Cultural Adaptation on Overseas Assignments

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Early return from International Service Personnel (ISP) assignments and inadequate job performance while abroad are very costly to GM and the individual ISP families. Adaptation problems experienced by the ISP spouses are one of the main causes of poor ISP job performance. This paper addresses variation in the ease and rate of cultural adaptation with ISP families. Structured interviews with ISPs and spouses enabled us to compare their statements about adaptation with their statements about the nature and structure of their daily routines. Two principal findings emerged from the data. First, ISPs interact to a greater extent with host country nationals while the spouses interact primarily with members of the expatriate community. Second, the spouses experience a more difficult and prolonged period of adaptation than the ISPs. We conclude that the spouses' more difficult adaptation is due to their initial lack of organizational affiliation and social networks. Our recommendations focus particularly on providing more specific types of assistance and social contacts to newly arrived family members, especially the spouses.

Key words: overseas assignments, expatriate families, cultural adaptation, social networks, General Motors Corporation

EXPATRIATE ASSIGNMENTS at General Motors (GM) are an important means of developing and managing the international business activities for the corporation. International Service Personnel (ISPs) and their families are typically assigned to various GM locations around the world for periods of three years or more. Such assignments present an opportunity for examining the process of cultural adaptation. By *cultural adaptation*, we mean adjustment to a new cultural environment through involvement with individuals in that environment. While much of the theoretical literature on adaptation and the empirical studies on expatriates[1] focuses on the variables contributing to ease of adjustment, intra-group variation in the ease and time frame of adjustment have not been explored. Because early return from assignments and poor job performance abroad are very costly to GM and the individual ISP families, knowledge and planning directed at hastening the adjustment process would be beneficial to both corporate and familial interests.

This paper identifies and suggests an explanation for differ-

ences in ISP and ISP spouses' cultural adaptation during the expatriate experience. First, we identify gender-linked models of overseas adjustment on the basis of our respondents' statements. Second, we present evidence that the actual models of overseas adaptation are more complex than the respondents' models. We show that social networks available to or created by ISPs and spouses differ significantly and suggest that the nature and structure of the daily routines account for these varying strategies of social interaction. Next, we present some evidence concerning the variation in the ease and time frame of adjustment among ISPs and spouses. Finally, we make some recommendations to hasten the adaptation of ISP families in their new environment.

Cultural Adaptation

Several theoretical models have been proposed to illustrate the process of cultural adaptation or acculturation in the US — models which may apply to other nations as well. In the 1920s, Park and Burgess (1970:360-361) defined this process as one of

interpenetration and fusion in which persons and groups acquire the memories, sentiments, and attitudes of other persons or groups, and by sharing their experience and history, are incorporated with them in a common cultural life.

This perspective consists of three principal models. Gordon (1975) and Cole and Cole (1954) have suggested that *conformity to Anglo values and language* as the standard for American life has predominated. Others (Handlin 1959, Turner 1920) have argued that American society has evolved not from a slightly modified English culture, but from a blending of several nationalities or cultural traditions. Thus, American culture is formed

from a *melting pot* or composite of many cultures. A third model, *cultural pluralism*, suggests that subgroups within a society preserve their own heritage and traditions, socializing primarily with members of their own ethnic, racial, and religious groups (Gordon 1964, Murguia 1975). While some of these authors have argued that a particular model "best" describes the process of acculturation for American immigrants, we recognize that portions of any given society may exhibit the characteristics of any of these three theoretical models simultaneously. Following Murguia (1975:105), it is possible to depict these three theoretical models along a continuum from adoption of the host culture by the incoming group to coexistence of both the incoming group and host group's culture. (See Figure 1.)

This literature was extended by several researchers who developed typologies of adaptive styles of behavior for individuals in new cultural environments. Kluckhohn and Murray (1948), Thomas (1951), Bennett et al. (1958), and Nash (1970), among others, have identified various personality types associated with the cultural adaptation process. For example, the "bohemian" is ready to learn, flexible, and open to new ideas while the "philistine" displays fixed attitudes and an unwillingness to be flexible (Thomas 1951). The discussion of these types suggests that members of an incoming group adapt to their new environments in different ways. Differences may exist between different incoming groups, and also within the same group.

A number of variables have been proposed to account for the type and ease of cultural adaptation for migrant populations.[2] Warner and Srole (1945) hypothesized that racial and cultural differences between the incoming and host cultures would affect the rate at which the incoming group would acculturate. Murguia (1975) expands on Warner and Srole's work by identifying three other variables, all defined with reference to the majority society: 1) mode of entry of the incoming population (voluntary vs. conquest), 2) their size, and 3) distribution in the new location. Length of residence in the new location may affect the rate at which acculturation occurs (Briody 1987, Massey 1986, Nash 1970). The identification of common experiences and values (such as patriotism) by the incoming and host groups aids in the acculturation process (Thomas 1951). Kin and informal reciprocity networks usually provide the initial lodging, food, information about the area, and social and occupational contacts for new arrivals (Butterworth 1971, Kemper 1974, Lomnitz 1974). Formal organizations such as clubs and associations may serve as adjustment or buffer mechanisms for the incoming group (Collier 1976, Cornelius 1971, Doughty 1970, Thomas 1951).

Some of the variables cited in the migration literature on adaptation are relevant to the adjustment or assignment success of expatriates because expatriates are a special type of incoming migrant group. Expatriates use many of the same strategies employed by migrant populations in adapting to their new environments: social networks, occupational contacts, and formal associations, among others. Variables cited in the migration

Conformity to
the Host Culture   Melting Pot   Cultural Pluralism
|_____|_____|_____|

ADOPTION   COEXISTENCE

FIGURE 1. MODELS OF CULTURAL ADAPTATION

literature that are less relevant to expatriate adjustment include problems associated with legal status, individual rather than household migration, and long term residence in the host country. Most expatriates are a transient group, that is, their stay in any particular country is usually temporary. Cohen (1977:18) argues that "transiency reduces the readiness and even the opportunity for adaptation to, and integration into, the host environment." Unlike most migrants, expatriates belong to a privileged minority in the host society, which probably eases their adjustment process (Cohen 1977).

Perhaps because expatriate status and function in the host society differ somewhat from most other migrant populations, the variables examined in studies of expatriate adjustment are different. Variables positively correlated with successful assignments include "relational abilities" or getting along with members of another culture (Abe and Wiseman 1983; Ratiu 1983; Hays 1972, 1974), the employee's technical competence (Inman 1980; Tung 1981; Hays 1972, 1974), ability to deal with stress (Abe and Wiseman 1983, Ratiu 1983), and ability to communicate with host country nationals (Abe and Wiseman 1983; Hayes 1972, 1974; Nash 1970; Ross 1985; Tung 1982).

The ease with which family members adapt overseas may be one of the most important variables affecting the success or failure of an assignment. For example, several studies have described the difficulties in adjustment faced by adult females accompanying their husbands overseas (Clark 1973, Cleveland et al. 1960, Harvey 1985, Rodgers 1984, Tung 1982, Wolf 1969). Cleveland et al. (1960) suggest that while the expatriate benefits from the continuity of his profession while abroad, the spouse must deal with a much different lifestyle. Some of these difficulties eventually are resolved—for example with the help of "associations" made up of the spouses (Clark 1973)—while others are not. The expatriate literature, in general, has reported that expatriates tend to associate principally with other expatriates (Cohen 1977) or that females associate with both expatriates and host country nationals (Cleveland et al. 1960, Nash 1970).

Researchers have also examined the relationship between family adaptation abroad and job performance. Problems generated at home have an influence on the efficiency and effectiveness of an expatriate manager's job performance. Harvey and Lusch (1982) found that stress on the family affects an overseas manager's ability to be creative, make decisions, and manage employees. Tung (1982) found that the most important reason given by American expatriates for failure to function effectively overseas was the inability of the expatriate's spouse to adjust to a different physical or cultural environment. Similarly, Hays (1972, 1974) reported that an adaptive and supportive family was important in avoiding failure on overseas assignments.

Researchers conducting expatriate studies have recommended that selection and training programs incorporate or focus on the above mentioned variables. As such, the expatriate studies recognize differences among expatriates in their adaptation. Much of the emphasis in these studies, however, has been to identify whether the assignment was considered a "success" or "failure." The principal measures for the relative success or failure of an assignment are not indicators of expatriate productivity, effectiveness, efficiency, or reputation, but rather the statistics on dismissal from an assignment, or early return to the home country. These cruder indicators of assignment failure
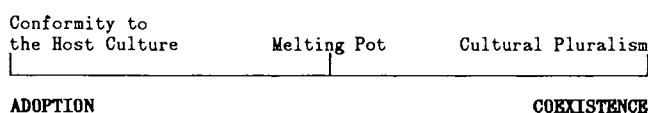
have been used because overseas job performance is difficult to measure and the ratings are difficult to evaluate. The estimates for "failure rates" based on dismissal or early return nevertheless average between 25 and 40% (Harvey 1985, Mendenhall and Oddou 1985, Rehfuss 1982, Tung 1981). In contrast to many other corporations, less than 1% of GM's ISP families since 1985 have returned home early.[3]

However, overseas job performance is relevant to corporations generally due to the high costs associated with keeping a family abroad. In 1986, the total costs (including salary) involved in sending a typical GM family overseas for one year ranged from $250,000 to $350,000 (Briody and Baba 1987:56). According to managers at the International Personnel Administration Staff, the costs in 1988 averaged two to three times the ISP's base salary. In high cost locations like Japan, these costs may average five times the ISP's base salary and exceed $350,000 per year. Such costs are based on a family size of four.

One other area of research on cultural adaptation suggests that there are key stages in the overseas experience reflecting an individual's psychological and cultural adjustment to a new environment. Oberg (1960) used the term "culture shock" to describe such feelings as anxiety, confusion, and strain when individuals come into contact with a new culture. Typically depicted as a "U" shaped curve, the most difficult (or lowest) period for the individual occurs after an initial period of enthusiasm (Copeland Griggs Productions 1983, Harris and Moran 1979, Harvey 1985, Jacobson 1963, Kepler et al. 1983, Lysgaard 1955, Ross 1985, Selltiz and Cook 1962, Torbion 1982). (See Figure 2.) Other studies such as Nash (1967) focus on stages in the adaptation process. Over time, the individual who successfully adapts acquires sufficient information about the host country culture and develops an ability to cope in the new environment. The stages of adaptation and the "U" shaped pattern have been reported for expatriates and students, among others, residing in a particular location on a non-permanent basis; by inference, such patterns may hold for other types of migrants as well.

The "U" shaped curve pattern is not supported in all empirical studies. For example, Church (1982) found that the pattern of adjustment could not always be depicted in the shape of a "U" and that when it could be depicted, its shape was irregular. Indeed, Church (1982:542) argued that support for this general pattern "must be considered weak, inconclusive, and overgener-

alized." Furnham and Bochner (1986:132) point out that the rate of cultural learning is not the same across sojourners and that the "U" curve hypothesis is "too vague and too generalized to be of much use in predicting or understanding sojourner adjustment." They suggest that longitudinal studies should be conducted which examine patterns of adjustment over time. Gullick (1988) suggests that cultural adaptation is viewed best as a learning process depicted by step or cyclical models rather than "U" shaped diagrams.

In general, the previous research has made important contributions to our understanding of cultural adaptation, and expatriate adjustment specifically. The three models depicting "ideal types" of cultural adaptation are useful as heuristic devices and present alternative perspectives of cultural adaptation. These models, in addition to other work on adaptive styles, focus attention on the nature of social interaction between and within incoming groups and whether they adopt new values or retain their existing values. However, apart from individual differences in personality characteristics, this literature does not consider alternative explanations for differences in cultural adaptation such as demographic, linguistic, or occupational variables, among others.

Empirical studies devoted to migration and expatriate assignments have generated and tested a number of hypotheses to account for ease of adjustment in a new environment. Those of migrant populations usually have not examined intra-group differences in cultural adaptation. Instead, such studies have compared migrants with nonmigrants, focusing on migrant selectivity and its explanations, and have proposed variables accounting for ease of cultural adaptation—such as racial and cultural characteristics, kin and reciprocity networks, and formal organizations among others.

Expatriate studies have identified variables important to overseas adjustment, and thus the success of the assignment including relational abilities, communication skills, and stress, among others. And, they recognize variation in overseas adjustment strategies. However, these studies tend to be either largely correlational (in which assignment success, based on the expatriate's ability to remain abroad, is correlated with certain sociodemographic characteristics of the returnees) or anecdotal/descriptive (lacking an examination of what happens during the assignment period per se, that is, the *process of adjustment*). In studies such as Nash's (1970), differential adjustment is described as being based largely on a personality-centered typology. Indeed, Nash (1970:168) reports little variation in adaptive styles, stating that the majority of his sample were "more philistine than creative." Furthermore, he does not explicitly or systematically link differences in adjustment to varying patterns of social interaction, or to aspects of an individual's daily routine. Finally, while the "U" shaped model of overseas adjustment suggests that some members of an incoming population follow a general stage-by-stage pattern of adaptation, it does not differentiate the *ease or time frame* in which different portions of this incoming population adapt.

This paper addresses intra-group variation in the ease and time frame of adaptation. Since our interviews were conducted with those who completed at least one overseas assignment (that is, the "success" cases rather than the "failures"), we focus not on the issue of whether or not they adjusted, but on how their adjustment proceeded and the timing associated with it. We document the means by which cultural adaptation is facilitated,

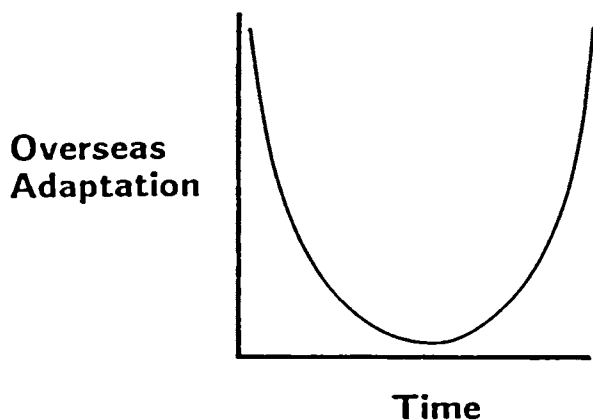
Overseas
Adaptation

Time

FIGURE 2. THE "U" SHAPED CURVE DEPICTING ADJUSTMENT
TO A NEW CULTURE

relating it to the structure or context of daily life in which our respondents are embedded. Thus, the paper documents and explains differential patterns of adaptation, not just within any given incoming group, but within any given household.

Data and Methods

The data for this project were collected over several months in 1986 and consisted of open-ended interviews with 30 respondents. These 30 individuals represented 15 households and were interviewed individually, following their return to the US from their last international assignment.[4] We interviewed the GM employees (or ISPs) first, emphasizing career and work-related issues and the overseas assignment generally. Their interviews averaged approximately 75 minutes. Then we interviewed the spouses or an older child, focusing on family lifestyle prior to, during, and following their stay abroad. Their interviews averaged 105 minutes. Some of the questions appeared on both interviews.

The individuals we interviewed were not selected randomly. Instead, we worked through informal contacts within the corporation.[5] Our ISPs were selected only from among employees at GM operations in the US; retirees and persons no longer working at GM were not considered. Names of potential ISPs for the study were suggested by GM employees, particularly those from the International Personnel Administration Staff, and by members of ISP families. In a few cases, individuals who were contacted to participate in the study either declined to be interviewed, or ultimately were not chosen because a second family member was not available to interview with us.

Characteristics of the Sample

In this study all the ISPs are male and all the spouses are female.[6] This distinction is also apparent in the 1986 population of ISPs in which 99% of the ISPs were male; as such, our sample is at least representative of the larger population of ISPs. The 15 ISP families in our sample spent between three and 16 years overseas, averaging about 6.5 years; they participated in two assignments on average. The first family to leave on an overseas assignment left in 1961 and the last returned to the US in 1986. Assignments prior to the late 1970s were quite lengthy while those since 1979 averaged less than three years due to changes in GM's ISP program.[7]

We selected a few socio-demographic variables to provide a general profile of the 15 families at the time of their first overseas assignments. The median age for the ISPs was about 39 years while the spouses' median age was 35 years. While seven of the 15 ISPs were foreign born, only two of the spouses were foreign born. The ISPs had been employed at GM for about 13 years on average before taking their first overseas assignments. Their last domestic assignments, in order of frequency, were in finance, engineering, sales, administration, and materials management. About one-third of the spouses worked just prior to their first overseas assignments. Thirteen of the ISPs were married prior to departure while the two others married during their assignments. The 13 couples married prior to departure had been married about 11 years on average and eight of them had children who resided with them.

Respondents' Models of Overseas Adaptation

One concern of this paper is the comparison of the respondents' perspectives or models on overseas adjustment with the actual models used in adjusting abroad. A number of interview questions enabled us to develop the respondents' own models of adaptation overseas. Thus, there was no single question that prompted our respondents for their own models of the adjustment process. Some of these questions include:

- Did you or the kids experience an initial period of disorientation that people have called "culture shock"? How would you describe it?
- Where did you turn for help (personal, household/shopping, medical)?
- Describe a typical or composite day for you and the children.
- Could you provide examples of what types of job-related learning you picked up from your experience abroad?

Twelve of the 15 couples provided statements about the differential adjustment of males and females to the overseas lifestyle.[8] Thus, these ISPs and spouses viewed adjustment as gender-linked, or related to marital roles. All 12 couples agreed that females experience a more difficult adjustment to overseas life than males. For example, one spouse stated that her husband did not experience culture shock "because he had his work . . . It's much harder on the wives since not much English is spoken." A second spouse reported that, "Men adapt better. Business is done just the same. With their American backdrop of friends, they don't have to venture into the foreign world as much . . . They are often too busy with business to learn the language or community." A third indicated,

I was very impressed with most of the GM wives in (country x). They were independent and resourceful. The guys had problems with the business and couldn't take the time with the families. It was the gals who had to figure out what to do.

The ISPs' comments are very similar. One man stated, "I never have a problem. I just go to the office—no problem. It's just like it is in Detroit. For women, they have a different strategy." A second ISP remarked,

If she (the wife) has the least negative ideas (about overseas living), then don't send her. The wife is the key. For the man, what the hell. Ninety percent of his life is the same as working in Detroit. For the wife, she is ninety percent immersed in the culture. . . .

Several of the ISPs said everyone else in the family experienced a more difficult adjustment than their own. One ISP reported that he "was afraid that they (his family) might not be able to adapt." He was going to immerse himself "in a very time consuming project but that they had hours and hours in which they had to face the unknown." There also appeared to be some sense on the part of some ISPs that they were responsible for the difficulties that their families faced. "What made it so bad was that you knew that you were the cause of their stress," stated one ISP. Another remarked that he "pushed his family into different activities to help them adapt."

Based on these comments, we derived our respondents' models of overseas adjustment. Figure 3 depicts the adjustment of females or spouses to life overseas while Figure 4 represents male or ISP overseas adaptation. Our respondents agreed that

spouses experience a more difficult adjustment to the host country culture than the ISPs because the spouses' primary responsibilities concern the management of household affairs. Such activities cannot remain unattended for any length of time and thus force the spouses to interact immediately, and with little if any orientation, to the host country culture. Other statements from the respondents suggest that the spouses' adjustment is related to their relatively unstructured daily schedule and their lack of social networks, particularly at the outset of the overseas assignment. The irregular line in Figure 3 depicts the difficulty of the overseas experience for the spouses.

By contrast, Figure 4 illustrates the perception that the ISPs have an easier adjustment to overseas life because they spend so much time at work and because they are already familiar with various aspects of their role as GM employees. They interact with the world of work—an environment that is similar to the corporate GM culture based in the US. Because the majority of the ISPs' daily routines involves work, an activity familiar to them, their adjustment to it is straightforward and accomplished easily (hence the straight uninterrupted line). It appears that the ISPs adapt to their new environments much more easily than the spouses. The implication in Figure 4 is that the ISPs do not have to concern themselves with the host country culture, at least not to the same extent as the spouses.

Actual Models of Overseas Adaptation

SOCIAL INTERACTION WITH THE HOST COUNTRY NATIONAL AND EXPATRIATE COMMUNITIES. Our interviews suggested that the overseas lifestyle has two important components: social involvement with *host country nationals* and with members of the local *expatriate community*. First, ISPs, spouses, and their children have to adjust to or interface with host country nationals. The following comments indicate the range of interaction that ISP families have with host country nationals. Shortly after their arrival abroad, one spouse recounted,

We drove through the countryside and saw many poor families living in shacks. This was a shock—a harsh shock to the kids . . . However, having seen this over and over they are better for it. They have a better understanding of life in general.

Another spouse reported that the shopkeepers were

not very patient with American buying habits. I started buying groceries on a weekly (rather than a daily) basis . . . A lot of the women waiting in line would either sigh as I was going through the checkout or ask if they could go ahead of me. I would let a few go ahead of me but I couldn't be doing that all day.

One ISP stated that due to the sharp contrast between Eastern and Western culture, he "started to learn more (once he was sent

to the East) due to cultural changes. I recognized . . . that some values are appropriate to adopt—dealing with people in perceptions of how things work." One of the families was frequently "invited to go out to dinner with many [host country] families [from work since] the home is not usually used as the basis for socializing." In the last few years while this particular ISP was running the plant, his family was "invited to go to weddings, baptisms, etc."

A second component of the overseas lifestyle concerns social involvement with the local expatriate community. However, just as arriving ISP family members encounter differences in the physical environment, values, attitudes, and behavior in the host country, they are also exposed to and expected to participate in the expatriate community of that host country. One of the principal functions of the expatriate community, particularly those affiliated with GM, is to integrate the arriving ISP family members into their new environment.[9] One spouse commented that, "You could really stay to yourself if you didn't force yourself to get out. The ISPs that we met in the hotel (who had been there slightly longer than we had) helped out a lot. They showed us a few places." Information was shared with arriving families at social gatherings (welcome parties and informal get-togethers), at commonly frequented organizations and institutions (clubs, work, church, and school), and in the course of other activities such as shopping and leisure pursuits. Cohen (1977:41) points out that,

The expatriate associations, clubs and schools are not only the most ubiquitous but also the most important expatriate communal institutions; internally, they focus and structure the life of the expatriate community; externally, they symbolize its separateness and exclusiveness from the surrounding host society.

We now focus on the extent to which the adjustment strategies of the ISPs and spouses (based on their statements about their behavior) corroborate or contrast with Figures 3 and 4 (based on their statements about overseas adjustment). To derive the actual models of overseas adjustment, we examined our respondents' statements describing daily activities and interpersonal relationships involving non-family members. Social interaction patterns with host country nationals and expatriates is our proxy variable for overseas adjustment. We recognize that social interactions have many facets to them, including frequency of contact, multiplicity of contact, amount of time, nature, and content of the exchange, and context in which the exchange occurred. For example, interaction with maids and shopkeepers would not have been counted unless personal relationships developed with the ISPs or spouses. Our assessment for each respondent is based on an overall reading of the individual's interview.

First, we examined the development of personal relationships between the ISPs and spouses with the host country national community, expatriate community, or both communities. Table 1 shows that the 14 spouses developed personal relationships with host country nationals on 12 (40%) of the 30 assignments, and with expatriates on each of these 30 assignments.[10] By contrast, the 15 ISPs developed personal relationships with host

Females ——/\\\\\\\\→ Host Country Culture

FIGURE 3. RESPONDENTS' MODEL OF FEMALE ADAPTATION ABROAD
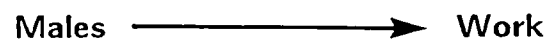
Males ————————→ Work

FIGURE 4. RESPONDENTS' MODEL OF MALE ADAPTATION ABROAD

country nationals in all 32 of their overseas assignments and with expatriates in 27 (84%) of their 32 assignments. Since an individual could be counted as interacting with either type of community abroad or with both communities, these counts were not mutually exclusive and formal tests of independence were not appropriate. However, the data depicted in Table 1 suggests that the ISPs have contact with both the host country national and expatriate communities. By contrast, the spouses are much more likely to interact with expatriates than host country nationals.

Second, each of us independently examined the interview data for information concerning the frequency and nature of daily interaction patterns of the ISPs and the spouses. We identified pertinent aspects of each interview that focused on interaction with both host country nationals and expatriates. Next, we classified each respondent's reported daily interaction patterns by whether he or she had spent more, less, or equal amounts of time with the host country national and expatriate communities. Rater agreement was fairly high (72%); we resolved the remaining cases in which the ratings differed by consulting the interviews together. In Table 2, we report our final assessment of the amount of social interaction ISPs and spouses had with the host country national and expatriate communities. Spouses are more likely to associate with expatriates on a daily basis while ISPs are more likely to associate with host country nationals on a daily basis. These results are significant in a Chi Square test at the .001 level.

The results from both Tables 1 and 2 contrast with the findings we anticipated on the basis of the respondents' models. (See Figures 3 and 4.) Host country nationals are included in the respondents' conceptualization of the spouses' adjustment (Figure 3) but not in the respondents' conceptualization of the ISPs' adjustment (Figure 4). Similarly, the respondents' models do not include any reference to the expatriate community. While Table 1 provides evidence that the ISPs and the spouses *interacted with members of both the host country national and expatriate communities*, Table 2 depicts the *extent of the interaction* with each of these two communities.

Based on these quantitative data, we derived two actual models of overseas adaptation. Figure 5 depicts ISP interaction patterns with both the host country national and expatriate communities. ISPs tend to be involved to a greater extent with host country nationals on a daily basis than with expatriates. The line linking the ISPs with the host country community through the work environment is thicker than any of the other lines. Work usually acts as the principal facilitator for the ISPs' social interaction with the host country nationals and to a lesser extent with the expatriate community. However, some of the ISPs' contacts

TABLE 2. EXTENT OF SOCIAL INTERACTION WITH THE HOST COUNTRY NATIONAL AND EXPATRIATE COMMUNITIES BY ROLE*

Extent of social interaction	Role	
	Spouses ($n = 30$ assignments)	ISPs ($n = 32$ assignments)
More with nationals	7	22
Equal amounts with both expatriates and nationals	3	2
More with expatriates	20	8

*$p \leq .001$.

with both host country nationals and expatriates develop independently of their work environment.

By contrast, Figure 6 illustrates ISP spouses' interaction patterns with both the host country national and expatriate communities. As with the ISPs, the degree to which the spouses interact with these two communities varies by individual and location of the assignment, among other reasons.[11] However, in general, the data from Table 2 suggest that the spouses interact far less frequently with host country nationals and more frequently with members of the expatriate community. Thus, the line linking the spouses to the expatriate community is thicker than the lines linking them with the host country community. When the spouses interact with the host country culture, the expatriate community often acts as a facilitator for these interactions. This particular finding has been documented elsewhere (Useem and Useem 1967, Useem et al. 1963). In general, the results of these analyses indicate that all members of expatriate households do not associate primarily with other expatriates (Cohen 1977). Rather, our results suggest that ISPs and Spouses experience different patterns of social interaction with the expatriate and host country communities. These patterns are different from those described by our respondents and different from those identified in the expatriate literature.

EXPLANATIONS OF SOCIAL INTERACTION PATTERNS. The expatriate literature identifies a number of variables associated with the selection and training of candidates and their adjustment abroad that have a higher probability of leading to successful assignments. As reported earlier, the variables most frequently cited include relational abilities, technical competence of the employee, ability to deal with stress, ability to com-

TABLE 1. SOCIAL INTERACTION THROUGHOUT THE OVERSEAS ASSIGNMENTS BY ROLE

Social interaction	Role	
	ISP spouses ($n = 30$ assignments)	ISPs ($n = 32$ assignments)
With host country nationals	12 (40%)	32 (100%)
With expatriates	30 (100%)	27 (84%)
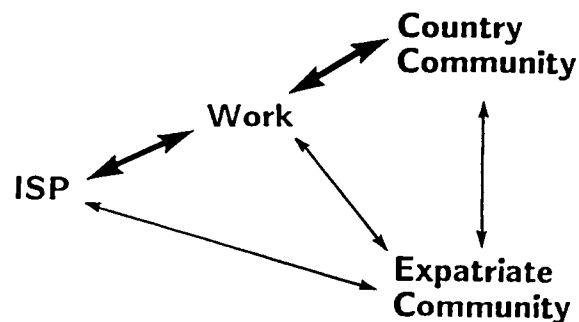
FIGURE 5. ACTUAL MODEL OF MALE ADAPTATION ABROAD

Expatriate Community

SPOUSE

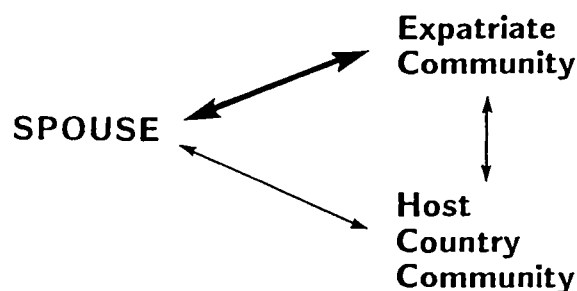**Host Country Community**

FIGURE 6. ACTUAL MODEL OF FEMALE ADAPTATION ABROAD

municate with host country nationals (language ability), and the ease with which family members adjust overseas. Other variables not cited as frequently include age, prior residence abroad, and geographical location of assignment (Mendenhall and Oddou 1985, Ross 1985, Torbion 1982). Because of limitations associated with the type of interview data collected, we were not able to examine the relationship between all these variables and the dependent variable—social interaction patterns. For example, we collected no objective data on the ISPs' technical competence. We also did not ask our respondents to evaluate the stress associated with an overseas assignment or their ability to deal with this stress.

However, we were able to test the effect of the following independent variables on the dependent variable: language ability at outset of assignment, language ability at end of assignment, age, geographical location of assignment, length of assignment, previous residence abroad, and desire to live abroad. Extent of social interaction abroad with both host country national and expatriate communities is our proxy variable for adjustment overseas. Based on the literature and on explanations provided by our respondents, we hypothesized that individuals with some language ability, who were older, not sent to the Middle or Far East (considered to be very difficult assignments, Harvey 1985), spent a longer period of time on each assignment, lived abroad before their first GM overseas assignment, and desired to live abroad before their first GM overseas assignment, would be more likely to associate with host country nationals than with

expatriates. We examined the relationship between each of these variables and extent of social interaction abroad (as depicted in Table 2) using a Chi Square test, both controlling and not controlling for gender.

We found no statistically significant relationship between any of these independent variables and the dependent variable. Similarly, none of these variables had any effect on the extent of social interaction when we controlled for gender. Table 3 depicts the descriptive characteristics of five of these independent variables for the 62 overseas assignments. Two of the variables we predicted are in the expected direction and have been reported in the expatriate literature: language ability at outset of assignment and location of assignment; the three remaining variables are not in the expected direction.[12] For example, on 63% of the 62 overseas assignments, the ISPs and spouses had some language ability at the outset of the assignments. We expected that the ISPs and spouses would interact more with host country nationals than with expatriates. And, in fact, 69% of those who had more social interaction with nationals had some language skills prior to departure—a percentage greater than the 63% total.[13] Similarly, 23% of the 62 overseas assignments occurred in the Middle or Far East. We anticipated that the ISPs and spouses would interact more with expatriates than with host country nationals on these assignments. Twenty-nine percent of those who had more social interaction with expatriates were located in the Middle or Far East—a percentage greater than the total 23%.

Table 4 examines the relationship between extent of social interaction with the host country and expatriate communities during the first overseas assignment with prior residence abroad and desire to live abroad. With these two variables, we considered statements made by the ISPs and spouses before their first overseas assignments. The total number of cases is 29, since one of the spouses did not accompany her husband overseas. Neither result was statistically significant, but one of the two independent variables, percent residing abroad before first assignment, was in the expected direction.[14] Forty-one percent of the ISPs and spouses had resided abroad before their first overseas assignment. We expected that these individuals would be more likely to associate with host country nationals than those who had never lived abroad before. Indeed, 55% of those who had

TABLE 3. EXTENT OF SOCIAL INTERACTION WITH THE HOST COUNTRY NATIONAL AND EXPATRIATE COMMUNITIES BY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ISPS AND SPOUSES (n =62)

Extent of social interaction	Descriptive characteristics on 62 assignments				
	% with some language at outset of assignments	% with some language at end of assignments	% >37 years	% in Mid/ Far East	% on assignments ≥3 years
More with nationals (n = 29)	69	86	41	14	48
Equal amounts with both expatriates and nationals (n = 5)	80	80	20	40	40
More with expatriates (n =18)	54	86	54	29	68
Total (n = 62)	63	85	45	23	56

TABLE 4. EXTENT OF SOCIAL INTERACTION WITH THE HOST
COUNTRY NATIONAL AND EXPATRIATE COMMUNI-
TIES BY CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ISPS AND
SPOUSES ($n = 29$)

Extent of social interaction	Descriptive characteristics on the first assignment	
	% residing abroad before first assignment	% desiring to live abroad before first assignment
More with nationals ($n = 15$)	55	55
Equal amounts with both expatriates and nationals ($n = 3$)	67	33
More with expatriates ($n = 11$)	27	67
Total ($n = 29$)	41	59

more social interaction with nationals had lived abroad prior to their first GM overseas assignment—a percentage greater than the 41% total.[15]

Explaining Social Interaction Patterns

Because none of the variables reported in the literature or the explanations suggested by our respondents were associated with the actual models of overseas adaptation (Figures 5 and 6), we sought potential explanations from the interview data. Based on an analysis of our 30 interviews, we suggest that the *nature and structure of the daily routines* account for the distinct patterns of social interaction within the sample: ISPs tend to associate primarily with host country nationals while spouses tend to associate primarily with expatriates. In the next sections, we describe the day-to-day activities of both the ISPs and spouses and the way in which their activities were established. These descriptions furnish an understanding of the individual's role during an overseas assignment and the amount of structure associated with that role.

DAY-TO-DAY ACTIVITIES. *ISPs.* The majority of the ISPs' daily routine involved work—whether at an office, plant, dealership, or in the banks and offices of business partners. ISPs tended to work long days and portions of the weekends. While overseas, ISPs served in a wide variety of professional fields, including finance, engineering, accounting, computing, sales/service, public relations, government relations, general management, marketing, and materials management (Briody and Baba 1989:30–32).

About one half of the ISPs were physically located at the GM base of operations. In these cases, daily interaction involved a large degree of social interaction with co-workers—both host country nationals and other ISPs. As the following comments suggest, an integral part of the ISPs' daily activities involved the establishment and maintenance of relationships. One ISP stated,

Thirty to thirty five percent (of a typical day for me) was oriented to-

wards people development. I got lots of satisfaction from this. I also attended supervisors' meetings to share information. About thirty percent of my day was oriented towards a specific activity. And, about forty percent was oriented towards communication.

Another ISP stated that "We developed some of the local talent." As part of his job he,

spent a lot of time in the factory . . . I would go out to collect and then analyze my own data, and then interpret it. I wanted to find out how things could be improved. I had to be very tactful or else everyone would get defensive . . . In my job you could lose friends. You can't say you know it all. The acid test is that we are still friends.

A third ISP remarked that he "had more contact with the (host country nationals) than any other ISP." As director of product and business planning, about 50 people reported to him. "I had more knowledge of the gossip in the plant because of my knowledge of the language and type of position I had."

In the remaining cases, job demands required the ISPs to interact primarily with host country nationals "offsite," that is, away from the GM facility. One ISP mentioned, "I spent most of my time with contractors, bankers, lawyers, the (host country) government, and the joint venture partner. I operated in the (host country language) on a daily basis." A second ISP commented that, "You develop patience. You have to get through the banalities which last for one half hour or so. You must accept their style which combines their business life with the rest of their life. You must adapt to their way." A third ISP stated that, "In business development, you deal a lot with the natives" and that, "I was there to do business with the natives." Sales positions were quite similar in this regard. One ISP stated that when he was in the field, he made dealer/fleet contacts.

When going to the area for the first time, I would go with someone who had been there before, like the service guy. This way I got introduced to people. Then I could begin to get a sense of how big the facility was, what its problems were, and any other support functions I might be able to offer them.

In general, however, with the possible exception of one or two ISPs whose jobs were closely aligned with the domestic corporate staffs, interaction with host country nationals occurred frequently and regularly.

Spouses. Unlike the ISPs, the spouses were not wage earners overseas due to both personal choice and host country visa restrictions.[16] Descriptions of typical or composite days from the interviews were useful in providing some sense of the kinds of activities and interactions that the spouses experienced. Their day-to-day activities centered on tasks related to household maintenance, personal interests, and child rearing. For example, in large part it was the spouses who dealt with the administrators, teachers, and parent-teacher organizations of the American and international schools that their children attended. Other daily activities included participation in sports, various types of enrichment classes including language skills, crafts, and gourmet cooking, and volunteer work with other spouses.

The following examples refer primarily to the period subsequent to the initial adjustment phase—within several months after their arrival. One spouse remarked,

Usually it is a difficult adjustment for the wives in (country x) since the husbands conduct much of their business at night. He (my husband)

would often come home late at night, having eaten out with business associates. Sometimes I would do things with the other (GM) wives at night.

Another spouse reported that she,

would go out shopping for groceries before 8 a.m. Then I might play bridge, go to a club meeting, take a nap, wait for the kids to come home from school, help them with their homework, prepare their dinner, go to a cocktail party, and perhaps (go) out to eat with some friends and my husband.

A third spouse indicated that she would "get up and walk for an hour or so, go shopping with the other wives that she knew, (and) attend meetings at the orphanage, church, or Newcomers' Club." A fourth reported that she "went to classes at the American Women's Club, played bridge, (and) shopped. The club would arrange for trips to castles (and other places) and I would go on them."

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE DAILY ROUTINE. *ISPs.* How were the ISPs integrated into their daily routines? In general, the ISPs reported a certain degree of ease in beginning their work tasks abroad. First, the majority were familiar with the type of position they would fill and had some knowledge of the job requirements. Their initial overseas assignments, for example, either fell generally within the same range of major professional fields as the last domestic assignments held, or were in the same fields as positions they had held earlier in their careers (Briody and Baba 1989). Second, there was some continuity in the work by virtue of a set of commonly based GM procedures. As one ISP stated, "In general, the GM office in (country x) ran very similar to the one in Detroit." Another remarked, "There are four manuals which dictate the financial workings of the corporation, whether in Detroit or wherever." A third emphasized this point even more strongly by stating, "We were there to enforce the GM system." However, this same individual pointed out, "You can't do it like you did in the good ol' U.S.A. They'll (the host country nationals) never understand."

Third, in most cases there was some type of orientation or informal training to new work assignments. One ISP stated, "It was a relatively easy move with nothing really traumatic. GM management was assertive and aggressive and promotions were given on the basis of real work. My boss was an American." Another ISP mentioned, "My predecessor was gone by the time I arrived. However, the other ISPs (in the plant) helped to get me started." When this same ISP was about to return to the US following his overseas assignment, he "trained his successor for about three weeks." Other ISPs reported similar circumstances whereby they either trained their replacements, or the remaining ISPs "helped him (the arriving ISP) along." Support personnel such as secretaries were frequently cited as facilitators to the new work environment. One individual stated, "I had a secretary who spoke several languages so that was very helpful."

Spouses. The spouses described the establishment of their daily routines very differently from the ISPs. Much of their adaptation was accomplished on their own. One spouse stated, "I would go every day (to the store) but I wouldn't talk to anyone there. I was afraid that they would start speaking to me in (the host country language)." A certain degree of trepidation and loneliness is evident in the following statement by another spouse. "You're left with four kids in a foreign country and your

husband is away (on business)." And, several of the spouses commented on the fears they experienced during their initial attempts at driving overseas. One mentioned,

I learned how to drive although the first few times I went out I almost cried. There were no street signs so people told me to watch for landmarks. Once I picked a landmark that someone ended up moving—a sign. Most of the American women carried a little card with them when they went out. It had their address on one side and a map on the back. We could show this to someone if we were lost.

However, the spouses' initial period of adjustment seemed to be eased by the development of relationships with other expatriate spouses. Spouse interaction patterns soon seemed to be concentrated primarily within the expatriate community as the following statements suggest. One spouse remarked that in country x, "The American Women's Club was an absolute necessity . . . You couldn't get along without joining the club." A second spouse stated that she met

an American girl who had two kids and she had some (host country national) friends. They met once each week to talk about their problems. It functioned as a support group . . . Some of the Ford and Dow wives would join . . . Whenever I would hear an American voice in the supermarket, I would invite that person to come to the club if she wanted to.

Indeed, the spouses often contrasted their involvement with the expatriate and host country national communities. One spouse mentioned, "I didn't associate with the locals there since there was a large American community." One family lived "close to the American school so that there were quite a few Americans and internationals (expatriates) living there . . . We met fewer (host country national) people than anyone else." One of the children that we interviewed stated, "We had contact with the natives only through my dad's job connections." Finally, one other spouse reported that she "wasn't as open as her husband to meeting (host country nationals) and spending time with them. I didn't speak the language much at all and this hindered me."

Ease and Time Frame of Adjustment

Although we did not have specific questions that asked either the ISPs or spouses to comment on the ease and time frame of their adjustment abroad, we introduce evidence to shed some light on these variables. First, we provide *contrasting statements* from the interviews comparing the relative ease and timing of adjustment between the ISPs and spouses. In particular, we note the high agreement between the couple's statements as they refer to each other's adaptation.

Second, we examine the *descriptions of the individual difficulties* faced by the ISPs and spouses while they were abroad. As we were interviewing, it became clear that the spouses talked in great detail about their adaptation problems; the ISPs, on the other hand, did not. We note the content and the context in which the statements were made.

Third, we focus on the *length of these descriptions.* We hypothesized that those adjustment periods that were relatively difficult would be reflected in relatively longer portions of text devoted to descriptions of adjustment difficulties. Our hypothesis is grounded in experimental work done in the area of cognitive psychology. It seems reasonable to assume that if respon-

dents devote considerable attention to one particular topic during their recollections of past experiences, such attention may reflect the "sharpened" memory of a particularly salient set of past events (Bartlett 1932, Bernard et al. 1984, Freeman et al. 1987). When information is encoded in memory, it is transformed by various processes, one of which is known as sharpening or the exaggeration of information that is especially relevant or important to an individual (Bartlett 1932). We argue here that our respondents' lengthy reports related to difficulties experienced in overseas adaptation reflect the transformative process of cognitive sharpening, that is, the enlargement or enhancement of particularly salient memories.[17] Further, we argue that salience is related directly to the nature of the difficulties experienced, particularly those that are serious, threatening, and/or not easily accommodated. Whether or not lengthy passages of text reflect relatively lengthy as well as difficult adjustment periods is determined by the content of the time markers in the text. We identify actual references to the passage of time within the text, and use those references to extrapolate length of adjustment periods (as discussed below).

Fourth, we note the *mention of time in these descriptions*. We thought that time markers found in these descriptions might carry concrete information pertaining to the adjustment period. We also suspected that those respondents making specific references to time would have been more aware of the time frame of their adjustment overseas and would have experienced a more lengthy and difficult adjustment. This hypothesis was also based on inductive reasoning.

STATEMENTS CONTRASTING ISP-SPOUSE EASE AND TIME FRAME OF OVERSEAS ADJUSTMENT. *ISPs.* Statements from the ISP interviews suggest that spouses experience a more lengthy adjustment period than ISPs. Three of the ISPs, for example, compared their own adaptation to their spouses' adaptation. One ISP stated, "I had no big problems but my wife did." Another remarked, "I experienced no culture shock but my wife and kids did. Patience got them through it. The kids' teachers and the other wives were the bridges for them." In both of these cases the comments imply that the ISP adapted more quickly than the spouse because the ISP did not encounter any "big problems" or "culture shock." A third ISP identified the order in which members of his family adapted, stating that he adapted before any of the others.

Each person (in the family) took his or her own time in deciding that they were going to adjust and how they were going to adjust. I adapted first, followed by my oldest child, then my youngest, my wife, and 1½ years later, my second child.

Seven of the ISPs pointed out the importance of screening ISP candidate families carefully before sending them abroad. We reported many of these citations in our discussion of Figure 3. One of the principal themes emerging in these statements was that special attention should be paid to the spouses. One ISP remarked that ". . . the key is how the wife and kids adjust. Get at her. If she's unhappy, then the man can't function." Another noted,

GM should be very careful in screening the wives. This is important and absolutely necessary . . . Some of the ISPs in the hardship places were eventually taken out. They told GM that either they get transferred back to the US, they will quit [sic], or their wives would divorce them.

While some of these statements about the time frame of adjustment are somewhat indirect, they seem to imply a lag between the adjustment of the ISPs and the spouses, with the ISPs adjusting first.

Spouses. A few of the spouses made some comments about the difficulty of their adaptation and time it took them to adjust in comparison with their husbands. These comments suggest that the spouses had a more difficult and slower adjustment than the ISPs. One spouse reported,

I was homesick for the first three months. I was from a large family and missed them a lot. It was hard to leave that much behind. But after three months my husband told me that unless I straightened up, we would all have to go back to the US. I knew I was the only one in the family that wasn't adapting.

A second spouse commented indirectly on her time frame of adjustment by stating, "My husband would ask at the office (when he had any questions). He was bending over backwards to keep us with him. He did everything for us." In this particular interview, the spouse described her inability to cope with and function in the new culture, during which time her husband "coped" for her. The adjustment period for this spouse exceeded her husband's adjustment by several months.

DESCRIPTIONS OF INDIVIDUAL DIFFICULTIES IN OVERSEAS ADAPTATION. *ISPs.* Having examined each ISP interview for evidence of ease or time frame associated with adjustment, we found that 12 of the 15 ISPs made no comments about any personal difficulties they faced during their overseas experience. On the contrary, their statements appeared to be quite positive and straightforward. For example, one ISP stated, "Anywhere we moved it was the same thing. We know what to do since we have moved so much." Another remarked, "I made friends with the locals and this was not difficult at all. I just started meeting people." A third ISP commented that, "It was easier on me since I was born in (a country which speaks the same language as my host country)." And, a fourth ISP indicated, "You have the ability to make a comfortable living without certain US necessities. You can make it if you are industrious."

The three remaining ISPs did comment on individual adaptation problems that they encountered abroad. The content of their statements indicated that their adaptation problems usually were not associated with their jobs, but rather with their lives outside the work environment. Furthermore, their descriptions were not in the first person singular but rather in the *first person plural*—inclusive of family members. One ISP commented,

The shock was in the off-balanced feeling of being somewhere where English was not spoken. We had to deal with the fact that daily life was extremely different, such as getting water. There was the realization of things that you took for granted in the US were no longer available. The frustration at the home level was very high.

Another stated, ". . . we lacked a large support network of ISPs. There were other oil and diplomatic families there from the US and other places but we had to make the contacts with them— GM gave us some names."

Spouses. We also examined the spouse interviews for evidence of ease or time frame associated with their adjustment. Of the 14 spouses who accepted overseas assignments, all indi-

cated that they experienced personal problems in adjusting overseas. (Many of the spouses' statements cited in the section "Establishment of the Daily Routine" were among those included in this analysis. These statements centered on the problems faced by the spouses during their daily lives overseas – the majority of which involved some contact with the host country culture.) Noticeable about the majority of the statements was that the spouses usually described their experiences in the *first person singular* (not first person plural as with the ISPs). For example, one spouse stated, "I felt that I was dropped there. You are starting at base zero. I felt like a kid. I did my pantomimes and pointed to things that I wanted when I went shopping." The use of the first person probably differs for the ISPs and spouses because of their own culture shock experiences. Spouses usually encountered unfamiliar situations on their own rather than in conjunction with their husbands. By contrast, much of the ISPs' culture shock occurred during off-work hours while in the presence of other family members, particularly spouses.

LENGTH OF THE DESCRIPTIONS OF OVERSEAS ADAPTATION PROBLEMS. In this section we examine the amount of text associated with overseas adjustment problems. We suspected that the amount of text in each interview that focused on overseas adjustment difficulties would be an indicator of adjustment problems. Thus, we hypothesized that those respondents who experienced difficult adjustment periods would talk longer about their adjustment experiences in comparison with those whose adjustment experiences were not as problematic.

ISPs. We examined the length of the statements made by the ISPs about their overseas adjustment difficulties. We found that these descriptions comprised a range of between five and 14 lines of the interview text for the three ISPs who commented on their own adjustment problems. To standardize, we divided the number of lines of each interview associated with descriptions of these personal difficulties by the total number of lines of text in the interview. These lines of text represented an average of .8% of the total number of lines of text for all 15 ISPs.

Spouses. We conducted this same analysis for the spouses. The amount of text in the spouses' interviews associated with discussions of personal adaptation problems ranged from two to 36 lines of text, or 4.3% of the 14 spouses' interviews on average. This proportion is over five times higher for the spouses than for the ISPs. Our hypothesis that more difficult adjustment periods would be reflected in longer portions of the text seems to be supported.

Because our gender and daily routine/work variables were confounded, an argument could be made that women might be more willing to discuss their overseas adjustment difficulties than men and/or be willing to talk longer about them. Certainly, it is known that there are gender differences in speech patterns (Bate and Taylor 1988, Coates 1986, Lakoff 1975, Trudgill 1974). To address this potential argument, we conducted an additional analysis on the interview data. We compared two different segments of the interviews for evidence of adjustment problems. The principal adjustment problems with which this paper is concerned related to the period of overseas adaptation. However, in the final questions of the interview, we also collected data on the repatriation stage of the overseas assignment. During our interviews we noticed that both the ISPs and spouses

commented on adjustment difficulties associated with their return to the US. These difficulties related to their reintegration into American culture and into the work force.

We found that both ISPs and spouses discussed difficult experiences that they encountered related to the overseas assignment. The difference between the ISPs and spouses was that the ISPs described their difficulties with respect to their repatriation experiences while the spouses focused primarily on their overseas adjustment. The data used to address this issue of possible gender differences in discussions of adjustment are presented in Table 5. We note the number of respondents commenting on repatriation difficulties in comparison with overseas adaptation difficulties. All of the ISPs mentioned problems related to repatriation, while only three ISPs commented on problems associated with their adjustment abroad; about the same number of spouses commented on both overseas adjustment and repatriation experiences, 14 and 13 respectively. The differences in the number of ISPs commenting on overseas vs. repatriation adjustment suggest two potential conclusions. First, repatriation seems to have been the critical period for more ISPs in comparison with the period of their overseas adaptation. Second, ISPs (all of whom happen to be male) can and do talk about adjustment difficulties, not just the spouses (all of whom happen to be female). In short, ISP and spouse differences in adjustment difficulties seem to be more salient at certain stages of the overseas assignment.

It is also useful to compare the proportion of interview text associated with these two types of adaptation problems, controlling for gender. Table 5 shows that a greater proportion of interview text is devoted to comments about the difficulties associated with living abroad than the difficulties related to repatriation; this relationship holds for both the ISPs and spouses. When we compare ISPs and spouses on the proportion of text associated with any adjustment difficulties, we find that the spouses talked more about the problems encountered overseas while the ISPs talked more about the difficulties they faced upon return to the US. Indeed, a greater proportion of the ISP inter-

TABLE 5. CHARACTERISTICS ASSOCIATED WITH DESCRIPTIONS OF ADJUSTMENT DIFFICULTIES BY TYPE OF RESPONDENT

	ISPs	Spouses
Overseas adaptation difficulties		
Number of respondents mentioning difficulties	3/15	14/14
Percent of text associated with difficulties	.8	4.3
Mean number of time markers	.4	1.6
Repatriation Difficulties		
Number of respondents mentioning difficulties	15/15	13/14
Percent of text associated with difficulties	.5	.1
Mean number of time markers	7.6	4.0

views was devoted to discussions of repatriation difficulties (.5%) than the proportion of the spouse interviews (.1%). ISPs appear to be just as willing to discuss adjustment difficulties as the spouses (albeit related to a different stage of the overseas assignment), and talk at length about their adjustment.

MENTIONS OF TIME IN THE DESCRIPTIONS OF OVERSEAS ADAPTATION PROBLEMS. Another area of interest for us concerned the references made to particular time periods or time in general in the descriptions of overseas adjustment difficulties. We anticipated that the content of the statements made by the ISPs and spouses about time might provide us with specific information about their adjustment period. Thus, we first identified the time markers embedded in their statements. Next, we reasoned that those respondents experiencing a more lengthy and difficult adjustment would have made more references to time in their statements. As such, the proportion of time markers associated with the text on overseas adjustment difficulties would be another indicator of length and ease of adjustment.

ISPs. The three ISPs who indicated that they experienced personal difficulties in overseas adjustment mentioned the element of time in some of their statements. These time markers are *underlined* below. For example, one ISP stated,

Our *first* feelings were that we could never adapt or manage. We couldn't read nor could we understand what we were reading. We didn't known what was going on and this led us to feel insecure. We couldn't speak the host country language *at first* . . . *Then* came some of the minor successes which built up some sense of security.

Another stated, "We took things as they came . . . We had no furniture for *four months*. The house was not adequately wired for our appliances. My wife washed the clothes by hand *for quite awhile.*"

These time markers provide us with two different sets of findings. First, the time markers furnish us with information related to the initial period of an overseas assignment, and hence a concrete period of time. The ISPs' comments about the initial portion of the assignment lend some support to the "U" shaped curve or stage process of adjustment discussed earlier. Second, we can analyze the differences in use of time markers by ISPs and spouses. Making such a comparison may give us some insight into the length and difficulty of overseas adjustment. Since there were only six references to time in the ISP descriptions, the number of time markers used by the ISPs was very low—.4 on average. (See Table 5.) In the next section we provide the comparative data for the spouses.

Spouses. Nine of the 14 spouses made references to a particular time period or used time markers in their descriptions of adjustment difficulties; the remaining five spouses made no references to time in their descriptions. Some of the time markers that we identified in their statements are *underlined* below. For example, one spouse stated, "There was no one to help us. I didn't expect the other American women to help us but it would have been nice to have a sponsor for the *first week*. It would have quickened our adjustment." Another remarked, "I had it the worse. I had no language skills. I couldn't get out on my own. For *three months* I just felt sorry for myself." A third spouse indicated, "I forced myself to go out since it was so much easier

to stay in. For the *first few months* my husband would come home to lunch and I would look forward to that. You could really stay to yourself a lot if you didn't force yourself to get out." A fourth spouse reported,

At first I was very unhappy in (country x) and I was making everyone unhappy. After *three to four months,* my husband came home from work one day and said that he was going to get his resume together and send it out. I didn't know what he was talking about so he explained that I just wasn't happy and that maybe it would be better to look for jobs outside GM. I asked why we couldn't just go back to the US and he said because they (GM) just spent all this money to bring us over here . . . Well, I said that I would try to change my attitude and I did.

As with the ISP time marker data, the time markers mentioned by the spouses also focus attention on the initial period of the overseas assignment, revealing concrete information about this period. Indeed, on average, the length of the adjustment period seems to last about three to four months. We also note the differences in use of time markers by the ISPs and spouses. We hypothesized that there would be a relationship between the number of references to time and ease and length of adjustment. In the spouse interviews, there were a total of 23 time markers so that the average number of time markers per spouse was 1.6 (see Table 5). In comparing the average number of time markers between the ISPs and spouses, the spouses express more concern about time; passage of time seems to have made more of an impression on them. We suspect that the latter were very conscious of time during their adjustment period because their adjustment was so difficult. The ISPs as a group had far fewer references to time (.4) in comparison with the spouses (1.6). Our hypothesis seems to hold: adjustment periods that are relatively easy and short are associated with fewer time markers while those that are relatively difficult and lengthy are associated with more time markers.

Because our gender and daily routine/work variables were confounded, an argument might be made that there are gender differences in use of time markers, and specifically, that women tend to use more time markers in their speech than men. We investigated this possibility using two different portions of the interviews: the lines of text associated with overseas adaptation difficulties and the lines of text associated with repatriation difficulties. Table 5 shows that the use of time markers is associated not only with the overseas adaptation stage, but also with the repatriation stage of the overseas assignment. Both the ISPs and spouses used time markers in their descriptions of repatriation difficulties although the ISPs used almost twice as many (7.6) as the spouses (4.0). Thus, both kinds of descriptions of difficulties associated with adaptation may be embedded with time markers, regardless of gender. Indeed, we find that ISPs used more time markers in their discussions of repatriation difficulties relative to the spouses, while the spouses used more time markers in their statements of overseas adjustment difficulties relative to the ISPs. These findings suggest that both ISPs and spouses use time markers in their speech in varying proportions, depending on which stage of the overseas assignment is more difficult and lengthy for them.

We also wanted to examine the relationship between the lines of text associated with adjustment difficulties and the number of time markers embedded in those descriptions of adjustment difficulties—for both overseas adaptation and repatriation. If

both of these variables are indicators of adjustment, they should be highly correlated. The results are shown in Figures 7 and 8. In both cases, the two variables were highly correlated. The correlation coefficients between lines of text associated with adjustment difficulties and number of time markers were .76 for overseas adaptation difficulties and .73 for repatriation difficulties. These results support our idea that each is a measure of adjustment difficulties. The next step for some future analysis would be to validate both indicators in a controlled experiment in which gender and work are not confounded.

Discussion

The ISPs' daily routines overseas were defined largely in reference to the work setting. Their jobs were the most time consuming part of their lives (as suggested in Figure 4) and furnished a ready-made forum or opportunity for activity. The ISPs described their entree into their initial work assignments as relatively straightforward. Only three of the 15 ISPs mentioned any personal difficulties they experienced in adjusting abroad; overall, their adaptation occurred relatively quickly. In general, the context or structure in which they performed their work tasks was preestablished and immediately available to them upon arrival abroad. Although they encountered situations that appeared incongruous to them because of their own cultural backgrounds, they operated within an organizational structure bounded by certain tasks, time, and some knowledge of the ways to reach their work goals. Their jobs served not only as the means for initiating plans and accomplishing tasks, but for generating and maintaining social networks with individuals employed by or connected with GM in some way. For the most part, host country nationals were the principal figures in these networks (as shown in Figure 5), although interaction with other ISPs played a prominent role at the GM base of operations.

A different experience emerges from the interview data for the spouses. The spouses were not automatically integrated into an existing organizational structure by virtue of their participation in an overseas assignment. Their integration into overseas life, their daily activities, and the procedures or rules they followed in the course of any given day were not as systematically
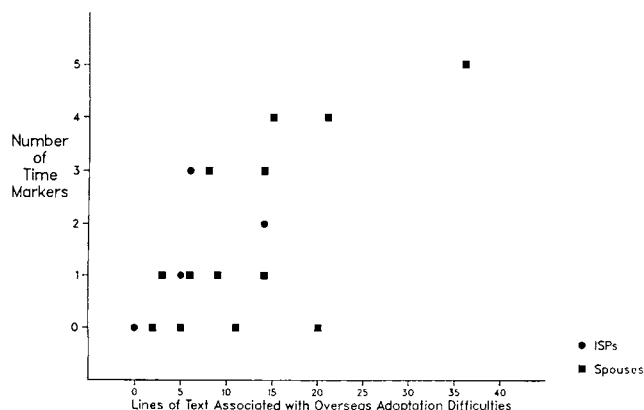

FIGURE 7. LINES OF TEXT ASSOCIATED WITH OVERSEAS ADAPTATION DIFFICULTIES BY NUMBER OF TIME MARKERS AND TYPE OF RESPONDENT
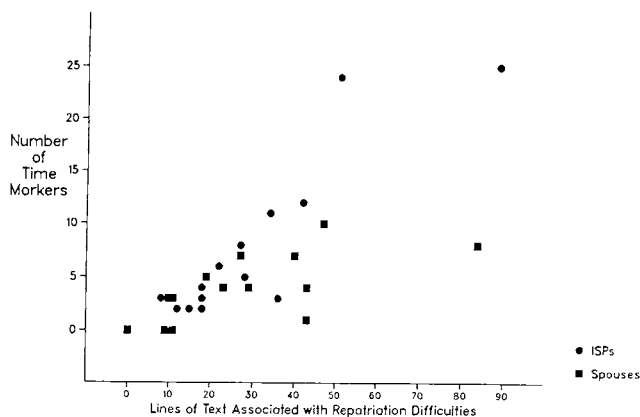

FIGURE 8. LINES OF TEXT ASSOCIATED WITH REPATRIATION DIFFICULTIES BY NUMBER OF TIME MARKERS AND TYPE OF RESPONDENT

defined as with the ISPs. There were few established patterns of behavior for the spouses to follow, particularly at the outset of their first overseas assignment. Their integration or entree into overseas life was probably quite difficult (as suggested in Figure 3 and the general comments of all 14 spouses about their adaptation). Furthermore, the spouses' time frame of adaptation was substantially slower than the ISPs as indicated by 1) the statements made by both ISPs and spouses about their own time frame of adjustment relative to their spouses — always indicating that the spouses adapted more slowly, 2) the spouses' discussion of the problems they faced overseas, described primarily in the first person singular (rather than first person plural as with the ISPs), 3) the high proportion of spouse interview text associated with descriptions of overseas adjustment difficulties compared with the ISPs, and 4) the spouses' numerous references to time markers in their descriptions of overseas adjustment difficulties.

These spouses had to create their own structure and then fill it with selected activities and individuals. By establishing their own routines, they were simultaneously developing a procedure to facilitate their adjustment to the overseas lifestyle on their first as well as subsequent assignments. The spouses' daily routines became more structured as they met other people and identified activities that would occupy their time. We propose that the longer it took the spouses to create a structured environment in which social interaction was a central component, the longer it took them to adjust to their new environment. Unlike the ISPs, the spouses' activities did not involve interaction with host country nationals to the same extent as with expatriates. The spouses were not thrust into activities of either a personal or in-depth business nature with host country nationals as were the ISPs. However, with time, their networks usually extended into the expatriate community[18] as depicted in Figure 6. That community, by virtue of its clubs, school, church, and sponsored activities, furnished a potential structure around which the spouses could organize their lives.

Another question remains: what is it about the daily routines that encourage the ISPs to interact primarily with host country nationals and the spouses to interact primarily within the expatriate community? For the ISPs, the organizational structure and social networks related to their jobs lead to a work environment which is largely associated with host country nationals. The latter are either directly or indirectly affiliated with the GM

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operations in a particular location. Further differentiation occurs on the basis of job type or job duties.

Although spouses accompany the ISPs abroad because of marital status and the ISPs' employment with GM, the structure and/or social networks associated with GM do not automatically extend to the spouses. We suspect that because of a variety of factors – the availability of expatriate networks, expatriate institutions, and host country language skills – the spouses' lifestyle becomes more closely associated with the expatriate community than with the host country community.[19] Indeed, it is with other expatriate spouses that arriving spouses are most closely linked. Frequently, but not exclusively, these spouses are from the same countries or speak the same languages. Further differentiation may occur at a later date as the spouses seek out other spouses sharing similar interests and hobbies.

Implications of the Results

From a theoretical viewpoint, this study has contributed to a better understanding of the cultural adaptation process. We have shown that there is variation in adaptive strategies within a particular incoming population – in this case employees of a corporation and their spouses. All members of an incoming population do not adapt to a new environment in the same way or at the same time. Further, we have shown that the differences in adaptive strategies are found within the expatriate household unit. With regard to acculturation into the host country society, we propose that the experience of the ISPs in their work environments most closely approximates the melting pot model. While ISPs work closely with host country nationals on a daily basis, many of the policies and procedures followed in the overseas work environment stem directly from the GM headquarters in the US. Thus, there appears to be a blending of the two different work cultures. By contrast, the spouses' daily experiences appear to be more like the cultural pluralism model. Since their principal social interactions occur within the expatriate community rather than with host country nationals, they are 1) less integrated into the host country culture than the ISPs, 2) have retained some of their US lifestyle, and 3) have incorporated much of the expatriate culture into their lives.

One of the main problems cited in the empirical literature on expatriates is the high failure rates due to dismissal or early return from an assignment. For the *corporation*, early return implies a tremendous cost in terms of:

- repatriating the ISP family;
- finding an appropriate position for the returning ISP;
- selecting and training another family to replace the repatriated one (unless either a host country national serves as a replacement or the position is terminated);
- filling the domestic position of the newly chosen ISP.

For the *ISP family,* the costs associated with "failing" may be substantial:

- social-psychological factors including loss of self-esteem, confidence, etc.;
- disruption of career paths of ISPs, and in some cases, spouses;
- family financial situations related to property and investments.

Job performance overseas, although more difficult to assess, has also been cited in the expatriate literature as problematic to the success of a corporation. Inadequate job performance has both direct and indirect costs to a corporation, such as loss of business, low morale among host country national employees, and poor corporate image generally. Our data do not allow us to draw definitive conclusions about the relationship between ISP job performance and ease and time frame of adaptation abroad. However, we suspect that job performance affects and is affected by relationships within the ISP household, making overseas adaptation more difficult and contributing to personal difficulties among family members.

Our study enabled us to analyze ease and time frame of adjustment among ISPs and spouses. We demonstrated that fewer ISPs than spouses reported experiencing any difficulties and that these difficulties were more intense and lasted longer for the spouses than the ISPs. Perceived and actual difficulties associated with the initial period of adjustment were particularly prominent for the spouses. We suspect that there is a positive relationship between failure rates and the first months of the expatriate assignment.[20] It would seem that the longer an individual – particularly a spouse – experiences what has been depicted as the bottom of the "U" shaped curve, the greater the chances for a "failed" assignment.[21] Further, our data suggest a relationship between time frame and ease of adjustment: the quicker the adjustment, the greater the structure of the daily routine. Thus, to facilitate the adaptation process, it would be important to create or enhance an existing set of daily activities, included in which would be the formation of social networks.

On the basis of the expatriate literature and our own findings, we are making three principal recommendations. All three recommendations would hasten the adjustment of ISP families to their new environment and probably improve the productivity of the ISP on the job. We are aware of the importance attached to a speedy adjustment, particularly since the assignment length has been reduced to about three years. Our recommendations are designed to speed the time frame associated with cultural adaptation overseas, as well as positively affect the degree of integration or extent of social interaction of the ISP families in their new environments. In addition, all of the recommendations would directly affect GM's public image in its overseas locations.

First, our results suggest that *social networks* are central to the meaning of the overseas experience. They may stem from a structured organizational environment (such as the workplace or club) and/or from an informal group of individuals who create their own sets of activities. These networks may serve a wide variety of functions: friendship, emotional support, business connections, information gathering about the new location, and creating or enhancing an appreciation for the new culture, among others. They may consist of both host country nationals and expatriates in varying combinations. By gaining access to both expatriate and host country national networks, cultural adaptation can be facilitated and the overseas experience broadened for the ISP families. Currently, access to different social networks appears to be greater for the ISPs (as depicted in Figure 5) than for the spouses (Figure 6). Without the integration of the ISPs and spouses into such networks, adjustment may be slowed, if not permanently hampered.

A high priority should be assigned to helping newly arrived ISP families make contact with other expatriates and host coun-

try nationals. Eight of the 15 ISP families mentioned the importance of the ISP community in orienting them to life overseas. Many others reported the difficulties they faced when such support and social interaction were not available to them (Briody and Baba 1989). Indeed, several individuals mentioned that their overseas adjustment could have been eased if the GM staff resident in certain overseas locations had taken a more active role in "showing the new people around." Our data indicated that the most difficult period of adjustment following arrival overseas lasted about three to four months. One spouse emphasized, "The first months were very lonely. I didn't even known where to look for the other GM people." This attitude was shared by an ISP who stated,

I would never allow an ISP family to come to a new country that I was in without inviting them to my home. No one in (country x) invited us and thus it could have been a tough place for some . . . This should be an added responsibility for the general manager.

Another ISP indicated, "the most essential thing for a successful ISP assignment is an established social network."

We suggest that two types of expatriates would be particularly suited to assist the arriving families: the managing director, and one of the spouses, who might fill a part-time position as an ISP family coordinator. We recommend that the involvement of these two types of expatriates is appropriate—the managing director because of his role in GM as a leader, and one of the spouses because of the contacts and information about the expatriate community and host country she already possesses. However, in addition, it would be useful for the arriving ISP families to benefit from introduction into the host country national community. Furnham and Bochner (1986:251) found that those sojourners who interact with members of the host country national society "seem to be more content, satisfied and successful than sojourners who have no such contact." They speculate that this finding may be due to the "'training' role that such hosts perform or to the social and emotional support they provide, or to a combination of both factors." Similarly, Nash (1970:144) found that expatriates who developed "significant relationships with hosts were more likely to feel 'more at home.'"

While the ISPs tend to work closely with host country nationals during the workday, these same types of host country national networks are not typically available to the spouses. Such host country national networks could play an important role in the adjustment process of ISP families—particularly the spouses. Furnham and Bochner (1986:250) suggest that a "'culture friend' . . . serve as an unofficial tutor in cultural affairs." We independently arrived at a similar recommendation. We propose that some host country national spouse or family work with the ISP family coordinator. Perhaps it would be possible to find interested host country nationals through some local civic group, university, or church. Together, the ISP spouse and the host country national spouse or family could serve as mediators or cultural brokers, easing the transition of the arriving ISP families into the new culture.

Second, *language skills* are an important skill in speeding the adjustment process. ISP families could benefit from a much more extensive language training program; in our sample, 22 of the 32 assignments took place in non-English speaking countries. Although there were no significant differences between our two language variables, and the extent of social interaction

with either host country nationals or expatriates, the results for those with some ability to speak the host country language at the outset of the assignment were in the expected direction. These individuals tended to associated more with host country nationals than with expatriates. With the ability to speak the host country language comes the possibility of expanding and integrating into the social networks of the host country national community.

Currently, GM offers the ISPs and spouses language lessons amounting to 180 hours. In practice, GM imposes no limit on language study whether at home or abroad. However, one International Personnel Administration Staff manager told us that most ISP families only participate in about 80 hours of language instruction. While US-based language training provides a beginning foundation for the non-native speaker, the resulting skill levels are less than adequate for general conversational purposes. And, even though our data indicate that the first several months of a particular assignment are much more difficult for the spouse, the spouse usually does not take the language training prior to departure. Indeed, this manager pointed out that most ISP families do not have language training prior to departure and that all ISP families completing a recent survey developed by the International Personnel Administration Staff complained about insufficient language training prior to departure.

We recommend that GM institute a much more long term approach to language study for its ISP candidates and spouses, such that they have several months of language instruction prior to taking an overseas assignment. This recommendation would require GM to plan much further in advance for its overseas needs, integrating them with the career paths of specific GM employees. While the period between the selection of a candidate and the overseas departure may be as long as three months, four to six weeks tends to be the norm—a period insufficient for both language training and planned career development.

Third, we recommend that the ISP families participate in a more extensive *cross-cultural training program*. Although the relationship between previous residence abroad and extent of social interaction with either host country nationals or expatriates was not significant, the results were in the expected direction. Those ISPs and spouses who lived abroad prior to their first overseas assignment were more likely to associate with host country nationals than with expatriates. Previous residence abroad provided these individuals with experience in a different cultural setting, and perhaps the desire to explore the possibilities for developing contacts with host country nationals. These factors play a role in helping GM's overseas operations through the early adjustment of ISP families, an expansion of business and business contacts, and the enhancement of GM's public image.

Currently, the families take a three-to-five day program offered by selected firms in the US. Such programs usually target cultural differences generally, with less attention to specific host country differences. Research results published three decades ago are just as pertinent today: culture training is far more beneficial if it is built around actual situations that people may encounter in a particular area (Hall 1957). Since the late 1970s when this program was added to the ISP benefit package, 10 of the 15 ISP families were eligible for it. We know that two of these 10 families attended the training while two other families

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decided against it because they had already taken at least one overseas assignment; we are not sure if the remaining six families participated (Briody and Baba 1989:93–94).

One ISP who had not taken advantage of the cross-cultural training program stated that if he and his family went abroad again, "We would take the cultural training and the language training before we went." Another stated that, "We would take advantage of the cultural orientation and language training which was not offered when we went abroad." Some of the ISP families suggested that the cross-cultural orientation might be more effective if it occurred in the host country. In general, however, based on both the ISPs and spouses' comments about the "culture shock" they experienced during the first several months of their assignments, it seems that a more in-depth understanding of the specific norms and values of their host country would 1) improve their ability to cope with the cultural differences they encounter, 2) shorten their adjustment period, and 3) enhance their appreciation of the host country and its people.

NOTES

[1] We define the term expatriate following Cohen (1977:6): "those voluntary temporary migrants, mostly from affluent countries, who reside abroad for . . . business—private entrepreneurs, representatives, managers and employees of foreign and multinational firms, foreign employees of local firms, professionals practicing abroad. . . ."

[2] Although we consider expatriates to be a very specialized category of migrants, the majority of the social science literature on migration focuses on the movement, whether temporary or permanent, of a low income population from one geographical area to another. When such migrants cross an international border to reside in another country, they are referred to as immigrants. Because of differences in the social status of most migrants from expatriates, we have contrasted the findings from these two sets of literature.

[3] One manager from the International Personnel Administration Staff indicated that dismissal or early return from an assignment may be low for two reasons. First, there is a tendency for the GM culture to "make you stick with it (the assignment)." Second, he indicated, "Our selection process is, in fact, very good." However, this individual pointed out that measures of overseas performance are imperfect. For example, Americans rate other Americans and operate with the attitude, "(You) scratch my back and I'll scratch yours." Similarly, high ranking executives, such as vice presidents, are protective of the ISPs reporting to them. Any negative evaluation of an ISP would reflect on a high ranking executive because the latter had either selected and/or approved that particular ISP for the assignment. More objective measures of an ISP's job performance are needed.

[4] Retrospective interviewing via work and life histories has a long history as a data collection method employed by anthropologists. Bernard et al.'s (1984) article reviews the literature on informant accuracy and reports that about one half of the information provided by informants is inaccurate in some way. However, an increasing number of studies have shown that cultural norms tend to be reported more accurately rather than actual facts or events. For example, Freeman et al. (1987:322) argue that, "What is recalled, then, is what is typical— whether it happened or not" and that ". . . memory bias is in the direction of some kind of norm." These results suggest that we may have confidence in the accuracy of our respondents' comments related to their overall experience during the overseas assignment.

[5] In general, the sample of ISPs in our study seemed to be representative of the 1986 ISP population on gender, age, overseas location, and most job function categories. Differences between the population and

sample occurred with regard to their classification status (i.e., there were more technical/professional rather than managerial employees in the sample) and type of home office (i.e., all were from corporate staffs and car divisions rather than from component divisions). Since no historical data were available on past participants of the program, we could not determine if the sample was representative of any particular time period.

[6] We recognize that our gender and occupational/daily routine variables are perfectly confounded. We ultimately argue that the occupation/daily routine variable, rather than gender, accounts for the differential adaptation patterns.

[7] For a further discussion of the history of the overseas assignment, see Briody and Baba (in press). According to one manager from the International Personnel Administration Staff, ISPs and their families have tended to be the adventurous type. They have sought overseas assignments for both career and personal reasons. However, another manager at the Staff suggested that some of the characteristics of our sample may not be representative of a "new breed of ISPs." ISP families accepting assignments in the 1980s tend to take only one assignment, of less than three years duration, in a developing nation, where their host country language skills are extremely limited. The majority never lived abroad prior to their overseas assignments and few are foreign born. In addition, most of today's ISPs do not consider overseas assignments to be an integral part of their careers, but rather "a parenthesis" in their various job assignments at GM. Few indicate that they wish to accept an overseas assignment out of some "sense of mission" as many earlier ISPs did. If this new breed of ISP families is distinguished from earlier ISPs by certain socio-demographic characteristics, it may be that some of the conclusions we have drawn also differ. We have indicated some of the observations made by the International Personnel Administration Staff on this recent group of ISP families.

[8] There were four couples in which both the ISP and spouse commented on male and female adjustment, two couples in which only the ISP commented on it, and six couples in which only the spouse offered any remarks. There were also three couples in which neither the ISP nor the spouse mentioned it.

[9] The expatriate community in any given overseas location is usually quite diverse. Its size and composition vary by factors such as the principal reason for the overseas assignment, the amount of overseas experience of its members, their nationality, their ability to speak the host country language, and the presence of family members accompanying the individual employed overseas. GM families socialize with expatriate families from both the business and diplomatic communities. One ISP pointed out that, "Family socializing occurred around the school, the embassy people, and the American families there in general." Like Cohen (1977) and Useem et al. (1963), we found that the expatriate communities overseas have a culture or lifestyle that is distinct from either the host countries or the home countries.

[10] For the spouses, the total number of assignments was 30 rather than 32. One spouse did not accompany her husband overseas on an assignment and a second spouse did not provide any social interaction data on one of her assignments.

[11] One manager from the International Personnel Administration Staff remarked that many spouses report associating less with members of the expatriate community abroad and more with members of the host country community.

[12] Although we expected that older individuals and those overseas for longer periods of time would interact more with host country nationals than with expatriates, these ISP families were "career internationalists," frequently moving to new assignments in new locations. Such movement might not always have encouraged acculturation into the host country society.

[13] In a recent survey conducted by the International Personnel Administration Staff, ISPs and spouses showed significant differences in language usage while abroad. Ninety-five percent of the ISPs reported using the host country language only about 5% of the time in contrast

to the spouses who reported using their language skills about 50% of the time.

[14] It may be that desire to live abroad was not linked solely with an individual's desire to develop personal relationships with host country nationals. Indeed, many in our sample stated that they looked forward to overseas living because of travel opportunities and the possibilities of career enhancement.

[15] Nash (1970:141) found that previous experience abroad was not associated with cultural adaptation unless level of country development was taken into consideration. For those expatriates sent to underdeveloped countries, previous experience abroad was related to cultural adaptation. However, this relationship did not hold for those sent to developed countries. In our data, we controlled for country level of development but found no relationship between previous residence abroad and our dependent variable, extent of social interaction.

[16] According to one International Personnel Administration Staff manager, there are two factors contributing to the increasing rejection rate associated with taking overseas assignments. First, many ISP candidates are from dual career households. Such households are increasingly unwilling to accept overseas assignments because the spouses would not only have to give up employment in the home country, but would probably not be able to find employment in the host country. This manager stated, "We don't know how to deal with this (work issue)." Second, various repatriation problems (documented in Briody and Baba 1989, 1991) experienced by ISP families are becoming more well known. According to this manager, "fast trackers" are not as willing today to jeopardize their careers by accepting overseas assignments.

[17] Our reasoning is not inconsistent with Freeman et al. (1987) who show that it is the typical, normative, long-term patterns that are recalled more accurately than the details of a particular event. If the difficulties recalled by our respondents represent their typical experiences during the early period of the overseas assignment, as suggested by the length of text devoted to such recollections, then we also can argue that these recollections are reasonably valid from the standpoint of accuracy.

[18] One spouse had very limited interaction with both host country nationals and members of the expatriate community during her assignments. Based on the type of comments in two of the interviews, it appears that she was unable to adjust to the new environments she encountered abroad.

[19] Other research has shown that as the expatriate community in a given location grows, social relationships tend to be confined within the expatriate community rather than within the host country community (Sterling 1969, Wolf 1969). With the exception of a few of the 32 assignments reported here, the expatriate community numbered in the hundreds, if not the thousands. The expatriate community abroad does represent some semblance of the familiar to the spouses, consists of others in similar social and work-related circumstances, and offers the potential for fulfilling a variety of functions helpful to new arrivals.

[20] At least one of the 32 assignments in our sample was an early return. In that case, the household remained abroad for about one year, although the ISP made numerous trips overseas during the five months preceding his family's arrival. The reasons given for their early return included health problems and problems associated with living in a developing nation. We suspect that this ISP family did not return earlier because it was their second overseas assignment.

[21] One manager at the International Personnel Administration Staff noted that most ISP families experience the adjustment difficulties illustrated in the "U" shaped curve. While such factors as the ISP's work situation or the number of children accompanying a family abroad may affect the family's adjustment, he suggested two other correlations. Overseas adjustment and season of the year may be related whereby ISP families tend to experience the low point of the "U" shaped curve during their first winter months abroad. Overseas adjustment may also be related to a specific period of time following arrival. This manager suggested that the six months following arrival abroad may be associated with the low point of the "U" shaped curve. While our data

are not detailed enough to test these observations, it would be useful to examine them using a larger sample of ISP families. However, our data suggest an initial three to four month adjustment period following arrival overseas.

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