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Looking out or looking up: gender differences in expatriate turnover intentions

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Looking out or looking up: Gender differences in expatriate turnover intentions

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LOOKING OUT OR LOOKING UP: GENDER DIFFERENCES IN EXPATRIATE TURNOVER INTENTIONS

Purpose - With the steady increase in the number of female expatriates and multinational corporations' (MNCs') pressing need for global female talent, understanding the factors that attract and retain female expatriates is urgent. Drawing from the literatures on gender differences in (domestic) labor turnover and gender differences in social networks, we investigate gender differences in expatriates' turnover intentions.

Design/methodology/approach - We collected data via a questionnaire survey from an international sample of female (N=164) and male (N=1,509) expatriates who were on a company-sponsored international assignment at the time of completing the survey.

Findings - Our findings show that female expatriates' turnover intentions are mainly explained by *satisfaction with company support*. In contrast, male expatriates' turnover intentions are explained by *repatriation concerns* and *perceived gap between within- and outside-company career-advancement opportunities*, in addition to *satisfaction with company support*. We did not find any gender differences in the levels of turnover intention *per se*.

Practical implications - Since males dominate the expatriate cadre of most companies, existing expatriate retention strategies are likely to be geared toward males. Companies that value and want to retain their female talent, need to gain a better understanding of what matters to female expatriates in their decisions to stay or leave the company, and adjust their expatriation and repatriation management strategies accordingly.

Originality/value - Our study is one of the first to empirically test the gender differences in expatriate turnover intentions. We propose two underlying mechanisms that explain gender differences in expatriate turnover intentions: (1) *social integration*, and (2) *career advancement*. Our findings point to an important new research frontier that focuses on gender

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3 differences in the underlying mechanisms of turnover intentions rather than in the level of
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5 turnover intentions.
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10 **Keywords:** Female expatriate, International assignments, Turnover intentions, Female talent,
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Introduction

Over the past few decades, women have made much progress in the traditionally male-dominated corporate world, with their increasing representation in the talent pool at the entry level. However, women's representation in senior and executive positions in business organizations has not increased in tandem with the increase in the number of women entering the corporate world (Bear et al., 2010; Eagly and Carli, 2007; Torchia et al., 2011). For example, women currently hold 23 (4.6%) CEO positions at S&P 500 companies, and held 25% of executive/senior-level management roles globally in 2015 (Catalyst, 2016). The key contributing factors to the under-representation of women in a business organization at the top are high rates of turnover among women and disproportionately lower rates of promotion among women than men (Ibarra et al., 2010; Krishnan, 2009; Lyness and Heilman, 2006; Ryan and Haslam, 2009). In terms of the expatriate population, although the percentage of female expatriates has risen steadily (Adler and Gundersen, 2007; Tzeng, 2006), an overwhelming majority of expatriates is still men at an estimate of around 80 percent (Welsh and Kersten, 2014).

While research on the similarities and differences between male and female expatriates has accumulated (Altman and Shortland, 2008), a recent review over the past four decades of expatriation and repatriation research concluded that gender issues have received limited attention in the mainstream expatriation literature (Kraimer, et al., 2016). While this may partly due to the fact that women have been a numeric minority in the expatriate population, the review (Kraimer, et al., 2016) pointed out that the lack of attention to gender-related aspects may be due to earlier studies' rather conclusive stance that there are no gender differences in expatriation. For example, early studies on women and expatriation in 1980s reported that women and men equally desired international assignments (Adler, 1984), and

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3 performed equally well (Adler, 1987). The research findings of the 2000s confirmed some of
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5 the early findings such that female expatriates adjust and perform well during the
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7 international assignment (Shortland and Altman, 2011; Tung, 2004). However, research also
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9 suggests that women experience obstacles of getting offered international-assignment
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11 opportunities (Harris, 2006), and they do not meet their career goals as well as men
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13 (Hutchings and Michailova, 2014; van Emmerick, 2006). These findings indicate that there
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15 could be other gender-related aspects among expatriates that warrant further research.
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19 In this regard, an important area that has been neglected over the past four decades of
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21 research into international assignments is whether and how gender plays a role in expatriate
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23 turnover and turnover intentions. The domestic turnover literature consistently claims that
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25 women are more likely to quit than men at both managerial and professional levels (Hom et
26
27 al., 2008), but little is known about whether this pattern applies to the population of
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29 company-sponsored expatriates. Our study addresses this gap and examines gender
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31 differences in intentions to leave for a better job in another company (henceforth referred to
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33 as 'turnover intentions') among expatriates.
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37 International assignment practices are an important means for multinational
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39 corporations (MNCs) to equip their talent with cross-cultural skills and international
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41 perspectives. Although MNCs have recently diversified their international staffing practices
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43 to include commuting, business travelling, short-term assignment and virtual assignment
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45 (Baruch, et al., 2013; Collings et al., 2007; Demel and Mayrhofer, 2010), the need for long-
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47 term international assignment has not diminished (e.g., CARTUS, 2016). Furthermore,
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49 scholars (Harzing et al., 2013; Jokinen et al., 2008) point out that international exposure
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51 through long-term assignment is the most intense and effective way for MNCs to develop
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53 their key talent and to transfer knowledge across boundaries. However, developing global
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55 talent through international assignment is a complex task for MNCs. At the heart of the
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3 challenges is the retention issue as company-sponsored expatriates' and repatriates'
4 tendencies to 'look out' for a new (and potentially better) employer are generally very high
5 (Jassawalla and Sashittal, 2009; Kraimer et al., 2009). Employees who are sent abroad often
6 become disconnected from their home-organization unit, and tend to experience lowered
7 social integration with their company (Kraimer et al., 2012). In addition, expatriates typically
8 represent high-skilled talent (Baruch, et al., 2016), and MNCs around the world are
9 competing for the same talent pool (McNulty, 2014). Therefore, developing an effective
10 retention strategy that encourages expatriates to stay and 'look up' the organizational career
11 ladder, and thus linking global mobility with sustainable global talent management is a key
12 task for MNCs (Casico and Boudreau, 2015; Collings and Scullion, 2012; Harvey and
13 Moeller, 2012).

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The goal of this paper is twofold. First, we integrate two extant streams of literature—
gender differences in (domestic) labor turnover research and gender differences in social
networks research- and propose two distinct mechanisms through which gender influences
expatriate turnover intentions: (i) *social integration* and (ii) *career advancement*. Second, we
empirically test gender effects on expatriate turnover intentions: gender main-effects and
gender moderation-effects. We expect this paper to contribute to advancing how gender
issues are considered and conceptualized in the expatriate-management literature.

The paper is structured as follows. First, we review the extant literatures that predict
competing stances on gender's main effect on expatriate turnover intentions. Second, using
three established antecedents of expatriate turnover intentions (Stahl et al., 2009), we develop
the gender moderation hypotheses. Then, we describe the research method and present the
results. Finally, we discuss the implications for research and international management
practice.

Literature Review and Hypotheses

A recent literature review of decades of domestic turnover research (Hom et al., 2012) suggests a number of new and important directions for future research, including a call to focus on ‘proximal withdrawal states’ of turnover behavior. These are motivational states preceding turnover, derived from desires to stay or leave the current organization. It is a behavioral intention that reflects the subjective probability of, and the most direct and immediate cognitive precursor to, actual behavior (Fishbein and Ajzen, 1975). Typically, the correlations between turnover intentions and actual turnover are reported at around .50 in various meta-analyses (Griffeth et al., 2000; Steel and Nestor, 1984), making it the single most powerful predictor of actual turnover. Even if not all turnover intentions translate into actual turnover behavior, employee turnover intentions have other detrimental effects, such as hampered performance or lowered morale, which often affect other employees within the organization (Felps et al., 2009).

Below, we review theories that predict gender differences in the level of turnover intentions and identify two main mechanisms that may explain gender differences in turnover intentions in the international-assignment context: *social integration* and *career advancement*. We define the social-integration mechanism as expatriates’ sense of connectedness to the home-organization unit. Weak connectedness is a likely driver of turnover intentions. On the other hand, we define the career-advancement mechanism as expatriates’ increased access to alternative job opportunities. Attractive career opportunities elsewhere are a likely driver of turnover intentions. Based on these two mechanisms, we propose (competing) hypotheses on gender’s main effect on expatriate turnover intentions as well as hypotheses on gender’s moderating role between expatriate turnover intentions and their antecedents.

Gender as a main effect on turnover intentions

Labor economists predominantly view women's turnover as higher than men's (Sicherman, 1996; Weisberg and Kirschenbaum, 1993). This view stems from the historically lower and less consistent labor-force participation rate of women compared to men. For example, classic statistical discrimination theory (Bielby and Baron, 1986; Phelps, 1972) predicts that companies are reluctant to invest in female human capital partly due to the 'female quitter' stereotype. Statistical discrimination also contributes to create a 'vicious circle' for women as follows: companies are reluctant investment in women; this deprives women of developmental opportunities; this makes women to feel discriminated against, as a result, women are more likely to quit their jobs; this reinforces the 'female quitter' stereotype, and so forth. A large-scale empirical study (Hom et al., 2008), based on the data of around 500,000 professionals and managers from 20 corporations in the US, found evidence that indeed a higher percentage of women quit compared to men.

In terms of relatively lower female participation rate in the workplace, organizational behavior theories argue that female employees of organizations with an under-representation of women are less socially integrated and have weaker organizational attachment than their male counterparts (Lee and Peccei, 2007; Peccei and Lee, 2005; Tsui and Gutek, 1999). Social integration and organizational identification have been repeatedly suggested as major predictors of turnover and other withdrawal behaviors (Ashforth and Mael, 1989; O'Reilly et al., 1989). The foregoing discussion of statistical discrimination and the mechanism of social integration lead to our first gender main-effect hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1a. Female expatriates' level of turnover intentions is higher than male expatriates'.

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3 On the other hand, women who are sent on international assignments by their
4 companies can be viewed as non-representative of the general female labor force in a
5 domestic environment. Specifically, accepting international assignments might be interpreted
6 as an indicator of strong commitment to work. This particular group of female expatriates
7 may not confirm the 'female quitter' stereotype and might have broken the 'vicious circle'.
8 Therefore, we argue that a new perspective is needed to understand gender differences in
9 turnover and turnover intentions for this particular female expatriate group.
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19 Turnover contagion theory posits that when an individual engages in behaviors
20 indicating an intention to leave a job, including job-search behavior, these activities spill over
21 onto others, and the affected others are also likely to leave (Felps, et al., 2009). The
22 international assignment process inevitably disrupts individuals' existing social links to the
23 home country, and thus weakens expatriates' job and organizational embeddedness in their
24 home-organization units (Kraimer et al., 2012; Reiche et al., 2009; Yan et al., 2002). On the
25 other hand, expatriates develop new social networks in their host countries, including host-
26 country nationals and fellow expatriates to adjust and succeed (Farh, Bartol, Shapiro and
27 Shin, 2010). These new and often close social ties in the host country provide expatriates
28 with access to a variety of useful information, including the ones related to new job
29 opportunities. Since expatriate communities provide a strong basis for social networks, we
30 argue that a member's job-search behaviors or actual turnover will spill over to other
31 members in his/her expatriate's networks.
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48 It is widely known that formal and informal social networks allocate a variety of
49 instrumental resources that are critical for career advancement (Burt, 1997; Granovetter,
50 1973). However, women and minorities have limited access to high-quality resources and
51 social networks (Campbell, 1988; Ibarra, 1993; McGuire, 2000; van Emmerik, 2006). Men
52 tend to build strong same-sex networks that are primarily instrumental, which enable them to
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3 enjoy greater network returns, while women tend to build same-sex networks that are
4 primarily oriented toward emotional support and less beneficial for career-advancement
5 purposes (Ibarra, 1992). Given that male expatriates are in a numerical majority and likely to
6 form larger social networks in their host countries, compared to their female counterparts, we
7 expect male expatriates to have more access to alternative career-advancement opportunities
8 than female expatriates.
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16 The foregoing discussion on gender differences in social networks, indicating male
17 expatriates' prospective better access to information on alternative job opportunities and
18 turnover contagion via larger social networks, suggests that male expatriates are more likely
19 to consider leaving for another employer than female expatriates. This contradicts Hypothesis
20 1a proposed previously, thereby leading to the following competing hypothesis:
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30 **Hypothesis 1b.** Male expatriates' level of turnover intentions is higher than female
31 expatriates'.
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36 **Gender as moderator between turnover intentions and their antecedents**

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38 The majority of turnover theories correspond to March and Simon's (1958) idea about
39 the 'perceived ease' and 'desirability' of leaving one's job, or 'push and pull' factors.
40 Perceived ease of leaving – the pull factor – is reflected by job alternatives, and desirability
41 of leaving – the push factor – is usually reflected by (low) job satisfaction. People who are
42 dissatisfied with their jobs and their employers are likely to search for alternative
43 employment, compare those options available with their current jobs, and leave if any of the
44 alternatives are perceived to be better than their current jobs. Hence, job attitudes such as
45 satisfaction with current employer, combined with alternatives of better employment
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3 opportunities, are generally used to predict employee turnover and turnover intentions in the
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5 domestic turnover literature.
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7 In the context of international assignments, two alternative and complementary
8 perspectives have been proposed as drivers of turnover among repatriates (Lazarova and
9 Cerdin, 2007). First, repatriates leave the company because they are 'frustrated' with
10 problems in their home-organization unit upon return. The main problems include concerns
11 related to under-utilization of their newly acquired skills and knowledge upon return. Thus, it
12 is frustration with career-advancement prospects that increases the likelihood for repatriates
13 to consider quitting. The second perspective suggests that turnover upon repatriation is a
14 'proactive' choice for repatriates, instrumental with regard to achieving their career goals.
15 Expatriates see the skills and knowledge they acquired during their international assignments
16 as a stepping-stone for pursuing external opportunities that would provide a better fit with
17 their career objectives.
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32 In line with both the general turnover theories and the repatriation turnover literature,
33 Stahl et al. (2009) tested three antecedents of expatriates' turnover intentions:
34 (dis)satisfaction with company support during the assignment, repatriation concerns, and
35 perceived gap between within- and outside-company career-advancement opportunities. The
36 first predictor taps the general 'desirability of leaving'. The more dissatisfied expatriates are
37 with company support during the international assignment, the higher their turnover
38 intentions are (Lazarova and Caligiuri, 2001; Linehan and Scullion, 2002; Stahl et al., 2009;
39 Suutari and Burch, 2001). The second predictor captures the 'desirability of leaving', and
40 corresponds to the 'frustration' perspective in the repatriate turnover literature. The more the
41 expatriates feel concerned about repatriation, the more likely they consider alternative career
42 opportunities (Kraimer et al, 2009; Lazarova and Cerdin, 2007; Stahl et al., 2009; Stroh et al.,
43 2000; Suutari and Burch, 2001). The third predictor taps the 'ease of leaving' as suggested in
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3 turnover theories, and captures the 'proactive' perspective in the repatriate turnover literature.
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5 The more attractive the career-advancement opportunities outside the company compared to
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7 within the company, the more likely the expatriates will consider leaving. Based on these
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9 three predictors, we develop our gender-moderation hypotheses below.
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14 ***Satisfaction with company support***

16 Models of turnover processes indicate that dissatisfaction is the single most important
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18 predictor of turnover (Hom and Griffeth, 1991; Hom and Kinicki, 2001; Mitchell, 1981;
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20 Mobley et al., 1979; Price and Mueller, 1986; Steers and Mowday, 1981). This view is
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22 echoed in early expatriate-turnover models (Birdseye and Hill, 1995; Naumann, 1992), and
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24 research evidence show that individuals' dissatisfaction attributed to a lack of sufficient
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26 company support is a key driver of turnover in the international assignment context
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28 (Lazarova and Caligiuri, 2001; Linehan and Scullion, 2002; Stahl et al., 2009; Suutari and
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30 Burch, 2001). Research evidence shows that individuals who feel supported by their
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32 company during all phases of their international assignment, are more satisfied with their job,
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34 and thus more likely to stay in their current assignments and with their employers (Stahl et
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36 al., 2009; Suutari and Burch, 2001). If the firm provides expatriates with ongoing support
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38 during the assignment, and helps them to adjust and perform in the host country, they are
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40 likely to maintain organizational embeddedness within their home-organization units while
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42 on assignment. A lack of such support will likely lead them to develop feelings of
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44 disconnection to the home-organization unit, leading them to consider looking out for
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46 alternative job opportunities.
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52 Although the international-assignment literature does not indicate gender differences
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54 in the link between satisfaction with company support and turnover intentions, extant
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56 literature on gender role socialization suggests that feelings of satisfaction, social integration,
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3 and connectedness with others are more important for women than men (Cross and Madson,
4 1997; Lun et al., 2008; Umberson, et al., 1996). More specifically, women seek to be socially
5 connected to a higher degree than men (Umberson et al., 1996); social affiliation is more
6 strongly related to women's self-esteem than men's (Cross and Madson, 1997); and feeling
7 understood by others is related to higher levels of well-being among women than men (Lun et
8 al., 2008). Hence, we expect that feelings of connectedness with people in the workplace and
9 with the home-organization unit, due to the support and care received from the employer
10 during the international assignment, are likely to play a more important role in female
11 expatriates' turnover intentions. The foregoing discussion suggests the following gender-
12 moderation hypothesis:
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27 **Hypothesis 2.** Gender moderates the relationship between satisfaction with company support
28 and turnover intentions, such that the negative association between satisfaction with company
29 support and turnover intentions is stronger for female than for male expatriates.
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36 *Repatriation concerns*

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38 Repatriation concerns arise when expatriates anticipate that no suitable position will be
39 available for them upon return (Linehan and Scullion, 2002), or that their home organization
40 will not value their international experience (Bolino, 2007; Hammer et al., 1998). Research
41 has shown that problematic repatriation management is a strong contributor to employee
42 turnover (Kraimer et al, 2009; Lazarova and Cerdin, 2007; Stahl et al., 2009; Stroh et al.,
43 2000; Suutari and Burch, 2001). Concerns such as reduced responsibilities and autonomy on
44 the job, reduced size of compensation packages, and limited opportunities for using the
45 knowledge and skills acquired during the international assignment, result in a significant
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3 number of expatriates leaving their company within a year of their return due to frustration in
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5 career advancement (Baruch et al., 2002; Black and Gregerson, 1999; Kraimer et al., 2009).
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8 Studies on gender differences in the domestic turnover literature generally indicate that
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10 men tend to place a greater emphasis on opportunities for promotion and career advancement
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12 than women (Miller and Wheeler, 1992; Wood and Lindorff, 2001). In the context of
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14 international assignments, research findings on gender differences in motivation to accept an
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16 international assignment can provide some insights into how perceived repatriation concerns
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18 might predict men and women's turnover intentions differently. Wang and Bu (2004), for
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20 example, found that out of a number of reasons to accept an international assignment, men
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22 and women differed only in terms of opportunities for career advancement, with a higher
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24 percentage of men being motivated by this. Similarly, Mäkelä et al. (2011) reported that
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26 women considered reasons such as family and spousal considerations as more important than
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28 career-advancement opportunities in their decisions to accept (or reject) an international
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30 assignment.
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34 If expatriates' primary motives to accept international assignments are to advance their
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36 careers, and if they anticipate these expectations as unlikely to be met upon return, they are
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38 likely to look out for alternative employment opportunities. Since career advancement upon
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40 return plays a stronger role in male than female expatriates' decision to accept an
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42 international assignment (e.g., Wang and Bu, 2004), any repatriation concerns relating to
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44 career advancement are likely to create greater frustration among men than women. Our
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46 above discussion leads to the following gender-moderation hypothesis:
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52 **Hypothesis 3.** Gender moderates the relationship between repatriation concerns and turnover
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54 intentions, such that the positive association between repatriation concerns and turnover
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56 intentions is stronger for male than for female expatriates.
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5 *Perceived gap between within- and outside-company career-advancement opportunities*
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7 It has been suggested that organizational tenure and proven productivity records
8 within the organization are more essential for women's long-term career advancement than
9 for men's (Konrad and Pfeffer, 1991; Lyness and Thompson, 2000). This is mainly due to the
10 different gender roles generally expected for men and women at work. Gender roles are
11 defined as 'generally shared expectations about appropriate qualities and behaviors that apply
12 to individuals on the basis of their socially defined gender' (Eagly, 1987: p.12). Gender-role
13 socialization theory predicts that women will feel more pressure to balance career and family,
14 whereas men will feel more pressure to prioritize their career, and thus career priority and
15 commitment to work are congruent for male gender roles, and incongruent for female gender
16 roles (Vogel, et al., 2003; Wood and Lindorff, 2001). Employers may therefore expect
17 women, compared to men, to be less committed to their work. Career-oriented women will
18 thus need to 'prove' that they are committed to work, and that they are productive at work to
19 make career advancements.
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36 If women leave their current company for a better job in another company, they need
37 to prove 'once again' to their new employer that they are committed and productive (Konrad
38 and Cannings, 1997). This implies that career-advancement opportunities outside the
39 company pose a higher risk to women. Konrad and Pfeffer's (1991) study provides evidence
40 that women are more likely than men to reach responsible administrative positions through
41 promotion from within the organization, whereas men are more likely than women to reach
42 similar positions through external hiring. Similarly, Lyness and Thompson (2000) found that
43 female and male executives follow different routes in climbing the corporate ladder: the
44 'looking up' route appears to be a better option for women's career progression, whereas men
45 tend to achieve better career progression by 'looking out'. The above discussion indicates
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3 that leaving for a better job at another company is relatively risk-free for male expatriates
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5 compared to female expatriates. This leads to our next gender-moderation hypothesis:
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10 **Hypothesis 4.** Gender moderates the relationship between perceived gap between within- and
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12 outside-company career-advancement opportunities and turnover intentions, such that the
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14 positive association between perceived gap between within- and outside-company career-
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16 advancement opportunities and turnover intentions is stronger for male than for female
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18 expatriates.
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23 To further clarify our gender-specific position that we have discussed thus far, we
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25 illustrate in Figure 1 the two main mechanisms that explain expatriate turnover intentions: the
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27 ‘social integration’ mechanism and the ‘career advancement’ mechanism. We discussed these
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29 two general mechanisms to argue for two competing hypotheses H1a and H1b. We also
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31 position the three antecedents (H2, H3 and H4) in the figure accordingly. Our gender-specific
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33 views are highlighted in shades such that the social integration mechanism (left part in the
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35 figure) will more strongly affect female expatriates’ turnover intentions, while the career-
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37 advancement mechanism (right part in the figure) will more strongly affect male expatriates’
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39 turnover intentions.
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50 **Methods**

51 **Sample and Procedure**

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53 The data we used in the analysis are derived from a large scale international research project
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55 which collected the data through a survey questionnaire during the period between 2001 and
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3 2004. The sample consists of German, French, American, Singaporean and Japanese
4 expatriates who were on an international assignment at the time of completing the
5 questionnaire. All respondents in our sample were company-sponsored expatriates.
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7 Prospective survey participants were contacted via email either directly by the research team
8 or through HR professionals in charge of managing international assignments at the central
9 HR offices of participating companies. The proportion of direct contacts versus those through
10 central HR offices varied from country to country. In order to ensure respondents' candid
11 answers on their assessment of company practices, we included a confidentiality statement
12 that individual responses would not be shared with their companies or anyone outside the
13 research team. In addition, all respondents were asked to send their completed questionnaires
14 directly back to the research team. The response rates were 46%, 38%, 34%, 50% and 39%
15 for the German, French, American, Singaporean, and Japanese samples, respectively.
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30 We identified 1,509 usable questionnaires from male respondents and 164 usable
31 questionnaires from female respondents. Completed questionnaires that did not have
32 respondents' gender information were deemed unusable for the data analysis of this study.
33
34 Approximately 10% of our sample is female, comparable to previous studies in the literature
35 (Harris, 2006; Tharenou, 2008; Tung, 2004). Respondents worked in companies across a
36 variety of different industries such as airlines, automotive, consumer products, chemicals,
37 electronics, financial services, pharmaceuticals and telecommunications.
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45 Since our male and female respondents differed in several demographic characteristics
46 and assignment-related variables, we controlled for these variables in the statistical analyses.
47
48 About 11% of female respondents hold senior management positions, compared to 28% of
49 male respondents. While about 50% of both male and female respondents are between 30 and
50 39 years old, the majority of the remaining male respondents are older than the female
51 respondents. More than 80% of the male expatriates are married, whereas fewer than half of
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3 the women are. Similarly, around 70% of the male expatriates and less than 30% of the
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5 female expatriates have children. About 55% of the male respondents have prior international
6
7 assignment experience, while 40% of the female respondents possess such experience. On
8
9 average, female respondents have shorter international assignments than male respondents.
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11 The age difference is one possible explanation for the differences in prior international
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13 assignment experience, assignment length, and hierarchical position levels. In terms of
14
15 assignment location, a higher percentage of female than male respondents were sent to
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17 Western Europe, East Asia, Australia and New Zealand. Conversely, a higher percentage of
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19 male than female respondents were sent to Eastern Europe, the Middle East, and Africa.
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23 The questionnaire is based on the scales originally developed by Tung (1998). After
24
25 reviewing the expatriate-career and international-assignment literatures, several new items
26
27 were added to refine Tung's (1998) original scales in order to improve scale reliability. For
28
29 this purpose, a pilot study was conducted with a sample of German expatriates. The English
30
31 version was administered to American and Singaporean respondents. The German, French
32
33 and Japanese respondents received the German, French, and Japanese versions of the
34
35 questionnaire, respectively. To ensure the idiomatic and literal equivalence of these
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37 questionnaires, we followed Brislin's (1986) methodological guidelines and back-translated
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39 them into English.
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43 Since our data were collected from a survey where all the variables were measured
44
45 via respondents' self-report, we took precautions to minimize potential common-method bias.
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47 We introduced a number of procedural remedies in line with Podsakoff et al.'s (2012)
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49 recommendations. First, we introduced a proximal separation between the main variables. In
50
51 the survey design, our dependent variable was not measured immediately before or after any
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53 of the independent-variable scale items, thus maintaining a reasonable proximal distance
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55 between predictor and criterion. Second, we also introduced a psychological separation
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3 between variables by providing a new prime heading that preceded each scale. By breaking
4
5 each construct with a new sub-heading and a new instruction, we enabled respondents to
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7 move psychologically away from the questions that they had just answered. We also used
8
9 different scale anchors in each construct measured.
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11 12 13 14 **Measures**

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16 ***Satisfaction with company support.*** We measured this variable with five items using a
17
18 Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (highly dissatisfied) to 5 (highly satisfied). Respondents
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20 were asked how satisfied they are/were with their company's support concerning: (i) pre-
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22 departure preparation for the requirements of their new job; (ii) pre-departure cross-cultural
23
24 training to enhance their understanding of the foreign culture; (iii) their compensation and
25
26 benefits package; (iv) ongoing support during their international assignment; and (v) long-
27
28 range planning of their repatriation. Cronbach's alpha for this scale was .78.
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34 ***Repatriation concerns.*** We used a four items of Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (highly
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36 concerned) to 5 (not concerned). Respondents were asked how concerned they were about the
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38 following: (i) career advancement upon repatriation; (ii) reduced responsibility and autonomy
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40 on the job upon repatriation; (iii) reduced size of compensation package upon repatriation;
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42 and (iv) limited opportunities for using their newly acquired knowledge and skills upon
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44 repatriation. We reverse-coded the items of this scale. Cronbach's alpha was .76.
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49 ***Perceived gap between within-company and outside-company career-advancement***
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51 ***opportunities.*** We operationalized "perceived gap between within-company and outside-
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53 company career-advancement opportunities" variable as potential career-advancement
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55 opportunities elsewhere 'relative' to those with their current employer; and calculated the
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3 difference between the two respondents' scores, namely, perceived 'outside-company career-
4 advancement opportunities' and 'within-company career-advancement opportunities' for this
5 variable. A positive score shows that respondents perceived their career-advancement
6 opportunities to be better with other companies than with their current one. The respondents
7 were asked: 'In your opinion, what is the likelihood that successful performance in your
8 current international assignment will be important to your career opportunities with other
9 possible employers?', and 'In your opinion, what is the likelihood that successful
10 performance in your current international assignment will advance your career within your
11 company?', respectively. We measured both with a Likert-type scale, ranging from 1 (highly
12 unlikely) to 5 (highly likely).

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27 **Turnover intentions.** We measured respondents' turnover intentions with one item, 'Are you
28 willing to leave your company for a better job in another firm?', using a Likert-type scale
29 ranging from 1 (highly willing) to 5 (highly unwilling). This item was reverse-coded.
30 Although there exist turnover-intention scales that are frequently used in the general turnover
31 intention literature, such as Cammann et al. (1983) and Colarelli (1984), these scales do not
32 capture the central idea of turnover intention that we are examining in this study, that is,
33 "looking out for a better job opportunity than the current one." We therefore used a single-
34 item measure that also appears in Tung's work (1998, 2004). While it is generally more
35 desirable to use multiple items for a psychological construct, there are exceptions to the norm
36 if the construct is sufficiently narrow or is unambiguous to the respondent (Sackett and
37 Larson, 1990; Wanous et al., 1997). As turnover intention is not considered a
38 multidimensional construct, and the assessment of one's turnover intentions is relatively
39 straightforward, we used a single item measure.
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3 **Control variables.** We introduced a number of control variables to eliminate potential
4 alternative explanations for the results, including individual- and country-level factors that
5 might be associated with turnover intentions. To avoid possible country-of-origin effects, we
6 created dummy variables to control for respondents' country of origin. We also controlled for
7 position level (senior management, middle management, lower management and non-
8 supervisory positions), age group (20-29, 30-39, 40-49, 50 or over), and time on current
9 assignment (in years). We further controlled for assignee type: functional assignee vs.
10 developmental assignee. The developmental assignment is defined as to primarily gain
11 experience, skills, and exposure for future positions within the parent company or the foreign
12 operations of the company (Stahl et al., 2009). Respondents who indicated that their
13 assignment was for these objectives were categorized as 'developmental', while the rest who
14 chose other objective options listed on the questionnaire were categorized as 'functional'
15 assignee.
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34 Results

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36 Means, standard deviations, and inter-correlations of the study variables are reported in Table
37 1. The mean score of *turnover intentions* for the total sample is 3.13 (sd = 1.22), slightly
38 higher than the neutral point. The *satisfaction with company support* mean is 2.79 (sd =
39 0.79), slightly lower than the mid-point, whereas the mean score of *repatriation concerns* is
40 3.25 (sd = 0.94), higher than the mid-point. The mean of *perceived gap between within- and*
41 *outside-company career-advancement opportunities* is 0.53 (sd = 1.04), indicating that
42 respondents assessed outside-company career-advancement opportunities higher than within-
43 company opportunities.
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5 To ensure that our data were robust from biases, we conducted two robustness tests.
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7 First, we checked for multicollinearity among the main independent variables. The VIF
8 indices showed that all independent variables in the final multiple regression model are well
9 under 10, the recommended cut-off point suggested in the methods literature (e.g., Neter et
10 al., 1999): the VIF value for *satisfaction with company support* is 1.157; for *repatriation*
11 *concerns*, it is 1.2145; and for *perceived gap between within- and outside-company career-*
12 *advancement opportunities*, it is 1.098. We therefore conclude that the set of independent
13 variables in the multiple regression equation is not systematically correlated. Second, we
14 conducted residual analyses by correlating the residual score of the multiple regression
15 analysis with the main independent variables. The results showed no correlations between the
16 three independent variables, and the residual scores are significant. Given the results of these
17 two analyses, we can confidently say that our dataset is robust from biases, therefore suitable
18 for conducting multiple regression analysis.
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34 We used Ordinary Least Squared multiple regression to test the hypotheses. In step 1,
35 we included the control variables. These are four nationality dummy variables, hierarchical
36 position level (senior management, middle management, lower management and other
37 professional positions), age (in age groups), time on the current international assignment (in
38 years), and type of assignee (developmental versus functional). In the second step, to test our
39 gender main effect competing hypotheses (H1a and H1b), we entered 'gender' in the
40 equation, along with the three predictors that had been found to influence expatriate turnover
41 intentions in the literature, namely, 'satisfaction with company support', 'repatriation
42 concerns', and 'perceived gap between within- and outside-company career-advancement
43 opportunities'. In order to test the gender-moderation effects, we entered the interaction terms
44 in step 3: (i) gender x satisfaction with company support (H2), (ii) gender x repatriation
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3 concerns (H3), and (iii) gender x perceived gap between within- and outside-company career-
4 advancement opportunities (H4). Before we calculated the interaction terms, all variables
5 were first mean-centered to avoid high correlations with the main effect variables. Table 2
6 shows the results of the multiple regression analyses. We report the standardized beta
7 coefficients from the final step in Table 2.
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21 Hypotheses 1a and 1b concern the direct relationship between gender and turnover
22 intentions. Hypothesis 1a posits that female expatriates' turnover intentions are higher than
23 males', therefore predicting a negative relationship between gender and turnover intention.
24 The competing Hypothesis 1b posits the opposite-male expatriates' turnover intentions are
25 higher than females'-, therefore predicting a positive relationship between gender and
26 turnover intentions. The beta coefficient of gender from the second step of the multiple
27 regression analysis shows that the relationship between gender and turnover intentions is
28 non-significant (beta: $-.01, p > .05$). Our results indicate that male and female expatriates do
29 not differ in their levels of turnover intentions, supporting neither of the two competing
30 hypotheses. Thus, neither theoretical stance is strong enough to override the other. This can
31 be interpreted in two different ways. First, there are no gender differences at all, indicating no
32 support for both mechanisms proposed. Second, both proposed mechanisms that lead to
33 turnover intentions are in fact operating for both male and female expatriates, as we posited,
34 and their strengths are similar, leading to similar levels of turnover intentions by both
35 genders.
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54 In terms of gender-moderation effects, Hypothesis 2 proposes that the negative
55 relationship between satisfaction with company support and turnover intentions is stronger
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3 for female expatriates than for male. Our results show that the interaction term of gender and
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5 satisfaction with company support is non-significant. Therefore, Hypothesis 2 is not
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7 supported, indicating that the strength of the negative association found between satisfaction
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9 with company support and turnover intentions is not significantly different between male and
10
11 female expatriates.
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14 Hypothesis 3 proposes a gender-moderation effect on the relationship between
15
16 repatriation concerns and expatriate turnover intentions, such that the positive relationship is
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18 stronger for male expatriates. This hypothesis is supported, as the interaction term of gender
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20 and repatriation concerns is statistically significant ($\beta = .05, p < .05$). The positive sign
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22 indicates that this relationship is stronger for male expatriates. To better understand the
23
24 nature of this gender-moderation effect, we conducted additional regression analyses for the
25
26 male and female sub-samples separately. The results are shown in Table 3 alongside the
27
28 results of the total sample. As shown, repatriation concerns are positively and significantly
29
30 associated with turnover intentions among the male expatriates sample, but the effect is non-
31
32 significant for the female expatriates sample. Repatriation concerns, such as concerns about
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34 life after returning to home-organization units, including possibly reduced compensation
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36 packages and reduced responsibility, affected male expatriates' turnover intentions, but not
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38 those of females. We plot this gender moderation effect and present it in Figure 2.
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44 Similarly, gender has a significant moderating effect on the relationship between the
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46 perceived gap between within- and outside-company career-advancement opportunities, and
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48 turnover intentions (H4) ($\beta = .05, p < .05$). As shown in the additional regression analyses
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50 for the separate male and female samples, the beta coefficient for the male sample is positive
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52 and significant ($.20, p < .001$). For the female sample, however, the beta is non-significant,
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54 indicating that the relatively more attractive outside-company career-advancement
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56 opportunities compared to those within the company do not explain female expatriates'
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3 turnover intentions in our sample. Figure 3 shows the precise nature of this gender
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5 moderation effect.
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14 15 **Discussion** 16

17 Over the past four decades, expatriation research has paid limited attention to gender
18 issues (Kraimer, et al., 2016). Our study aims to shed light on an increasingly important, but
19 yet under-researched topic in the expatriation literature, namely, gender differences in
20 expatriates' turnover intentions. Our study is one of the first to focus specifically on gender
21 differences in expatriates' turnover intentions. It contributes to the literature by expanding the
22 research horizon beyond the initial phases of international assignments, such as female
23 candidates' motivation and willingness to accept an international assignment, and female
24 expatriates' adjustment in host countries. Our findings did not reveal any significant gender
25 differences in the level of turnover intentions *per se*. However, we found significant gender
26 differences in two of the three antecedents of expatriate turnover intentions examined.
27 Female expatriates in our sample were not affected by repatriation concerns nor by relatively
28 more attractive alternative job opportunities elsewhere in their considerations to leave the
29 company. What matters to female expatriates is their level of (dis)satisfaction with company
30 support during international assignments. For male expatriates in our sample, consistent with
31 prior studies, their turnover intentions were significantly influenced by all three antecedents.
32 As such, expatriate turnover intentions are not gender-driven. Instead, the underlying
33 mechanisms leading to turnover intentions appear to vary by gender. Consequently, we call
34 for a more nuanced approach to gender issues in expatriate turnover intentions by
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3 highlighting gender as a moderator rather than as a main effect. Below, we discuss how our
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5 findings contribute to the current literature on gender differences in expatriation research.
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7 Drawing mainly from the literatures on gender differences in domestic turnover and
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9 gender differences in social networks, we proposed two mechanisms – the social integration
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11 and the career advancement mechanisms that explain expatriate turnover intentions. Our
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13 empirical findings suggest that the career advancement mechanism (Mechanism 2 in Figure
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15 1) appears to operate more strongly for male expatriates. Our finding shows that relatively
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17 more attractive alternative employment opportunities (H4) and concerns for career prospects
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19 upon return (H3) drive men to consider leaving their current employer, but not women. On
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21 the other hand, mainly the social integration mechanism (Mechanism 1 in Figure 1) appears
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23 to be relevant for female expatriates such that satisfaction with company support(H2) is a
24
25 strong predictor of female expatriates' turnover intentions, but not repatriation concern(H3)
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27 nor relatively more attractive outside company job opportunities (H4). We speculate that both
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29 mechanisms of the gender-direct effects on turnover intentions (H1a, H1b) are in fact
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31 operating concurrently, but their opposite effects appear to cancel each other out, thus
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33 resulting in no gender-direct effect on turnover intentions. While this speculation is in line
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35 with extant research on gender differences in individuals' motivations to accept an
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37 international assignment (e.g., Tharenou, 2008; van der Velde, 2005; Wang and Bu, 2004),
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39 future research that directly measures the two mechanisms will further inform how the
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41 proposed duality operates in expatriates' turnover processes. Overall, we argue that in order
42
43 to understand expatriate turnover process, research would benefit greatly by integrating the
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45 domestic turnover literature with the gender implications of the social networks literature.
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47 The implications of gender differences from the domestic turnover literature, while providing
48
49 a good starting point for investigating gender differences in expatriates, lack the global
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51 perspective where the push and pull factors in the turnover process might be much more
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3 complex than in the domestic context. Drawing from the two perspectives together, we will
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5 be better able to understand the complexities of gender differences in expatriate turnover
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7 process.
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10 Our findings call for further examination on the two perspectives of the repatriate
11 turnover literature with respect to 'frustrated expatriates' and 'proactive expatriates'
12 (Lazarova and Cerdin, 2007). Hypothesis 3 corresponds to the 'frustration-leaving'
13 perspective, and hypothesis 4 to the 'proactive choice-leaving' perspective. While our
14 findings confirm that both perspectives do explain the male sample's turnover intentions,
15 neither explains the female sample's turnover intentions. Therefore, our findings suggest that
16 prior studies may be applicable primarily to male expatriates, and do not adequately explain
17 female expatriates' turnover intentions. In view of MNCs' challenges in expanding and
18 maintaining their female talent pools, our findings therefore point to an important new
19 research frontier in the area of international assignment management and repatriate turnover.
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32 33 34 **Managerial Implications**

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36 This study provides a number of implications for managerial practice. Since MNCs continue
37 to send their employees on international assignments, representing a significant investment in
38 human capital, they need to have effective retention strategies in place, especially for high-
39 performing (female) expatriates. The differences in antecedents of turnover intentions
40 between male and female expatriates found in our study suggest that there is a need for
41 MNCs to review their existing practices in managing female expatriates. We suggest three
42 key implications for practitioners.
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52 First, our findings show that there are gender differences in the mechanisms driving
53 the turnover process. Thus, it is pertinent for MNCs to recognize that male and female
54 expatriates are not necessarily influenced by the same set of factors in their intentions to
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3 leave the company, even if their turnover intentions do not differ. Thus, it is vital for MNCs
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5 to be aware of the underlying mechanisms related to expatriates' turnover intentions and how
6
7 they differ for male and female expatriates. They should be taken into consideration when the
8
9 purposes of international assignments and related goals are defined (cf., McNulty et al. 2009).
10
11 This will enable managers responsible for expatriation and repatriation to better tailor
12
13 company-support initiatives to the company's expatriates, which in this study we found
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15 important for both men and women, throughout the entire expatriation process.
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19 Second, since our findings indicate that a positive feeling about company support
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21 during all phases of the international assignment is the single most important predictor for
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23 female expatriates' intentions to stay, women may particularly benefit from formally
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25 assigned sponsors. These could be experienced senior executives or line managers who
26
27 supervise and support expatriates during all stages of the international assignment. Given the
28
29 evidenced weakness of women in building strong informational networks (Ibarra, 1993; van
30
31 Emmerik, 2006), a formalized mentoring scheme will especially help women to establish
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33 and maintain strong personal intra-company networks (Carragher, et al., 2008; Ragins and
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35 Cotton, 1991). The support provided by sponsors and personal networks is likely to help
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37 retain female expatriates upon repatriation.
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41 Third, we witness a recent shift in firms' emphasis from international HR to global
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43 talent management (Cascio and Boudreau, 2015). Thus, companies that value and want to
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45 retain their female talent need to gain a better understanding of what matters to female
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47 expatriates in their decisions to stay with or leave the company, and adjust their expatriation
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49 and repatriation management policies in a way to align these with the firm's global talent
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51 strategies. These considerations need to be deliberately reflected in formal talent programs
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53 for expatriates. These provide female expatriates with a better intra-company social network
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55 and social capital (Reiche et al., 2009), and thereby positively contribute to their social
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3 integration and identification with their current company, making them less likely to leave.
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5 Retaining women repatriates not only helps to expand the social network and social capital
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7 of females within companies, it also enables companies to be more diverse in terms of
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9 gender, especially with regard to women's representation in senior and executive positions.
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14 **Limitations and Future Research Directions**

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16 There are several limitations of this study that suggest avenues for future research.
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18 First, we used self-report measures for all the independent and dependent variables. The
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20 variables that we investigated are all psychological constructs; thus, there is no alternative,
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22 objective way of measuring them, but there is the potential problem of common methods
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24 bias. While precautions were taken to reduce potential biases, namely by introducing
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26 "procedural remedies" in the survey design (Podsakoff et al., 2012), and statistical checks to
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28 ensure that the data were robust from biases, it is possible that they still have an effect on our
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30 findings. In addition, our dependent variable, *turnover intentions*, was measured with a single
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32 item. Although our conceptualization of turnover intentions is narrow enough and
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34 unambiguous to the respondents, the use of single-item measures is generally not encouraged.
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36 Therefore, future research that replicates the present study with multiple-item measures is
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38 welcome.
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43 Second, our study included only three established antecedents of turnover intentions.
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45 While these three factors have been identified as the main predictors of expatriate turnover
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47 intentions (Lazarova and Cerdin, 2007; Stahl et al., 2009), our study found that only
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49 satisfaction with company support significantly predicts female expatriates' turnover
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51 intentions. Thus, future studies should explore additional predictors in order to gain a better
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53 understanding of female expatriates' turnover intentions. Also, it would be important to
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55 further explore factors that predict only female, but not male, expatriates' turnover intentions.
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Conclusion

The challenges posed by global talent shortage and thin female talent pools in the global business environment make it imperative for MNCs to understand how to use international assignments to develop their much-needed female talent, and, more importantly, to keep them. Our study shows that female expatriates do not differ in the level of turnover intentions, but they do differ in what matters for them to consider leaving. We call for a more nuanced approach to understand gender-related aspects in expatriate turnover process by focusing on the multiple mechanisms that might operate differently for female and male expatriates. Although research in gender differences in expatriation is by no means new, we still have some way to go before we can truly achieve a better understanding of the complexities that operate female and male expatriates' turnover process.

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Table 1. Descriptive Statistics and Correlations ^a

Variable	Mean	S.D	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Turnover Intentions	3.13	1.22												
2. Satisfaction with company support	2.79	0.79	-.24**											
3. Repatriation concerns	3.25	0.94	.11**	-.20**										
4. Perceived gap between within- and outside-company career-advancement opportunities	0.53	1.04	.23**	-.20**	.12**									
5. Gender	0.90	0.30	-.05	.02	.00	-.05								
6. Nationality dummy 1	0.13	0.34	-.00	.08**	.09*	-.01	-.13**							
7. Nationality dummy 2	0.29	0.45	-.12**	-.17**	.15*	-.10**	.07**	-.25**						
8. Nationality dummy 3	0.12	0.33	-.03	.14**	-.03	.06*	-.10**	-.15**	-.24**					
9. Nationality dummy 4	0.14	0.35	.04	.08**	.16**	-.03	.10**	-.16**	-.25**	-.15**				
10. Age group	2.47	0.85	-.21**	.05	.02	.01	.18**	-.07**	.04	.08**	.07**			

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11. Years on current assignment	2.10	0.9	-0.04	-0.02	.18**	.02	.09**	.05	.08**	.06**	.11**	.29**		
		6												
12. Hierarchical position level	2.25	1.0	.10**	-	-0.03	.06**	-.15**	-.09**	-.07**	.01	.01	-.38*	-.20**	
		2		.08**										
13. Assignee type (Developmental vs. Functional)	0.34	0.4	.13**	-0.02	-0.05	-.07**	-.09**	.01	.01	-.05*	-.09**	-.56**	-.17**	.23**
		7												

Note. ^aN = 1,673. For gender, female = 0, male = 1. * $p < .05$, ** $p < .01$.

Table 2. Multiple Regression Results for Turnover Intentions

Variables	Total Sample (N = 1,673)	Male Only (N = 1,509)	Female Only (N = 164)
<i>Step 1: Control</i>			
Nationality dummy 1	-.05	-.05	.02
Nationality dummy 2	-.17***	-.18***	-.09
Nationality dummy 3	-.04	-.04	-.00
Nationality dummy 4	.00	.01	-.04
Age	-.16***	-.15***	-.27*
Years on current assignment	-.01	-.01	-.01
Hierarchical position level	-.03	-.02	-.10
Assignee type (Developmental vs. Functional)	.06*	.06*	.03
ΔR^2 in Step 1	.06***	.06***	.09
<i>Step 2: Main Effects</i>			
Gender (H1a & H1b)	-.01	n.a.	n.a.
Satisfaction with company support	-.20***	-.19***	-.30***
Repatriation concerns	.09**	.11***	-.10
Perceived gap between within- and outside company career-advancement opportunities	.18***	.20***	.05
ΔR^2 in Step 2	.10***	.11***	.10**
<i>Step 3: Interaction Effects</i>			
Gender x satisfaction with company support (H2)	.04	n.a.	n.a.
Gender x repatriation concerns (H3)	.05*	n.a.	n.a.
Gender x perceived gap between within- and outside-company career-advancement opportunities (H4)	.05*	n.a.	n.a.
ΔR^2 in Step 3	.01*		
<i>R</i>	.41	.41	.43
<i>R</i> ²	.17	.17	.18
Adjusted <i>R</i> ²	.16	.16	.12
<i>F</i>	20.42***	25.03***	2.72**

Note. standardized beta coefficients are reported. For gender, 0 = female, 1 = male.

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

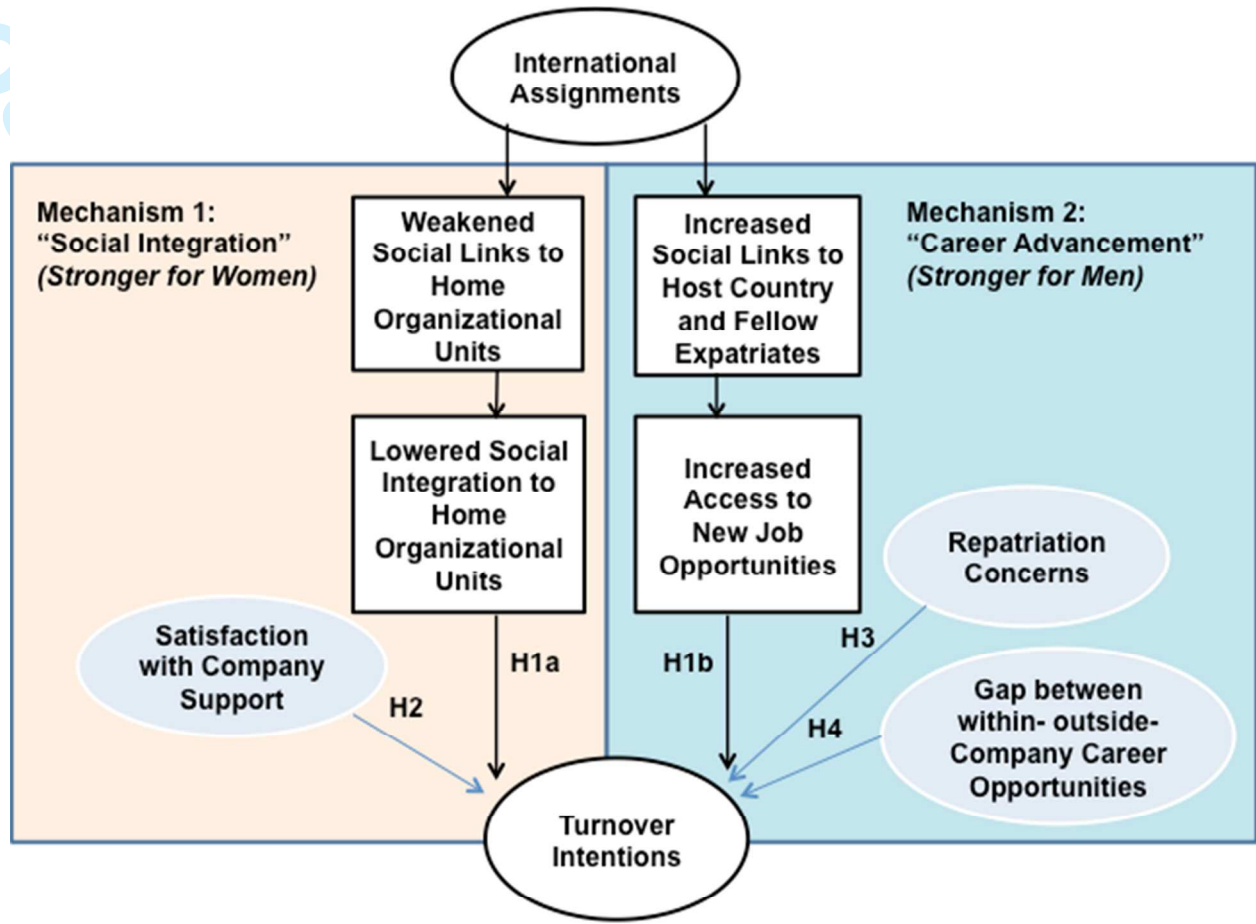


Figure 1. Dual mechanisms of expatriate turnover intentions.

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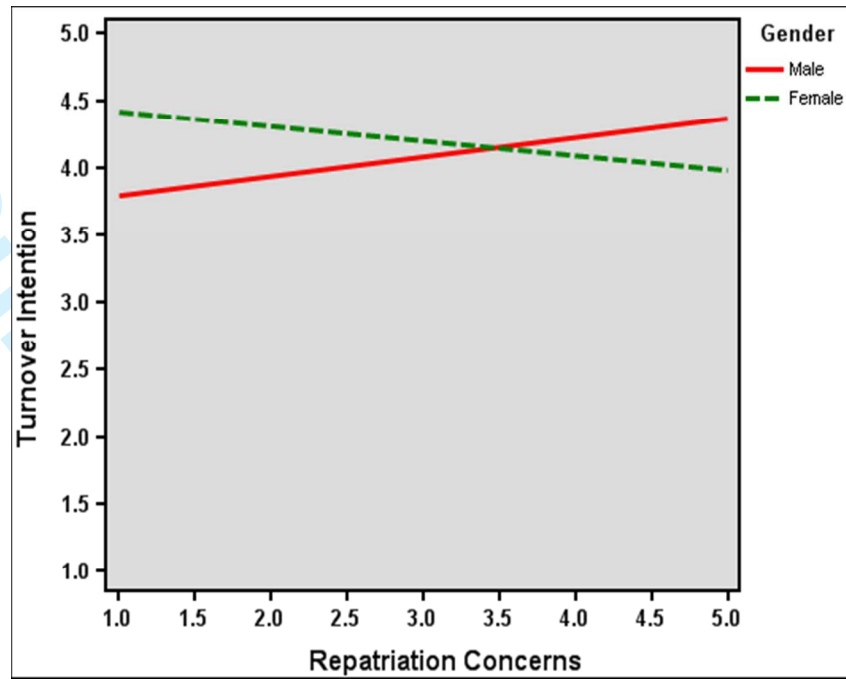


Figure 2. Moderating effect of gender on the relationship between repatriation concerns and turnover intentions

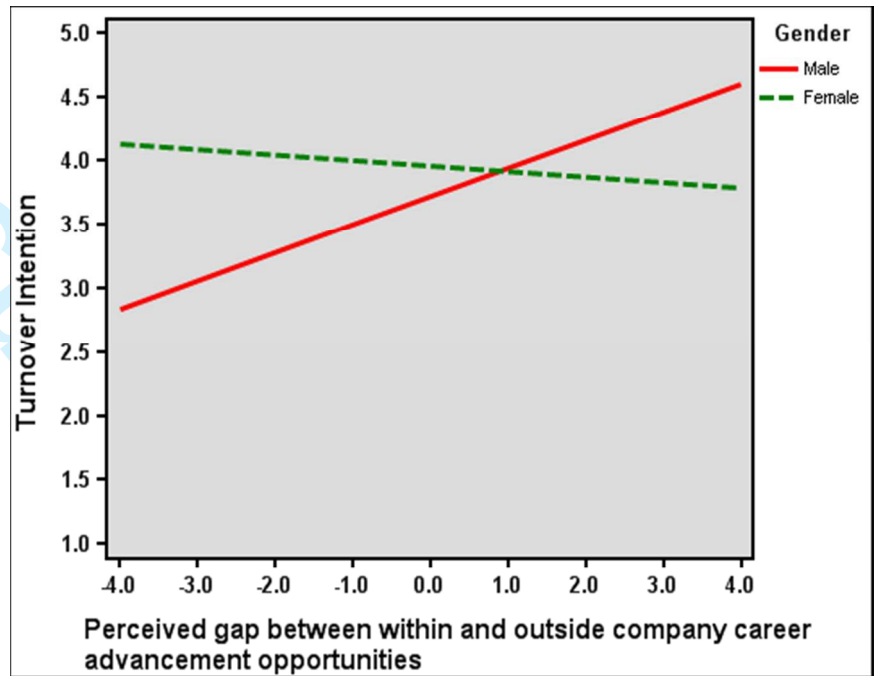


Figure 3. Moderating effect of gender on the relationship between the perceived gap between within and outside-company career-advancement opportunities and turnover intentions

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