submitting the questionnaire.

### **5.2 Data Collection**

Data was collected through the use of a structured cross-sectional questionnaire. The questionnaire was hosted online by a secure survey software and questionnaire tool site ([www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)). Questionnaire responses were stored by this hosting site for the duration of the data collection period and, at its conclusion, were downloaded and saved into

the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS, Version 17). The self-report questionnaire consisted of three sections: section one asked participants to think about their social support (availability of/use of/satisfaction with), and answer personality related items; section two required participants to think about their adjustment to their host country, their life satisfaction, and their feelings and emotions; and finally, section three posed two open ended questions, requiring participants to think of the most stressful and satisfying aspects of expatriate life. This section was concluded by asking several demographic items (see Appendix A for the complete questionnaire). A non-probability sampling strategy was employed, with participants being recruited both directly, through advertising on expatriate and expatriate spouse focused websites/online groups, and indirectly through snowball sampling.

### **5.3 Participants**

Eighty five current expatriate spouses completed the questionnaire, however, after excluding those cases exhibiting more than 15% missing data, the final sample consisted of 77 respondents. Specifically, 65 (84.4%) of the participants identified themselves as female, and 12 (15.6%) identified themselves as male. The inclusion criteria did not impose any restrictions in relation to the nationality or gender of the participating spouses; they were merely required to be current expatriate spouses.

Reported time on current assignment ranged from one month to 73 months. At the time of conducting the survey, the average number of months participants had been on their current assignment was 20 months. Nine participants (11.7%) did not answer this question. Forty three (55.8%) participants reported having accompanying dependents, 33 (42.9%) reported having none, and one did not specify. Of those who reported having accompanying dependents, the number of children ranged from one to three, with the average number of

dependents being two. In terms of employment status, 33 (42.9%) participants indicated that they were currently employed in their host country, with 44 (57.1%) reporting that they were not. Thirty nine (50.6%) respondents reported having had previous experience as an expatriate spouse, with 38 (49.4%) classifying their current assignment as representing their first occasion. Of the 39 (50.6%) respondents who reported having had undertaken previous assignments in the capacity of an expatriate spouse, 38 (49.4%) further indicated their number of prior experiences. Specifically, the number of previous assignments ranged from one to six, with a mean of three.

#### **5.4 Data Preparation**

Prior to conducting any of the following analyses, negatively worded items were reversed. After removing those cases with more than 15% missing data, a missing value analysis revealed that the remaining cases contained no more than 7.4% missing data. Little's MCAR test ( $p = .30$ ), confirmed that the data was missing at random. Mean scale scores were computed based on the number of items completed by each participant. This affords greater ease of scale score interpretation, and avoids using imputation or listwise deletion methods (Judd & Kenny, 2010). A final step in preparing the data file for subsequent analyses was to dummy code the categorical variables into two levels: Sex ( $0 = \text{Male}$ ,  $1 = \text{Female}$ ), Accompanying dependents ( $0 = \text{No}$ ,  $1 = \text{Yes}$ ), Employment status in host country ( $0 = \text{Not employed}$ ,  $1 = \text{Employed}$ ), and Previous experience as an expatriate spouse ( $0 = \text{No}$ ,  $1 = \text{Yes}$ ).

#### **5.5 Measures**

Analyses were conducted in order to investigate both the internal consistency and dimensionality of the study measures. In relation to tests of reliability, given that the coefficient alpha is recognised as the best index of internal consistency (Kline, 1993) this

value was computed for all measures. Specifically, alphas of at least .7 and above were regarded as sufficiently large (Kline, 1993). The dimensionalities of several scales were also assessed using Principle Components Analysis (PCA). PCA was chosen over Factor Analysis based on recommendations for selection by Tabachnick and Fidell (2007).

### **5.5.1 The index of sojourner social support (ISSS).**

The ISSS (Ong & Ward, 2005) was developed in an attempt to assess social support in an acculturation context, while integrating generic conceptualisations of the social support construct with the unique circumstances of a sojourning population. Items were measured using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*No one would do this*) to 5 (*Many would do this*). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of .92, and the significant value for Bartlett's test of sphericity ( $p \leq .001$ ) supported the use of PCA. PCA using a Direct Oblimin rotation revealed two components, with all but one item (item 14), loading in accordance with the original scale. This supported the use of the socio-emotional support items and the instrumental support items as separate scales. Accordingly, the factor labels were kept the same as the original labels. Observed coefficient alphas for this study were  $\alpha = .92$  for the socio-emotional support scale and  $\alpha = .94$  for the instrumental support scale.

Measures of frequency of use and satisfaction with available social support were also utilised. To assess frequency of use, following each item on the ISSS, participants were asked to indicate the frequency with which they used the type of support described. Responses ranged from 1 (*NA*), either because the support was unavailable or because they did not use it, to 5 (*Daily*). To assess satisfaction with support, following each item on the ISSS, participants were also asked to indicate their satisfaction with each type of support described. Responses ranged from 1 (*Very dissatisfied*) to 5 (*Very satisfied*). Observed coefficient alphas for this

study were  $\alpha = .79$  for frequency of use (socio-emotional support),  $\alpha = .89$  for frequency of use (instrumental support),  $\alpha = .92$  for satisfaction with socio-emotional support, and  $\alpha = .92$  for satisfaction with instrumental support.

### **5.5.2 The international personality item pool (50 item IPIP).**

Goldberg's (1999) IPIP 50-item markers measure the five factors of personality: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, intellect/imagination (openness), and emotional stability (neuroticism). The IPIP consists of 50 self-referencing statements, with 10 items being assigned to each of the Big Five factors. Utilising a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*Very inaccurate*) to 5 (*Very accurate*), separate scores were calculated for each factor, with some items requiring reverse scoring. For reasons stated previously, the personality characteristics, and subscales this study chose to explore, included the scales of extraversion, agreeableness, openness, and emotional stability. Observed coefficient alphas for this study were  $\alpha = .91$  for extraversion,  $\alpha = .70$  for agreeableness,  $\alpha = .82$  for openness, and  $\alpha = .89$  for emotional stability.

### **5.5.3 The spousal adjustment scale.**

The Spousal Adjustment Scale (Black & Stephens, 1989), adapted from the most frequently used measure of expatriate adjustment, has been widely used in conjunction with an expatriate spouse population. Spousal adjustment is comprised of two factors: interaction adjustment (3 items), and general adjustment (6 items). Items were measured on a 7-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Completely unadjusted*) to 7 (*Completely adjusted*). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of .84, and the significant value for Bartlett's test of sphericity ( $p \leq .001$ ) supported the use of PCA. PCA using a Direct Oblimin rotation revealed two components, with all but one item (item 3), loading in accordance with the original scale. Interestingly, like

Black and Stephens (1989) Expatriate Adjustment Scale, item 3 in fact loaded most strongly on general adjustment, rather than interaction adjustment. Nonetheless, it was decided to keep the factor labels the same as the original labels. Observed coefficient alphas for this study were  $\alpha = .90$  and  $\alpha = .90$  for general adjustment and interaction adjustment respectively.

#### **5.5.4 The positive and negative affect schedule (PANAS).**

The PANAS (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988) consists of a word list describing two different affective states. Using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*Very slightly or not at all*) to 5 (*Extremely*), participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they had generally felt each affect during the past few weeks. Both the positive affect and negative affect scales consisted of 10 items each. Separate positive and negative affect scores were generated, with higher scores indicating that participants felt more of that particular affect. Affective balance was calculated by subtracting negative affect from positive affect (Bilbao Ramírez, Bobowik, Páez & Campos, 2008). The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of .82, and the significant value for Bartlett's test of sphericity ( $p \leq .001$ ) supported the use of PCA. PCA using a Direct Oblimin rotation forced a two component solution, with items loading in accordance with the original scale, and thus supporting the use of the positive affect and negative affect items as separate scales. Accordingly, the factor labels were kept the same as the original labels. Observed coefficient alphas for this study were  $\alpha = .87$  and  $\alpha = .87$  for the positive and negative affect scales respectively.

#### **5.5.5 The satisfaction with life scale (SWLS).**

The SWLS (Diener, Emmons, Larsen, & Griffin, 1985) consists of five brief statements. Participants were asked to indicate their level of agreement or disagreement with each statement on a 7-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (*Strongly disagree*) to 7 (*Strongly agree*).

A total scale score was calculated, with higher scores indicating more satisfaction with life. The observed coefficient alpha for this study was  $\alpha = .88$ .

### **5.5.6 Demographics.**

Gender was measured by asking participants to select their sex from a drop down menu. Spouses were also questioned as to whether they had accompanying dependents, and if so, to state how many. A spouse's employment status was also objectively measured by asking spouses whether or not they were currently employed in their host country. Additionally, time on assignment was measured by asking for the total number of months spouses had been on their present assignment for. Finally, previous experience as an expatriate spouse was objectively measured by asking participants to select either *Yes* or *No* with respect to previous experience, and, if applicable, to state the number of previous assignments.

## **5.6 Data Analysis**

### **5.6.1 Bivariate correlations.**

Prior to testing the bivariate hypotheses, the assumptions for correlation analysis (Pallant, 2011) were examined by producing histograms with superimposed normal distribution curves, and normal probability plots of the individual variables. Inspection of these respective histograms and normal probability plots provided no indication of any serious violations to the assumption of normality. Linear relationships between the two variables were also assessed by inspecting bivariate scatterplots, of which, no obvious nonlinear relationships were observed. Finally, skewness and kurtosis values were checked to determine the appropriateness of the distribution of the scores. Absolute skewness and kurtosis values were found to be within the accepted limits of the study (plus or minus 2.0), suggesting an appropriate distribution of the scores.

### **5.6.2 Independent-samples t-test.**

Following consideration for the supposition of independence of observations, and confirmation that the respective dependent variables displayed a roughly normal distribution within each population, the assumption of homogeneity of variance was verified by means of analysing the Levene's test statistic (Pallant, 2011). Specifically, the Levene's test for equality of variances produced a non-significant result on all separate occasions, thus indicating equality of variance.

### **5.6.3 Multiple regression.**

While there are a variety of guidelines regarding sample size requirements, the current sample size ( $N = 77$ ) was seen as exceeding the absolute minimum case-to-variable ratio of 5:1 (Humphries, 2009). In order to focus on the unique contribution of each predictor variable, a simultaneous multiple regression analysis approach was chosen.

Following the generation of each multiple regression, respective outputs were initially checked for any violations of the assumptions governing the use of this statistic. Accordingly, independent variables were required to demonstrate at least some relationship ( $r = \sim .3$ ), with the respective dependent variable. While no two independent variables displayed high collinearity ( $r > .80$ ) (see Table 3), additional measures of multicollinearity; namely, tolerance and the variable inflation factor (VIF), were also investigated (Pallant, 2011). All tolerance values were above .10 and all VIF values were below 10, further supporting the assertion of no obvious violation of the multicollinearity assumption. Nevertheless, given that socio-emotional support and instrumental support shared a correlation of .73, assessing the individual importance of each of these predictors would have proven difficult. In light of this, a composite of the two support variables; perceived social support, was created. With regards to the assumption of normality, data points on the normal probability plot of the standardised

residuals did not display much departure from the diagonal line, thus appearing to conform to the assumption of normality. An examination of the scatterplot of the standardised predicted scores against the standardised residual scores showed no clear pattern to the residuals, and thus no indication that they would be best summarised by a line that was not straight. Accordingly, the assumption of multivariate linearity was supported. In light of the fact that the spread of residuals in the aforementioned scatterplot also formed no discernable pattern either side of the superimposed regression line, multivariate homoscedasticity was inferred. Finally, with regards to the presence of outliers, after inspecting the Mahalanobis distance values, and evaluating these in relation to the critical chi-square values, no cases were identified as being of concern. Moreover, an examination of the respective scatterplots did not reveal any cases with standardised residuals of greater than 3.3 or less than -3.3.

#### **5.6.4 Content analysis.**

By reducing large amounts of text into a comparatively small number of categories, content analysis has proved a useful technique for analysing results from open-ended survey questions. Due to the epistemology's underlying assumptions regarding the nature of knowledge, the present content analysis is more descriptive rather than interpretive in nature. Specifically, a mixed content analysis was undertaken; in doing so utilising both qualitative and quantitative applications, an approach consistent with the view that content analysis is a combination of these two traditions, that is to say, a "hybrid" (Nagy Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2010, p. 232).

1. At the completion of data collection, participants responses to the two open ended questions were placed in one of two groups, namely, stressful or satisfying aspects of expatriate life, hereafter referred to as either Text 1 or Text 2 respectively.

2. Text 1 was read and re-read several times in order to obtain a holistic perspective and to allow the researcher to become somewhat immersed in the data. Accordingly, an inductive rather than deductive approach to the content analysis was undertaken. In line with this conventional content analysis approach (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005), the development of coding categories was driven by the text itself rather than pre-existing theories or research (Lichtman, 2010). The categories within the coding scheme aimed to be both exhaustive and mutually exclusive. (Zhang & Wildemuth, 2009). This was achieved by seeking to ensure the categories were neither redundant, nor too broad or specific. However, for a category to be retained, two or more instances were required to have been recorded.
3. However, prior to developing these coding categories, the unit of analysis was specified. Because the researcher felt it was difficult to specify a-priori the size of a unit, the unit of analysis for this study was defined as a “unit of meaning”, or theme (Henri, 1991, In Rourke, Anderson, Garrison & Archer, 2001). Accordingly, the majority of participants’ descriptions were divided into several distinct themes.
4. The method of assigning codes to this data oriented around a process of attending to both manifest, and, to some degree, latent content (Klenke, 2008). The coding scheme was systematically applied across the entirety of Text 1, by utilising a thematic coding oriented approach to assign codes, in this case numbers, to the coding units (Klenke, 2008). Thematic coding is a useful technique due to its ability to attend to both manifest and latent level themes (Klenke, 2008). Each coding unit was assigned to one category only. Where there were a small number of unrelated responses, these were assigned to the category of *Other*. If content was identified as irrelevant it was not coded.
5. Selections of quotations illustrating the respective concepts were provided as exemplars of each category.

6. This qualitative categorisation process was then combined with the quantification of content through the use of simple frequency counts. These counts represent the number of occasions on which each category was mentioned throughout Text 1.
7. The aforesaid steps were then repeated for Text 2.

To ascertain interpretive reliability, a second rater, who had once been an expatriate spouse and is tertiary qualified, was invited to code instances to the categories developed by the researcher. As recommended by Burla et al. (2008) the concordances and discordances of the two coders were then documented in a table. Next, inter-coder reliability testing was performed by calculating Cohen's kappa. To cover the full range of measurement, 20% of the observations were sampled. Kappa provides a measure of inter-rater agreement by adjusting the observed proportional agreement by that agreement which would be expected by chance (Klenke, 2008). Not only does this process assess whether the established coding schemes lead to units being coded to the same category, but it also questions whether additional categories should be added and/or operational definitions refined.

According to Wasserman and Bracken (2003), the value of Cohen's Kappa for both content analyses is indicative of excellent agreement:  $K = .90$  (Text 1: Stressful aspects of expatriate life) and  $K = .94$  (Text 2: Satisfying aspects of expatriate life). These values for Kappa serve to indicate that after correcting for agreements expected due to chance, the coding scheme was sufficiently unambiguous, and capable of producing a high degree of consistency in coding expatriate spouses' responses.

## **Chapter 6: Results**

The following chapter consists of three parts: part one presents the descriptive statistics of individual items, and the outcomes of preliminary analyses; part two provides the results from the bivariate analyses, tests of between group differences, and multiple regression analyses; and finally part three sees an overview of the findings from the content analyses.

### **6.1 Descriptive Statistics**

Table 3 presents the descriptive statistics and correlation matrix for the study variables. All key criterion variables namely, general adjustment, interaction adjustment, life satisfaction, and affective balance exhibited significant relationships with at least one hypothesised predictor. With regard to the frequency with which each type of support was utilised, both socio-emotional support and instrumental support were reported as being used fairly infrequently, that is, between a few times a year to monthly. In relation to satisfaction with perceived social support, spouses considered themselves to be receiving adequate support for their specific needs, reporting, on average, as being fairly satisfied with both their perceived level of socio-emotional and instrumental support.

### **6.2 Testing of Hypothesised Relationships**

#### **6.2.1 Bivariate correlations.**

Both general and interaction adjustment shared significant positive relationships with each of the two subjective well-being indicators, demonstrating support for Hypothesis 1. Modest positive correlations were also found between social support and life satisfaction, and social support and affective balance, presenting support for Hypothesis 2. There was also a moderate

Table 3

*Descriptive Statistics and Correlation Matrix*

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Extraversion									
2. Agreeableness	.36**								
3. Openness	.11	.23*							
4. Emotional stability	.26*	.16	-.20						
5. Perceived social support	.23*	.08	.02	.32**					
6. General adjustment	.15	.26*	.39**	.16	.35**				
7. Interaction adjustment	.26*	.20	.36**	.19	.21	.53**			
8. Life satisfaction	.31**	.13	.13	.45**	.51**	.41**	.38**		
9. Affective balance	.25*	.25*	-.01	.55**	.42**	.39**	.40**	.58**	
<i>M</i>	3.32	4.24	3.86	3.27	2.85	5.50	4.64	4.97	1.51
<i>SD</i>	.76	.44	.56	.76	.81	1.04	1.57	1.27	1.18
Min	2	3	3	2	1	2	1	2	-2
Max	5	5	5	5	5	7	7	7	4

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

positive relationship between spouse general adjustment and perceived social support, while a non-significant relationship was found between spouse interaction adjustment and perceived social support. This result provided partial support for Hypothesis 3. Bivariate correlations between the four personality factors and adjustment revealed significant positive relationships between general adjustment and the traits of agreeableness and openness, and interaction adjustment and the traits of extraversion and openness. Life satisfaction shared reasonably strong relationships with both extraversion and emotional stability, with moderate correlations being displayed between affective balance and each of the traits of extraversion, agreeableness and emotional stability. Of the four personality characteristics, only extraversion and emotional stability shared significant positive relationships with perceived social support. These results provided partial support for Hypotheses 4-6.

### **6.2.2 Between-group differences.**

Results from the independent-samples t-tests demonstrated no support for Hypotheses 8-9. Specifically, the average general adjustment and interaction adjustment of expatriate spouses with previous experience did not differ significantly from those spouses with no previous experience  $t(75) = -.48, p = .64$  and  $t(75) = -.57, p = .57$  respectively. Moreover, those spouses with accompanying dependents did not differ significantly in terms of their level of either general or interaction adjustment, from those spouses with no accompanying dependents,  $t(74) = -.16, p = .87$ , and  $t(74) = .33, p = .74$ , respectively. There was also no significant difference found in either the average general or interaction adjustment for male and female expatriate spouses,  $t(75) = -.15, p = .88$ , and  $t(75) = .86, p = .40$ , respectively, failing to demonstrate support for Hypothesis 10. Support was however demonstrated for Hypothesis 11, wherein the average interaction adjustment of spouses currently employed in

their host country differed significantly from those spouses who were not currently employed in their host country  $t(75) = -4.07, p < .01$ .

### **6.2.3 Multiple regression.**

#### ***6.2.3.1 Spouse adjustment.***

In accordance with Hypothesis 12, Table 4 shows the results of multiple regression analyses, conducted in order to examine the predictive power of variables in relation to both general and interaction adjustment.

##### *General adjustment.*

As Table 4 indicates, while the overall model for general adjustment was significant, when taken together, the independent variables explained moderate variation in spouses' general adjustment. The only significant predictors of general adjustment were openness and perceived social support, with openness recording the highest significant beta value of the two. According to the semi-partial correlations in the coefficients table in the regression output, openness and perceived social support uniquely explained 11.36% and 8.18% of the variance in general adjustment respectively. The unique predictive ability of perceived social support upheld Hypothesis 12a.

##### *Interaction adjustment.*

The model for interaction adjustment was also significant (see Table 4), with the individual difference variables explaining a moderate amount of the variation in spouses' interaction adjustment. In the final model, the significant predictors were employment in the host country and the personality trait of openness, with employment in the host country recording the highest significant beta value of the two. According to the semi-partial correlations in the coefficients table in the regression output, openness and employment in the host country

uniquely explained 7.67% and 18.58% of the variance in interaction adjustment respectively. Perceived social support was not found to be a significant predictor of interaction adjustment, thus failing to provide support for Hypothesis 12b.

Table 4

*Regression Analysis Summary for Individual Difference Variables and Perceived Social Support Predicting General and Interaction Adjustment*

Variable	General Adjustment			Interaction Adjustment		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Individual difference variables						
Socio-demographics						
Sex	.03	.32	.01	.16	.43	.04
Accompanying dependents	.19	.23	.09	.33	.31	.10
Employed in host country	.22	.25	.11	1.57	.34	.50**
Previous experience	.09	.23	.04	.29	.31	.09
Personality						
Extraversion	-.08	.17	-.06	.31	.23	.15
Agreeableness	.37	.27	.16	.23	.37	.07
Openness	.69	.21	.37**	.85	.29	.30**
Emotional stability	.18	.16	.13	.41	.22	.20
Perceived social support	.40	.14	.31**	.25	.19	.13
<i>F</i> (full model)			3.37**			5.64**
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>			.32			.44
Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>			.22			.36

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

### 6.2.3.2 Subjective well-being.

In accordance with Hypothesis 7, several multiple regression analyses were conducted in order to examine the predictive power of variables in relation to subjective well-being (see Tables 5 and 6).

#### *Life satisfaction.*

As Table 5 shows, the final models for life satisfaction were significant when considering both general and interaction adjustment, and, when taken together, the independent variables in each model explained a reasonable amount of the variation in spouses' life satisfaction. The significant predictors in both models were the personality trait of emotional stability and perceived social support.

Table 5

*Regression Analysis Summary for Personality, Perceived Social Support and Adjustment Predicting Life Satisfaction*

Variable	General Adjustment			Interaction Adjustment		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Personality						
Extraversion	.24	.17	.15	.19	.17	.11
Agreeableness	-.22	.29	-.08	-.15	.29	-.05
Openness	.25	.24	.11	.27	.24	.12
Emotional stability	.52	.17	.31**	.50	.17	.30**
Perceived social support	.48	.16	.31**	.55	.15	.35**
Adjustment	.25	.13	.21	.15	.08	.19
<i>F</i> (full model)		8.77**			8.71**	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.43			.43	
Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.38			.38	

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

According to the semi-partial correlations in the coefficients table in the regression output, when considering the model containing general adjustment, emotional stability and perceived social support uniquely explained 7.73% and 7.34% of the variance in life satisfaction respectively. With regards to the model containing interaction adjustment, emotional stability and perceived social support uniquely explained 7.08% and 10.37% of the variance in life satisfaction respectively. However, neither general nor interaction adjustment made a unique contribution to the prediction of life satisfaction, above and beyond the influence of the other predictors in the model. Hypothesis 7a therefore remained unsupported.

*Affective Balance.*

With regards to the second component of subjective well-being, the results of both regression models were also significant (see Table 6), with the independent variables in each model explaining a substantial amount of the variation in spouses' affective balance. Emotional stability proved a significant predictor in each model, however perceived social support was only significant when considered alongside interaction adjustment. General adjustment and interaction adjustment were both significant positive predictors of affective balance, providing support for Hypothesis 7b. According to the semi-partial correlations in the coefficients table in the regression output, when considering the model containing general adjustment, emotional stability and general adjustment uniquely explained 13.10% and 4.12% of the variance in affective balance respectively. With regards to the model containing interaction adjustment, emotional stability, perceived social support, and interaction adjustment uniquely explained 11.42%, 4.62%, and 5.86% of the variance in affective balance respectively.

Table 6

*Regression Analysis Summary for Personality, Perceived Social Support and Adjustment  
Predicting Affective Balance*

Variable	General Adjustment			Interaction Adjustment		
	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$	<i>B</i>	<i>SE B</i>	$\beta$
Personality						
Extraversion	.06	.16	.04	-.02	.16	-.01
Agreeableness	.28	.27	.12	.36	.26	.13
Openness	-.12	.22	-.06	-.15	.22	-.07
Emotional stability	.63	.16	.41**	.60	.16	.39**
Perceived social support	.28	.15	.19	.34	.14	.23*
Adjustment	.28	.12	.24*	.21	.08	.28**
<i>F</i> (full model)		8.87**			9.5**	
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.43			.45	
Adjusted <i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>		.38			.40	

\*  $p < .05$ . \*\*  $p < .01$ .

### 6.3 Content Analysis

The following section presents the quantification of content through the use of simple frequency counts. These counts represent the number of occasions on which each category was mentioned throughout the respective texts. In order to illustrate reported instances of the respective concepts within each particular text, a selection of quotations has been provided under the respective category headings.

#### 6.3.1 Stressful aspects of expatriate life.

Table 7

*Frequency Counts for the Categories Identified as Representing Stressful Aspects of Expatriate Life*

Category	Frequency	%
Language and communication	26	13%
Friends & family in home country	23	12%
Relocating & resettlement	18	9%
Employment/career	17	9%
Culture	13	7%
Socialisation	13	7%
Support	11	6%
Economic reasons	9	5%
Bureaucracy	9	5%
Geography	8	4%
Other	8	4%
Infrastructure	7	4%
Belongingness	6	3%
Host country nationals	6	3%
Homesickness	5	3%
Uncertainty	4	2%
Spouse	4	2%
Environment	3	2%
Lifestyle	3	2%
Dependency	2	1%
Lack of control	2	1%
Accompanying dependents	2	1%

*Note.* Total of percentages is not 100 due to rounding.

As Table 7 highlights, 22 categories were identified in the aforementioned text as constituting stressful aspects of expatriate life. The concepts most commonly cited as stressful appear to be of a more extrinsic rather than intrinsic nature. The following verbatim are provided as exemplars of each category (see Table 8).

Table 8  
*Illustrative Comments of Stressful Aspects of Expatriate Life*

Category	Illustrative comments
Language & communication	The language barrier is the greatest problem. It makes every tiny chore more difficult and time consuming Communicating in the language - esp. with doctors, officials Not being able to express myself in the language when I am in a difficult situation, or need help Not being adequately fluent in the host country language can be difficult & cause stress at times
Friends & family in home country	Now that I am here I realise how much i [ <i>sic</i> ] enjoy having a drink with my mates back home When situations crop up back at home with friends and family Being away from my family and friends
Relocating & resettlement	The initial settling in phase - schools, finding your feet, sense of chaos Not knowing where everything is The same things I would find stressful in a domestic move: finding what one needs. new dry cleaner, new doctor, does the car have the right documents, etc The leaving and arriving arrangements - the two month period on either side when all the admin and personal organization requires attention
Employment & career	I am not able to work in my field - the regulating body does not recognize my degree nor my professional license I am unable to get a license here in my profession, despite having a license for several years where I came from (unless I am willing to be supervised again, which I am not) Where we are living there is no work for me in the field that I am qualified in
Culture	Running fowl [ <i>sic</i> ] of certain cultural expectations that one is unaware of A little unsure about if somethings [ <i>sic</i> ] are acceptable or not around different cultures Cultural differences of the host country are the most challenging Not understanding some cultural things (maori [ <i>sic</i> ] culture, pacific island [ <i>sic</i> ] culture etc)
Socialisation	One can feel very isolated Difficulty [ <i>sic</i> ] to approach locals socially Not having many friends to talk to I am struggling to meet new people
Support	Having no one to ask simple questions about everyday life Living without the support of my extended family Not having the support of any really good friends or family on a day to day basis

Table 8 (continued)

Economic reasons	<p>The cost of living          Finances...taxes          Like in all walks of life MONEY [sic] or Lack [sic] of it is always a under lying [sic] Stress [sic] but manageable          We assumed our childrens [sic] education would be paid for but it wasn't. This is very costly and I had to find work</p>
Bureaucracy	<p>Dealing with the local health care system and administration          The red tape, for everything          Can be hard to get information required          Systems in everyday life that are so different to home and seem so silly</p>
Geography	<p>The most stressful thing is being so far away          It is a loooong [sic] journey to NZ from Abu Dhabi          The size of the country I am in</p>
Other	<p>Civil unrest          Difficulties with property rented</p>
Infrastructure	<p>Not having safety in knowing that if something happens the police or the system in our host country would help us through it          Healthcare, especially for my kids, is not up to NZ standards. eg [sic] an ambulance refused to come because they didnt [sic] know where our compound was!          Unreliable postal system          Traffic...chaos</p>
Belongingness	<p>I feel...uncomfortable because I don't feel like I belong          Will always be regarded as a stranger          I am always the foreigner, am always outside [sic]          Sometimes...feel alone and an outsider</p>
Host country nationals	<p>A little resented by nzers [sic] -They feel we have come here and taken all the good jobs          I also find the people stressful in our host country as they don't seem to give a damn about anything but themselves          People in Norway, where I live, can be VERY [sic] rude, surprisingly so, in a crowd or 'stranger' situation</p>
Homesickness	<p>I would like to be back in my home country. Now that I am here I realise how much i [sic] enjoy...going to things like a football match          I just miss London          Missing... shops, food, scenery, and the vibrancy of Africa</p>
Uncertainty	<p>Constant not knowing of what the future will bring - move, not move          The uncertainty          The times when I don't know how to get something done</p>
Spouse	<p>My husband's travel schedule          My husband works in the oil industry and is away from our rented home for 2 weeks out of 3          We live our's [sic] husband's [sic] life and problems</p>
Environment	<p>Sanitary conditions in the streets          Poor air quality (diesel pollution)          It is cold and windy and raining lots sometimes [sic] and I have [sic] heat pump going most of the day</p>

Table 8 (continued)

Lifestyle	Different styles of living Scarcity of restaurants with good quality food
Dependency	Not to have your own life The frustration of not being independent and able to make my own decisions
Lack of control	We have been robbed three times with the robbers coming into our home when we sleep. they [ <i>sic</i> ] go into our childrens [ <i>sic</i> ] bedroom while they sleep and steal toys. the [ <i>sic</i> ] police don't believe us and don't care Lack of control in my life at the moment
Accompanying dependents	Am parent of [ <i>sic</i> ] adult child with an intellectual disability living with us- making sure his life is appropriately accommodated Getting my children settled into their new lives

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### 6.3.2 Satisfying aspects of expatriate life.

Table 9

*Frequency Counts for the Categories Identified as Representing Satisfying Aspects of Expatriate Life*

Category	Frequency	%
Intercultural experience	63	30%
Relationships/socialisation	35	17%
Personal development	32	15%
Lifestyle	24	11%
Infrastructure	11	6%
Economic reasons	10	5%
Environment	10	5%
Language	9	4%
Geography	6	3%
Cuisine	4	2%
Accompanying dependents	3	1%
Employment	3	1%
Spouse	2	1%

*Note.* Total of percentages is not 100 due to rounding.

As Table 9 highlights, 13 categories were identified in the aforementioned text as constituting satisfying aspects of expatriate life. The concepts most commonly cited as satisfying appear to

be oriented toward opportunities/experiences, and interpersonal interaction. The following verbatim are provided as exemplars of each category (see Table 10).

Table 10  
*Illustrative Comments of Satisfying Aspects of Expatriate Life*

Category	Illustrative comments
Intercultural experience	<p>Interesting having new life experiences</p> <p>Able to do things that were not possible or less accessible in my home country</p> <p>Never having really travelled this has given us a chance to explore places we would never have seen</p> <p>The fact that I am waking up to a new experience everyday. When we were in India and my kids were whining about missing home and we drove past an elephant walking down the street I said 'well you don't see that in Montana!' and they shut up</p>
Relationships/socialisation	<p>The opportunity to meet and interact with people that I would never have met had I stayed put</p> <p>Meeting a hugely diverse range of people</p> <p>It is an adventure &amp; you meet many interesting people quite often making life-long friendships</p>
Personal development	<p>The confidence it has given me</p> <p>Learn more about myself</p> <p>You can see and think things around you on a global point of view</p>
Lifestyle	<p>The quality of life</p> <p>Better way of life...better quality of life</p> <p>We live in a nicer, larger house, in a good neighborhood [<i>sic</i>], with my daughter's school close by</p>
Infrastructure	<p>The expatriate school provides a good educational standard for our children</p> <p>Safety</p> <p>Access to a great health care system</p>
Economic reasons	<p>We are saving reasonable money</p> <p>Financial security</p> <p>After we have saved enough money for a house back home (and probably a bit more) we will probably start a family and review where we go from there</p>
Environment	<p>The good weather</p> <p>The climate is fantastic</p> <p>I like Australian summers even if it does get a bit too hot sometimes, but I can't really complain even though Australian winters can be a little colder than imagined the climate is alot [<i>sic</i>] better than where I previously lived</p>
Language	<p>Opportunity for the children to be bi-lingual</p> <p>Learning a new language</p> <p>I love the fact that my kids are learning a new language (in my daughters [<i>sic</i>] case - 2 languages)</p>
Geography	<p>The location</p> <p>Beautiful surroundings</p> <p>The coastal regions and outback are very contrasting and beautiful, a joy to visit</p> <p>The area we live [<i>sic</i>] is beautiful, with lovely beaches</p>

Table 10 (continued)

Cuisine	Experiencing new foods I like fruits and vegetables here I think the food is of good quality
Accompanying dependents	The children are happy with their social life My children like the school they go to The children have settled in well which makes my life much easier
Employment	A satisfying job Better work - life balance I've been able to bring my expertise to Chile and initiate new understanding regarding human rights/rights of people with disabilities (Ed.D. in education/special education and disability rights)
Spouse	I like knowing that it is advancing my partners career My husband enjoys his job

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## **Chapter 7: Discussion**

The expatriate workforce is an essential component in the ever increasing globalisation of modern industry and commerce. However, despite research consistently highlighting that expatriate spouse adjustment constitutes a significant predictor of expatriate adjustment, investigation into the unique adjustment of the spouse has, to date, received little empirical attention. This research project therefore aimed to examine two key areas relating to expatriate spouse adjustment, namely the unique relationship between spouses' adjustment and (a) their perceived availability of social support, and (b) their subjective well-being. Opened-ended questions were also included in the study in an attempt to enquire into the most satisfying and stressful aspects associated with expatriate spouses' lives.

### **7.1 Main Findings**

#### **7.1.1 Adjustment.**

Spousal adjustment is conceptualised in this study as a state of psychological comfort across two domains of adjustment, namely, general and interaction adjustment. Adopting the definitions of Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005), general adjustment refers to a spouse's comfort "with various nonwork factors such as general living conditions, local food, transportation, entertainment, facilities, and health care services in the host country", while interaction adjustment refers to a spouse's comfort "with interacting with host country nationals both inside and outside of work" (p. 257).

Bivariate correlations and multiple regression analysis revealed that higher levels of perceived social support were associated with more general adjustment. Specifically, after controlling for the effects of socio-demographic and personality variables, multiple regression results

indicated that perceived social support remained a unique predictor of general adjustment. This indicates that the perceived availability of socio-emotional and instrumental support holds significance for general adjustment outcomes, over and above the contribution of the specified individual difference variables, suggesting that the provisions afforded by human assistance, be they socio-emotional or instrumental in function, are highly important to spouses' adjustment during cross-cultural transitions. Given the additional challenges expatriate life presents, it is not surprising that the provisions afforded through social support facilitate spouses' adjustment.

Personality was also identified as playing an integral role in spousal adjustment. According to bivariate correlations, openness related to both general adjustment and the more social domain of interaction adjustment, while agreeableness was found to relate to general adjustment, and extraversion to interaction adjustment. Based on previous research (see, for example, Ali et al., 2003), the significance of the relationship between openness and spouse adjustment was not surprising, particularly because individuals high on openness may be more curious and willing to engage in interpersonal interactions, and appreciate a variety of experiences. Given the gregarious and general sociable nature of extraverts, the significant association between extraversion and interaction adjustment was also expected, as was the positive relationship between agreeableness and general adjustment. With regards to agreeableness, it is conceivable that general adjustment should be positively related to traits indicative of a flexible approach to life, and tolerance for aspects associated with an expatriate existence such as local bureaucracy and cultural traditions. When considering the unique predictive ability of personality, multiple regression results indicated that openness was the only personality trait that retained its significance as a predictor in either model of adjustment. The overarching relevance of openness was of no great surprise, particularly given its visible

prevalence within expatriate behaviour research (Ones & Viswesvaran, 1997). Interestingly, findings from the content analysis revealed widespread satisfaction with the intercultural experiences afforded through expatriate life; for example, the opportunity to travel and explore different places, cultures, and ways of life. Openness to experience may likely prove to be an important factor underlying these positive feelings, which are no doubt important to a spouse's adjustment.

As anticipated, t-test and multiple regression results also found that those spouses who were currently employed in their host country had significantly higher levels of interaction adjustment. This aligns with the opinion that social interactions with host country nationals, afforded, for example, through work, can be seen as providing spouses with not only a source of social support, but also the opportunity to learn culture specific adaptive behaviours (Pellico & Stroh, 1997). Interestingly, an examination of the qualitative data revealed the theme of employment and career as a common source of strain in expatriate life, most notably the issue of obtaining professional licensure and credentialing, and also to the difficulty of obtaining any employment, appropriate to career pathways or not. Problems regarding the realm of employment and career, both potential and actual, have also been previously emphasised throughout a variety of resources (Brookfield GRS, 2010; Copeland, 2004; Permits Foundation, 2009). Cessation of a spouse's career may not only prove disruptive to their identity but, as previously mentioned, diminish their opportunities for interaction with others, thus limiting their access to potential sources of support. This may prove especially true among those spouses who were employed in a career role prior to commencing an assignment.

Contrary to expectations, previous international experience did not contribute to a significant difference in spouses' average level of general or interaction adjustment. While earlier work with an expatriate spouse population has suggested that previous international experience may have a positive influence on their general living adjustment (Mohr & Klein, 2004), other researchers have also found spouses' adjustment to be unrelated to previous international experience (Copeland, 2004). It is possible that previous international experience is most beneficial when it is relevant to the cultural context of a new assignment, in doing so, limiting the extent to which previous experience may be of benefit.

Having accompanying dependents was also not found to affect a spouses' level of general or interaction adjustment. This absence of a difference is of interest given the suggestion that accompanying children constitute an important interpersonal-social base of identity, and thus represent an important facilitator of spouse adjustment (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). Since the questionnaire did not qualify what an accompanying dependent was, some participants may have assumed this to include dependents other than school-aged children; for instance, older family members. This may have accounted for the absence of the expected significant difference between the two groups.

There was also no difference found in either the average general or interaction adjustment for male and female expatriate spouses. Given that existing research has recognised expatriate assignments as potentially raising unique sex/role issues (Copeland & Norell, 2002; Punnett, Crocker & Stevens, 1992), by way of gender specific support resources and gender related expectations (Selmer & Leung, 2003), this finding was considered a slight anomaly. The comparatively small number of male respondents does however limit the extent to which firm conclusions can be drawn, and consequently, the extent to which these findings can be applied to male expatriate spouses. Nevertheless, as more women embark on international careers and

accept foreign postings, the number of accompanying male spouses is also likely to increase, gradually bringing the above issues to the foreground.

The lack of a relationship between perceived social support and interaction adjustment is a finding that warrants further exploration. Because social support is seen as providing a sense of belonging and acceptance, it was expected that perceived social support would be likely to increase one's comfort with interacting with host country nationals. It is however possible that, as Black and Gregersen (1991b) suggest, the association between support and interaction adjustment may in fact vary as a function of culture novelty. As such, the less novel a culture is, the less important support may be for one's adjustment to relationships and interpersonal associations with host country nationals.

Drawing from earlier research, the absence of a significant relationship between agreeableness and interaction adjustment, and extraversion and general adjustment was also unexpected (Ali et al., 2003; Huang et al., 2005). Given the altruistic like qualities of agreeable individuals it was anticipated that the presence of such a trait would facilitate positive interpersonal interactions with host county nationals, and thus their subsequent interaction adjustment. It was further expected that where spouses displayed traits representative of extraversion, this would be highly related to their general adjustment, primarily because extraverted individuals exhibit active and outgoing characteristics. As far as emotional stability is concerned, perhaps this non significant result reflects Huang et al.'s (2005) assumption, that some cultures may be more accepting of reduced emotional control, so limiting its impact on adjustment outcomes.

### **7.1.2 Subjective well-being: the other half of the story of adjustment.**

Results from the correlation analyses indicated that both general and interaction adjustment share a positive and significant correlation with subjective well-being indicators. This suggests that adjustment to expatriate life may indeed have an influence on spouses' subjective well-being, supporting the potential weight of shorter-term situational factors on well-being outcomes. In terms of the unique contribution of adjustment to spouses' subjective well-being, the results from the multiple regression analyses indicated, even after partialling out the effects of personality and social support, that both general adjustment and interaction adjustment remained positive and significant predictors of affective balance. This result indicates that a spouse's adjustment appears to be both uniquely, and positively, related to their individual emotional functioning, that is to say, the balance between their positive and negative affect.

According to bivariate correlations, extraversion and emotional stability can also be seen to be related to both life satisfaction and affective balance. As previously highlighted, personality traits have frequently been linked with subjective well-being, with extraversion and emotional stability featuring as chief regulators of affect. The significant correlation between agreeableness and affective balance is also no exception, with studies citing this Big Five factor as a facilitator of relationships and, in accordance with an instrumental explanation, an important predictor of positive affect (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998). However, interestingly, the only personality trait which retained its significance in both the life satisfaction and affective balance models was emotional stability. Accordingly, this finding suggests that positive, high-spirited, poised and resilient characteristics are important for effective mood regulation and life satisfaction in expatriate spouses. The lack of unique significance for the additional personality variables could indicate that within an expatriate spouse population, emotional

stability constitutes the most cardinal personality predictor of subjective well-being. This accent on emotional stability echoes sentiments similar to previous research, wherein emotional stability was found to be a particularly strong predictor of well-being indicators (see, for example, DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Hills & Argyle, 2001; Vittersø, 2001).

As anticipated, bivariate correlations and multiple regression results found higher levels of perceived social support to be associated with greater life satisfaction. Perceived social support was also found to be a unique predictor of affective balance, but only when considered within the multiple regression model containing interaction adjustment. While this result aligns with the suggestion that support may not always be necessary for subjective well-being (Gallagher & Vella-Brodrick, 2008), overall these findings support the wide ranging consensus across the literature for the existence of a positive relationship between support and subjective well-being (Diener & Oishi, 2005). In essence, the above suggests that spouses' perceived receipt of socio-emotional and instrumental support may influence their emotions and cognitions in a way that promotes their subjective experience of life satisfaction and effective mood regulation.

Contrary to expectations, neither general adjustment, nor interaction adjustment made a unique contribution to the prediction of life satisfaction, above and beyond the influence of personality and perceived social support. While significant predictors in the correlation analyses, this indicates that, when considered alongside the above variables, adjustment may in fact have been explaining the same part of variation in life satisfaction as that which personality and support were.

### **7.1.3 Supplementary findings.**

Based on the likelihood of cross-over effects between a spouse and their partner during an expatriate assignment, it is not surprising that the spouse's partner was mentioned as both a source of satisfaction and stress. Moreover, given the raft of new challenges which spouses face, and considering that some participating spouses reported lower levels of adjustment, support and subjective well-being, it was not surprising to find that several spouses expressed feelings relating to uncertainty, dependency, along with a lack of control and belongingness. Relocation and resettlement, and the subsequent tension that this can give rise to was also cited as a key source of strain, in particular the initial arrival period where spouses must familiarise themselves with local amenities and establish a new home environment. These transitional periods may prove particularly stressful for spouses because of the potential disruption to their personal, social, and environmental based identity predictors. Cultural traditions within the host country, and how they may differ from one's own cultural background, were also frequently mentioned as stressors associated with expatriate life, in particular the anticipation of being able to meet and conform to these differences.

While an examination of the qualitative data revealed that the richness of friendships and the chance to meet and interact with a diverse and interesting range of individuals constituted satisfying aspects of expatriate life, feelings of isolation, difficulties associated with engendering social interaction with others, and separation from friends and family back in one's home country were also expressed as common sources of strain. It was therefore, not surprising to note that a general lack in the availability of supportive functions was disclosed by several respondents as a further stressful aspect of expatriate life. Given that the aforementioned quantitative data found participants, on average, to be fairly satisfied with their perceived level of support, as a whole, these qualitative links were unexpected,

suggesting that despite the quantitative findings, support cannot be considered uniformly adequate or essential.

Additionally, according to the content analysis, not being able to adequately express oneself, or sufficiently understand others was frequently cited as a source of strain. These sentiments are supported by previous research, which has also recognised language as posing a frequent challenge for expatriates (Brookfield GRS, 2010). Language and communication issues may be particularly distressing for spouses if it affects their ability to interact with host country nationals and their level of comfort with situational and environmental conditions. Perceived socio-emotional and instrumental support is likely to be particularly pertinent for the adjustment of spouses facing these difficulties.

On a positive note, personal development was expressed as a satisfying aspect of expatriate life, with several spouses underlining the improvement in themselves, be it in their confidence, the enhancement of their existing skills or the learning of new ones, the broadening of their mindset, or their personal growth. The financial gain afforded through international assignments was also highlighted by respondents as being a rewarding aspect of expatriate life.

## **7.2 Limitations**

The major limitation of this study is that the data has been obtained through the use of a cross-sectional questionnaire. Accordingly, this approach lacks the ability for one to glean information regarding cause and effect, thus implicating population validity. Also, in cross-sectional, non-experimental research such as this, there were no interventions, and units were not randomly assigned to the levels of the independent variables. As such, the extent to which the researcher was able to predict whether a change in the dependent variable was related to a

change in the independent variable was limited due to the possibility of alternative explanations, and difficulty in determining directionality. Hypothetically, this poses a threat to internal validity because of the difficulty in reaching accurate conclusions about theorised relationships (Pedhazur & Pedhazur Schmelkin, 1991). An additional potential caveat of this research arises from the response choice sets of rating scales; namely, that of acquiescence response bias (Visser, Krosnick & Lavrakas, 2000). While the relatively sample size exceeded the minimum case-to-variable recommendation, the reliability of the results may be questioned by some reviewers due to the small sample size. Moreover, based on the size of the sample and the number of predictors, the risk of overfitting the data may also have been heightened. Harrison et al. (2004) do however recognise the difficulty faced by researchers in obtaining access to an expatriate population.

In the interests of brevity, the social support section of the questionnaire only asked participants to “consider if you know persons who would perform the behaviours described”. In hindsight, following feedback from participants, it would seem that with regard to the support related questions, rather than treating social support as a unitary construct, the questionnaire may have benefited from differentiating between specific sources of support; for example, local support from host country nationals and organisational members, and remote support from home country nationals. In relation to the content analysis, it should be noted that while the researcher aimed to approach the texts in an objective and informed manner, subjectivity and bias invariably influence this process, so, to imply that the final categories and their operational definitions represent absolute meanings from the texts would be misleading. Finally, given that all the data was obtained via a cross-sectional self-report questionnaire, it is important to acknowledge that observed relationships may, in part, be due to common-method variance.

### **7.3 Implications for Research**

With regards to the measure of spouse adjustment, in light of the fact that nearly 43% of participants reported being currently employed in their host country, the absence of a work component from this scale may mean that adjustment issues for expatriate spouses have been inadequately captured. It would therefore appear worthwhile to incorporate a work component in future studies. Moreover, while this study only sought to ask participants about their current employment status in their host country, given its apparent significant relationship with interaction adjustment, future studies could further elaborate on this by investigating whether spouses incurred a change in their employment status, and how this related to their subsequent adjustment.

As a means of gauging changes in adjustment, adoption of a longitudinal design could also prove worthwhile in order to map spouses' movements through the proposed phases of adjustment according to the U-curve theory of adjustment as applied to expatriates (Torbiorn, 1982). The incorporation of a longitudinal design in understanding predictors and their long reaching impacts on both spouses' adjustment and their subjective well-being would also prove valuable, particularly as cross-sectional designs can risk accentuating momentary emotional states despite a scale specifying an explicit time frame.

Investigation into the effectiveness of current organisational initiatives which encourage and facilitate social interactions between spouses and both host country nationals, and other expatriates, may also prove worthwhile, particularly given the relevance of social support for both adjustment and subjective well-being outcomes. Furthermore, an additional worthwhile area of future research may be to distinguish between the adjustment of spouses who trail company-assigned expatriates, and those who trail self-initiated expatriates, a split this research did not delve into, yet nevertheless a separation which may provide greater insight

into the adjustment process of the expatriate spouse. In order to ascertain their importance for adjustment outcomes, the sources of spousal strain that emerged in the content analysis; for instance, relocation/resettlement, language competency, support provisions and availability, and employment/career concerns, also deserve more attention in future research. Furthermore, the incorporation of future expatriate spouse adjustment research within a broader social support and social identity framework seems warranted.

#### **7.4 Implications for Practice**

While previous research has tended to predominately focus on female expatriate spouses, this study supports the view that male expatriate spouses constitute an increasingly significant portion of the expatriate spouse population, highlighting the changing nature of expatriate assignments. Furthermore, the fact that nearly 43% of participants reported being currently employed in their host country may indicate, as the literature claims, that dual career couples are becoming increasingly common. In such cases, the spotlight on the expatriate spouse is no doubt going to become more relevant as organisations strive to ensure the success of overseas assignments, and also attract suitably skilled staff.

In the interim, what this study does suggest is that difficulties associated with obtaining employment and licensure/credentialing are common causes of strain for accompanying spouses. This likely stems from the fact that employment and a career may not only be important for a spouse's identity, but that the workplace can also function as a source of support. While the current economic conditions and the location of postings may limit the likelihood of spouses obtaining employment, in light of the above findings, organisational assistance directed toward the maintenance and development of the spouses' careers would appear warranted. Furthermore, despite this study failing to differentiate between sources of support, in relation to the type of support, both socio-emotional and instrumental oriented

support appear to be relevant not only for spouses' general adjustment but also for their subjective well-being. Accordingly, if organisations can facilitate the acquiring and continuation of such support, the opportunity for these individuals to form and maintain valuable social connections that will function as sources of support may increase. This may then heighten the subsequent likelihood of spouses experiencing ensuing positive adjustment, and successful life outcomes. Potential ways in which organisations may provide, or assist, with the acquisition of support are as follows:

- utilise relocation companies that provide spouses with destination consultants and general direct assistance with aspects such as: finding accommodation, the setting up of bank accounts, and the sourcing of key amenities like healthcare and schooling. Such support services may help to relieve the strain related with many of the tasks associated with relocation and resettlement;
- indirectly assist spouses in retaining communication with family and friends in their home country, be it through internet or phone allowances;
- provide the spouse with key contacts for clubs/societies/local employers in their area of residence.

Recognition of the importance of personality for both adjustment and subjective well-being outcomes, may also serve to assist organisations in their development of support initiatives for expatriate spouses; for instance, given the positive relationships between spouses' personality traits and their ensuing perceptions of available support, those lacking in emotional stability or sociability, might require specific assistance on international assignments to better meet their support needs.

Given the plethora of research which focuses on negatively valenced outcomes of expatriate life, the identification, in this study, of satisfying aspects of spouses' expatriate

lives, serves to highlight areas that appear to be working well in international assignments, such as, personal development and opportunities for intercultural experiences, areas that may benefit from further investigation and development.

## Conclusion

This study supports the relevance of social support for spouses' general adjustment, extending existing literature by confirming its significance in the face of individual difference variables. This research also went beyond current literature by investigating a spouse's adjustment in relation to their subjective well-being, with results indicating that adjustment is an important determinant of spouses' effective mood regulation.

As previous research has highlighted, adjusted spouses can serve as important resources in international assignments. Understanding, acknowledging, and managing this potential asset, will no doubt assist organisations in their resolve to enhance expatriate assignment success, and so compete more effectively in an ever competitive and demanding global marketplace. Given its relevance as a predictor of both spouses' adjustment and subjective well-being, socio-emotional and instrumental social support should therefore continue to feature as a key consideration in expatriate management. Additional areas which appear to be central to the spousal adjustment process include, but are not limited to, obtaining employment, career maintenance, language competency, maintaining ties with significant others in their home country and the general processes surrounding relocation and resettlement. Moreover, in light of the value placed upon successful life outcomes and general quality of life, the significant positive relationship between adjustment and spouses' affective balance, only reconfirms the need to ensure that factors important to the positive adjustment of the spouse are more clearly understood.

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# **Appendix A**

## **Questionnaire**

# **Appendix B**

## **Coding Schemes**

## Coding Scheme: Stressful Aspects of Expatriate Life

<b>Code</b>	<b>Category Name</b>	<b>Category Definition</b>
1	Socialisation	Unit of text identified as referring to a spouse's difficulty with socialisation/relationships, and/or lack there of
2	Economic reasons	Unit of text identified as referring to financial difficulties
3	Environment	Unit of text identified as referring to the host country climate and general environmental conditions
4	Dependency	Unit of text identified as referring to a spouse's lack of independence or autonomy
5	Infrastructure	Unit of text identified as referring to the basic structures needed for the operation of the host country (e.g. institutional and social infrastructure)
6	Bureaucracy	Unit of text identified as referring to the host country's systems of administration
7	Host country nationals	Unit of text identified as referring to the nature of host country nationals
8	Lifestyle	Unit of text identified as referring to the way of living and quality of life in host country
9	Language & communication	Unit of text identified as referring to language and communication issues in the host country
10	Employment & career	Unit of text identified as referring to a spouse's difficulty with obtaining employment, licensure and credentialing
11	Geography	Unit of text identified as referring to the location/ landscape/size of the host country
12	Relocating & resettlement	Unit of text identified as referring to the arrival or departure phase of an assignment (e.g. the transporting of goods, settling in, orienting oneself)
13	Culture	Unit of text identified as referring to a host country's cultural traditions, cultural expectations and general cultural differences
14	Support	Unit of text identified as referring to a spouse's social support (e.g. its functionality and availability)
15	Friends & family in home country	Unit of text identified as referring to friends and family back in a spouse's home country (e.g. missing friends/family, absence from family occasions)
16	Homesickness	Unit of text identified as referring to a spouse missing their home country (e.g. its environment and national sports)
17	Accompanying dependents	Unit of text identified as referring to the unique demands presented by a spouse's accompanying offspring

18	Spouse	Unit of text identified as referring to the expatriate worker (e.g. their work schedule and their influence on the expatriate spouse)
19	Other	Unit of text identified as referring to any arbitrary stressful experiences for the spouse, arising as a result of expatriate life
20	Belongingness	Unit of text identified as referring to a spouse's sense of not belonging or not feeling accepted by individuals within their host country
21	Uncertainty	Unit of text identified as referring to a spouse experiencing doubts or insecurities
22	Lack of control	Unit of text identified as referring to a spouse's sense of a lack of control, or power

## Coding Scheme: Satisfying Aspects of Expatriate Life

<b>Code</b>	<b>Category Name</b>	<b>Category Definition</b>
1	Lifestyle	Unit of text identified as referring to a spouse's satisfaction with their quality of life and everyday life in general
2	Relationships/socialisation	Unit of text identified as referring to a spouse's positive interactions and affiliations with others
3	Cuisine	Unit of text identified as referring to the food in the host country
4	Geography	Unit of text identified as referring to the general landscape/size/location of the host country
5	Environment	Unit of text identified as referring to the host country climate and general environmental conditions
6	Language	Unit of text identified as referring to language related opportunities
7	Infrastructure	Unit of text identified as referring to the basic structures needed for the operation of the host country (e.g. institutional and social infrastructure)
8	Intercultural experience	Unit of text identified as referring to the experiences expatriate life affords a spouse with (e.g. travel, exposure to different cultures and/or ways of life)
9	Economic reasons	Unit of text identified as referring to financial rewards
10	Personal development	Unit of text identified as referring to the improvement in a spouse's life (e.g. the learning of new skills, the enhancement of existing skills, the broadening of their mindset)
11	Spouse	Unit of text identified as referring to the expatriate worker as contributing to positive experiences for the expatriate spouse
12	Employment	Unit of text identified as referring to a spouse's employment in the host country (e.g. work satisfaction, work-life balance)
13	Accompanying dependents	Unit of text identified as referring to the happiness/adjustment of a spouse's accompanying dependents

