

# A new perspective on the female expatriate experience: The role of host country national categorization

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## Abstract

This study was designed to investigate host country national (HCN) categorization of female expatriates, in two samples—U.S. and India. Two hundred and twenty-two HCNs (104 in the U.S. and 118 in India) participated in the study. Consistent with prior research [e.g., Tung, R. L. (1998). American expatriates abroad: From neophytes to cosmopolitans. *Journal of World Business*, 33: 125–140], we found that female expatriates from the U.S. were not discriminated against. Indeed, we found that female expatriates from the U.S. were preferred by Indian HCNs, as co-workers, significantly more than male expatriates from the U.S. We discuss implications for organizations and offer suggestions for future research.

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## 1. Introduction

The increasing globalization of the world economy has forced multinational enterprises to modify many of their policies and practices. In particular, the need to staff key positions in foreign subsidiaries with individuals from the home country has led to a significant increase in expatriate assignments. Clearly, it is important that all qualified employees have equal opportunity to participate in expatriate assignments, as these assignments often serve as a stepping stone to higher levels of authority in the home organization (Black, Gregersen, Mendenhall, & Stroh, 1999). As

Tung (2004) notes, one of the key determinants of promotion to a position of leadership is the “possession of a global mindset (p. 243).” Furthermore, it is the experience on expatriate assignments that is often used as a surrogate measure of the global mindset (Tung, 2004). However, research on expatriate assignments continues to show that females are disproportionately under-represented in expatriate assignments (Tung, 2004; Vance, Paik, & Semos, 1999). Indeed, as Caligiuri and Tung (1998) have noted, “a glass ceiling appears to persist (p. 763).”

Over the years, several researchers have attempted to explain the low numbers of female expatriates on expatriate assignments. Adler (1984) was one of the first to examine the issue—by exploring three myths:

1. Women do not want expatriate assignments.
2. Companies do not want to send women overseas.
3. Foreigners’ prejudice against women makes them ineffective expatriates.

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In this connection, Caligiuri and Cascio (1998) have also proposed that female expatriates were more likely to be negatively viewed by host country nationals (HCNs) as compared to their male counterparts. Harris, Brewster, and Sparrow (2003) have also argued that host nationals' attitudes towards female expatriates could be a reason for the low numbers. Clearly, if female expatriates are negatively stereotyped by HCNs, their ability to succeed on their assignment would be severely affected, as they would receive lower levels of support and cooperation from their hosts. However, in her research, Adler (1987) found that women did not experience prejudice when assigned to several countries in Asia. Westwood and Leung (1994) also examined the same issue with female expatriates in Hong Kong, and reported that females did not experience prejudice, as long as they were competent. Given these conflicting findings, others suggest that prejudice against women exists, but its presence and effects vary from country to country (Frontczak & Cateora, 1988).

### 1.1. The present study

In the present study, we were specifically concerned with Adler's third myth—the potential for HCNs to negatively categorize female expatriates. Clearly, if the female expatriate's co-workers are prejudiced against her, this would affect her ability to perform at optimal levels. However, we believe that previous research is somewhat lacking, in that all “foreigners” are assumed to be prejudiced against female expatriates. Furthermore, the majority of research (e.g., Adler, 1987; Vance et al., 1999) on problems faced by female expatriates has concentrated on studying the experiences of North American expatriates in other parts of the world (e.g., Asia). Relatively little is known about the experiences of female inpatriates to North America. In one recent study, Tung (2004) reported that female expatriates from the U.K. actually faced gender-based discrimination while on assignment in the U.S. This is a rather surprising finding, given the small cultural distance between the two countries. Indeed, given the perceived similarities (e.g., language, ethnicity) and historical connections between the two countries, one might assume that U.S. would be one of the easiest countries for female expatriates from the U.K. Interestingly, in the same study, it was also reported that female expatriates from the U.S. reported having a difficult time in the U.K.

Clearly, the problems faced by female expatriates are not limited to prejudice against North American female expatriates, by HCNs in Asian countries, for example. We believe that the only way to understand the potential

impact of local prejudices, and/or HCN categorization of female expatriates, is to study the countries individually—rather than attempting broad generalizations.

### 1.2. U.S. and India as host countries

In this study, we focus our investigation on two countries that have seen a substantial increase in mutual trade and cross-national movement of employees, in recent times—India and the U.S. Indeed, over the last decade or so, India has been attracting substantial foreign interest and investment as a result of economic liberalization policies (Budhwar, 2001; Gopalan & Dixon, 1996), and is tipped to become the fourth largest economy in the world in the next 10–15 years (see Kapur & Ramamurti, 2001). With U.S. being the largest investor in India (Budhwar, 2001), the need for U.S. companies to send key employees to work in their Indian operations is growing. However, India's culture and workplace practices stand in great contrast to that of the U.S.

For example, in India, matters like caste, religion, region of origin, etc., are an important part of people's day-to-day lives. Furthermore, these issues matter a lot in the workplace, and individuals tend to seek small groups to identify with, and are often mistrustful of others who may be different in some way (Sahay & Walsham, 1997). On the other hand, the United States has a history of immigration from all parts of the world, with Indian professionals making up the largest group of overseas professionals recruited to the U.S. (Kapur & Ramamurti, 2001). Furthermore, the U.S. workforce is increasingly made up of various races and ethnicities, and females are seen in every walk of life, and in all kinds of workplace employment roles.

In addition, research has shown that the U.S. is a highly individualistic society, with little or no emphasis on in-group and out-group categorization, while India is highly collectivistic (Hofstede, 1980). In India, individuals are often driven by the need to take care of those in their in-group, which is typically made up of extended family, and friends. Indeed, India is ranked as one of the most “collective in-group countries” (Javidan & House, 2001), where individuals' need to take care of the in-group may sometimes supercede the organization's formal rules.

Given this large cultural distance, we expect that employees of these two nations are likely to have different reactions towards expatriates in their country's workforce. Indeed, the Indian practice of seeking small group identification may lead Indian HCNs to

categorize all expatriates as outsiders, or out-group members. Clearly, this would have a negative impact on the ability of the female expatriate from the U.S. to successfully carry out her duties.

In this study, we specifically investigate three research questions: (1) Are female expatriates discriminated against more than male expatriates by their HCN counterparts? (2) Do male HCNs discriminate against female expatriates more than female HCNs? and (3) Are female expatriates regarded the same way in different countries (i.e., U.S. versus India)? We draw upon self-categorization theory to predict how gender characteristics in HCN-expatriate dyads influence HCNs' reactions towards expatriates. We predict that the extent to which HCNs categorize the expatriates as out-group members or "outsiders" would affect their subsequent willingness to engage in helping behaviors that could aid the expatriates in their adjustment, and ultimate success, on the international assignment.

### 1.3. HCN categorization of expatriates

Research has shown that individuals often tend to categorize themselves and others, as categorization helps them understand how they should behave in specific social contexts (Hogg & Terry, 2001). From a cognitive perspective, this categorization of others helps individuals ascribe certain qualities and traits to others, which in turn helps them decide their own reactions to others. Indeed, studies (e.g., Toh, Varma, & DeNisi, 2004) have reported that individuals use these categorizations to assign in-group or out-group status to others, and that this assignment guides their behavior towards others. As such, individuals would be more likely to demonstrate positive behaviors towards those deemed to be in their in-group (or similar in some way), and negative behaviors towards those assigned to the out-group (e.g., Reynolds, Turner, & Haslam, 2000). In this connection, previous research on expatriate selection (Varma, Stroh, & Schmitt, 2001) has argued that since most supervisors are male, they tend to assign their female subordinates to the out-group. Further, since supervisors are often the decision-makers of who gets to go on expatriate assignments, the out-group categorization of females, results in their exclusion from consideration for expatriate assignments.

In the context of organizations that host expatriates, there are several conditions that increase the probability of HCNs categorizing expatriate co-workers as out-group members (Toh & DeNisi, 2003). Expatriates are more likely to be categorized as out-group members if they possess obvious characteristics causing subgroup

identities (in this case, nationality) to become salient in the context. Further, research suggests that characteristics that are unique in a given context are also more likely to trigger group categorizations because they cause the individual's identity to become salient. Indeed, much research suggests that personal factors, like race, gender, and national origin play a significant role (see e.g., Varma & Stroh, 2001) in categorizations of out-group members as these characteristics tend to be most noticeable, and thus convenient, as bases for distinction.

Clearly, in the case of expatriate assignments, HCNs and expatriates are likely to be different in terms of national origin. In addition, because few women are selected for expatriate assignments, the presence of a female expatriate in the host organization may be viewed by HCNs as a unique occurrence. This uniqueness brings greater attention to the expatriate's "foreign-ness" in the host context and the likelihood of being perceived as not being "one of us" or the in-group. It is easy to surmise that Indian workers are likely to see their potential co-workers (expatriates) as members of an "out-group", especially given the potential differences in race, religion, and national origin. Furthermore, India scores rather high on gender differentiation (Javidan & House, 2001), where women are expected to take care of the home, while the men work outside the home (see Budhwar, Saini, & Bhatnagar, 2004). This stereotypical definition of gender roles, when combined with the fact that very few women are found in managerial roles all over Asia (Adler, 1987), makes it very likely that female expatriates from the U.S. would be categorized as "out-group" members by Indian workers.

On the other hand, as we note above, U.S. workers are much more accustomed to diversity in their numbers with their long history of migration and foreign investment. Currently, the U.S. is ranked the second largest recipient of expatriate workers in the world. Furthermore, women have been more successful in reaching higher organizational ranks than in most countries. It is, thus, not uncommon to find women in managerial positions and even less of an anomaly to find an expatriate in the organization who also happens to be female. As such, because a female expatriate may be viewed as not particularly distinct or unique in the U.S. host unit, HCNs are less likely to categorize the female expatriate as an out-group and will more likely be neutral to her.

### 1.4. Process and impact of HCN categorization

While HCN categorization of expatriates is a subject worthy of study in its own right, it is the potential impact

of categorization that makes it a critical issue to study, especially in relation to female expatriate assignments. As Toh et al. (2004) note, HCNs play a major role as the “socializing agents” for expatriates. Expatriates who are able to gather relevant information on local workplace norms and practices are much more likely to succeed on their assignments, than those who are unable to garner this information. In this connection, Louis (1980) has argued that HCNs have the advantage of knowing the formal and informal rules of the workplace in the host country—information that can often decide whether the expatriate succeeds or fails on the assignment. Clearly, when HCNs categorize an expatriate as an in-group member, they are more likely to go beyond work defined roles, and assist the expatriate with his/her adjustment and work. Indeed, as Higgins (2000) notes, “it only takes one good friend to make an individual feel satisfied at work (p. 290).” Obviously, if HCNs decide to help the expatriate by sharing information about local norms, and helping them adjust, they are more likely to succeed than otherwise. Clearly, expatriates’ success (or failure) could be affected by the extent to which HCNs help their adjustment (Florkowski & Fogel, 1999).

The question this raises is—on what basis do HCNs decide whether or not to help the expatriate. In this connection, Toh et al. (2004) have argued that HCNs’ attitudes and behaviors toward expatriates are guided by the process of social categorization (Taylor & Moghaddam, 1987). It is this process of categorization that helps individuals reduce uncertainty in their environment (Tajfel, 1981) and guides their behavior towards other individuals (Hogg & Terry, 2000). As such, if HCNs categorize an expatriate as an in-group member, they are more likely to demonstrate supportive behaviors toward them. On the other hand, if the expatriate is categorized by the HCNs as an out-group member, they are less likely to help the expatriate adjust to the new work surroundings or learn the nuances of working in the host country. In this case, expatriates are likely to lose out on the socializing potential of HCNs.

A discussion of the salient attributes that affect HCN categorization of expatriates is appropriate here. Among these, the attributes of gender, and perceived values, have received substantial interest (Harrison, Price, & Bell, 1998; Meglino, Ravlin, & Adkins, 1989; Turban, Dougherty, & Lee, 2002). In addition to national differences by which female expatriates are perceived, gender dissimilarity in the HCN-expatriate dyad may also have a critical influence on the extent of

categorization. In the host organization context, expatriates who are in same sex HCN-expatriate dyads are less likely to be perceived as out-group than, expatriates who are in opposite sex HCN-expatriate dyads. In other words, self-categorization theory would predict that male HCNs would categorize female expatriates as out-group significantly more than male expatriates. Similarly, female HCNs would categorize male expatriates as out-group much more than they would categorize female expatriates.

In addition to gender, perceived similarity in values is another salient attribute affecting categorization. In this connection, Orbe (1998) has noted that individuals who belong to the same demographic group tend to develop similar values due to shared experiences. Because individuals from different cultures are likely to grow up under different social and economic conditions, they are more likely to perceive someone from another country (e.g., India versus U.S.) as holding different values. When individuals believe someone to have similar values, they are more likely to categorize these individuals as members of their in-group, and as a result, interact more often with them (Geddes & Konrad, 2003). On the other hand, perceived differences in values could lead to difficult, and thus limited, interactions between people from different cultural and/or demographic backgrounds (Webber & Donahue, 2001).

Where a differentiating category (e.g., gender or values) becomes salient, individuals who differ from the focal person on the attribute tend to be cast as out-group and other individuals sharing the attribute are more likely to be classified as in-group. In other words, perceived dissimilarity on a salient attribute by the focal person relative to the target individual increases the likelihood that the target is classified as part of the out-group (McGuire, McGuire, Child, & Fujioka, 1978). In general, greater perceived dissimilarity has been linked to lower interpersonal affect, group attachment (Tsui, Egan, & O Reilly, 1992), and other work-related outcomes, such as performance and job satisfaction (Turban & Jones, 1988). Indeed, perceived dissimilarity of salient attributes has also been suggested to be closely related to extent of categorization. As noted earlier, we suggest that in-group/out-group categorization is the mechanism by which HCNs’ perceived dissimilarity with the expatriates affects their willingness to act as socializing agents for expatriates. Hence, greater categorization of expatriates as out-group decreases the level of support HCNs will offer to their expatriate counterparts.

## 2. Research hypotheses

Based on the above discussion, we predict and test the following hypotheses:

**H1.** HCNs from the U.S. will categorize expatriate co-workers less as out-group members than will HCNs from India.

**H2.** HCNs from the U.S. will not differentiate between male and female expatriates, whereas HCNs from India will categorize female expatriates more as out-group than they would male expatriates.

**H3.** Female HCNs in India will categorize male expatriates more as out-group than they will female expatriates and male HCNs in India will categorize female expatriates more as out-group than they will male expatriates.

**H4.** Expatriates who are perceived as being more dissimilar in terms of personal values will be categorized more as out-group members by HCNs.

**H5.** HCNs who categorize expatriates more as out-group members will be less likely to provide social support to expatriates.

## 3. Method

Two parallel questionnaire surveys were administered to 104 HCNs in the United States and 118 HCNs in India. The participants were drawn from management-cadre employees in multinational enterprises in both countries, and represented the whole range of functions (e.g., Marketing, Finance, Production, HR, etc.). The average age was 29 years for participants from the U.S., and 25 years for Indian participants. The HCNs had an average of 7.5 years of experience in the U.S. sample, and 4.2 years of experience in the Indian sample. About 40% of the U.S. sample was male, while about 68% of the Indian sample was male. Eighty percent of the U.S. participants had interacted with an expatriate in the past, while 82% of the Indian sample reported similar interaction.

The HCNs participating in our study were given a questionnaire that explained the purpose of the study—to better understand what individuals think and feel about expatriates/foreign workers and how those thoughts and feelings are related to various attitudes and behaviors. In addition, the cover sheet provided them biographical information on the potential expatriate co-worker, and they were asked to keep this expatriate in mind as they responded to the questions.

Participants in U.S. read about a potential co-worker from India, while participants from India read about a potential co-worker from the U.S. Participants in each country received one of two different versions—either the expatriate co-worker was male, or s/he was female. We kept all other instructions and information on the expatriate (e.g., education, type of job) constant in both countries. It should be pointed out that we deliberately presented the expatriate as a co-worker. This was done to avoid the possibility of HCNs responding to the questions based on the assumption that the expatriate might become their supervisor, for example.

The survey instrument was administered by one of the authors in each case, and the participants were instructed to read the directions on the cover page clearly, before moving on to subsequent pages to answer the questions. This was done to ensure that participants captured the salient information of the potential expatriate co-worker (i.e., country of origin, and gender). On the second page, the instructions again reminded them to use the information on the potential expatriate co-worker in responding to the questions.

### 3.1. Measures

Out-group categorization was measured using a six-item measure developed from a scale by Greenland and Brown (1999). The questions were aimed at estimating the degree to which the participants considered the potential co-worker as someone “similar” to them, or belonging to their own “group”. The questions were also aimed at understanding the degree to which the respondent was aware of the nationality of the potential co-worker. The Cronbach  $\alpha$  for this scale was .72 for the U.S. sample and .68 for the India sample.

Values dissimilarity was measured with a two-item measure. Respondents indicated, on a scale from “1 = very dissimilar to 7 = very similar”, the extent to which they perceived themselves to be similar to the expatriate in terms of their personal values and work values. This item was reverse-scored to reflect dissimilarity in our analyses. The Cronbach  $\alpha$  for this scale was .72 for the entire sample.

Social support ( $\alpha = .78$ ) was measured using Caplan, Cobb, French, Van Harrison, and Pinneau’s (1980) four-item measure assessing the extent to which the respondent would be (1) willing to make worklife easier, (2) easy to talk to (3) willing to help when things get tough, and (4) willing to listen to personal problems for the expatriate. Questions were asked on a 7-point Likert type scale (1 = strongly disagree to 7 = strongly agree).

Table 1  
Means, standard deviation, and correlations of study variables

Variable	Mean	S.D.	1	2
1. Values similarity	4.51	1.25		
2. Outgroup categorization	3.92	.93	-.25*	
3. Social support	5.49	.87	.28*	-.21*

Note:  $N = 222$ .

\*  $p < .01$ .

#### 4. Results

The means, standard deviations, and correlations of the test variables are summarized in Table 1. The results for H1 to H3 are summarized in Table 2. H1 states that HCNs from the U.S. will categorize expatriate co-workers less as out-group members than will HCNs from India. *T*-test reveals that respondents from India categorized potential expatriate co-workers into in-group or out-group significantly more than respondents from the U.S. ( $M = 4.28$  for India versus  $M = 3.66$  for U.S.;  $p < .01$ ). Hence, H1 is supported.

H2 states that HCNs from the U.S. will not differentiate between male and female expatriates, whereas HCNs from India will categorize female expatriates more as out-group than they would male expatriates. *T*-test reveals no significant difference between male and female expatriates in the U.S. sample ( $M = 3.57$  for male versus  $M = 3.67$  for female; n.s.). Further analyses also show that female expatriates were categorized significantly less than male expatriates in the Indian sample ( $M = 3.75$  for female versus  $M = 4.48$  for male;  $p < .05$ ). Hence, H2 receives partial support.

H3 states that female HCNs in India will categorize male expatriates more as out-group than they will female expatriates and male HCNs in India will categorize female expatriates more as out-group than they will male expatriates. Analysis of variance reveals

that female Indian respondents categorized male expatriates significantly more than they categorized female expatriates ( $M = 4.47$  for male and  $M = 3.38$  for female;  $p < .05$ ). Further, male Indian respondents also categorized female expatriates less than they did male expatriates ( $M = 3.96$  for female versus  $M = 4.49$  for male;  $p < .05$ ). Hence, H3 also receives partial support.

H4 states that HCNs will categorize expatriates who are perceived as being more dissimilar in terms of personal and work values more as out-group members. A significant correlation ( $r = .25$ ,  $p < .01$ ) indicates that the more dissimilar respondents perceive the expatriate to be with respect to values, the more they categorize the expatriate as out-group. Hence, H4 is supported.

H5 states that HCNs who categorize expatriates more as out-group members will be less likely to provide social support to expatriates. A significant negative correlation between out-group categorization and social support ( $r = -.21$ ,  $p < .01$ ) indicates that social support decreases as out-group categorization increases. Hence, H5 is supported.

#### 5. Discussion and conclusion

Expatriate assignments play a critical role in multinational organizations, yet ensuring expatriate adjustment continues to baffle and bother practitioners and researchers. While several organizational and individual level factors potentially contributing to expatriate success have been investigated, one important aspect of the expatriate assignment process, namely the role played by HCNs, has gone mostly unexplored. Barring a few exceptions, research on expatriate issues seems to have been based on the belief that the home organization and the expatriate control most, if not all, of the factors affecting the expatriate's experience on assignment. Needless to say, this is a rather narrow and myopic view of what occurs during the expatriate assignment.

While there is no doubt that better pre-assignment planning, selection, and training can help organizations find individuals who are better suited to expatriate assignments, there is another rather important variable that needs to be studied—the role of HCNs. Indeed, the perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors of HCNs can have a significant effect on the expatriates' experience, from adjustment to work success, to understanding local norms and practices (Toh et al., 2004). As Black (1988) notes, HCNs are usually the best source of information for the expatriate when it comes to learning about local work practices, culture, and the local organization itself. Further, HCNs are also best suited to help the expatriate adjust to the new environment and work, and the

Table 2  
Mean levels (and standard deviations) of out-group categorization according to group

Expatriates	Host country national		
	U.S.	Indian	
	Total sample	Total sample	Female
Total sample	3.66 <sup>a</sup> (1.03)	4.28 <sup>a</sup> (.96)	4.04 (1.28)
Male	3.57 <sup>b</sup> (1.03)	4.48 <sup>b</sup> (1.11)	4.47 <sup>c</sup> (1.19)
Female	3.67 <sup>b</sup> (1.07)	3.75 <sup>b</sup> (1.05)	3.38 <sup>c</sup> (1.07)

<sup>a</sup> Indicates results for H1.

<sup>b</sup> Indicates results for H2.

<sup>c</sup> Indicates results for H3.

significant positive effects of such help from HCNs have been documented in studies (e.g., Caligiuri, 2000; Kraimer, Wayne, & Jaworski, 2001).

Given the critical role that HCN reactions can play in expatriate success (see Toh & DeNisi, 2003), it is important that researchers study the issue of expatriate assignment with reference to HCN reactions and willingness to help expatriates. This examination will help us better understand the processes by which HCNs decide their reactions and subsequent behavior toward their expatriate co-workers. In this connection, Toh et al. (2004) argue that in-group/out-group social categorization by HCNs can influence the willingness of HCNs to offer social support to expatriates.

Our study adds to the existing literature on expatriate assignments, by exploring the categorization of female expatriates in two unique cultures—the U.S. and India. Our results point to some interesting findings. First, HCNs from the U.S. categorize expatriate co-workers less as out-group members than HCNs from India. This has implications for multinational organizations sending expatriates to India from the U.S., and for U.S. organizations bringing expatriates from India into their U.S. operations. Interestingly, there was no significant difference in the extent to which HCNs in the U.S. and India categorized females.

Another important finding of the present study is the role that perceived values play in HCN categorization of expatriates. We found that both sets of HCNs (U.S. and India) were likely to categorize expatriates whom they perceived as holding different values, both personal, and work values. Given the significant cultural differences between these two countries, it is very likely that HCNs from either country would perceive expatriates from the other country as dissimilar in values. Clearly, this is a critical issue, and likely to prove a stumbling block in the expatriates' attempts to gain cooperation from the HCNs. While expatriates cannot be expected to change their values for purposes of their assignment, perhaps they could emphasize the shared values between the two nations (e.g., democracy), in the initial stages of the assignment. Pre-departure training could play a critical role here, by exposing potential expatriates to the shared values of the home and host countries.

We also found that social support decreases as categorization increases. Given that expatriates would spend two-thirds of their time outside the workplace, social support is a critical factor in an individual's ability to adjust to his/her new environment. From learning the location of the local food market, to identifying potentially suitable residential neighborhoods, expatriates need a lot of information that can

help ease their transition into their new environment. HCNs are the ones who have this information available, and can save the expatriate a lot of time and energy if they are willing to share this information.

Finally, we also found that HCNs in the U.S. did not differentiate between male and female expatriates, i.e., females from India would not be disadvantaged during their assignments in the U.S. However, contrary to our prediction, female U.S. expatriates to India were categorized *less* – not more – than male expatriates. One might argue that, given India's masculine culture, female HCNs in India would feel more comfortable working with female expatriates. However, further examination of Indian respondents shows that *both* male and female HCNs preferred female expatriates to male expatriates even though self-categorization theory would predict that males would favor male expatriates more. This is an important finding and bears some discussion.

First, it is possible that male expatriates from the U.S. are seen as too aggressive by Indian HCNs and thus tend to stand out as (more) distinctive in India. It is also possible that given the collectivist nature of India's culture, Indian HCNs may be concerned that male expatriates from the U.S. may not make good peers, given the individualistic nature of the U.S. culture. In this case, male expatriates from the U.S. may need to consider modifying their behaviors to fit better with the Indian work environment, and thus succeed on their assignments.

Another possible reason for this finding might be found embedded in the cultural differences between the two countries we studied. In contrast to the U.S., India is a highly collectivistic society, where traits such as nurturance, group orientation, and harmonious relationship building are emphasized. Indeed, these are the very characteristics that are often attributed to females, and it is thus possible that Indian HCNs prefer female expatriates as they see them as representing these values.

Clearly, our results suggest that female expatriates from the U.S. might actually have a distinct advantage over their male counterparts on expatriate assignments in India. This finding supports Adler's (1987) finding that female expatriates from North America do not face prejudice in Asia. Perhaps it is time for organizations to make special efforts to recruit females for expatriate assignments, as females might very well be the "model global manager (Tung, 2004)."

Overall, the present study makes important contributions to our understanding of the female expatriate experience. First, we extend research on the female expatriate experience by examining how female

expatriates are treated in two vastly different cultures. We do this by investigating self-categorization as a possible mechanism explaining HCN perceptions of expatriates. As we note above, categorization has important implications for the willingness of HCNs to help female expatriates adjust to their new assignment and environment. If HCNs categorize expatriates as out-group members rather than members of their in-group, they are less likely to engage in helping behaviors and in extreme cases, may even act negatively towards expatriates.

Further, we also include non-U.S. expatriates in this field of study. Clearly, as cross-national movement of labor increases, we need to better understand the experiences of all expatriates, not just North American expatriates. Also, we extend the research on expatriate issues by highlighting the importance of perceived values dissimilarity on the potential for categorization. Finally, we also study the impact of categorization on HCNs' willingness to provide social support to expatriates.

### 5.1. Limitations

There are some limitations that should be noted about the present study. First, the information on expatriates as potential co-workers was provided to participants in our study, "on paper." In personal meetings with HCNs as part of this and other research, the authors learned that HCNs most often hear about a potential expatriate co-worker through office memos (nowadays, mostly via e-mail). Further, many HCNs admit that they form impressions of expatriates based on the initial information provided to them by the company. Nonetheless, we hope that future researchers will study this subject using actual expatriates or video simulations.

Next, it must be noted that some nationalities (e.g., Indians) are thought to be high on acquiescence bias. As such, some of our findings may be an artifact of response bias, rather than the result of a substantive difference between the two samples.

Lastly, the scale reliabilities in our study were lower than expected, ranging from .68 to .78. In this connection, Nunally (1967) has noted that  $\alpha$  coefficients of .5–.6 are sufficient for exploratory studies, and .7–.8 for basic studies. Given that ours is the first known study to investigate HCN categorization of female expatriates, we believe our study does make an important contribution to a critical area of business research.

### 5.2. Suggestions for future research

While our study makes some important contributions, further investigation is needed to better under-

stand the factors that caused HCNs in India to categorize male U.S. expatriates as out-group, significantly more than female U.S. expatriates. Future research should also expand the scope of this subject beyond just the two countries included in our study. Also, all participants in this study were drawn from Northern India, which may not necessarily reflect the perceptions and behaviors of all Indians. Future studies should include different parts of India as a moderator variable. It should be noted here that all previous management studies that have studied the Indian workplace, including Hofstede's classic (1980) study, have treated the "Indian employee" as a unitary variable.

Another avenue for future research would be to study how HCN categorization of other relationships (i.e., cases where the expatriate is to be the HCN's supervisor or direct report) affects the experience of expatriates. In this case, if the HCN categorizes the supervisor as an out-group member, s/he is less likely to help the supervisor adjust to the new assignment. On the other hand, given that the expatriate supervisor would be charged with giving the HCN subordinate his/her assignments, and evaluating his/her performance, the moderating role of "workplace reporting relationship" would be an interesting and important addition to this body of literature.

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