The Trailing Spouse:
A Qualitative Study looking into the Expectations and Reality of Expatriate Life in Shanghai, China.

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Victoria Hine
ID# 93035712
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ABSTRACT

This exploratory study looks at the experiences of eleven female trailing spouses living as expatriates in Shanghai, China. Semi structured interviews were conducted and questions centred around expectations of life as a trailing spouse in Shanghai as compared with their real life experiences. Grounded theory was used to analyse the data and identified five major themes to the study; Identity, Control, Relationships, Culture and Coping Mechanisms.

Analysis found that many accompanying spouses were dissatisfied with the support given by the company during the relocation process. It was felt that companies could significantly improve on their procedures and processes by investing more time and money into their staff before sending them overseas. Analysis also showed that some female trailing spouses experience a loss in identity, self-esteem and self-confidence during the initial stages of relocating. Without suitable support and information these feelings can linger and be the cause of premature repatriation for the family. Learning the local language, having a purpose during the stay and getting involved with social groups aided in minimising this identity crisis and seems to play an invaluable role in successful adjustment in a foreign environment.

This study contributes to highlighting the complexity of living abroad and the importance organisations should place on considering the spouse and family members when relocating employees.

CONTENTS

CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

As the presence of international corporations in Shanghai grows, the number of expatriate experts bought in to set up businesses and develop profitable sustainability is growing exponentially. So too, however, are the spouses and families who are often required to follow in the international footsteps of their husband and his employer. Frequently unable to work due to legal restrictions and without the necessary social support network of friends and family, these trailing spouses are often expected to put their lives down and pick up and move at a moment's warning. Numerous clubs and associations have been formulated in Shanghai in frequent years with the specific task of creating a sense of community and to provide a sense of purpose in the lives of these dutiful women as large multi-national corporations race to ride the economic boom in China.

In this study using semi-structured interviews, I have recorded and analyzed using Grounded Theory techniques, the personal encounters of eleven female expatriates living as trailing spouses in Shanghai, China. Using these interviews, I have been able to hear about how their expectations have matched the reality of living in Shanghai, and what they have learned from these experiences.

It is hoped that the information gained from this study will be useful to organizations that intend to send employees and their families overseas to work. It may provide more insight and an understanding of how better to serve their expatriate staff, ensure their emotional well-being and safety as well as ensuring productivity and financial success at corporate level.

Background to the Study

Increased globalisation and the attraction of cheap labour and products in developing countries have created a new type of employee and changed the traditional family dynamic. An expatriate employee is someone who lives in a foreign country at the request of their employer to establish or maintain the productivity and growth of an organization or corporation. Spouses and family members are often implicated in this relocation too. Of the estimated 22 million people living abroad for work purposes in the late 1990's (Hendershott, 1995), about 80% are married and 70% move with a family in tow (Black & Gregersen as cited by Selmer, 2001). Less than 10% of the trailing spouses are male (Harrison & Shaffer, 2001).

Whilst many expatriates have an enjoyable experience living overseas and some actively choose not to return to their home country, more than 40% of expatriate assignments end prematurely. One of the most significant reasons cited for premature repatriation is 'spousal dissatisfaction' (Price Waterhouse Coopers survey, 2001).

The costs of premature repatriation and posting failure are significant. It can impact individuals, marriages family and emotions, whilst the professional and career impact is often financial. An organization is likely to pay a steep price in recruitment and selection costs, training, moving, compromised careers and all the costs associated with lost opportunities, damaged relationships, low morale, reduced productivity and perhaps even damage to the company or organizations

reputation. However, these costs do not entirely fall on the individual expatriate or the business. Many expatriates have high profile senior positions where the decisions they make directly or indirectly affect the lives of a large number of people. There are two outcomes for expatriates who fail to adapt and adjust to their new environment. Either they are repatriated prematurely or they stay on with greatly diminished effectiveness sometimes doing themselves, their families and their companies' considerable harm.

Significance of the study

After decades of being closed off to the West, rapid development in China has seen a dramatic increase in economic growth resulting in increased foreign interest, investment and expatriate management.

China's Gross Domestic Product has increased 50 times since it became a Republic in 1949 and reached 7.9553 trillion RMB ($964 billion USD) in 1998, with a growth of 7.7 percent per annum, more than doubling the worlds' average of 3.3 percent (The Chinese Embassy, Switzerland, 1999).

China's economy is expanding faster than any other nation's on earth. Just over 10 years ago there were no more than 40 television stations - best estimates today put the number of legal television stations available throughout China at 5,000 (Murrell, 2000). National and provincial newspapers issued 20.3 billion copies in 1999 (National Statistics of China, 2000) and TV and radio penetration is now estimated at more than 93.4 percent (National Statistics of China, 2000) or

accessible to more than 1 billion people. From January 1999 to July 2000, the number of computers wired to the Internet in China soared from 747,000 to 6.5 million. The number of Internet users increased to 16.9 million from 2.1 million in the same period, according to the China Internet Network Information Centre (Murrell, 2000).

By 1999, China approved 334,000 overseas-invested enterprises with contractual investments of 594.81 billion USD and an actual investment of 288.94 billion US dollars (Chinese Embassy, Switzerland, 1999). China is becoming one of the largest manufacturing bases in the world and as a result, in 2003 alone, foreign direct investment reached 60 billion USD. This development and the colossal investment by foreign companies over the past decade has multiplied Chinese GDP and established definite links to the 'Western' world.

Shanghai is one of the most desirable Chinese cities for foreign companies to invest in. More than 50% of the Fortune 500 companies have injected capital in Shanghai since 1998 and with a GDP growth of 14.2% vs. the national average of 9% for the first nine months of 2004 (South Sphere Consulting, 2004), Shanghai is the fastest growing city in China. With a fixed population of 17 million, Shanghai is now home to more than 30 five star hotels; it is home of the Chinese Formula One Grand Prix, Masters Tennis tournament and numerous international trade fairs; it will host the 2007 Special Olympics and the 2010 World Expo.

With an ever-increasing number of companies earning revenue from overseas markets, first-hand knowledge and experience of foreign markets and conditions has become essential for today's managers and executives. The presence of expatriates in Shanghai has increased exponentially with foreign investment. It is estimated that more than one million foreigners were staying in Shanghai 2003 (South Sphere Consulting, 2004). This figure includes Asian expatriates (Taiwan and Hong Kong), students, long-term tourists and non-working spouses and family members.

It is recorded that 117,000 expatriates pay income tax under the municipality of Shanghai, China (Shanghai Star, 2004). Nearly 73 percent of those given work permits work as mid-level or senior managers in foreign-invested companies, while only 14 percent were employed by Chinese firms. It is estimated that in addition to this number, there are about 55,000 trailing spouses in Shanghai, the majority of who have children with them. Surprisingly, limited research has been done on the impact of moving abroad to the trailing spouse and family.

Personal experience/ involvement

I have lived abroad for more than one third of my life; in Japan and currently in Shanghai, China. I am very active in the Shanghai expatriate community and in the eight years I have spent here I have come into contact with both the expatriates employed here and their trailing spouses. My interest in this area came about as a result of my studies in Psychology and my employment with an international medical service provider. I subsequently became involved with a

group of foreign doctors in Shanghai who saw the need to establish a support service or network for the foreign community of Shanghai. They were concerned with the significant increase in expatriate patients who had been the victims of domestic violence, rape and alcohol abuse and were presenting with serious symptoms of depression.

I am the founding Director for LifeLine Shanghai, which was established in direct response to these issues and provides the foreign community of Shanghai with emotional support and information via a free confidential hotline service 12 hours a day, 365 days per year. The hotline is manned by trained expatriate volunteers who have all lived abroad before and have spent at least one year in Shanghai.

This exploratory study has emerged out of personal interest and curiosity and aims to bring to light some of the experiences trailing spouses deal with whilst living abroad.

At the beginning I hoped that I could compare and contrast the experiences between male trailing spouses and females. The term 'Trailing Spouse' has negative connotations and I was curious to learn if male trailing spouses experienced similar prejudice in expatriate societies or struggled with similar issues such as loss of identity and vulnerability. Unfortunately it was extremely difficult to find a suitable number of male trailing spouses living in Shanghai to interview. This should come as no surprise considering male trailing spouses make up just 10% of the global expatriate community.

CHAPTER TWO: Literature Review.

Introduction

More than 40% of expatriate assignments end prematurely primarily due to spousal dissatisfaction (Price Waterhouse Coopers survey, 2001). It is therefore surprising that limited research has been conducted on the impact of moving the spouse and family abroad with the seconded employee. Selmer (2001) has suggested that spousal adjustment may be a key antecedent as to how well an expatriate performs on his or her global assignment. It seems unusual then that in deciding who will be sent abroad, most companies do not consider the ability of the expatriate family to adapt and to function effectively in a new cultural environment (Black & Gregersen as cited by Selmer, 2001). Comments by trailing spouses about the loss of identity and control over basic day-to-day issues suggest that companies sending staff abroad need to be aware of this and prepare their staff for these changes (Pascoe, 2002). Corporations who send families abroad should take responsibility in providing a programme or support service to counteract these destructive feelings and the high failure rate of overseas assignments.

In this review, I will look at the impact of globalisation on the international employment market, with a specific focus on Shanghai, China. How these businesses are staffed is an important component of multi-nationals and the impact this has on the working spouse and the non-working spouse will be discussed. Reviewing a significant number of expatriates who return home prematurely, the three major reasons for premature repatriation will be touched

upon. These are partner dissatisfaction, family concerns and the inability to adapt. Finally, I will outline some of the predictors for successful adjustment.

The Era of Globalisation.

In the era of globalisation, an increasing number of companies and organizations are sending expatriates into the international employment field (Storti, 2001). It is estimated that more than 22 million people live abroad as expatriates (Hendershott, 1995). In a 1999 survey of 264 American based multi-national corporations, more than half of the participants indicated that they had increased their number of expatriate employees in the previous year, with an even larger figure expected for the following year (Windham 1999 as cited by Storti, 2001). The career path to senior management positions in most global companies now includes at least one overseas posting (Storti, 2001). Such postings are increasingly considered necessary for anyone who aspires to a leadership role in a company with foreign operations.

Globalisation and Shanghai, China.

China is one of the largest manufacturing bases in the world, and, as a result, in 2003 alone foreign direct investment reached 60 billion USD. Due to rapid modernisation and substantial economic growth, Shanghai is fast becoming the most desired location for these companies to establish themselves. With economic development on its side and with more than 50% of the Fortune 500 companies setting-up business in Shanghai, more multi-national corporations are moving their Asia Pacific head-quarters to Shanghai. With this extensive

investment and relocation of business, it becomes essential that corporations move their middle to senior management to design and supervise the new set-up. As a result, in the past five years the number of expatriates – working and trailing – has increased significantly. The number of westerners currently living and working in Shanghai is estimated to be almost 200,000.

Staffing Overseas Operations.

As overseas markets open up and globalisation becomes the norm for many enterprises, traditional human resources and staffing doctrine has changed dramatically. Globalisation has created a new employee, namely the expatriate. The wealth of research into expatriate life predominately focuses on the employee; many companies conduct personality tests, offer language training, cultural awareness classes and provide assistance with logistical issues (Pascoe, 2000; Storti, 2001).

However, to date, studies or research conducted on the trailing spouse and the effects of expatriate life on themselves and their families has been minimal. This is surprising considering that adaptation of expatriate families to the host country seems crucial to the successful fulfilment of international business assignments (Ali, Van der Zee & Sanders, 2003).

Some literature suggests that the limited focus on families and accompanying spouses is making it difficult for organisations to find staff willing to be relocated. In research conducted by Pricewaterhouse Coopers among over 270 international

organizations employing 65,000 expatriates, 80% of the companies reported major - and increasing - difficulties in recruiting executives to go overseas. According to the Pricewaterhouse Cooper's 'International Assignments European Policy and Practice: Key Trends 1999/2000', "getting people to accept international assignments remains a challenge". Employees are increasingly likely to refuse overseas postings due to family concerns. With 30-40% of expatriate assignments ending prematurely, and 60% suffering severe marital difficulties (Bruno Schricke as cited by Van der Boon, 2002), organisations may benefit by shifting their focus from the employee alone to include the entire family.

Punnett (1997) cited a 1994 Foreign Trade Council report that found that 80% of employees who refused international positions did so for family reasons and a further 31% of expatriate candidates rejected foreign assignments because of their spouses' careers (Punnett, 1997). As the Windham International Survey (cited by Storti, 2001) points out, the three leading causes of 'assignment failure' are partner dissatisfaction, family concerns and the inability to adapt. Robert Kohls' quips "if left to luck, your chances of having a satisfying experience living abroad would be about one in seven" (Kohls, 2001).

More surprising to note is that factors rated least highly by companies when selecting people for assignments, such as issues relating to partners' adaptability and dual career management, are most likely to be the cause of failed assignments. Research and literature strongly suggests that adaptation for the family into new

cultures and expatriate life is more difficult than that for the employee. Van der Boon (2002) believes that involving family members up front in the selection and preparation process, as well as providing ongoing support once on assignment is critical to the success and adaptation of the employee, the family and productivity for the company (Van der Boon, 2002). The cost of doing so is dwarfed by the cost of failure.

Whilst it is true that difficulties may arise for the family, and cultural adaptation problems can lead to failure of overseas assignments for the company, there is a significant impact for the working spouse.

Impact of Expatriate Life on the Working Spouse.

Selmer suggests that cross-cultural adjustment for spouses seems to be more difficult than adjustment for the expatriate employee (Selmer, 2001). Reassignment to any new culture is assumed to be 'easier' for the working partner because of the similarities in their life and structure. The employee finds continuity in their work life and colleagues provide a ready network of support. For those employees relocating to an operation in a third-world country, they may be given extra special treatment because of their status and assumed superiority (Pascoe, 2001) as occurs in Shanghai. For example, the expatriate employees' posted to Shanghai on assignment with a large multi-national corporation more than likely work along-side university educated, English speaking local employees. They stay within the stability of the familiar organizational culture

and for a large part of the day escape direct contact with the host culture and the cultural differences.

However, as Selmer points out (2001), there is limited literature and research conducted on expatriate work adjustment in China. The increasing availability of literature on business management in China has lead some to speculate that expatriate managers need to make considerable adjustments to their work roles in order to be successful. With limited understanding of cultural differences, expectations of head office / home can increase stress levels of expatriate managers. Expectations to attend after work social functions and to accommodate the time differences between their office and head-quarters result in expatriate employees often working long hours, which can commonly include a six or seven day working week. Most expatriate management positions also include a lot of travel. This in turn may place stress on personal relationships.

Therefore, it is not surprising that studies conducted on expatriate work satisfaction show a high positive correlation with the intercultural adjustment of the spouse (Ali, Van der Zee and Sanders, 2003). A happy spouse and family can contribute to a successful, satisfied and productive employee. The outcome of this type of research has resulted in some multi-national organizations that send expatriates overseas to refocus their efforts on supporting the spouses of expatriate staff. However participants of the study conducted by Ali, Van der Zee and Sanders (2003) show that spousal participants were not satisfied with the support they received from their partners' companies.

Impact of Expatriate Life on the Female Trailing Spouse.

According to Harrison (2001) there are at least 1.3 million expatriates working within American multi-national corporations alone. Given that about 80 percent of expatriates are married, this equates to more than 1 million spouses who are taking part in international relocations (Harrison, 2001). Studies have shown that whilst practical support for learning how to manage the tasks of daily living is important, it is critical to offer female trailing spouses emotional and social support throughout the entire assignment (McNulty, 1999, Pascoe, 2000). It is expected that because the trailing spouse has no access to organizational continuity they are more likely to experience strong disruption of their personal lives (Selmer, 2001). Expatriate life for the trailing spouse has been likened to 'developing a brand new personal and social identity from the ground up' (Harrison & Shaffer, 2001).

This is exacerbated in a country like China where strict legal requirements limit working opportunities and the types of employment foreigners can carry out. Not just confined to China, literature suggests that 81% of accompanying partners who were employed at home cannot find work in their destination country (Hendershott, 1995). This can have a direct impact on the self-confidence, self-worth and self-belief of the accompanying spouse. Instead of feeling excited about a new experience, many trailing spouses feel isolated and lonely, leading them to focus on the negatives instead of the positives of their new world.

Historically, trailing spouses have received little structural support in coping with the daily demands of unfamiliar circumstances. What they do receive is often considered insufficient. In a study of 194 trailing spouses in 4 regions; Europe, Middle East, Asia and Latin America, it was found that women who started their assignments well prepared in terms of language skills, cultural understanding, and career strategy had an easier time fitting into the culture (Copeland, 2002). Spouses who were consulted by the employer about the possibility of relocating and felt equally involved in the decision making process adjusted much better (Copeland, 2002).

However from the 194 expatriate spouses who took part in Copeland's study, only 6.2% were consulted by their husbands' employers before the decision to move was made. 28.3% said their husbands had had more influence in making the decision to move than they had. In addition, 31% of the spouses said they and/or their husbands felt pressured into accepting the assignment (Copeland, 2002).

Further results from Copeland's survey found that there was no single region in the world that women found "easier" to live in, nor to which they best adjusted (Copeland, 2002). Neither does having experienced previous international assignments necessarily protect women from adjustment problems (McNulty, 1999 as cited by Pascoe, 2000).

Premature Repatriation.

As previously mentioned, spousal dissatisfaction, family concerns and inability to adapt were cited as the three major reasons for posting failures and premature repatriation.

1. Partner dissatisfaction

The most frequently cited reason for premature repatriation is dissatisfaction of the non-working spouse. Moving countries, leaving jobs and changing roles within a relationship can result in a temporary loss of self-confidence, self-esteem and consequently personal identity.

Robin Pascoe, a long time trailing spouse and author, believes if you ask an accompanying expatriate spouse to identify the most overwhelming loss they feel after moving abroad, identity will likely be the near-unanimous reply (Pascoe, 2004). She suggests this is the case for accompanying spouses anywhere in the world. The question "Who am I?' can result in the short-term loss of the critical qualities – self esteem, self confidence and a sense of identity – and can cause even the strongest of women to doubt their ability. As one spouse talks about in a Wall Street Journal article (Opdyke, 2002);

"I entered a world where everyone knows me as Marc's wife or Riley's mom...I went from being the star of my own life to a supporting player in someone else's life."

These days, identity is strongly equated with career and professional status. The loss of a professional life upon expatriation can create feelings of worthlessness, a profound loss of self and manifest itself with symptoms similar to culture shock. The feeling of not being in control of the situation; not understanding cultural nuances; not understanding the language; restructuring a relationship and relearning basic daily chores can be extremely debilitating for a non-working partner. Those who do not adapt or learn to accept the current situation often get caught up in the denial or anger stages of the grief cycle. This is particularly harmful to personal relationships and can result in the non-working spouse lashing out at the partner whose job took them abroad, or the company who sent them there.

In order to lessen the extremes of spousal dissatisfaction and prevent premature repatriation, literature suggests that companies sending staff abroad implement a series of debriefing sessions for the family members. Grief therapist Elva Mertick confirms this: "My adamant position is that expats require regular follow up, preferably by the person who has done the pre-departure preparation, for no less than six months after arriving in the host country." (Elva Mertick as cited by Pascoe, 2004)

2. Family Concerns

Concerns regarding family matters are another common cause for failure of expatriate assignments. Resentment towards the working partner, guilt of

leaving elderly parents at home and concerns over children and education are common sources of concerns for families living abroad.

The dynamics of a marriage change when moved overseas. In addition to adapting to a new country and environment, expatriates and, in particular, the accompanying spouse may need to adapt to a new role within the marriage. Expectations to become the social co-ordinator for the working spouse and family often fall on the non-working spouse. Accompanying spouses are often called upon to host official entertainment at home or are expected to attend numerous cocktail functions and dinner parties. Issues dealing with children, healthcare, insurance and domestic chores are frequently left to the newly non-working spouse. In addition to the change in role of the non-working partner, the working partner is often required to travel a lot, frequently work late and expected to wine and dine clients, customers and visiting senior management. This change in lifestyle and marriage ideals can cause conflict if not discussed and equally considered.

Bruno Schricke, head of personnel for ABN AMRO in the Netherlands, has this to say: "People who are sent abroad on overseas assignments for a few years are more exposed to the stresses that can destroy a relationship." In his estimation, 60% of all expatriate executives experience serious marital difficulties (Bruno Schricke as cited by Van der Boon, 2002)

3. Inability to adapt.

Inability to adapt and adjust to a new way of life and a new culture is perhaps the most obvious reason for failure to work overseas. Expatriates and their families experience a whole new environment and must adapt to this in order to have a successful experience.

The literature suggests that the more different the host culture is from the expatriate's own culture, the more difficult the process of adjustment will be (Selmer, 2001). However, it would seem that expectations play an important role in the ability of western expatriates to settle in to the Chinese culture. Personal experience suggests that as a foreigner living in a visibly different culture, you are aware of the diversity and are either accepting of them as cultural differences or struggle and resist them.

However, according to Selmer (2001) Asian expatriates or Chinese born overseas who return to China seem to experience more difficulties in adjusting to the Chinese culture. This is perhaps due to expectations that they will assimilate more easily due to their Asian affiliations and similarities. A study conducted on the 'Adjustment of Western versus Overseas Chinese Expatriate Managers in China' by Jan Selmer has shown that Chinese born overseas and return to China do in fact encounter considerable adjustment problems. Whilst overseas Chinese expatriate managers experience lower levels of culture novelty than their western counterparts, they are generally less well adjusted than western managers,

especially with regard to work adjustment (Selmer, 2001). There is no mention of the effects of this particular cultural adjustment on trailing spouses.

It can be argued, however, that this finding has limited significance because the primary function of assigning an expatriate manager is to have that manager perform certain work tasks. However, further research shows that the less adjusted the individual is to their new country, the more work performance levels are reduced and ultimately the operation may fail (Selmer, 2001, Brewster, 1995, Brewster, 1994). Whilst the findings from this study are only derived from one cultural context, Mainland China, the results can be seen to support the argument that it could be more difficult for expatriates to adjust to a culture similar to their own (Selmer, 2001).

Brewster and Brewster (Selmer, 2001) suggest that assigning expatriates to a similar culture can be as much, if not more, of a trying experience as sending them to a different culture due to the perception of dissimilarity. Managers in similar cultures fail to identify the differences that exist and easily resort to blaming their subordinates or themselves for problems, which in reality are due to cultural differences. In a study conducted in the Netherlands (The Differences in Expatriate Spouses Intercultural Adaptation based on Hofstedes' Cultural Dimensions, 1991), it was expected that expatriate spouses from a culture similar to the Netherlands would adapt more easily to the Netherlands as compared to those from a different culture. However, the study showed that this was only weakly supported.

Adjustment into any new culture and work place can be a difficult experience for the expatriate employee, but it has been argued that adjustment for the trailing spouse is more difficult and has serious consequences on the success of an expatriate assignment (Pascoe, 2003).

Predictors of Adjustment.

Work and professional identity, social support, command of the local language and personality traits including open-mindedness and emotional stability have all been shown to be important factors in determining the success of overseas assignments by the accompanying spouse.

Women who suffered losses in professional identity and in the ability to live a life consistent with their career role values had poorer adjustment (Copeland, 2002). Punnett (1997, cited by Selmer, 2001) showed that female spouses who did not work in their host country suffered from substantial culture shock and tended to shut themselves away. Employment becomes a means for providing a sense of self worth and creating or maintaining a sense of personal identity in the new environment.

Support from the partner is shown to ease culture shock and speed up the adjustment of the trailing family. It is therefore not surprising that one of the strongest predictors of successful adjustment is the level of social support. Women who adjust best have both casual and intimate local friends. Women who rely most on long distance support (like e-mail) adjust more poorly (Copeland, 2002).

Maintaining a close relationship within a marriage is also significant in successfully adapting to a new culture. As previously outlined, many marriages fall by the wayside as new roles in a new environment take priority (Pascoe, 2002). Working husbands and organisations often wrongly assume that through providing tangible benefits such as drivers, maids, cooks and the like, their non-working partner will be happier and therefore these actions will facilitate faster adjustment (personal experience). Instead, these are often the main causes of conflict within a relationship and can be viewed as a burden on the stay at home spouse in terms of dealing with cultural differences in hygiene, language issues and safety concerns.

Literature states that it is the time and communication that each partner devotes to the other that facilitates healthy adjustment to a new environment. A study conducted by McNulty (1999) suggests that the personal internal environment that includes a person's self-esteem and identity is just as important as the external environment such as locating medical facilities and schooling when living abroad (McNulty 1999 as cited by Pascoe, 2002). Because the internal environment is intangible and an invisible entity, organizations usually overlook the importance of these factors and focus on the obvious external issues. As a result, issues and support that could assist with the self-esteem and confidence of the trailing spouse should be part of the support provided by the organization and would ease adjustment.

A command of the local language, personality traits of open-mindedness and emotional stability (Ali, Van der Zee and Sanders, 2003), duration of expatriate life, and having visited the country prior to relocation contributed to the successful adaptation of the spouses and family. Family cohesion and family adaptability were also found to have an impact on spousal adjustment (Ali, Van der Zee and Sanders, 2003). One of the biggest predictors of adjustment is whether the spouse makes an effort to get to know other people who live there (Harrison, 2001).

Further research into the factors that support successful adaptation of expatriates, trailing spouses and families is necessary if companies are to continue to send staff abroad. Organizations that send their expatriate staff and families overseas without preparation have been likened to "sending people into combat without teaching them how to fight" (Mendenhall, as cited by Carpenter, 2001). The decline in those interested to move abroad should be viewed as a significant indicator to multi-nationals that more support should be provided to those families who move overseas on behalf of the company.

To date there is little focus on the trailing spouse and their experiences of living abroad. It is well documented that spousal dissatisfaction is one of the most common reasons for premature repatriation and yet it is not often addressed in research or by corporations sending staff and families abroad. McNulty believes that verbal input from expatriate partners is essential as it reflects the absolute consensus of the expatriate family as a whole (McNulty as cited by Pascoe, 2002).

The results of this exploratory study conducted on female trailing spouses living in Shanghai supports the evidence that female trailing spouses do suffer from a loss of identity and control over everyday routine. These changes and the impact of a vastly different culture do impact the ease of adjustment into their overseas postings and corporations need to be aware of the impact trailing spouses can have over their husbands.

CHAPTER THREE: Methodology

Introduction

This chapter outlines the research design and paradigm used to conduct this qualitative study. It also gives a brief description of the eleven participants who were interviewed for this project. Following this, the chapter describes the materials used in this study including the consent form, information sheet and a copy of the interview schedule. The chapter outlines the procedures used and discusses ethical issues within the research.

Overview of Grounded Theory

Qualitative research studies people in their natural surroundings and aims to gain insights in how people make sense of their world and how they experience events (Willig, 2001). It is the aim of the researcher to understand or interpret meanings from events in people's lives and to understand what it is like to experience particular events and how people manage these situations. Unlike quantitative research, limited emphasis is placed on the cause and effect relationships and theories or meaning is derived from the data collected. The objective of qualitative study is to describe and possibly explain events and experiences, but never to predict outcomes (Willig, 2001).

Qualitative data collection techniques allow participants meaning to be heard, which is most successfully done through collecting data from case studies, semi-structured interviews, and observations of the participants in their own environment. From this data, categories or descriptive labels emerge, which

evolve throughout the research process but are not mutually exclusive. These techniques of data collection therefore need to be open ended and flexible enough to facilitate the emergence of new and unanticipated categories of meaning and experience. At the point of collection, data should not be coded, summarized or categorized so that meaning can emerge from the analysis of the data at a later date.

The objective of data collection in qualitative research practice is to create a comprehensive record of the participants' words and actions and to see how the researchers own personal perspective influences the data analysis. Personal preconception or reflexivity becomes an explicit addition into the study. Personal reflexivity refers to reflecting upon the ways in which our own personal values, experiences, interests, beliefs, political commitments and social identities have shaped the research and its interpretation. According to Willig (2001), reflexivity urges a researcher to 'explore the ways in which their involvement with a particular study influences, acts upon and informs such research'. It is essential to take reflexivity into account when collecting data for qualitative research.

Grounded Theory is the most commonly used post-positivist design (Leong & Austin, 1996) and was used to analyse data in this study. It can be defined as "a qualitative research method that uses a systematic set of procedures to develop an inductively derived grounded theory about a phenomenon". In 1967, Barney Glaser & Anselm Strauss, two academic sociologists at UC-San Francisco put forth Grounded Theory Development as a systematic approach to generating new

concepts of what is going on in newly emerging areas of study. Instead of using raw data and focusing on testing a hypothesis, their influential work, "The Development of Grounded Theory" (1967), shifted researchers into generating theory from their observations, hence grounding the theory in data.

Researchers using grounded theory generate theory from the data collected, rather than seeking to prove a statement or hypothesis. It differs from other research designs in that grounded theory is explicitly emergent, meaning that it moves from the specific to the more general in theorizing. Grounded theory does not test a hypothesis; rather it sets out to develop explanations that account for the research situation. The aim is to discover the theory within the data. Grounded theory is both the process of category identification and integration or the method and it's the final product or theory (Willig, 2001).

An initial research question is used to focus the attention upon a particular phenomenon and serves to identify the area of interest. Grounded theory is therefore relatively flexible in nature and allows the researcher to continuously review earlier stages of research and change direction if necessary. Semi-structured interviewing, participant observation, and focus groups can generate data for Grounded Theory. Once some data is collected, initial open coding can be used to explore the data, establish linkages between categories and then more data can be collected. Coding constitutes the most basic as well as the most fundamental process in grounded theory and is the process by which categories within the data are identified. These initial categories are largely descriptive

labels for occurrences or phenomena. These labels give rise to low-level categories, which methodically incorporate these categories into meaningful units. Data should be read and re-read until no new emerging categories can be uncovered.

The objective of this particular study is to learn about the real life experiences of the female spouses who move abroad for their husbands' employment. Through semi-structured interviews, data was collected, categories emerged and through analysing the data meaning can be created.

Research Design

Semi structured interviews were conducted over a three month period with eleven expatriate female spouses who are currently living in Shanghai. The interviews aimed to explore the thoughts and feelings of women living in a foreign country as a non-working spouse. The participants are from Britain, Australia, America and one spouse from Hong Kong with an American Green Card. The average age of the participants is 47 with an age range from 35 years old to 56 years old. Many of the expatriate positions are held by senior business partners and employees within the organization, hence the older ages of the participants. Participants have been married for an average of 19.5 years with a range of 2 months to 35 years. These spouses have been in Shanghai for a time frame ranging between 4 months and 9 years. More than half of the participants have lived overseas before in at least one other posting as an expatriate trailing spouse. See table 1 below.

Participants

Table of Participants demographic details.

*	Nationality	Age	Number of years married	Time spent in Shanghai	First overseas Posting?	Previously employed?	Children
Sally	British	36	9	2 years	Yes	Yes	No
Jane	Australian	36	7	5 months	No	Yes	No
Gail	British	52	34	4 months	No	Yes	Yes
Jill	British	44	22	8 months	Yes	Yes	Yes
Crystal	Aus/Brit	53	20	8 years	No	Yes	No
Ann	Brit/NZ	55	35	9 years	Yes	Yes	Yes
Cheryl	British	55	30	1.5 years	No	Yes	Yes
Iris	HKG	46	20	2 years	No	Yes	Yes
Lindy	American	56	32	1.5 years	No	Yes	No
Stella	Australian	49	5	8 months	No	Yes	Yes
Kath	American	35	2months	1 year	Yes	Yes	No

Table 1. (* - Not participants real names)

This section gives a brief outline of the backgrounds of the 11 participants; pseudonyms have been given to protect the identity of the spouses.

Sally

Hong Kong was their initial destination, but for business reasons soon after moving to Hong Kong relocated their head office to Shanghai. Sally had her own business in the UK and had difficulties settling into the traditional 'wife' role. Her major unsettling period occurred ten months into her time in Shanghai when she suffered a sporting injury (disabling her from being active) and the computer broke disconnecting her from communicating with her family.

Jane.

Jane moved to Shanghai 5 months ago after her husband got a promotion. They lived in Beijing before that for a year and half. Jane felt most apprehensive about missing her family and friends and leaving her career as a Community Government Social Worker. Some of the most difficult aspects of adjustment for Jane have been the pollution, traffic and not being to work in her field of expertise. She also feels uncomfortable with not being financially independent.

Gail.

Gail has been in Shanghai for 4 months and previously lived in Korea twice, Singapore twice, Paris and Vietnam. However, she does not consider herself an experienced expatriate wife. Gail is really enjoying her time in Shanghai and is surprised at how well she has adjusted this time even though she dislikes Shanghai as a city. She had negative experiences with the women's groups in her other postings but has found these useful and fun in Shanghai. She usually seeks to undertake some form of work but says she has not had time in Shanghai.

Jill

As a nurse, Jill is unable to work in China, but does participate in volunteer work at the orphanages. She has really enjoyed spending the time with her husband and setting her life up to suit them as a couple and not having to revolve around their two children. Initially Jill had a difficult time settling in Shanghai and found communicating extremely difficult. However, she feels she has learnt a lot with

this experience and is looking forward to the chance to move to another overseas posting in the future.

Crystal

Prior to moving to Shanghai, Crystal lived in Papua New Guinea for 3 years and moved around Australia numerous times with her husbands' job role. Crystal says she and her husband like adventure and she gets a real sense of achievement in winning over day-to-day chores in developing countries. They had travelled to China before as early as 20 years prior and had been here when it was closed off and nothing western was available. These limited expectations Crystal believes made it easier to adapt to now, because anything they did find and what they did achieve was considered a bonus.

Ann

Getting a job for Ann was paramount in her decision making process to come to Shanghai and she has been fortunate to find a job in her medical field with a Consulate. Her husband was travelling back and forth from Shanghai for a few years before his company asked him to move permanently. It was her 18-year-old son who convinced her to go and be with her husband – her older daughter was living overseas already. Like many, the language is one of the most difficult aspects of living in Shanghai, but she enjoys the opportunities and sights and sounds of everyday life here.

Cheryl

Cheryl has been in Shanghai for about 1 and half years and lived in India and Hong Kong prior. She gave up a full time job to be with her husband in their first overseas posting in India and found the initial adjustment difficult. However, she did adapt and had a very positive experience and today says it has been their best overseas experience. Shanghai has been positive also in that she felt like she knew what she needed to do in order to adapt and adjust. However, she does admit that she has not thrown herself into friendships the same as she did in India because of the difficulty of saying good-bye to good friends made in the expatriate community. She does voluntary work here and is still technically on a career break from the National Health Service in the UK.

Iris

Iris has lived in Shanghai for 2 years, but has been living abroad for more than 15 years. They have lived in Singapore, Canada, Florida, Boston and 2 years in Beijing before returning to Hong Kong for a year and then moving to Shanghai. She feels living in Shanghai is not too difficult because of her language ability in Mandarin but she still has difficulty accepting hygiene and manners of the local population. Her children had difficulty moving from the US back to Asia after living an American lifestyle.

Lindy

Lindy lived in Tokyo, Japan for 2 and half years in the mid 80's. Having a job was imperative before she considered moving to Japan and she thinks having a

job made life much easier for her there. Her life in Shanghai is very different and her move here is a very different experience because she is not working full time. Also she was not prepared for the vast communication gap.

Stella

Prior to moving to China, Stella lived in Indonesia and spent a year in the Middle East in 1980 with 2 of her 3 children. Stella found it easier to slip into life in Shanghai, she is unsure if this is because she lived in Beijing before and sort of knew what to expect, or whether Shanghai is an easier city to live in. She does find the lifestyle here pretty exhausting and talks about the need to protect herself from this by taking days out and learning to be open minded and just 'try'.

Kath

As a student Kath travelled extensively living and working in the UK, Japan, Guatemala, Mexico and Taiwan for 3 years before moving to Shanghai. She was most apprehensive about moving to Asia with a husband because of the stresses and strains expatriate life puts on a marriage and especially the threat of Asian women. She felt her previous experience in Taiwan made it more difficult for her to adjust in Shanghai, in that it made her more apprehensive about the culture shock and cultural differences that were inevitable. She likes the financial independence and the feeling of purpose being employed gives her.

Materials

Information Sheet (see appendix 1)

The information sheet outlined the purpose of the study and told the participants what to expect with regards to the amount of time the interviews will take, confidentiality, anonymity, and voluntary participation.

Informed Consent (see appendix 2)

The Consent Form is designed in accordance with the requirements of the Massey University Ethic's Committee.

Interview Schedule (see appendix 3)

An individual interview allowed the participant to tell of her personal experiences with moving to and living in Shanghai. It was used to encourage discussion about the participant's expectations and the reality of their move to Shanghai, China.

The interview questions were divided into 3 sections; the first was a set of closed questions concerning the demographic status of the participants. It included questions about nationality, years of marriage, age and language ability.

The second section looked at the participants' expectations about moving to Shanghai as a trailing spouse. It focused on areas such as circumstances that bought the respondent to Shanghai, the control she had over the decision to relocate and support services provided and made available by the employer. It asked her about her initial thoughts and feelings of moving to Shanghai and what her particular concerns were.

In direct contrast to this, the third section focused on her reality as a trailing spouse in Shanghai and asked questions about how her reality has matched her expectations and what her life is like in Shanghai. It also asks for advice and recommendations she would make to another couple and trailing spouse preparing to move to Shanghai. Participants were given the opportunity to speak of any other aspects of life as a trailing spouse that the researcher had overlooked at the end of the interview.

Procedures

Participants were all known to the researcher and invited to partake in this study. Initially, each interested participant was given the information sheet and made aware that they could withdraw at anytime during the process and were assured of confidentiality and anonymity of the study and results. Written consent to take part in the study was obtained from each participant prior to commencing the semi-structured interviews. Eleven female spouses agreed to be interviewed and participate in the study.

Participants were interviewed at their place of choice, the majority being interviewed in their home, with the interviews lasting between 45 minutes and 2 hours. All interviews were recorded and later transcribed by the researcher. Participants were assigned a number to protect confidentiality and anonymity and this number was noted on the tapes and transcriptions. During analysis they were each given a pseudonym and these are the names referred to in the findings.

After the interview was completed, each participant was thanked for their time and told that a copy of the final study would be made available to them early 2005 and that the tapes and transcripts would be returned to them or destroyed at their request after the project is complete.

Data Analysis.

Analysis of the data was based on grounded theory procedures. Once the tapes were transcribed verbatim, each transcription was printed off from the computer and labelled with a number corresponding to the tape. Later these were given a pseudonym. Each transcript was read thoroughly to get a general feel for the content. A table with information regarding nationality, age, years married, years in Shanghai, 1st posting overseas, job in home country, children, language ability, circumstance bought to Shanghai, employed in Shanghai, voluntary work and their overall rating was drawn up to help understand the group dynamics and information. Each transcript was then read carefully and notes made in the margins line by line of important emerging themes and labels. Significant statements were underlined. Analysis was carried out on each transcript in turn and each transcript was read and re-read repeatedly during the process of analysis until no more concepts could be obtained. These themes and labels were then collated and organised into the five main categories seen in the findings section; Identity, Control, Relationships, Culture and Coping Mechanisms. These themes were set out in a matrix and important information from each participant was noted into the matrix. This information was then used to draw up the findings section of the report.

Ethical Considerations

Each participant was provided with the consent form and information sheet prior to conducting the interview. They were asked to read both forms and had the opportunity to ask questions and clarify details before signing the consent form. At the time of the interview, each participant was reminded of her rights as a volunteer participant to withdraw at anytime during the interview.

The researcher had three female spouses decline her request to partake in the study; one because she had recently been told they were leaving Shanghai, another because of time constraints and the 3rd felt uncomfortable about participating for personal reasons.

Confidentiality and anonymity are vital in the expatriate community of Shanghai and this was guaranteed with the participants through using pseudonyms in the body of the study. The tape recordings and transcripts are identifiable with numbers and participants have the choice of having the tapes and transcripts back upon completion of the study, or they will be destroyed.

Each participant was given the option of where they would like to conduct the interview in order to ease the participant and make them feel relaxed. A non-threatening interview technique was ensured and each participant was made to feel comfortable and had the opportunity to postpone the interview or terminate it should it become uncomfortable.

Participants were also given the number of LifeLine Shanghai, whom they could anonymously contact should the interview touch on uncomfortable issues or upset the participant to the point of needing emotional support.

The information gained through this study is to be used to contribute to the understanding of expatriate life for the non-working, trailing spouse. It will hopefully uncover possible opportunities to make the transition easier for the spouse and family and to offer some insights in the experiences of the spouses for the multi-nationals who engage in expatriate employment.

CHAPTER FOUR: Findings.

Grounded theory data analysis of the eleven interviews conducted has identified five major themes that will be discussed in the following chapters; Identity, Control, Relationships, Culture and Coping Mechanisms (See table 1).

It is important to note that these findings are subject to the numerous positive and negative emotions and feelings experienced when living abroad and can appear contradictory at times. Not all experiences are identical and the findings represent each of the participants experience including the negative aspects and the positive.

Table 1

Major themes and subheadings from interviews of trailing spouses in Shanghai

Major Theme	Sub Heading
1. Identity	**1.1** Life without Purpose
	1.2 My Job Defines me
	1.3 Shift in Power
	1.4 Becoming the Wife
	1.5 The Social Coordinator
2. Control	**2.1** Expatriation Process
	2.2 The Employer
	2.3 Everyday Life
	2.4 Communication
	2.5 Local Environment
	2.6 Prepared-ness
3. Relationships	**3.1** Marriages
	3.2 Expatriate Friendships
	3.3 Relationships with the Host Culture
	3.4 Family
4. Culture	**4.1** Personal Culture and Culture Shock
	4.2 The Host Culture
	4.3 The Expatriate Culture
	4.4 Repatriation Fears
5. Coping Mechanisms	**5.1** Coping mechanisms for Identity
	5.2 Coping with Homesickness
	5.3 Coping Mechanisms - Culture Shock

1. IDENTITY

One of the most common themes running throughout the data collected was the notion of identity, or more accurately the loss of personal identity among the trailing spouses interviewed. Moving countries, leaving jobs and changing roles within a relationship can result in a temporary loss of self-confidence, self-esteem and consequently personal identity. Therefore, the loss of identity can be devastating and have an enormous effect on the experiences of the female trailing spouse living in Shanghai.

This chapter looks at numerous issues that can affect the identity of women who move abroad with their husband. In particular it looks at the importance a sense of purpose plays in women's lives and how employment defines some women's self identity, the shift in power within marriages due to expatriate wives' financial dependence on their husbands and the change in identity through learning to become the traditional housewife and assuming the role of social coordinator.

1.1 Life Without Purpose

Loss of identity and the feeling of being without purpose is a common experience for spouses who give up their life at home and follow their working partner on an international assignment. Woman in their home countries can have many roles including employee, mother and wife in addition to being heavily involved in the community. It was felt by some participants that these responsibilities gave them definition of who they were in their home environment. The removal of these 'chores' and responsibilities have, in some instances, also removed a sense of

purpose. The feeling of purpose and having a meaningful experience was important to many of the participants in their new role of 'trailing spouse'.

Below, Kath, a newly married 35-year-old American spouse comments on the need to feel like she has a purpose living in Shanghai as a trailing spouse.

'I mean I get up Monday morning and I'll think that I'm busy, I'm having lunch with these people and I've got to go shopping and buy this and that but then at the end of the week, you were busy but you ate a lot of lunches and went shopping and drank wine, but what did you really accomplish?'

And a second spouse talks about being busy without meaning;

'There is a busy-ness here that I don't have at home and I don't crave at home and there are times here when I feel I have a lot of busy-ness without meaning' – Lindy, 56.

Another previously employed 36-year-old spouse talks about the frustration of getting a job and having one that is meaningful. Doing something meaningful is more important or more of a concern to her, than just having a job for something to do.

'I needed something meaningful, its not just work, it has to be meaningful work and that's the difference...I miss loving something that I do everyday!' – Jane, 36.

This initial loss of purpose also affected the self-esteem of some of the participants. All of the participants have been employed at some stage of their life either in their home countries or at their last posting. The feeling of the loss of identity and consequently their self-esteem seems to stem from the loss of identity through job role.

'What happened to me is that I lost a lot of self esteem, because I came here and suddenly I didn't know who I was anymore, because before I was Balance for Life (own company)...I had this blank piece of paper and it was totally exciting, but what I didn't realise was that this blank piece of paper gave me no definition and in itself resulted in me having no self esteem, so having a period of not knowing who I was...' – Sally, 36.

1.2 My job defines me.

For women whose lives were fully occupied in their home countries, moving abroad suddenly left them with no definition and an uncomfortable period of trying to figure out who they were. It appears that many of the younger participants viewed having a job, as a much needed definition to their lives. When this is removed, identity and self-esteem are impacted.

'then when you leave your job you suddenly think who am I? – Jill, 44.

When asked what was the biggest apprehension or concern about moving to Shanghai, this 35-year-old spouse answered;

'...my career...what am I going to do when I get over there' – Kath, 35.

Another spouse reflects on her experience moving to Japan twenty years ago and talks about how important her career was to her then. All her energies and emotions were attached to finding a job, which made for a very different set of expectations or requirements in comparison to her requirements living in Shanghai now.

'I had just recently gotten my MBA and just sort of started on my career and was not happy to leave my job and punished Michael for that verbally many times!, but that was my big concern about whether I could get a job and once I did life was pretty much the same as it is anywhere, get up, go to work, get home and go out for dinner, you know'- Lindy, 56.

The idea that having a job makes life pretty similar no matter where you live and may help to explain why it is generally more difficult for the trailing spouse to settle in her new environment. One spouse reaffirms this idea;

'men just slot in, they have their job, their work and they have a function to do, but the women when they move whether its their home country or here they have to actually define their role and that can be quite difficult particularly if you've always had this sort of role and come here you think gosh!' – Stella, 49.

It is interesting to note here, that most of the comments about the importance of employment as a definition of identity and financial independence are made from

the younger participants. As one mature spouse ponders below, is it more difficult for younger generational women to become 'successful' trailing spouses?

'so I have been an expat wife if you like for most of our marriage or an away from home wife if you like as well, but I did sort of give up what I was doing and start again in a new place, so I guess I have done that a bit and its always been something that I was just prepared to do, I think it would be more difficult, I would think it will become more difficult for woman now who have their own careers as such...I mean we just sort of pick up sticks and trail behind...' – Cheryl, 55.

1.3 Shift in power

Financial freedom provides independence and control or power over one's environment and brings about equality in a relationship. Whilst many of the participants interviewed were previously employed and earning their own money, one of the greatest struggles was the loss of identity through loss of financial freedom. It is not always possible to work in your host country due to visa restrictions and legal issues with type of employment. For example, foreign nurses are unable to work in China. This has a direct impact on identity through loss of job role, financial freedom, and a shift of power to the breadwinner. These young spouses talk about the difficulty of suddenly becoming dependent on their husbands.

'yeah (a job is an identity for me) and...to earn my own money is key, to stop asking my husband to transfer money into my account' – Kath, 35.

'It's really hard because financially you know I had my own money, I wasn't providing like I normally provide. It was more like pocket money that you made from teaching...' – Jane, 36.

All of the interviewed spouses have undergone a dramatic change in their lives and in some cases have adapted and changed roles to create an identity and purpose. A common change is for the spouse to take on the role of being the wife, and also a new role of social coordinator.

1.4 Becoming 'The Wife'

Many of the participants talked about the full and busy life that they led in their home country prior to moving and how this differs dramatically when they move aboard and assume the role of a spouse. Organisations and the community are well established in our home countries and the sports clubs, churches, school committees, community support groups etc are part of a the culture creating a sense of permanence and stability for those living there. When a family is relocated to another environment, this immediate security and sense of permanence is removed. The loss in sense of belonging intensifies the initial feeling of emptiness and the shock of changing roles as this 56-year-old spouse talks about.

'I was incredibly busy you know, full time mother, work, full time job, you know running the house and being very good at being on my own actually and suddenly I had to go and be a wife and a nothing, I mean I arrived in India and I had

nothing to do because we had servants, Martin was out at work for long hours everyday and it was a really difficult time...' – Cheryl, 56.

For women who were employed in their home countries, full time mothers, or heavily involved in community work, becoming 'the wife' seems to have a negative connotation. One experienced trailing spouse talks about how she maintains her identity through employment in order to avoid becoming the wife.

'I've always thought to work because I don't want to be (known as) his wife' – Gail, 52.

However, one 49 year old participant suggests that the busy-ness of everyday life at home helps to create an identity and once that busy-ness is gone, it gives you a chance to really discover who you are.

'...whereas you come here, you are actually exposed in a sense here, and you wouldn't be so much in your home country and the who you are and what you are and what you think and how and all that sort of stuff you would never see in your home country' – Stella, 49.

She talks about the need to become self-reliant living abroad and how confronting that can be for spouses who have not had the opportunity to really uncover who they are and their identity. She argues that living abroad and having the uncluttered time gives spouses the chance to really look at who they are.

'They actually have to be self reliant in a way that they don't have to be in their home country, that can be quite confronting'

Many of the participants interviewed struggled with the idea of becoming the traditional wife and being known within the community as 'the wife of'. It would appear that this form of identity is one that is not coveted and has a detrimental effect to the self-esteem and confidence of the accompanying spouses. This is one particular identity that the majority of those interviewed actively strive to prevent.

1.5 Social Coordinator

Another sense of identity is created through assuming the role of social coordinator. Trailing spouses frequently assume the role of the social coordinator for the family, in particular the working partner. She becomes the connection to the rest of the environment and is often relied upon to makes these friendships and connections within the community. The social groups that are organised specifically for the non-working spouse are the key source to meeting people and arranging dinners or social occasions on behalf of the couple.

'That's one thing here that the men don't meet with people other than their work and the key function really for the trailing spouse, female, is to make those acquaintances...' – Crystal, 53.

In fact, one spouse talks about how it was officially asked of her to provide the social outlets for her husband by her husbands' boss.

'...I've actually had my partner's CEO tell me that your job is to set up the social life, he actually said that to my face, it didn't surprise me but I hadn't actually heard anyone articulate that before but its true, when you look at most of the guys the people they know are usually through their wife' – Stella, 49.

In conclusion, whilst the usual forms of maintaining identity and purpose in women's lives are limited by their new environment, women are required to mould themselves to suit the needs of their partners and to take on new roles to recreate their sense of self and develop a sense of purpose.

2. CONTROL

Control and the feeling of having it or losing it is deeply interwoven within spousal identity and definition and is the second major theme emerging from the data. All of the participants interviewed in this study talk about the deep frustrations and overwhelming feelings of vulnerability in having to relearn even the most basic of tasks and how this lack of control can have extremely detrimental effects on one's self esteem and identity.

In this chapter, control over the expatriation process and the relationship with the husbands company, control over every day life, communication, and the environment will be looked in to.

2.1 Control over the expatriation process

Initial feelings of loss of control stemmed from the very start of the expatriation process. Questions about equality in the decision making process and the relocation to Shanghai resulted in some strong feelings about corporate pressure and some interviewees verbalised resentment towards the husband at various stages in the contract. One spouse talks about how after her husband had been travelling back and forth from China for almost one year that she was asked to make the decision to move or not. Whilst she did not move immediately and therefore maintained some control over her life, it meant that life for her family changed dramatically. Here she talks about the initial phone call from her husband's CEO.

'I got a telephone call one day form my husbands CEO who said "Ann, we need to know what you are going to do" and that really threw me because I guess my initial thought was well I'm not going to do anything, there was some pressure from the company, absolutely...the thought that the family may be affected and have to come, never really entered my head'- Ann, 55.

Two participants talked about how they reluctantly said yes to moving but really felt like they had limited control, hence the feelings of anger and resentment. However, these spouses have grown children and are in a more flexible stage of life in terms of career, financial commitments and family commitments. It might be a different scenario for younger spouses.

'And I had absolutely no idea this was going to happen...and I think I probably basically reluctantly said yes and then I was very angry about it for quite a while after that...' – Cheryl, 55.

When asked about the circumstances that bought her to China, every single participant answered their husband's job. How the move was announced uncovered some interesting stories. The following spouse is an experienced accompanying spouse who when asked how the possibility of expatriation was announced, she answered;

'On the steps of the hotel as I was having my leaving lunch for leaving Saigon, my husband rang me and said, 'Oh, we are not going home to the UK tomorrow, we are actually going to Shanghai!' – Gail, 52.

She qualifies this scenario by saying;

'I mean if this was our first time that would have been pretty appalling behaviour, but yeah, not when we've done it a million times'

Her previous experience at relocating has given her the experience and resources to draw on to deal with this type of behaviour. This experience is in contrast to the following spouse, who for the first posting was told that they would be moving.

'...he said they've asked me to go to India and I was like Oh, just to sort of go and talk to people?, No as the CEO so that was a bit of a shock really! - Cheryl, 55

However, whilst the following story does not equate to having control over the move, it does have a positive outcome for both the spouse and working partner.

'That one particular day Carl came home, again I was supposed to be on nights and had trouble to get the day off to be with him, hassle at work, I was crying cos I wasn't seeing him and I said if you get the chance to go abroad or another job we'll look at it and he just started laughing – it made me really cross cos I was like blub blub and he was like no, you know I've been worried for the last 2 days all the way home on the plane how I would ask you to go to China…'

Contrary to abundant feelings of loss of control, a few of the participants talked about how they took control and made certain moves and decision themselves. A couple of the participants felt that because China was relatively new territory and many companies had no experiences with dealing with expatriates in China that they were able to create their own destiny and had total control over their move to Shanghai.

'We manifested it ourselves really. We were in Papa New Guinea and David's work there was finished and we certainly didn't want to spend any, one more day longer there, we considered what we wanted to do...but we kind of thought did we really want to go back to Australia or did we want to manifest our own destination...then we started thinking about China...so then really we suggested it back to the international who was running or opening up China at that stage and that we were interested...'- Crystal, 53.

It is perhaps their previous experience in living abroad that enabled them to know what exactly to take control over and what should be left to the company to decide.

Generally speaking, attempted control over the expatriation process is hindered by the casual manner in which the employer considers the needs of the spouse and family members when relocating staff.

2.2 Control over the Expatriation Process.

Relationships with the husbands' company can be fraught at times especially if the spouse feels it was the company that instigated the upheaval in family life. 'The Company' can be cause for conflict within a marriage particularly if the spouse experiences difficulty in adjustment and feels like she has limited control over the move. During many of the interviews, women talked about the limited support from their company and some participants discussed the feeling of being pressured into making the decision to move.

'I got a telephone call from my husbands company who said "Ann, we need to know what you are going to do"...there was some pressure from the company, absolutely' Ann, 55.

This pressure to make a decision to move also impacts the family and reduces the feeling of being in control. One spouse spoke out about how she feels it was the company who pulled her family apart, blaming them for taking her husband away from his family.

'I still feel a bit angry about it because in a way for the kids that was it really for them, he left home in a way forever.' – Cheryl, 55.

Every single participant of the 11 interviewed claimed that their husband's company provided 'almost none' to 'zero' amount of support or assistance in the process of relocating. Many of the participants talked about being on their own once they arrived in Shanghai with very little support or information.

'It was horrible yeah, they didn't tell us anything. The moving company who we used to move, any information that would have made it easier, they helped with the visa and paperwork, but in terms of helping us assimilate or getting there and saying you know theses are the expatriate supermarkets if you really miss your tin cans, or these are the phone cards that you can use to call home, now that I look around and look at other people who get a really good introduction, yeah, we didn't, we had to do it all on our own' – Jane, 36.

Several respondents suggested that companies tend to throw money at the situation and assume that that will be sufficient in terms of helping families to settle. Companies offer employees a significant increase in salary, hardship allowance, trips home, drivers, paid rental etc in return for relocating abroad. Once the decision is made to move, and the package is negotiated, families feel better about moving.

'I mean they are very good in terms of paying for things...on the other hand they do expect you to pick up sticks and go, and certainly we never had, you know

some people get sent on a kind of course, familiarisation course, nothing, they paid for Chinese lessons but there was never a suggestion that we should go on a familiarisation course, never'- Cheryl, 55.

However, real life experience shows that remuneration packages can be the topic of negative conversation between expatriates and can increase conflict between the relationship and resentment with the company.

'Then you learn that others have shopping trips and R&R's and then you learn not to compare your package with their package!' – Lindy, 56.

Many foreign companies who send their staff to China rely on the Chinese office to organise the expatriates locally. As one spouse points out this is an unrealistic expectation as many Chinese have never travelled outside of their home country and cannot be expected to sufficiently provide information and support to the expatriates if they have not experienced it first hand. Many respondents suggested that head office should take more responsibility with their staff rather than relying on the local offices.

'I think when you're leaving it to the local company the local bit they don't have any concept of your needs, they have no idea what its like to move outside China let alone Shanghai and you don't know what your needs are going to be so I think there should be more of a company policy towards expats' – Jill, 44.

China is also a relatively new destination for expatriate placements. Shear lack of experience could be an important factor to consider in terms of lack of support and assistance towards the expatriate staff.

'They didn't really (aid in our expatriate experience) because they only had one other expat couple who were living in Hong Kong and they were the only expats and Hong Kong is relatively much more easier to live than Shanghai so they didn't'...they had no idea so we actually moved and came up against a lot of obstacles' – Sally, 36.

Expatriate packages that are perceived to be badly negotiated and pressure from the company to relocate in the first place can reduce self esteem through lack of control, lead to occasional feelings of resentment towards the husband and add conflict within a marriage. As the spouse talks about below, she feels she has sacrificed a lot more than her husband to be here.

'That's what I used to say to Michael, your life is the same as it always was, you come home from work and I have dinner almost ready and you help with the dishes just like you always did and you've got a driver now so you don't have to drive to work for 45 minutes, what a deal for you! And you know, my whole life has changed, everything I did had to be relearned...' – Lindy, 56.

'The Company' plays much more of a role in the life of an expatriate employee than in a normal situation. Employees who have been moved abroad expect much more support and assistance for their perceived sacrifice and that of their family.

2.3 Control over everyday life.

When I asked if had there been any factors that the spouses had felt hindered their ability to settle here, many participants talked about relearning everything and the impact this has on the control you have over your life.

'How am I going to do it, you literally have to start from scratch, you have to build from nothing and that can be quite challenging' – Stella, 49.

The loss of control over simple things and the having to relearn everyday tasks that you previously had control over creates frustration. Not understanding the language (washing machine instructions and buttons written in Chinese character) combined with tackling everyday tasks, increases the feeling of lacking of control as this first time expatriate talks about below;

'I had no idea and how your world just falls apart and you can't do simple things... because you just can't do them. Like you look at the washing machine and you think I've been washing clothes for 30 years, why can't I work the washing machine?' – Jill, 44.

One participant summed it up;

'It was sort of the basics of life that I found hard at first and very frustrating' Lindy, 56.

2.4 Control over communication

This feeling of losing control was also evident in the frustrations and fears of not being able to communicate with people. The break down of communication within their immediate environment and contact with friends and family at home was a major concern. This breakdown can cause enormous amounts of irritation and threaten control. As this first time expatriate spouse tells, everything you felt you understood from your own culture, particularly in terms of communication, suddenly doesn't apply to this new foreign environment.

'It was the language and the very fact that their body language is different and if you go back to the things that have worked for you since you've been born and they suddenly don't work, you don't have anything else to use' – Jill, 44.

'I did everything by hand signal, with no help at all, I don't even know how I managed to do it all quite frankly' - Ann, 55.

Experiences differed significantly between the working spouse and non-working partner with regards to communication with the Chinese. For example, in the multi-national work place most, if not all of the staff spoke English. It was assumed by some working spouses that this was representative of China as a whole. Their spouse's were treated to a very different experience.

'Ok, now here's the deal, Michael says to me, its OK everybody in China speaks English. And in fact everyone in his world does, because they are young educated

people who come to work for American companies because they speak English!' Lindy, 56.

One spouse went on to talk about how uncomfortable not understanding made her felt, it increased her sense of vulnerability and on her 'bad days' she talks about the feelings of paranoia towards the host culture that she does not understand.

'You're very vulnerable to it sometimes, cos you don't know what's being said and they could be saying anything and sometimes if you are feeling that way you can get a bit paranoid and you can think that they are charging you a different price because you are western...it just compounds it...' – Jill, 44.

Communication was an extremely important link for spouses who assumed the household role of maintaining contact with friends and relatives at home. When communication channels were blocked, this exacerbated feelings of isolation and impinged on the spouses feeling of having some control in her new life.

'There were times when hotmail would breakdown and that would drive me crazy and then I became completely dependant on Michael to do that and I didn't like that' - Lindy, 56

'...my computer broke down and suddenly the two things that kept me going, one is being active and the other is communicating with my family in the UK, both broke down at the same time and suddenly my world fell apart' – Sally, 36.

2.5 Control over local environment

Many expatriates talk about ABCD – 'A Bad China Day'. It is a common expression throughout the expatriate community and refers to the lack of control over the local environment and the frustrations that come with it. Some of them are due to cultural differences and lack of understanding; others are due to tangible differences in things such as pollution and traffic. Kath, 35, talks about the most frustrating aspects for her;

'Traffic, pollution and then just some of the cultural differences, they call them good China days and Bad China days which are just good and bad days in the rest of the world, but in both ways they are more extreme here, when they are good they are really good, when they are bad they are a lot worse than in the States'

The transient nature of expatriate life creates an environment where people are continuously coming and going also impacts on the feeling of having little control over the environment. A few participants spoke about the difficulty of losing friends and the frustration of not having control of a steady and stable friendship environment.

'...the hardest thing for me is making friends, very good friends and losing them and it's a never ending cycle, it never stops. Most people are only here for 2 or 3 years so if you meet them in their second year, you know that they are only here for a short while longer. I feel it's in a perpetual state of loss, and you know that it's never going to end because that is the nature of expat life' – Ann, 55.

Another spouse is able to bring her past experiences of living in India to her life in Shanghai and as a result takes a bit more control by also not actively throwing herself into friendships.

'I know what it was like in India in that you get really friendly with people and then they've left so in a way I've been a bit more, you know, I perhaps haven't thrown myself into friendships as much as I did...it's the leaving of people, me leaving whenever that is...' – Cheryl, 55.

Some expressed frustration and fear at the lack of control over issues that are taken for granted in home countries such as medical care. Particular frustrations at friends, family and corporate head office that saw the glamorous expat life and neglected to take into account the risks such as inadequate medical services that expatriate life brings.

'Sometimes I get a bit annoyed with people going on about the glamorous life we lead because you also take risks living in some of the countries, because you are not going to get the medical treatment that you could get home, an ambulance isn't going to turn up 3 minutes later and carefully pick you up off the road...' – Gail, 52.

This particular spouse has a background in Human resources and felt particularly out of control when dealing with HQ and trying to get an answer regarding medical care.

'I asked what happens if anything happens to Tony while he's travelling...and they just say refer to your health insurance, well your health insurance doesn't cover that sort of stuff, so what policies do they have in place...so if anything serious happens with him, I really don't know what I'm going to do!' – Stella, 49.

There is also the feeling of not having control through not understanding how the host country operates. Medical issues are one of the major concerns for expatriates and the following spouse talks of how out of control they feel in between their host country and HQ with regards to medical insurance.

'We are looking at medical issues at the moment, they have us insured by this company who expect us to pay upfront for everything and they try and claim it back, and it takes months for it to come back plus you don't have that much RMB cos Carl only gets a small portion of his wage in RMB. I feel really unsupported by them in terms of medical...' – Jill, 44.

Political styles can leave a foreigner feeling out of control if it is extremely different to what they are used to. In communist China, political concerns are always prominent.

'I think always a concern about being in a communist country and not being sure of what that means, and you don't necessarily believe everything you see on TV because that portrays one particular aspect or what they want to you to believe about the country' – Stella, 49.

Nevertheless, there are aspects of control that expatriates feel they have more of living in Shanghai than they would if they lived at home. Control over free time and over the environment in terms of safety aspects is an appreciated aspect of which many of the spouses interviewed commented on.

'and its safe here, I've never felt unsafe here and I suppose I didn't necessarily expect that, that's a very positive thing that's come out of this place in that you do feel very comfortable, very safe' – Gail, 52.

Time is factor that trailing spouses they feel they have control over living in Shanghai. Many of the spouses were grateful for the time and opportunities that being unable to work gave them.

'It's very exciting and at the end of the day it gives you the opportunities that you just would not get in your own country' – Crystal, 53.

2.6 Prepared-ness

Being prepared and knowing what to expect is essential to aid a successful relocation overseas. Previous experience of living abroad helped the majority of interviewees to settle faster and some rated their relocation as more successful in Shanghai because of their previous experiences. It can be viewed as an important asset in helping trailing spouses to cope and settle faster in Shanghai. Specifically it 'teaches' spouses what they 'need to do' in order to get settled – this almost becomes a learned behaviour.

This second time expatriate talks about what she found she needed to do so as to be included on the next outing or privy to information. She talked about not being particularly interested in attending some of these events, but felt she needed to do this in order to be prepared by having the information.

'I've had to learn that you do things that you are not particularly interested in just to be present, because you have to be present to be included in the next thing that happens, you know so I was like well I don't care about that so I wont go so then there were three more things that happened that you don't know about because you were not present' Lindy, 56.

A long-term expatriate living in Shanghai with previous expatriate experience talks about the difficulty of walking into a room full of strangers in order to meet people. These 'experienced spouses' become supporters and motivators for newly appointed expatriates and offer assistance to ensure these newcomers are prepared and know what needs to be done to settle successfully.

'Knowing that you have to walk into a room of strangers at some stage but that everyone else has been a stranger, that's what I tell every new person, everyone has been through this, everybody has been here' Crystal, 53.

Previous experience certainly helps with being prepared and knowing what needs doing and having the confidence and self esteem to be able to do it.

'I'm not nervous walking into things like BritsAbroad because I've walked into those things endlessly in India and so I don't have that sort of anxiety but I know that must be so daunting for some people' Cheryl, 55.

To be prepared and to know what to expect was a frequent comment from participants when asked what advice they would give to a couple preparing to move to Shanghai. Previous experience of living abroad is an obvious advantage to knowing what to do and how to be prepared for the next move. Two participants that have lived abroad before confirm this assumption;

'I mean its still very different than everywhere else, but because, if I had come straight from the UK I'm sure I would have found it much more difficult than I have coming from Vietnam...because I have the past experience' -Gail, 52.

However, it is important to note that whilst previous experience of living overseas does give insight into what is needed to be done to help settle it does not guarantee a successful placement.

It appears that positive feedback from acquaintances frames the state of mind and most who had received some sort of positive affirmation of Shanghai as a city and for living in settled faster and with less 'down days' than those who came into contact with negative feedback.

'a lot of people tell us that it's a great city, not with a lot of sights and things but a really good city if you want to live so we had a positive sort of feedback so I think knowing what I had to do made things a lot better'

However, this experienced spouse could see that negative feedback from people could be self destructive and made a conscious effort to be prepared and not be in contact with negative surroundings.

'Two of the wives absolutely hated it and wanted to get out, so after the first meeting of them I didn't want to associate with them cos I just thought this is destructive' - Crystal, 53.

One younger spouse who had travelled extensively comments on the absolute importance of being prepared in order to settle and adjust successfully.

'The people I see that have adjusted the best have spent a year preparing, because they have had that time, the people that have done the worst like with three weeks notice, and knew nothing about China' -Kath, 35.

Nonetheless, during the interviews it appeared that many of the newcomers did not conduct any pre research of their own, did not take language lessons nor did they make contact or an attempt to find out more about Shanghai before arriving here. Whilst they agree that they have settled here OK, they all talk about the importance of being prepared and the sense of control that gives you as a spouse.

Being prepared before moving also creates the much-needed sense of control over oneself and confidence. It can be seen that families who move overseas do experience a significant loss of control over their lives, their environment, through communication, and even in their own communities. Issues such as medical and unfamiliar political regimes feature as a major concern for expatriates. However control over free time and abundant opportunities also feature as positive aspects to expatriate life.

3. RELATIONSHIPS.

Relationships are a complex yet integral aspect to life and take on new forms and can have a different meaning in the expatriate community. The need to make friends and 'just get out there and do it' gives the trailing spouse a sense of identity and control over at least one aspect of her new life. In her assumed role as social coordinator, this is also an important sense of achievement in providing this for her family.

This section covers four types of relationships; Marriages, Expatriate Friendships, Relationships with host culture and the Family.

3.1 Marriages

Marriages undergo a real test when they are moved to another country and environment. Unfortunately with all the upheaval and obvious visible changes, the marriage is often ignored and left to survive with minimal consideration. Relationship dynamics change when moved overseas especially if a previously

employed female spouse is now unable to work and therefore becomes financially dependent. In addition to adapting to a new country, culture and environment, women have to adjust to a new role as dependent trailing spouse.

The stresses and strains on a marriage are apparent especially in the first few months of relocation as the spouses struggle with learning a new life and environment and the husband takes on a heavy workload.

'I suppose the main problems were in Beijing where my husband used to walk in and I'd be on the phone to Qantas to go home, yeah it was really hard, I guess the next 6 months, 6 to 8 months were really hard on him cos I put a lot of pressure on him' – Jane, 36.

The combination of feeling lost, lacking identity and self-confidence can create conflict within a marriage, often resulting in harsh words to the person closest.

'Telling my husband what are you doing taking me here and I hate this place and I want to go home...' – Gail, 52.

'I normally go in with that sense of adventure and then hit a wall and think what have you bought me here for, I mean what am I doing here?' – Stella, 49.

However, these are normal reactions to change and if dealt with in an appropriate and timely manner can be rectified.

China itself also lends to potential disputes within a couple due largely to differing expectations and experiences with different people. Whilst most of the large multi-national companies employ highly educated, sophisticated English speaking Chinese, local domestic help is largely from the countryside, uneducated, do not speak English and have vastly different hygiene standards than foreigners are perhaps used to. One spouse talks about how important it is to recognise these differences as a couple and make an effort to understand each other's experiences.

'You have to understand that your two experiences are very different and the working spouse needs to be particularly sympathetic about that and I don't think a lot of them are. Michael was only sympathetic because I was sitting across the table from him so unhappy...' – Lindy, 56.

Another spouse reiterates the need to understand each other's situations where the wife is dealing with one type of problem and the husband another. Communication and an understanding of each other's experiences seem to be key in lessening the strains on a marriage when living abroad.

'I mean the husband – job is new and exciting for him and he was up and running from the word go, I mean he's human and at the end of the day so through no fault he is going to get caught up and taken away, and the wife is there going Yeah Ok, I've watched an HBO movie today, what's next?' – Sally, 36.

Infidelity is another threat that can compromise a marriage. One spouse talks very candidly with regards to the threats of Asian woman on western relationships.

'I think its quite bad because a western man can be a ticket, it's a passport for certain and it's a better life than they are going to live married to a local Chinese guy so they are very aggressive at going after a man, and if they see a man they want, they will go after him, from the western man perspective there are these beautiful exotic woman that are throwing themselves at them, and I think a man can turn this down for only so long, but with drinking and karaoke and if this has been going on for three years, the wife is gone for the summer and you know, eventually his resolve wears down and you know, numerous affairs in Asia' – Kath, 35.

However, in some cases marriages are strengthened and one spouse talks about the benefits of being able to re evaluate her relationship and take the time to be a couple without the daily parental responsibility.

'Re-evaluating your time together with your partner, because your whole new life you can set up as you please rather than they way you've drifted into it over the years...so every weekend we try and so something just the two of us in the city...that's the best thing, that my husband and I are closer than we've ever been, we've had the time' Jill, 44.

Marriages are fragile entities and need to be nurtured and attended to especially in an expatriate environment. The change in roles, shift in power financially and feelings of sacrifice are all extremely real issues faced by the trailing spouse and in order to maintain a successful marriage, need to be openly communicated so both parties understand the situation.

3.2 Expatriate Friendships

Meeting people and making friends is considered one of the most important tasks of a trailing spouse when she arrives at her new posting. She meets people and makes friends for her own pleasure, for information and to learn about her new city. She also makes friends for her husband and assumes the new role of social coordinator for her family. Social groups are considered the best way and the most convenient way to meet people.

These groups are established with the soul purpose of providing an opportunity for people to network and exchange contact details, information and experiences. They are usually set up according to nationality (Australian Women's Group, American Women's Group etc), business groups (American Chamber of Commerce, The Expatriate Professional Women's Society etc), general social groups (The Shanghai Expatriate Association) and specific interest groups (Foreign Correspondents Club, Historic Houses Association etc). These groups provide a forum for social get-togethers, hold bi monthly events with guest speakers, social functions and are an invaluable source of information.

The idea of these groups is to provide an informative and informal plateau to meet people and make friends. Every participant interviewed belonged to at least two different social organisations in Shanghai and most found them a fair source for meeting people and an avenue for developing friendships. Some spouses have had positive experiences with these groups, others have had negative experiences.

'I think they are a good entry point...they provide a venue to go to lunch or have a coffee or whatever, but I think that are an entry point to then develop your own friendships. (These social groups are) a good entry point for meeting people, finding people my age, with my interests, whatever, so from that perspective they are useful...' – Crystal, 53.

However, there were a number of preconceived expectations that these groups were full of 'complaining wives with no purpose in their lives'. Although many of the spouses attended these groups, their misconceptions were righted as this previously employed, first time expatriate spouse talks about;

'I thought they were attended by wives who didn't really want to do anything...but I didn't want to mix with somebody who I thought didn't have any purpose in their life and that, and I think I was being extremely judgemental and now that I've been here for a long time I think I understand that these organisations do. I've found people who are of like mindedness to go out with!' – Sally, 36.

However, the general sense is that they are not just a source of friendship as much as a source of information and an easy avenue to get information and meet people.

'(Expat groups) they are very easy, you don't have to do anything and they have such a wide variety of activities and you can pick up and put down what you want to do really' – Cheryl, 55.

The wave of expatriates in and out of Shanghai makes it difficult to create long-term friends. Everybody in the expatriate community is at one time a newcomer and looking to meet people and make friends. One young spouse talks about her expectations of making friends and how she thought it would be easier than it is.

'I thought it would be easier to make friends than it was, because I've lived in Asia before and because my job in Taiwan had bought me into contact with all these people, I was constantly meeting people so that was one expectation I had' – Kath, 35.

Interestingly that is the assumption of most spouses interviewed, purely because they believe they are all in the same boat and therefore assume that many people want to make friends. However, as Stella, 49, points out, sometimes the pressure and expectations to meet people and get 'settled' means that you are socialising with people you necessarily wouldn't do at home.

'You are often thrown together with your own country people and if you put us altogether in your home country you'd never have anything to do with them'

Perhaps it is more difficult to make friends because the more senior expatriates have become guarded and wary of making friends because they know the transient nature of expat life. As one spouse shares, she has expatriate spouses tell her they can not be bothered making friends because they have lost so many friends, its easier not to bother.

'I've actually had a few expatriate women say to me that they have been in the country for how ever long, usually more than 3 or 4 years and they cant be bothered, they have lost so many friends that they are over making new ones' – Stella, 49.

A spouse who has lived in Shanghai for almost 9 years confirms this by saying;

'When you are first here...you just keep making new friends and accept it (that they leave), the longer you are here the harder it is to be bothered. You have to be careful you don't become a hermit' – Ann, 55.

This difficulty talked about above could be due to the guarded nature of expatriates in Shanghai compounded by the continual movement of the community. It is these acquaintances that are made through the social groups; the key is turning them into lasting friendships. The expatriate life could be considered a lonely one, with many acquaintances and very few friends.

'....I think also, the other expats are very guarded with their own emotions, cos they are so used to other people going they don't really want to, yeah they are

happy to tell you where to buy such and such but beyond that I think its difficult to make friends, acquaintances are easy, but to make friends....' – Jill, 44.

There are certainly numerous opportunities to meet people in Shanghai. However, a few of the spouses interviewed talked about the issue of over committing to Shanghai and the social scene and the feeling of obligation to go out and do things with people that you wouldn't necessarily befriend at home.

'I guess the main thing is when you do meet friends, make sure that when you do make friends that they are people you want to hang out with because that's what I did, I had 300 people ringing me a day do you want lunch, dumplings, coffee, it really got too much and a lot of the times and I realise now its because a lot of them don't like their own company...choose your friends cos you will have a much better time' – Jane, 36.

Also it is important to realise that these social groups do serve different functions and therefore attract different types of people with different interests. As the spouse below discusses, it is important to be yourself and know what it is you want to achieve from these groups.

'I suppose the people there were a bit older than me and I felt that I didn't have anything in common with the people there, I'm not judging anyone but I personally didn't have a lot in common with what they wanted to do and where they wanted to go' – Jane, 36.

It can be seen that expatriate friendships are extremely subjective as is the value of the social groups that are set up to serve this purpose. Friendships are perhaps more superficial on one level yet more in-depth on another. Superficial in that somebody you meet at a coffee morning can become your best friend, and in-depth in that if you find someone you get along with you have the time to get to know each other and a sense of dependency to be friends. However, positive and negative personal experiences aside, it seems that the expatriate community can be seen as a culture or community of its own.

3.3 Relationships with host culture

The Chinese culture is vastly different from western culture. The western concepts of privacy, personal space, what is considered polite and what is not, are not the same in Chinese culture and could be part of the reason for the limited interaction between the expatriate community and Chinese. Expatriates have a certain status in China where finance, freedom and opportunities are limited. In a Western country these different classes and social standings would be unlikely to mix in the same social circles. There is a perceived class structure between Chinese and the expatriate community that creates a natural barrier to interaction. This particular interviewee spent some years in India where she cultivated some long lasting friendships and had expected to be able to do the same in China.

'I get the feeling that the Chinese are very friendly and faithful in their family units but they aren't so really outside, they are terribly nice to these foreigners

that they drive around but I suspect they don't give a second thought really. I suppose why should they be interested in our lives?!' – Cheryl, 55.

Another spouse talks about how the language and communication barriers also create a natural barrier to the Chinese–Expat relationship. In this quote below, the spouse is referring to the receptionist for the property agent who manages their apartment.

'...always quite rude towards me, and I don't know if she is really, at that time I felt she was because she has quite a brash manner, she came across as very abrupt and then again they have no idea what you're experiencing, they think you lead this wonderful rich life that is so easy...' – Jill, 44.

Domestic help is perhaps the most common form of relationship between the expatriates and local host culture. Many expatriates have an 'Ayi' or cleaning lady and a car and driver. The cheap cost of labour and the populous work force serves a dual purpose; expatriates and wealthy Shanghainese can afford to have domestic help which employees a substantial number of Chinese workers. Whilst most expats do have an Ayi, their value is not always positive or viewed as a benefit.

'The other problem I had with someone like an Ayi was that I assumed that they knew how to do the job, I've never hired a woman who didn't know how to clean a house...so I wasn't really prepared for the intensity of training that it was going

to take. I had to teach them not to use the same rag that they clean the toilet with and the kitchen sink, there are things that we take for granted that they don't quite know and I wasn't prepared for that' – Lindy, 56.

Expectations of work standards and work ethic were not matched.

'In the UK I paid 8 times as much for them (cleaning lady) per hour where as they actually did 20 times the amount of work. I was completely shocked at just how slow and little they do during the day which is why you have to have them so much' – Sally, 36.

Relationships with the domestic help are limited to professional, however there are families amongst the expatriate community who grow to rely heavily on their help. One spouse reflects on her negotiation with her husbands' company about the amount of time she required hired help.

'Now that I've gotten here I realise that people here don't even make their own beds, there really is a full time help thing going on...I would feel like dilatants if I really had someone come in and make my bed every morning, its my own personal stuff I think, I don't know' – Lindy, 56.

Whilst there are various forms of interaction with Chinese, relationships are unlike those in previous overseas postings where some participants had friends of the host culture. Relationships with Chinese remain predominately professional.

3.4 Family.

Family also plays a large role in the experience of spouses living away from home. Constant feelings of guilt and a lack of control over what is happening to family appear to become the role of the trailing spouse. Many participants interviewed talked about the difficulties of living abroad in terms of aging parents and children.

'Dad dieing this year rocked me a little bit...I'm really worried about my mother' – Crystal, 53.

It appears that the trailing spouse who has the time to be concerned takes on these feelings of guilt. Sometimes, this can appear to create a purpose for them by doing so. As one experienced travelling spouse comments;

'I guess I'm going to feel guilty about somebody, either my parents there or my husband here...' – Cheryl, 55.

She also talks about how uncomfortable she felt by leaving elderly parents when they moved out to Hong Kong after their time in India.

'Leaving elderly parents at home because both my mother and my husbands mother are both in their 80's and they didn't think, when we came back from India and we were in London they both fondly thought that we wouldn't be going abroad again and it was a shock to them saying we were going to Hong Kong and I find that quite stressful'

Children are also a source of stress and concern, especially if they are left at home. A first time expatriate talks about the anguish she felt sending her college age daughter to boarding school and the guilt she carried knowing that her daughter didn't have the option of going back home.

'So my main concern was that she had no time to change her mind, that she was there and as soon as she left we locked the door behind her and I think that was my main concern at the time...and knowing that Rebecca was unhappy and she didn't want to say anything so she hasn't said much and you know its there, and you just feel so guilty' Jill, 44.

However, in one spouse's case, it was her 16-year-old son who was in boarding school who instigated her decision to move to Shanghai to be with her husband.

'And it was our son who came to me one day and said "you know Mum, just go to Dad, I'll be ok" and I guess something clicked in my head that he would be OK and that he didn't actually need me there telling him to get his hair cut and that's probably what decided it...' – Ann, 55.

Homesickness is an obvious and very real experience for those that live away from home. This is compounded by guilt for leaving family behind and the feeling of being without responsibility or control over issues at home.

'For me the most bad days are homesickness type days, I just want to be somewhere else, I just want to be home...' – Jill, 44.

Relationships make up an important part of human life and this is especially the case in an expatriate environment. Intimate personal relationships can take on a new form that needs negotiating into a structure that both parties are comfortable with. Friendships within the expatriate community do occur quickly but can be superficial and conflictual at times. Social groups are in abundance to facilitate these friendships. However, friendships with the Chinese seem to be minimal and social interactions usually occur within professional confines such as domestic help and drivers. Maintaining contact with family at home often becomes the task of the non-working spouse and can cause feelings of guilt and homesickness.

4. CULTURE

According to the Collins dictionary (2000), Culture is defined as the total of the inherited ideas, beliefs, values and knowledge, which constitute the shared bases of social action (Collins Dictionary, 2000). It is the total range of activities and ideas of a group of people with shared traditions and is made up of behaviours and traditions that have been cultivated over a long period of time.

Culture shock is experienced when one culture is bought into sudden contact with another bringing about feelings of isolation and rejection. These differences in culture and the deeply held beliefs about what is good, right, natural and normal are extremely visible for expatriates living in a foreign culture. Culture shock, cultural differences and cultural adjustment all feature within the context of the data collected. There are both positive and negative experiences under the theme

of culture which impact on spousal identity and control of their lives and environment particularly living in Shanghai.

In this section we will look into culture shock with the host culture and also look at culture shock pertaining to the expatriate culture and community. Culture shock can also impact someone who is moving home and in this chapter we will look into the fears of repatriation.

4.1 Personal Culture and Culture Shock

One American spouse talks about her own concerns that her personal culture may not fit within the traditionally conservative Chinese culture let alone her American-ism.

'I was sort of hesitant, cos I, not only is the US culture not very similar to the Chinese, but my own culture, who I am, doesn't always blend real well in Asia either' –Kath, 35.

Culture shock can be debilitating to a persons sense of self, self esteem and own control and the data collected here bares no exception. A 44 year old first time expatriate expresses her fears about living in Shanghai and how much of an impact these cultural differences had on her initial experiences in Shanghai.

'This culture shock thing I had NO idea what it meant, it's a word I would have used for somebody who, oh I don't know, I had no idea what it meant and how your world just falls apart and you cant do simple things...' – Jill, 44.

This spouse who has travelled, lived and worked in numerous countries before marrying explained the difficulties in adjusting to a culture such as the Chinese, which is so different from her own.

'I mean the cultural stuff, I spent a lot of time thinking about it and working in it and to a degree think I can understand or at least be pretty sensitive to it, but it doesn't match with my culture or how I do things and that makes it really challenging' – Kath, 35.

At face value, Westerners stand out as being different in China and some argue that this visible difference eases some of the culture shock or at least sets expectations that this will be different. However, one well travelled expatriate wife talks about how culture shock can creep in and affect you regardless of the visible cultural differences.

'Even Paris, I suffered real culture shock and going through the cycle of not exactly depression but you know being very miserable and telling my husband what are you doing taking me here and I hate this place and I want to go home…' – Gail, 52.

4.2 The Host Culture

China and the Chinese culture is one of the oldest known civilisations dating back to more than 5000 years. It was ruled by Dynasties for thousands of years and in 1949 was declared The Peoples Republic of China. Unfortunately, modern China

has seen tragedy and political instability since its founding and only recently has started on a path towards economic development and international affiliation. Due to the Communist Political regime, the Chinese people as a population have been isolated from the Western world and as a result have maintained an ethnocentric culture. This is an aspect that many expatriates find extremely difficult to cope with when living here.

'I went out for a walk and I was walking for three hours and I never saw one western face and that scared me and it suddenly hit me that oh, this is very different' – Sally, 36.

Many western countries have been predisposed to other cultures and nationalities through immigration and close boarder relationships with other countries. Many western countries are multi cultural and have melded into a melting pot of cultural differences. Issues such as personal space and privacy are common points of discussion among the expatriate community living in a big city such as Shanghai and as this spouse talks about, the apparent lack of consideration for other people.

'I don't think I will ever get used to there being a wide open space and I'm the only person on the pavement and someone will literally bump into me, or like I mentioned the spitting, not saying sorry when someone has slobbered all over me, yeah those things, I suppose the cultural things...' – Jane, 36.

Surviving in a different culture can lend itself to both positive and negative experiences. Negative experiences can have an impact on control and leave one feeling confused and detached from the environment one is living in.

'So a cultural thing...like trying to get there today two taxis drive by me and I don't know why and maybe its because the road I was on they are not allowed to stop but I cant read the sign so I don't know why and I'm not from here, a Chinese person might know why but then again who knows, maybe they just didn't want to pick up a foreigner' – Kath, 35.

Once the initial culture shock of living in a new and foreign city had settled, many of the spouses interviewed talked about the excitement of living amongst change and seeing something different everyday.

'I walk home from work every night and I very rarely don't see something that makes me smile and I would miss that!' – Ann, 55.

Most of the participants found that they enjoyed sharing in their host country's culture and being part of it. Although one spouse admits that the culture is extremely different and therefore a little difficult to accept at times.

'I find the Chinese culture fascinating, it's hard to love but it's fascinating' – Stella, 49.

A few of the spouses talked about a sense of pride and almost a maternal instinct towards China and the Chinese people that made them proud to be part of their country's development.

'It's the general being here and the upward lift of everything and thinking god how proud you would be if you lived in your city and they did that, you know. I think that sharing in that pride too, I think its great to be, be part of that and share in that pride' – Crystal, 53.

This pride extended on a more personal level to Chinese people our spouses interacted with. As this long term resident of Shanghai comments on, she enjoys sharing in the change and seeing peoples lives change.

'Seeing peoples lives change like my tailor who used to come on an old push bike and then a little moped thing and now she's driving a new Honda you know what I mean, personally I think that's fantastic!' – Crystal, 53.

4.3 The Expatriate Culture

In addition to adjusting and adapting to the new host culture, an expatriate must become familiar with the expatriate community and the separate culture that creates. Living in an expatriate community means that one is constantly exposed to different cultures and values. This can be an exciting time but also confusing in realising that each culture has its own differences.

Western expatriates living in Shanghai are obviously foreign and have different cultural values and expectations to that of their host country nationals. It becomes acceptable for some things to happen because 'TIC- This is China'. However, within the expatriate community of Shanghai, it is easy to forget the numerous cultures that fall under the 'Western' label.

'Ok every culture is different, American culture is different, Australian culture is different so I think it's about having more understanding...' – Sally, 36.

Not having the understanding that all nationalities have a different set of cultural values even if they look the same, means that the expatriate environment can also bring with it conflicts and misunderstandings. As one long term Shanghai resident and active community member discusses;

'quite honestly being in an expat environment brings and associating with other expats brings it own problems, you have conflicts within committees even finding people not quite as dynamic as you'd hoped...' – Crystal, 53.

Another experienced expatriate spouse enjoys the perks and benefits of living as an expatriate in the expatriate community, but talks about feeling disconnected from the local culture at times because of this.

'I sometimes feel we are living in a bit of a bubble really and I'm happy about that I mean its very nice but I sometimes feel a bit disconnected really' Cheryl, 55

However, with all the frustrations and difficulties of living in Shanghai as a trailing spouse, the overwhelming consensus to expatriate life was positive. All of the spouses interviewed talked about enjoying the expatriate community, sometimes even more than the actual host culture.

'I can't say I've become enamoured with the Chinese people or the Chinese culture but the expat experience has been quite nice' – Lindy, 56.

Most popular aspect of expatriate life was the opportunity to befriend many different nationalities and share in numerous cultures and peoples stories.

'It's also interesting to learn about cultural differences, and that's probably the most interesting for me' – Jane, 36.

When the participants were asked 'What was the best aspect of living in Shanghai as a trailing spouse?', this young spouse said;

'The lifestyle, it feels like your on holiday all of the time! I never used to go out on weekdays, no it's a school night and, or you had to work so I suppose we only ever went out in the weekends, so I suppose in some ways it does feel like a holiday in that you do meet a lot of people and you do go out in the weekdays'- Jane, 36.

There was also talk about the abundant opportunities of living the expatriate life as a non-working spouse.

'I intended to teach English, but then I got here and started doing mandarin lessons and realised there is so much to do, I've got on this whirl and I cant actually find time to work at the moment!' – Gail, 52.

Whilst the lifestyle is mentioned as a positive aspect of living the expatriate life many are aware of the 'here and now' part of living the expatriate life and most are concerned about the difficulty in settling in back home.

'It's a bit of an exciting life, it's a life that does take some time to get used to but once you do I think its quite addictive and I know that it will be really hard to settle back home...' – Stella, 49.

These fears of how to settle back home are compounded by the status that expats have in Shanghai. This long-term participant talks about the experiences she had just being a foreign face in Shanghai and how this made her feel.

'You have a status believe it or not because you are a westerner. Now whether you are a trailing spouse or not, its immaterial, you stand out as being...you are treated differently and you have to watch that or it can go to your head but the truth a reality is you are seen as special, as foreign' – Ann, 55.

4.4 Repatriation Fears

Repatriation refers to returning 'home' at the end of an expatriate assignment. The adjustment to unexpected changes in the people the returnee expat knows, the places they lived, the events they have missed and the unexpected changes in themselves emotionally and physically have an impact on expatriates returning home – Return Culture Shock.

The opportunities and variety are often referred to as the bonus of living the expatriate life in Shanghai. The full life and chance to partake in many activities has one spouse nervous about going home and fitting back into life at home. Even though she suffered culture shock and had difficulties in settling initially in some of her overseas postings, the idea of 'going home' was more of a fear than relocating elsewhere.

'...we had a little scare of going home and realising maybe after all I didn't want to go home, even though sometimes when I was unhappy you'd say I just want to go home but when its actually dangled in front of you, and then you think the downside you think no, I'm not ready to put my slippers on and sit by the fire and talk about East Enders like everybody else does, I still have a lot more go in me than that, I want to see more places and do more things but I'm appreciating it' – Gail, 52.

Domestic help is often included in the expatriate remuneration package and as one expat talks about below, many of the expats take this 'help' to an unrealistic

extreme. Perhaps this is due to the inexpensive cost of hiring help, or over zealous use of something new.

'now that I've gotten here I realise there are some people here that don't even make their own beds, there really is a full time help thing going on and I just don't want, I think its one of the things that make it hard to go back home and I don't want it hard to go back home!' – Lindy, 56.

In addition to losing hired help, one spouse fears the 'same-ness' of everyday life at home. Many have commented on the excitement of seeing something different everyday;

'there is never a day when I don't do something or see something that comes out of left field, there is not one day...that I mean, wow, this is China!' – Crystal, 53.

This is compounded by the fact that nobody will be interested in your previous life.

'It's hard for people to go back home because nobody cares about your experiences here in Shanghai once you get home' – Lindy, 56.

One well travelled spouse talks about the difficulties of adjusting to life back home in between international assignments and how difficult it was to be a 'nobody' again. She is mainly referring to looking different and therefore in Asia

standing out but this also filters down to how you are treated in restaurants and hotels etc. She found being 'faceless' difficult.

'...and then we went back to London and nobody looked at me and I realised I was a nobody, and I know that sounds awful but in Asia we are not somebody but we are somebody different whereas in London you are just a faceless, nothing, and nobody gives you the time of day' – Gail, 52.

Culture and cultural differences are one of the main issues confronting expatriates who by nature live among different cultures. Whilst the overall consensus of living overseas was enjoyable and all participants interviewed would live overseas again if given the chance, there were still difficult or frustrating aspects relating to cultural differences.

5. COPING MECHANISMS.

Participants were asked what aspect of living in Shanghai as a trailing spouse frustrated them the most and how they coped with this. Volunteer work, getting involved with the community, having an open mind and being prepared were some of the coping mechanisms applied by the participants.

5.1 Coping Mechanisms For Identity

Involvement with the community seems to be a popular way to tackle the loss of identity issue and gives the non working spouse a feeling of achievement and purpose – it 'gives life some form' as this 56 year old talks about below.

'I got involved with the SEA (Shanghai Expatriate Association) and the AWG (American Women's group) and then life started to take on some form, it wasn't just sitting at home writing emails to the States all day and reading the local paper, so you know once I got involved...that's what really started it for me' – Lindy, 56.

There is also an important sense of needing to achieve which seems to negate the identity issue and overrides negativity associated with the feeling of losing of control.

'I think I got so much achievement out of the first months, of actually making the house work, joining things, doing things, the washing in the bath, making things to hang clothes on under the heaters...so I think we both came here with an adventure in our minds and little expectations of first world luxuries so when you found them it was a real bonus!' – Crystal, 53.

Having an open mind and limited expectations helped to increase the feeling of achievement and sense of life purpose. It could be likened to the same sense of achievement gained through employment, raising a family or being involved in the community – if these days are viewed as an achievement, a victory, having some control over life and re-establishing an identity, then it would appear the expatriate experience is benefited.

'The victory days you know they were great days, done it, achieved it! Crystal, 53.

In a unique way of coping with the identity issue, this participant below talks about a friend who has turned 'becoming the wife of' to her benefit and uses this to help her create an identity and satisfies the need for purpose.

'... She didn't think of herself as a trailing spouse, she thought of herself as a partner in her husbands firm, she called herself Mrs Name of Company, and I suppose that worked for her and that maybe that gave her the sense of identity that she needed' – Gail, 52.

Volunteer work is a positive step towards gaining a sense of purpose and achievement for the non-working spouse. One British spouse talks about the importance to her sense of self by doing volunteer work in the orphanage. She feels good about herself doing this even though it may have a negative perception within the business community.

'I look at the work we do in the orphanage you know its easy for people to deride it and say Oh they go and cuddle babies but those babies need a cuddle...and if it doesn't come from us, it certainly isn't going to come from elsewhere' – Jill, 44.

Financial dependence can lead to strains within a marriage and may upset a previous 'equal' marriage partnership in terms of power. As the spouse talks about below, financial dependency is one of the toughest barriers to settling in Shanghai. She talks about coping with this difficulty by maintaining the feeling of equality by not having to 'ask' her husband for money.

'That's the worst bit about being in Shanghai is being dependent. I've worked at least part time since the kids were little and then to have no income of your own...Carl is very good I must admit, we tend to put money in the drawer so I don't have to ask him, its just in the drawer.' –Jill, 44.

However, in contrast to this idea of financial dependency, the same spouse talks about this financial support and the time and travel as payment from her husband for her sacrifice of being here. Feeling that these things are her right for being here enables her to cope with financial dependence.

'it's my payment for being here, he couldn't do what he wanted to do if I insisted on being in the UK...'

5.2 Coping with Homesickness.

Many spouses feel guilty about leaving aging parents at home. One spouse uses the time difference to cope with this feeling of guilt but feels embarrassed by admitting that during this time she is likely to not think about them.

'I'm ashamed to say it but the time difference is incredibly good because you cant ring England until 4 o'clock in the afternoon so in a way during the mornings I'm likely to not think about them because I know there is nothing I can do' Cheryl, 55

Another first time expatriate talks about how she deals with guilt of missing her family by not going home or contacting them as much.

'I'm very close to my family and that has been the hardest thing. (I cope by) I don't go home very often because its too hard too, its too hard to go home because I cry, they cry that's the hardest thing because I'm a huge family person and how do I cope with this?? - Sally, 36

5.3 Coping Mechanisms for Culture Shock

A very common theme throughout the interviews was this feeling of endurance or the 'stiff upper lip' mentality. Many women felt living overseas was something that had to be endured and even expressed amazement at the thought that they were actually enjoying the experience. This endurance or stiff upper lip mentality was a common coping mechanism for experienced trailing spouses who have lived in developing countries before and know what the expatriate experience will be like.

'It can't be too bad, I'll survive – I've survived everything else, I didn't actually think I would enjoy it' – Gail, 52.

'I think I accepted that this is where you are living, this is where you live and either live here and be miserable and have an awful 3 years or accept this is where you live and look for the good points, focus on the good bits and remember that life in the UK wasn't perfect...accepting that you have down days and that they are just days and they will pass'- Jill, 44.

Expatriate assignments are usually two or three years and many of the experienced trailing wives talked about enduring this short period of time and then looking forward to a reward afterwards.

'I thought it would be a case of grit your teeth, just get on with it, you're not going to particularly enjoy it, its just something you've got to get through and maybe, maybe we can go home or do something nice. I thought this was something that had to be suffered' – Gail, 52.

Previous spouses coined the phrase Bad China Days and encourage newcomers to develop ways to protect themselves from these. Within the community it is common to give each other permission to have those down days and ensure that you do nice things for one or each other. Four spouses talk about how they cope with feeling down or 'up against it' whilst living abroad.

'Yeah, I'm much more aware like if I know I'm having a really bad Beijing day or a day in Shanghai then I either stay in with my book or massage, like I know what to do in order to protect myself, I think that's really important' – Jane, 36.

'I had my own personal days where I just hide and shut the door and it will be alright sort of stuff' – Stella, 49.

'If you are having a bad China day I say to people don't bother going out there and trying to achieve, sit down eat your box of chocolates, have your good book watch Days of your Lives and just treat it like that!' – Crystal, 53.

Some of the participants interviewed have taken measures specifically to try and minimise the impacts of 'Return Culture Shock' and keep them selves 'grounded' in what some refer to as real life and out of the 'expat bubble'.

'and I try not to play too much of the expat life because I don't think it's real...try to sort of make it a reality check as much as you can' – Stella, 49.

Mechanisms to cope with the newly created stressors of living abroad are necessary in order to adjust. These mechanisms can be self imposed (mutual agreement for financial support with the working partner) or passed on via expatriate hand-hands (Bad China Days are 'normal', told what to expect in terms of homesickness). It is important to feel that you are not on your own when these difficulties strike and having mechanisms to combat them or minimise the impact is good preparation.

CHAPTER FIVE: Discussion.

Introduction

The study started with a general focus of looking at the expectations of the women about to move and how these expectations have matched their real life experiences as a trailing spouse living in Shanghai. Grounded theory analysis has identified five main categories which are Identity, Control, Relationships, Culture and Coping Mechanisms.

Identity

Identity, or the loss of it, seemed to be one of the largest concerns that trailing spouses encountered when moving away from their home setting. The feeling of living a life without purpose was a common feeling from spouse's who had recently moved to Shanghai as expatriate wives. This is compounded by their inability to work (due to legal restrictions, time, and visa requirements), isolation from friends and family, sudden financial dependence and the change in social roles.

Many of the these spouses who were previously employed in their home countries, and therefore had financial independence and a sense of purpose to their lives, were now required to become 'The Wife', attending cocktail functions and being the supporting role to their husband. Frequently this new role includes coordinating the social engagements and making friends on behalf of the busy husband. The loss of personal identity has a direct impact on the self esteem, self

confidence and self worth of the female trailing spouse and needs to be taken into consideration when companies are moving families abroad.

Financial dependence is an important identity issue among trailing spouses but could be seen to be more of an issue among younger women. It is common today for women to hold career jobs and contribute to the household financially than it was a few generations ago. Dual careers have been cited a key difficulty in finding staffs who are willing to live overseas and should therefore become a key factor for companies to consider when sending staff overseas.

Companies could provide cultural awareness training to the entire family as a way of preparing the family members of what to expect when they get to Shanghai. Often this is left to chance, resulting in a staggering number of premature repatriations (Pricewaterhouse Coopers Survey estimates 40% failure rate, 2001). Time and money is a necessary investment into the accompanying spouse because statistics show that it is predominately an unhappy spouse who instigates these early repatriations. Instead of spending the money to prevent such an event though pre assignment training, corporations seem more inclined to spend fixing the problem once it has occurred (i.e.: sending the expatriate and family home and sending out another family). There appears to be minor regard to the emotional well-being of the couple involved and their relationship.

Control

Having control over events that take place during the move and once the family have reached Shanghai is an important factor that the interviewees talked about and is another core category identified during analysis. Most of those interviewed felt they did not have control over the expatriation process and a few were even told by their husbands or companies that they would be relocating. In most cases, the idea to relocate was not entirely a joint decision resulting in the accompanying spouse feeling like she has no control over her destiny and resenting the move.

This feeling of not having control extended to the employer who often encouraged the employee to make the move and put pressure on the spouse to make the decision to move. Many trailing spouses felt they were under pressure to agree so their husbands could move to Shanghai and commence work quickly. Many of the women interviewed had little warning of the intended move. To help reduce this feeling of not having control and to negate resentment towards the company by the spouse, a corporation should try to give the expatriate couple at least 3 to 6 months notice of their intended departure date.

Being prepared has been cited by those interviewed as an important coping mechanism and this is much easier to do if there is time allocated to do research, take language lessons, read about cross cultural differences, and are emotionally and psychologically prepared to move. Companies sending staff abroad should

aim to provide these trainings as they have all been cited as factors to ease successful adaptation of spouses into a new environment (Copeland, 2002).

Many of the women interviewed talked about the loss of control over basic everyday chores and activities at home and within the local environment. Tasks they had been doing at home with ease suddenly became impossible, mainly due to not being able to read instructions on equipment that is in Chinese character. Language and cross cultural training gives the spouse an understanding of their new environment and consequently a sense of control over it and can also facilitate a sense of purpose and improve feelings of self confidence and esteem. The low self esteem, confidence and sense of self worth coupled with the feeling of not having control over many aspects of the move or new environment can result in dissatisfaction with the assignment and early repatriation.

Relationships

Relationships prior to moving and those established after the move can also be factors leading to dissatisfaction and prevent a successful adaption to the new environment. It is common for relocating couples to spend a lot of time preparing and arranging household items and tangible goods for the move, but very rarely does the relationship come into discussion. Research suggests that couples need to be aware prior to the move that roles or standards within the marriage may change (the husband may travel a lot, the wife is unable to work, the husband works long hours, the wife is expected to participate in company social functions) which requires a period of adjustment. Communication needs to

be open and non judgmental within the marriage so as each party feels they have been heard.

It is a common occurrence in Shanghai that each spouse has a different experience of China and the Chinese people. Local staffs in a multi-national office are educated, speak English and have the determination to succeed, whereas home help are often from the provinces, uneducated and do not speak English. It is important to realize these different experiences of each spouse which if left un-communicated can lead to resentment of each other and negativity can seep into the relationship and the overseas experience.

Friendships within the expatriate community were also mentioned in the interviewees as a source of support and enjoyment as well as conflict and sorrow. All of the expatriates spoke of the difficulty of losing friends who due to the transient nature of expatriate life, were moving on to their next assignment. Some of the longer term expatriates in Shanghai who were interviewed talked about this difficulty and how this made them more wary of getting close to people, even though it is an inevitable occurrence.

Relationships with the host culture were another sub heading that most interviewed felt was important to acknowledge. There was some discussion about why many didn't have close Chinese friends although they may have had close friends of the host culture in their previous postings. Vast cultural differences and discrepancy in lifestyle were given as possible reasons. However, all of the

women interviewed have domestic help and some of them have a driver through their husbands' company. These experiences were not as positive as many of the women has expected prior to moving to Shanghai. This was due to limited experiences with having hired help (uncomfortable having 'staff', don't like people in their home, not strict enough with them) differences in hygiene standards and higher expectations of work output. Cross cultural training and preparation of what to expect with issues such as these would be valuable prior to moving so the spouse felt she had some knowledge about what to expect. In turn this knowledge would give her a sense of control.

Guilt and homesickness feature heavily in the lives of the expatriate wives. Guilt over leaving elderly parents or children at home is a common concern among the expatriate community and seems to become the concern of the wife. Whilst, she may make it her concern to give her a sense of purpose, this can prevent a positive experience of living overseas if the wife is constantly worried about those left at home. Communication mediums become a necessity and can have an overriding effect on the sense of control and purpose in the lives of the accompanying women if they breakdown.

Culture

Personal Culture and Culture Shock are common phrases used among the expatriate community. The meaning behind these phrases can have a profound impact on the expatriate and their experience of living overseas. This needs to be dealt with, preferably prior to moving. Companies can help mitigate these

feelings of shock through trainings and information which will prepare the expatriate couple before they move.

Insights into how business is conducted, what is to be expected with everyday life (no queues, spitting, loud volume when talking) table manners and customs and traditions will arm the expatriate couple with what to expect and minimize the shock value. Whilst culture shock is an inevitable part of relocating, it is manageable and can cause limited disruption if pre-empted. Chinese culture is obviously different and the people are visibly different. It is important for companies to include information on the differences between other expatriates as well. It is a common assumption that Westerners are similar and that Asians are similar and with the obvious visible difference, this is expected. Cultural awareness pertaining to the expatriate culture would be a good suggestion for companies to employ.

Repatriation fears rate highly in the interviews. Many of those interviewed talked about their concern of having to return home at the end of their assignment. Re-adjusting back into 'normal' life, not being understood by those at home and living a life with 'no excitement' were the major concerns. Some spouses have tried to minimize the repatriation shock by not having hired help and trying to live a life similar to what they may experience in their home country.

Coping Mechanisms

Finally, coping mechanisms was identified as the fifth core category and provides insights from the women interviewed on how they dealt with identity issues, homesickness and the culture shock. Permission to allow you to have 'A Bad China Day' was one of the most common coping strategies spoken about. Numerous inventive strategies were tried and implemented by women attempting to create an identity for themselves including actively taking on the role of social coordinator, family liaison and doing volunteer work.

Homesickness was eased with frequent trips home and communication via email or phone calls. Permission to feel homesick was also a common coping mechanism and knowing that most expatriates in Shanghai suffered from similar feelings helped. Corporations do acknowledge this difficulty and many provide frequent airfares back home.

Many corporations incentivize or support their expatriate staff through financial means. Many provide financial support in terms of allowances for the loss of the second income, money for language lessons in the host country, airfares home, rent free accommodation, hardship allowances on top of regular salaries and increased holiday time. However, it would appear with the increasing difficulty of finding staff who will move overseas and the significant rate of failure at these postings that companies need to re-look at their process of sending staff and what they could be doing better to make it a more positive experience for everyone.

Whilst the spouses appreciated the financial compensation, many of them thought that more warning of the move and pre move cultural training would have been invaluable. Language lessons and emotional support in terms of follow up phone calls for the first few months of relocation was also mentioned. However, whilst the women did acknowledge or appreciate the limited help HQ could provide from afar, it was the feeling of being considered in the move that was the most important for the spouses.

Suggested areas for further study

If limited study has been carried out on the female trailing spouse, then even less has been conducted on male trailing spouses. Pascoe suggests that this could be attributed to the fact that companies are not even-handed when it comes to providing spousal assistance (Pascoe, 2000 as cited by Cook, 2001) and therefore male trailing spouses have much more support from the company and less stress to settle. A female transferee is more likely to accept relocation if substantial support is provided for her partner (Herring 2000), whereas more often than not male transferees do not even inquire into support for their wives. Men are three times more likely to move for a new position than women and Hendershott (1995) reports that 95% of foreign relocations in international businesses go to men. Of the 22 million people who moved to work overseas in 1993, 17% were female expatriates, of which 10% were married leaving 2 million male trailing spouses (Hendershott, 1995).

However, whilst it may seem that the male trailing spouse collects more attention from the employer, society and societal pressure may hinder the adjustment of the male spouse in their new environment. Hendershott (1995) refers to the 'gender-role ideology' and comments that the roles husbands and wives play in the household is built on each spouse's conception of their own gender and can be heavily influenced by society and culture.

Interviewing male trailing spouses would be a suggested area of research to see if there is substantiated truth in the two points made above;

1) Male trailing spouses receive significant support from their wife's employer because the female employee asks for it,

2) Male trailing spouses suffer significant adjustment issues in their new environment due to the heavily ingrained gender-role ideology.

Another suggested area for further study would be to compare the experiences of other Asian nationalities living in Asian host cultures. Studies have suggested that being prepared and understanding the local language can help people settle into another culture. However, research also suggests that adjustment is not necessarily easier for comparable cultures living in a similar host culture. It would be interesting to interview Asian expatriate employees and / or their spouses to learn about their experiences and difficulties, if any, of living in China.

Numerous research studies have been conducted on the adjustment of the expatriate and corporations spend significant time and money investing in the wellbeing and suitability of staff in overseas operations. However, limited considerations are invested on the spouse and family who relocate too. Considering the high rate of failure among the expatriate community, it is surprising that corporations do not spend more time with the trailing spouse.

After all, time and money invested in the accompanying spouse and the trailing family could save the corporation hundreds of thousands of dollars in premature repatriation costs, not to mention the emotional well being of all involved.

Appendix 1

INFORMATION SHEET

School of Psychology
Massey University
New Zealand

The Trailing Spouse: A Qualitative Study looking into the Expectations and Reality of Expatriate Life in Shanghai, China.

You have been invited to take part in a qualitative study looking at your experiences as an expatriate spouse living in Shanghai, China. As a qualitative study, the aim of this study and the researcher is to interpret self attributed meanings of routine or problematic moments in the lives of expatriates in Shanghai. The study will focus on your pre conceptions and expectations prior to your move and how these compare to your actual arrival and 'real life' experiences in Shanghai.

In this study you will be asked to read and agree to this information sheet and the consent form. You will be invited to participate in an interview with the researcher to talk about your experiences as a trailing spouse in Shanghai. The interview session will be recorded and transcribed at a later date by the researcher. All information gained will be treated in confidence and all record of your involvement will be destroyed when the study is complete.

The interview will take between 60 and 90 minutes to complete.

The results of this study will be submitted to the academic committee at Massey University for marking purposes and may be published for external uses but only in a form that ensures that you can not be identified.

Please note that partaking in this study is voluntary. You are able to withdraw at any stage.

This research is being conducted by:
Victoria Hine
School of Psychology,
Massey University, (Extramural study)
New Zealand
China contact: 1370 175 4448

Appendix 2

CONSENT FORM

The Trailing Spouse: A Qualitative Study looking into the Expectations and Reality of Expatriate Life in Shanghai, China.

I have read and I understand the information sheet for the volunteers participating in this study.

The nature and purpose of this study has been sufficiently explained to me and I have had the opportunity to discuss and ask questions about this study, the answers of which I am satisfied with.

I give consent to have my interview recorded and transcribed at a later date knowing that all evidence of my involvement will be destroyed once the study is complete.

I understand I have the right to know what will happen to the data from this study and I have the right to request information about the outcome of the study.

I understand that my participation in this study and the information I provide is strictly confidential and that no material that could identify me will be used in reports on this study.

I understand that taking part in this study is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any stage.

I, _____ hereby agree to participate in this Post Graduate research paper for Miss Victoria Hine of Massey University, New Zealand.

Signature: _____ Date:_____

Appendix 3

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

The Trailing Spouse: A Qualitative Study looking into the Expectations and Reality of Expatriate Life in Shanghai, China.

1) **Demographic information.**

- Nationality
- Approximate age
- Approximate years of marriage
- How long have you been in Shanghai?
- Were you employed in your home country? In what position? For how long?
- Do you have children? How old? Are they with you or at home?
- Do you speak Mandarin? Take Mandarin lessons? How would you grade your fluency (1=greetings/very limited communication, 4= 'taxi Chinese', 6=can 'get around', 10=can communicate on most subjects)

2) **Pre conceptions.**

- Is this your first posting overseas?
- What circumstances bought you to Shanghai?
- How was the possibility of expatriation to Shanghai announced to you?
- Who told you? How? Where? When?
- Did you have an equal say in deciding to relocate?
- How was it decided that you would move to Shanghai?
- How long was it in between when you were asked/told you were moving until you actually moved?
- What were your initial thoughts and feelings about moving? Concerns? Apprehensions?
- How well do you feel your organization aided in your expatriation experience?
- What support / types of support services did your company offer?
- Was this support / type of support sufficient?
- What else do you feel your company could have done to make your move and experience here easier? From home office? Upon arrival in shanghai?

3) **Expectations.**

- What were your expectations prior to moving to Shanghai?
- How have these expectations matched your real life experiences?
- What factors have helped you to settle in Shanghai?
- Have there been any factors that you feel have hindered your ability to settle here?

4) **Reality**.

- What has been the 'best' thing about living in Shanghai as a trailing spouse?
- What has been the most difficult aspect of living in Shanghai?
- How did you cope in that situation?
- What are the most pleasing aspects of life in Shanghai?
- For you, what are the most frustrating aspects of life in Shanghai?
- Are you employed in Shanghai? Full time? Part time?
- Do you partake in voluntary work? Where? Doing what?
- Are you a member of an expatriate association? Which ones? How often do you attend these meetings?
- Do you find these organizations effective in helping you to settle in Shanghai?
- Do you play sports? If so, which ones? How often?
- Are these groups and organizations a main source of friendship for you?
- If not, explain.
- What do you do in your free time usually?
- Do you have a maid? A driver? Tell me about your experiences with them.
- What advice would you give to another couple preparing to move to Shanghai? To another trailing spouse?
- Would you like to move to another expatriate posting in the future? Why? Why not?

5) **Miscellaneous.**

- Are there any other aspects of life as a trailing spouse in Shanghai you would like to talk about that I have overlooked?

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