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### When worlds collide

van Erp, Kim Johanna Petronella Maria

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# **When Worlds Collide**

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The Role of Justice, Conflict and Personality  
for Expatriate Couples' Adjustment

Kim J. P. M. van Erp



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**Colliding particles** - People, cultures, foreign food and their native countries, all consist of that universal matter called atoms. It's that matter that connects everything with everything. All working as individual tiny ancient factories. When colliding, being a part of something bigger makes norms and values shake to their foundations. Leaving nothing but chaos as a result or give birth to something so breathtaking beautiful it is not even possible to explain in words or write down in ink.

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RIJKSUNIVERSITEIT GRONINGEN

## **When Worlds Collide**

The role of justice, conflict and personality  
for expatriate couples' adjustment

Proefschrift

ter verkrijging van het doctoraat in de  
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aan de Rijksuniversiteit Groningen  
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Kim Johanna Petronella Maria Van Erp

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Prof. dr. A. J. R. van de Vijver

- I am he as you are he as you are me and we are all together -

*I am the Walrus, The Beatles*

Voor mijn ouders

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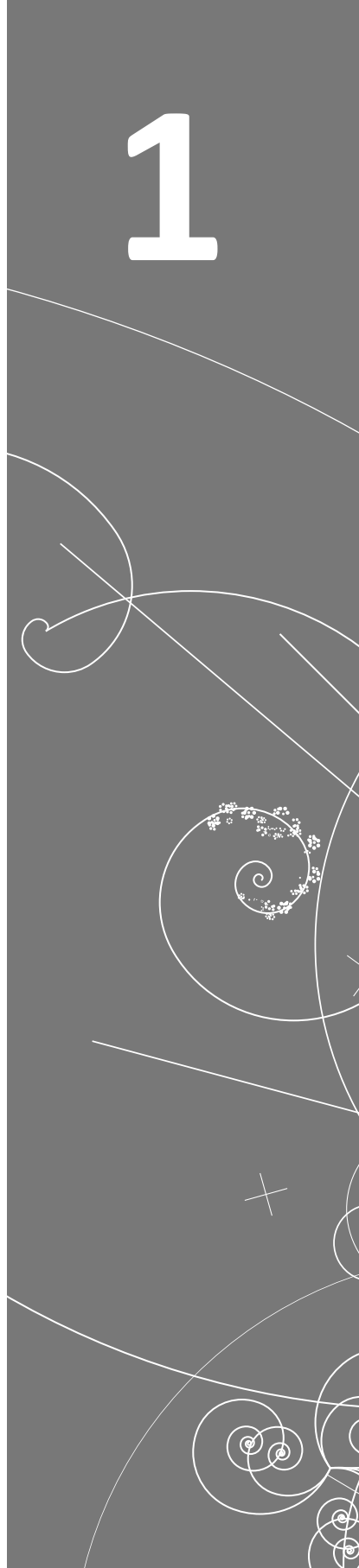
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# 1

## Introduction





“In a new country, where you do not know a soul, you start off as a couple. However, the disparity grows rapidly” says Dutchwoman Simone de Hek, who works in Chile. Her Argentinean husband Pablo turned down a PhD-position in Wageningen (the Netherlands), and followed her to Chile. While she met new people through her work, he was staying at home: A work permit was withheld, and voluntary work was hardly available.[...] This is difficult, not only for the trailing partner, but also for the expatriate. “Being the expatriate, you feel very responsible for the happiness of your partner. I have qualms about going to work, when I know somebody is being unhappy at home.

*Partner of expat risks pining away (translated from Dutch: Partner van expat loopt risico weg te kwijnen). Vice Versa, trade journal on foreign aid, October 2006, p. 24.*

Marleen Inia is a trailing partner: “I have mixed feelings. You learn so much from this lifestyle [...] But there are also a lot of disadvantages. When you arrive you’re referred to as “the wife of...”. I sometimes feel guilty—it would be a lot easier for Jan Paul if I loved everything about our expat life. We have a beautiful house and a good salary, but material possessions aren’t the most important thing to me. I want to be happy inside, something that goes hand in hand with having a job I can totally immerse myself in. If I am fulfilled professionally, then I’m also a much nicer person for Jan Paul to be with!

*“The odd one out”, Global Connection. Journal for expat partners, Vol 7 (1), 2009, p. 15*

Although the exact size of the expatriation market is hard to quantify, United Nations (UN) estimate that OECD countries alone (North America, Australia, and most [West-] European countries) count more than 18 million highly skilled migrants (UN, 2005), including a growing number of expatriates. Expatriates are “employees of business and government organizations who are sent by their organization to a related unit in a country which is different from their own, to accomplish a job or organization related goal for a pre-designated temporary time period” (Aycan, & Kanungo, 1997, p. 250). Characterizing for an international assignment, and illustrated by the examples above, is that the decision of one partner—the expatriate—to work abroad, usually affects the couple as a whole and may drastically uproot their prior arrangements (e.g., regarding financial and household responsibilities). Consequently, the personal well-being of the expatriate and the expatriate spouse<sup>1</sup> become increasingly intertwined.

With about 90% of the expatriates being accompanied by their relationship partner (Brookfield Global Relocation Services [GRS], 2009), remarkably little attention has been devoted to the expatriate spouse, neither in practice nor in research. Whereas multinationals may provide the expatriate with (pre-departure) training and support, the expatriate spouse

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<sup>1</sup> Although the term spouse generally refers to a partner in marriage, for reasons of clarity and parsimony, we will use the term expatriate spouse for all trailing partners, either married or cohabiting, throughout the document.

is often forgotten or ignored in this process (see e.g., Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). Likewise, academic research predominantly focused on the adjustment of the expatriate, and much less on the adjustment of the expatriate spouse.

Of course, the attention for the expatriate is not surprising: Assigning employees to foreign postings involves high costs and risks. For one, expatriates are more expensive than company's regular, home-based employees due to extra costs and allowances (e.g., air tickets, housing, schooling for children, hardship bonuses). Additionally, because expatriates are often assigned to key positions abroad, an expatriate who is not functioning properly or who is returning home prematurely, may cause huge financial and immaterial losses. Gaining insight into factors that enhance successful international adjustment is therefore of great importance. Studies suggest that, among the wide variety of factors that have been investigated regarding expatriate adjustment (e.g., language ability, interpersonal skills, cultural novelty), the adjustment of the expatriate spouse is one of the most important (Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, & Luk 2005; see also Hechanova, Beehr & Christiansen, 2003). Already in the 1980's, studies acknowledged the importance of the expatriate spouse. For example, Tung (1982) revealed that multinationals indicate maladjustment of the expatriate spouse as the main reason for expatriate failure overseas. However, only recently studies started to include *both* the expatriate and the expatriate spouse as a data source (e.g., Shaffer & Harrison, 1998; Takeuchi, Yun, & Tesluk, 2002; see for an exception Black & Stephens, 1989). Although these studies conclude *that* expatriates and expatriate spouses influence each other's adjustment, these studies do not reveal *how*. That is, up till now expatriation research has not revealed which relational processes are at play.

This dissertation will focus on *relational dynamics* that are associated with an international assignment and are central to close relationships. In doing so, I will consider *both the expatriate and the expatriate spouse* to gain further insight into factors that make the adaptation process of the expatriate couple more (or less) successful. Moving abroad often leads to a fundamental change in roles for both partners. Prior arrangements are uprooted and new ones have to be considered. For example, whereas in the home country both partners contributed to the family income and shared responsibilities for household and childcare tasks, in the new situation abroad the expatriate becomes the main breadwinner. Consequently, the expatriate is the one who works on his or her career, and the one with a demanding, time-consuming job, while the expatriate spouse often does not have a job and picks up extra household and childcare tasks. This may reinforce feelings of injustice; perceptions of injustice may in turn give rise to conflict; feelings of conflict eventually may hamper a couple's ability to adjust. Additionally, the way in which expatriate couples deal with the conflict at hand may alleviate (or aggravate) its harmful consequences.

In addition to studying relational dynamics that may hinder effective adjustment, I will focus on personality resources that may protect partners against such disturbing effects. The

new cultural context can make encounters with daily problems taxing and challenging, both in the personal domain and in the work context. Especially *intercultural* competences may be a useful resource in such intercultural contexts. Again, I will not just explore intrapersonal effects of such personality traits, but I will focus on interpersonal effects as well. That is, I will explore to what extent expatriates and expatriate spouses can draw from *each others* personality resources.

In sum, this dissertation furthers our knowledge on the intra-relational processes through which expatriates and expatriate spouses influence each other's adjustment abroad. In a broader sense, it contributes to the literature on close relationships that go through a transition phase and have to cope with new arrangement in several domains of life.

## Relational Processes

The couples in the examples at the beginning of the introduction have experienced it personally: Moving abroad can be a life changing experience. The transition situation of an international assignment likely affects relational dynamics because it uproots prior arrangements and often entails new tasks and responsibilities (cf. Kluwer, Heesink, & Van de Vliert, 2002; Kluwer & Johnson, 2007). In the home country, usually both partners contribute to the family income, work on their career and are to some extent financially independent. Moving abroad, the expatriate usually becomes the main breadwinner, and the one who is working on his or her career. Furthermore, the new function abroad entails an instant new social network of colleagues. In contrast, the expatriate spouse seldom has a job upon arrival in a new country, consequently lacking a connected social network and becoming financially dependent. In other words, roles become more imbalanced, with expatriate spouses becoming more financially, socially and emotionally dependent on the expatriate than vice versa.

In fact, in theories departing from a social exchange perspective such as the Interdependence Theory (Kelley & Thibaut, 1978) and the power-dependence theory (Emerson, 1962), dependence is considered an essential factor in relationships. In general, dependence is based upon a partner's need to maintain a relationship with the other partner in order to achieve one's goals. In intimate relationships partners may influence each other's outcomes through the relational dynamics at play.

Especially in the transition phase expatriate couples are going through, two components of interdependence seem important. First, the *level of dependence* refers to the degree to which one partner's outcomes are influenced by the other partner's actions. Second, the *mutuality of dependence* indicates to what extent partners are equally dependent

on each other (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). Whereas the overall level of dependence increases as a result of the overseas transition, the *mutuality* of dependence usually decreases due to the transition abroad. The balance in expatriates' and expatriate spouses' roles is often disturbed as a result of the move, increasing the asymmetry in dependence. Expatriate spouses become more dependent on the expatriate, than vice versa. This may in turn provoke intra-relational processes—perceptions of injustice and conflict—that may negatively affect a couple's ability to adjust. At the same time, the international assignment increases the *level* of interdependency between the expatriate and the expatriate spouse. In the absence of other sources such as friends and extended family, they have to rely on each other more heavily for social and emotional support. In addition to relying on their own personal resources, they may try to benefit from the resources of their partner, in order to obtain additional resources to cope with the new situation. The present dissertation aims to gain further insight into these two interpersonal processes at play.

#### *The role of justice and conflict in psychological adjustment*

Justice is a concept that is thoroughly embedded in our lives. Topics as diverse as the high salaries and bonuses for top executives, legalization of same-sex marriage, or Alanis Morissette's public revenge on an ex-lover

*“And I’m here to remind you/ Of the mess you left when you went away/  
It’s not fair to deny me/ Of the cross I bear that you gave to me”*  
(You oughta know, 1995)

all have to do with feelings of justice or injustice experienced by those involved.

In general, the importance individuals attach to justice can be explained both from concerns about controlling one's outcomes, and from a need for gratification of important group memberships. According to the *self-interest model*, individuals will be primarily concerned with controlling their personal outcomes (Thibaut & Walker, 1975; see also e.g., Tyler, 1994). For example, top executives may consider their financial bonuses as fair given the effort they made and the results they have booked. Additionally, the *group-value model* suggests that people value membership in social groups because groups are a source of self-validation and can provide their members with important resources like emotional support (Tyler, 1989). For example, denying marriage to same-sex couples tells something about their status in society.

In this dissertation I distinguish between two types of justice that are derived from the above-mentioned justice motive theories. First, distributive justice—the perceived fairness of the amount of compensation one receives—has for long been the primary focus of justice literature, especially in the domain of close relationships (e.g., Sprecher, 1986; Van Yperen & Buunk, 1991). In a close relationship for example, as a compensation for hours spent on childcare tasks, a partner may think it is fair to spend less time on household tasks. From

the late 1970 (e.g., Folger, 1977), the scientific literature started to recognize that not only the distribution of outcomes, but also the way in which outcomes are derived—procedural justice—is important. For example, having a voice in the decision-making procedure (i.e., decision-making fairness) or being treated respectfully (interpersonal justice) began to be acknowledged as important constructs of justice, in several domains of research (e.g., Colquitt, Conlon, Wesson, Porter, & Yee Ng, 2001; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Sweeney & McFarlin, 1997).

Close relationship studies hardly explored the relevance of these decision-making and interpersonal justice concepts among intimate partners (for an exception see Kluwer et al., in press; see also Kluwer et al., 2002). Yet, especially during an international assignment, these two aspects of justice may become important (cf. Lind & Tyler, 1988). For example, the expatriate's new function often requires him or her to work extra hours (e.g., on business trips to neighboring countries; by receiving business relationships during off-work hours), leaving less time for enjoyment (and obligations) with the family. The expatriate spouse may consider the distribution of time and tasks unfair, but because of the expatriates' (contractual) obligation towards the company, there is little room for maneuver. In these cases having a say in decisions, and being treated with respect becomes more important (cf. Van den Bos, Lind, Vermunt & Wilke, 1997).

As a result of highlighted perceptions of injustice, conflict may arise. Conflict emerges when "one party perceives its goals, values, or opinions being thwarted by an interdependent counterpart" (De Dreu, 2008, p. 6). Also in intimate relationships, conflict is a central as well as crucial phenomenon (e.g., Fincham & Beach, 1999; Kluwer, Heesink, & Van de Vliert, 1997). Research clearly shows that in close relationships, interpersonal conflict has negative consequences for a variety of personal and family-related outcomes, such as mental health and physical well-being (Kluwer, 2000). The introductory quotes illustrate nicely how conflicts may emerge among expatriate couples. Simone and Pablo may have to renegotiate their arrangements regarding household tasks. Simone, having a demanding job, may expect Pablo—who has extra spare time—to do some extra household tasks. Pablo may not necessarily agree. He already turned down a job opportunity in Wageningen; doing boring house chores instead would feel like another sacrifice. Indeed, recent studies, for example on transitions to parenthood, showed that couples experienced more conflict after as compared to before transitions (Choi & Marks, 2008; Kluwer & Johnson, 2007).

Conflicts can be either cognitive or affective. Affective conflict (or relationship conflict) refers to perceived interpersonal incompatibilities between parties (Jehn, 1995). For example, expatriate couples' affective conflict may evolve around intimate, personal undertakings, like spending quality time together or deepening personal understanding. Cognitive conflict (or task conflict) refers to a disagreement about the content of the tasks or duties to be performed, thus reflecting on substantive rather than non-substantive issues



(e.g., De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Giebels & Janssen, 2005; Jehn, 1995). That is, a romantic relationship inevitably entails more practical issues as well, like grocery shopping, and keeping the accounts (e.g., Choi & Marks, 2008). As a consequence, conflict may evolve around such task and content-oriented issues as well. Although the distinction between affective and cognitive conflict is widely accepted in organizational research, it has hardly been used in close relationship studies (see for an exception Rispens, Jehn, & Rexwinkel, 2010). Nonetheless, it may be a relevant distinction in close relationship research as well.

#### *How the effect of conflict on adjustment depends on conflict behavior*

When conflicts emerge, whether and how one deals with them, may affect the nature and severity of their (harmful) consequences (DeChurch & Marks, 2001; Tjosvold, 1998). The literature on conflict management strategies is abundant, and several strategies can be distinguished. Relevant in this regard is the literature on coping strategies, which in general identifies two distinct coping strategies: engagement coping, referring to responses directed toward a stressor, and disengagement coping, which is oriented away from a stressor (Connor-Smith, Compas, Wadsworth, Thomsen, & Saltzman, 2000; Roth & Cohen, 1986). Similarly, the specific domain of conflict management research suggests that conflicting parties basically have the choice of actively dealing with the conflict at hand—for example through problem solving or forcing—or avoiding the issue and the interaction with the other altogether (e.g., Dijkstra, De Dreu, Evers, & Van Dierendonck, 2009). In the present dissertation I am particularly interested in avoidance behavior, a lesser explored strategy (cf. Roloff & Ifert, 2000; Wang, 2006). Avoidance is characterized by attempts to ignore the conflict, withdrawing from discussions involving the conflict, or doing as little as possible in a negotiation process (e.g., Carnevale & Pruitt, 1992; Pruitt, 1983).

Situations characterized by stress and tension often elicit avoidance behavior (Roth & Cohen, 1986; see also Dijkstra, Van Dierendonck, & Evers, 2005; Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, & DeLongis, 1986). Furthermore, particularly in close relationships, avoidance seems to be a common response to conflict (Kluwer et al., 2000; Verhofstadt, Buysse, De Clercq, & Goodwin, 2005). Traditionally, avoidance behavior is considered a destructive conflict management strategy, emanating from inconsiderate and unsociable motives. For example, avoidance is thought to originate from low concern for one's own and the other's interests (e.g., Pruitt, 1983), a desire to circumvent obligations (Dijkstra et al., 2005), or an attempt to leave things "as they are" (Kluwer et al., 1997; 2000). However, based on new scientific insights I will argue and demonstrate that avoidance may prove beneficial through two complementary processes. First, avoiding painful and possibly irresolvable conflicts will in many cases signal concern, rather than a lack of interest, for the relationship and the other party (e.g., De Dreu & Van Vianen, 2001; Wang, 2006). Additionally, avoidance may be used to protect oneself from harmful conflicts. If one does not recognize or acknowledge (the

seriousness of) the conflict at hand, its negative consequence may hit less hard (e.g., Buysse & Ickes, 1999). Particularly in the context of close expatriate relationships these beneficial mechanisms of one's own and the other partner's avoidance may emerge. Because close relationships are built on a sense of shared beliefs and a mutual identity and because partners become more dependent upon each other due to expatriation, concern for the other is more evident. In Chapter 3 I will further elaborate on the brighter approach towards avoidance and the processes behind it.

### *Personality resources as input for interpersonal process*

In order to cope with the challenging situations that an international assignment may entail, *coping resources* are an important asset. Especially since an international assignment also entails a *loss* of resources such as the proximity of family and friends, and, especially for expatriate spouses, job loss and a loss of work identity, personal resources become more important. Fortunately, expatriates and expatriate spouses do not approach the international assignment empty handed, but often have various coping resources at their disposal. As such, personality provides an important resource to cope with these potentially taxing aspects of an international assignment (e.g., Shaffer, Harrison, Gregersen, Black, Ferzandi, 2006; see also e.g., DeLongis, & Holtzman, 2005; Hobfoll, 1989). In the present thesis I will focus on *intercultural* personality dimensions which are specifically tuned to the threats and challenges of an intercultural context (e.g., Leone, Van der Zee, Van Oudenhoven, Perugini, & Ercolani, 2004; Van der Zee, Van Oudenhoven et al., 2004). More specifically, the emphasis will be on three intercultural personality dimensions that emerged as important predictors of expatriate success. First, *emotional stability* refers to the tendency to remain calm in stressful situations versus a tendency to show strong emotional reactions under stressful circumstances. Particularly individuals who are high in emotional stability will be able to cope with stressful and unfamiliar aspects of an international assignment (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000; 2001). Second, *social initiative* refers to a tendency to actively approach social situations and to show initiative. *Open mindedness*, finally, refers to an open and unprejudiced attitude toward out-group members and toward different cultural norms and values (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000; 2001).

Elaborating on Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources Model (COR), I will subsequently demonstrate that intercultural personality dimensions may not only function as internal coping resources, but as potential external coping resources as well. In case one's own intercultural personality dimensions are insufficient, the intercultural personality traits of one's partner may be a helpful and beneficial substitute. Being, for example, low in social initiative is not necessarily prohibiting effective adjustment abroad if one's intimate partner takes initiatives to go out, or if he or she invites people over. Interestingly, the mechanisms of how internal and external resources interact are still relatively unknown (Thoits, 1995).

In the present dissertation I aim to further our knowledge by investigating the potential of such an “exchange of resources” effect such that when the expatriate’s own personal resources are insufficient he/she may rely on the resources of the expatriate spouse (and vice versa). The extent to which one’s partner’s intercultural personality traits may function as supportive external coping resources has, as far as I know, not been explored

## Adjustment

Up till now, I discussed relevant intra-relational and interpersonal factors and processes that may influence expatriate couples’ adjustment. Adjustment can be defined as “the degree of comfort and absence of stress” associated with the new situation abroad (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005, p257; Hechanova et al., 2003). International adjustment is considered a multi-dimensional concept (e.g., Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991; Searle & Ward, 1990) and in the present dissertation I will consider psychological, socio-cultural and professional adjustment. Psychological adjustment refers to “internal psychological outcomes such as mental health and personal satisfaction”. Next, socio-cultural adjustment refers to external psychological outcomes that link the individual to the new environment, such as the ability to deal with daily problems like general living conditions, transportation, entertainment, and health care services in the host country (Ali, Van der Zee, & Sanders, 2003, p 565; cf. Van der Zee et al., 2007). Finally, professional adjustment reflects expatriates’ ability to effectively adapt to the new position abroad.

In the present dissertation justice and conflict experienced in expatriate relationships will be connected to psychological outcomes (Chapter 2, Chapter 3). Moreover, specific intercultural personality dimensions will be linked to specific constructs of adjustment.

### *Interdependence framework*

A main objective of this dissertation is to understand how expatriates and expatriate spouses influence each other and each other’s adjustment. In order do so it is important to take into account that expatriates and expatriate spouses are not statistically independent data sources. Regarding justice perceptions or feelings of conflict, the expatriate and the expatriate spouse reflect on the same experiences. Moreover, they probably influence each other’s thoughts and feelings. The aim of the present research is to gain knowledge into *how* partners influence each other—which processes are at play. Not only do I want to control for these interdependencies, I want to *explore* them. Therefore, in all three studies the data are modeled according to the Actor Partner Interdependence Model (APIM) with distinguishable parties (Kenny, Kashy, & Cook, 2006). In this model both intrapersonal (actor) effects and interpersonal (partner) effects are modeled.

In the field of close relationships, and especially in the case of expatriation where the two partners depend even more on each other, it may not be enough to explore just the individual (actor) effects. Rather, I want to gain insight in the relational processes. APIM allows for estimating statistically independent paths for actor and partner effects, making it possible to explore both interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships while statistically controlling for each of these effects. Figure 1.1 gives a graphic representation of the overall model of the present dissertation.

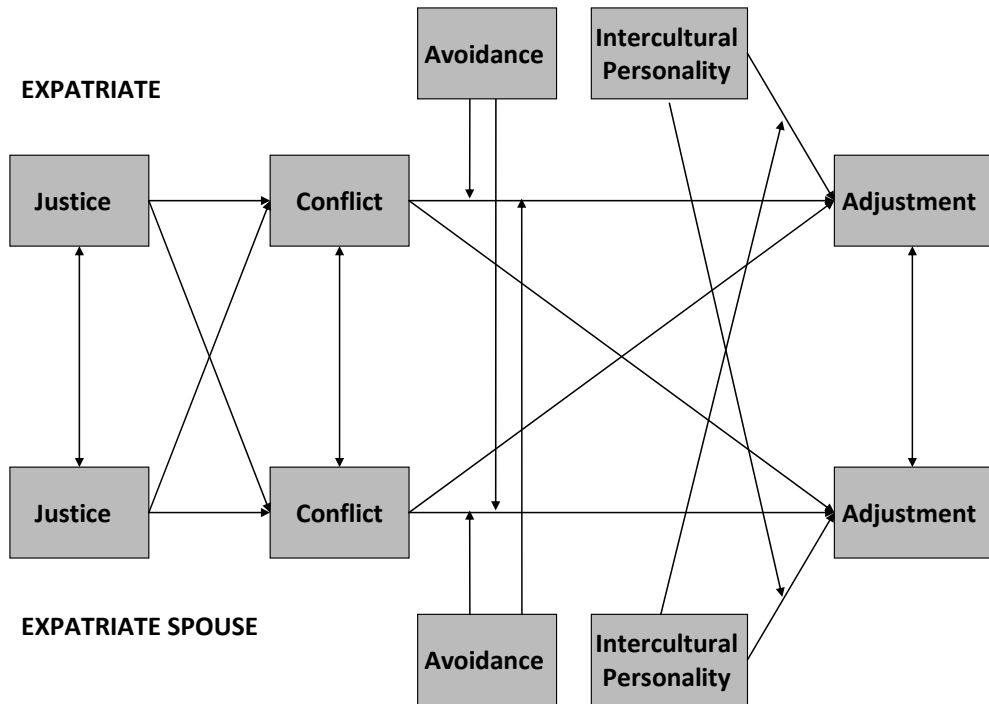


Figure 1.1 Overall model

### The Present Dissertation

The overall objective of this dissertation is to gain insight into the positive and negative relational processes that are at play in an intimate expatriate relationship and that may hinder or enhance both partners' effective adjustment abroad. The importance of such research is emphasized by the fact that 1) the majority of expatriates is accompanied by their spouse or life partner; 2) organisations' risks and monetary costs involved with expatriation are high, making a successful adjustment a priority; 3) prior studies emphasize

that the adjustment of the expatriate and the expatriate spouse are strongly associated, but the processes underlying this association are still obscure 4) the number of expatriates is expected to grow.

Using empirical data of over a hundred expatriate couples, both intra-relational processes regarding justice and conflict perceptions, and interpersonal exchange processes regarding personality dimensions are explored. The study described in *Chapter 2* concerned a cross-sectional field study on the effect of justice perceptions and feelings of conflict on couples' psychological adjustment. On the basis of the self-interest and group-value models I try to unravel the impact of distributive and procedural justice dimensions on affective and cognitive, task-related conflict. Additionally, I investigate how justice and conflict affect expatriate couples' adjustment.

The longitudinal study presented in *Chapter 3* further qualifies the conflict-psychological adjustment relationship. Focusing specifically on affective conflicts, I examine the consequences of avoidance behavior. Taking into account the relational dynamics as well as the dynamics over time I demonstrate an alleviating effect of avoidance behavior on the negative conflict-adjustment relationship.

*Chapter 4* explicitly focuses on the interplay of personal resources of expatriates and expatriate spouses in determining different adjustment outcomes. I explore to what extent individuals can draw from each others personality resources. Cross-sectional as well as longitudinal data are used. An overview of the proposed models in the empirical chapter is given in Figure 1.2.

*Chapter 5* concerns a general discussion of the findings of this dissertation. Finally, it should be noted that the empirical chapters of this dissertation are accepted or submitted as independent articles, and can be read independently. Therefore, there is some overlap, particularly in the introduction sections. Furthermore, as the empirical chapters were written in collaboration with others, in these chapters I use the word "we" instead of "I" when a reference to the authors is made.

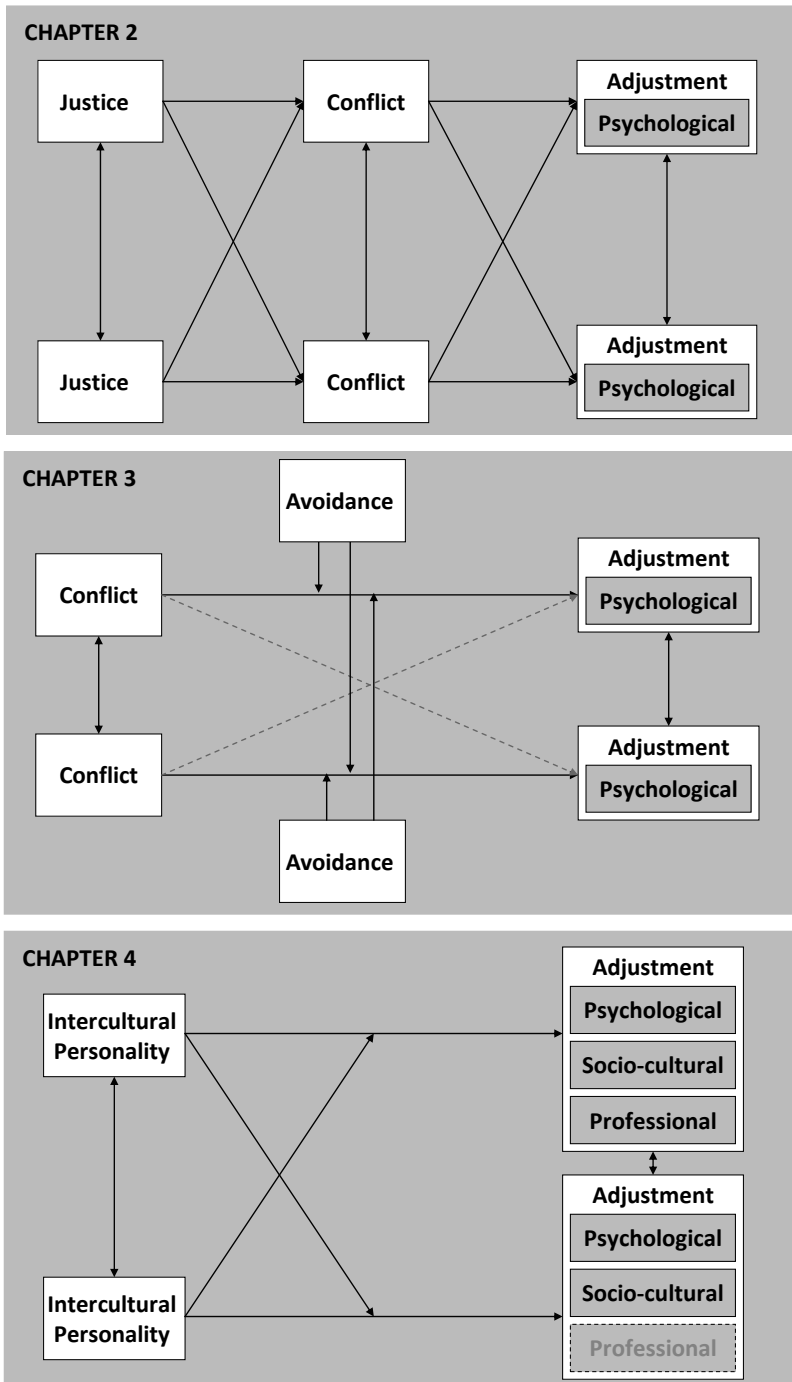


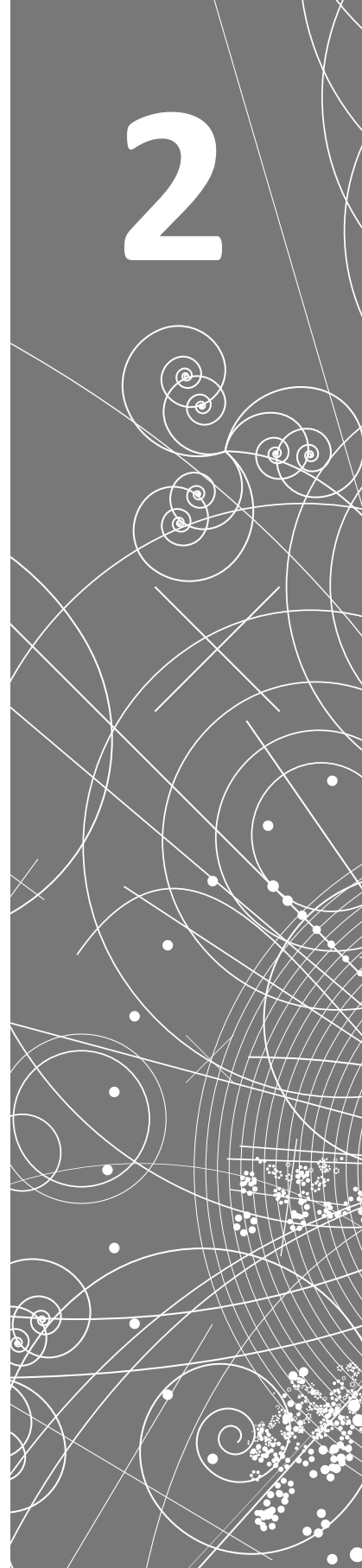
Figure 1.2 Overview of proposed models per chapter



# 2

## **It's not fair: The role of justice and conflict for expatriate couples' adjustment**

This chapter is a modified version of an article that is in press as:  
Van Erp, K. J. P. M., Giebels, E., Van der Zee, K. I. & Van Duijn, M. A. J.  
Expatriate adjustment: The role of justice and conflict in intimate  
relationships. *Personal Relationships*







In 2010 there will be 214 million people living abroad—an increase of 10% compared to 2005 (United Nations [UN], 2006). Today, OECD countries alone (North America, Australia, and most [West-] European countries) count more than 18 million highly skilled migrants (UN, 2005), including a growing number of expatriates.

About 90% of all expatriates—employees accepting an international assignment—are accompanied by their relationship partner (Brookfield Global Relocation Services [GRS], 2009; see also Van der Zee, Ali, & Haaksma, 2007; Ali et al., 2003). Evaluations from international companies worldwide reveal that expatriate spouses' dissatisfaction and lack of expatriate spouses' career opportunities following the assignment are the most frequently mentioned reasons for assignment failures and premature returns (Brookfield GRS, 2009; see also Kupka & Cathro, 2007; Tung, 1987). Considering the costs associated with (failed) assignments (e.g., Stroh, Black, & Gregersen, 2005, Chapter 1), surprisingly little academic work includes the expatriate spouse and examines the relational dynamics associated with a couple's adjustment abroad. For example, a recent meta-analytical study on expatriation by Bhaskar-Shrinivas, Harrison, Shaffer, and Luk (2005) examining 65 studies shows that only 13 studies include measures relating to the trailing partner, while only 3 studies actually use both the expatriate and the expatriate spouse as a data source (i.e., Black & Stephens, 1989; Shaffer & Harrison, 1998; Takeuchi et al., 2002). While, overall, the Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. meta-analysis shows that the single most important factor for explaining expatriate adjustment is the expatriate spouse's adjustment (see also Hechanova et al., 2003), these studies do not reveal the relational processes that are at play. The current study is designed to fill this void and sets out to contribute to the existing literature in three ways.

First, and in line with previous research focusing on the relational dynamics surrounding life changing experiences (e.g., Kluwer et al., 2002; Kluwer & Johnson, 2007), we propose a model that focuses on the role of justice perceptions and feelings of conflict in expatriate couples' adjustment to living abroad. We argue that transition situations such as expatriation affect relational dynamics because they uproot prior arrangements and often entail new tasks and responsibilities. As a result, couples have to renegotiate the division of responsibilities. This may accentuate perceptions of imbalance and injustice, and in turn cause discontent (Holmes & Levinger, 1994), particularly for the rising number of dual career couples (Harvey & Buckley, 1998). That is, whereas before moving abroad both partners contributed to the family income, expatriation usually means that the expatriate becomes the main breadwinner, and the one who is building a career, whereas the expatriate spouse often has a less demanding job in the host country. This reasoning is supported by recent studies, showing higher levels of conflict and lower levels of justice after compared to before a couple's transition to parenthood (Choi & Marks, 2008; Kluwer & Johnson, 2007).

In examining feelings of justice, we will not only focus our analyses on distributive justice but also on procedural justice. While distributive justice has been examined extensively

within the close relationship domain, this is less so for procedural justice. This is remarkable because research in organizational and legal settings shows that procedural justice is an important predictor of outcomes such as commitment, trust and (job) satisfaction (Colquitt et al., 2001; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Sweeney & McFarlin, 1997). Indeed, recent research in close relationships clearly shows a strong association between perceptions of procedural justice on the one hand and relationship satisfaction and affective feelings on the other (Kluwer, Tumewu, & Van den Bos, in press).

Second, the impact of feelings of (in)justice may differ for the two partners as a result of differences in the before mentioned roles of expatriate and expatriate spouse (cf. Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). As most expatriate spouses are still women lacking a job in their new environment (Brookfield GRS, 2009), these role differences are also more likely to be intertwined with gender and status differences. We will therefore expound on the resulting differential effects of justice perceptions for expatriates and expatriate spouses. This is particularly important because the way in which the two partners—in *mutual interaction*—deal with the changing circumstances, may be critical to a couple's successful adjustment.

Third, to explore how partners influence each other and thus to properly take into account *relational* phenomena, we will use a statistical model based on a multilevel approach, specifically suitable for analyzing interdependent, dyadic interaction (Kenny et al., 2006). The model considers the effects of both individuals' feelings of justice and conflict on their own adjustment as well as on their partner's adjustment simultaneously. In what follows, we will first discuss the concept of expatriate adjustment, followed by a theoretical rationale regarding the importance of including different types of justice and conflict, from which we derive our hypotheses on the justice-conflict-adjustment link.

Adjustment, which can be defined as “the degree of comfort and absence of stress” associated with the new situation abroad (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Hechanova et al., 2003), is a central theme in the expatriation literature (e.g., Black et al., 1991; Harvey, 1997; Stahl & Caligiuri, 2005). It is a multidimensional concept, including, for example, socio-cultural adjustment and work adjustment. Here, we will focus on psychological adjustment, referring to internal psychological outcomes such as mental health and personal satisfaction (Van der Zee et al., 2007; Van Oudenhoven, Mol, & Van der Zee, 2003; cf. Searle & Ward, 1990). Generally, psychological adjustment is considered “*the vital construct underlying rewards and costs of the expatriate experience*” (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). In our proposed model, feelings of injustice associated with the international assignment will set in motion a process that is likely to ultimately influence a couple's adjustment.

The modeled process starts with the partners' experience of both distributive justice, referring to the perceived fairness of the amount of compensation one receives, as well as procedural justice, the perceived fairness of how people are treated during the process that precedes the distribution of such outcomes (Kluwer et al., in press; Lind & Tyler, 1988).

Traditionally, research focused on *distributive justice*, particularly within the domain of close relationships (e.g., Sprecher, 1986; Van Yperen & Buunk, 1991). For example, a party may consider it fair that as a compensation for hours spent on childcare tasks, one can spend less time on household tasks. The concept of *procedural justice* has received much less attention in close relationship research (for an exception see Kluwer et al., in press; see also Kluwer et al., 2002). This is remarkable because research in other domains, such as organizational or legal settings, shows that in general people attach great value to procedural justice (Lind & Tyler, 1988). Furthermore, there is research evidence suggesting that both types of justice work out differently (e.g., Simons & Roberson, 2003). For example, in a study among bank employees, McFarlin and Sweeney (1992) found distributive justice to be most strongly related to personal outcomes like pay and job satisfaction, while procedural justice was the best predictor of organizational outcomes (e.g., organizational commitment).

*Procedural justice* is considered a multidimensional concept including both decision-making fairness as well as the quality of the interpersonal treatment, formally as well as informally (Blader & Tyler, 2003). Because intimate relationships are rather informal by nature, and because—as opposed to other domains—there is no overarching organizational structure or legal context (cf. Blader & Tyler, 2003), we expect that particularly informal manifestations of procedural justice will be important. With regard to the decision-making component, this may for example mean that the expatriate spouse has an important say in the couple's decision whether or not to extend the international assignment with an extra year. The informal quality of interpersonal treatment refers to the degree to which parties are treated with politeness, dignity, and respect.<sup>2</sup>

Feelings of injustice are arguably connected with conflict (Mikula & Wenzel, 2000). That is, when a situation is considered unfair, the resulting discrepancy between the preferred and the actual situation could easily give rise to conflict. Conflict is the extent to which one individual feels obstructed or irritated by another individual (Kluwer et al., 1997; Van de Vliert, 1997; Van de Vliert, Nauta, Giebels, & Janssen, 1999). Although it is not a commonly made distinction within the close relationships domain, we argue that feelings of injustice may give rise to both cognitive, task-related conflicts and affective conflicts.<sup>3</sup> That is, a romantic relationship does not only involve intimate, personal undertakings, like spending quality time together or deepening personal understanding, but also involves more practical issues like grocery shopping, and keeping the accounts (e.g., Choi & Marks, 2008). As such,

<sup>2</sup> There is some debate in the literature whether interpersonal treatment should be distinguished from the decision-making component. Although some scholars have considered fair interpersonal treatment a separate construct, naming it “interactional justice” (Bies & Moag, 1986), many others consider it an integral part of procedural justice, particularly in the close relationship literature (Kluwer et al., in press; see also Kluwer et al., 2002; Lind & Tyler, 1988). In developing our hypotheses, we therefore treat both decision-making fairness and interpersonal treatment as part of procedural justice.

<sup>3</sup> Although previous research uses many different labels for this type of conflict (e.g., emotional, relationship, personal), Jehn (1997) has convincingly argued why affective conflict is the most appropriate one.

task-related conflict refers to a disagreement about the content of the tasks or duties to be performed, thus reflecting on substantive rather than non-substantive issues (e.g., De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Giebels & Janssen, 2005; Jehn, 1995). For example, an expatriate couple can disagree about what kind of car suits their needs as a family best (a SUV or a Sedan). Affective conflict, on the other hand, refers to perceived *interpersonal* incompatibilities between parties (Jehn, 1995), for example, when one party accuses the other of not being emotionally supportive to him/her. Previous research from the organizational domain shows that, although task and affective conflict are strongly associated, it is important to consider them separately, because they not only differ in their effects but they may also have different antecedents (e.g., De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). We expect the relative importance of the different justice constructs to vary for the two conflict types. This expectation is shaped by two justice motive theories: the self-interest model and the group-value model. The *self-interest model* (Thibaut & Walker, 1975), also called instrumental or control model (e.g., Tyler, 1994), posits that people try to maximize their resources in exchange with others. The self-interest model is particularly helpful in explaining the influence of justice perceptions on task conflict, because task conflict reflects on instrumental and substantive rather than on non-substantive issues (e.g., Blader & Tyler, 2003; see also Giebels & Janssen, 2005; Jehn, 1995). According to the self-interest model, individuals will be primarily concerned with controlling their outcomes. This can either be accomplished by controlling fair exchanges (e.g., of time and tasks), that is, by *distributive* justice, or by controlling fair procedures that precede outcomes (e.g., voice; Tyler, 1994). Thus, also procedural justice may be important because having voice and ways to influence the decision-making process offers people a means to control, and therefore optimize, outcomes. Therefore, we posit:

*Hypothesis 1: Perceptions of distributive justice and procedural justice, particularly the decision-making component, are negatively related to task conflict.*

Additionally, and based on the group-value model (Lind & Tyler, 1988; Tyler, 1989), justice perceptions may influence affective conflict as well. The group-value model suggests that people value membership in social groups because groups are a source of self-validation and can provide their members with important resources like emotional support (Tyler, 1989). Since the likelihood of deriving benefits from group membership rises if one's status is higher (cf. Tyler, 1989), individuals will value information that holds clues about their status. Regarding valued group membership, especially procedural justice may be important. Particularly the interpersonal treatment component of procedural justice directly reflects deferential and respectful treatment. As such, it may be considered a clear indication of one's status within the relationship. Similarly, fair decision-making provides information on how one is appreciated. For example, considering the other's opinion in a decision is likely a

deliberate choice (Koper, Van Knippenberg, Bouhuijs, Vermunt, & Wilke, 1993). Thus, both aspects of procedural justice hold strong clues about how one is appraised and respected by the other person (cf. Koper et al., 1993). In turn, violations may threaten one's self-esteem and self-identity, and therefore may be particularly connected to affective conflict (cf. De Dreu, Van Dierendonck, & De Best-Waldhober, 2002; De Dreu, Van Dierendonck, & Dijkstra, 2004; Giebels & Janssen, 2005). This leads to:

*Hypothesis 2: Perceptions of procedural justice are negatively related to affective conflict.*

With regard to the relationship between procedural justice and affective conflict, we also anticipate role-based differences. That is, the role of being an expatriate substantially differs from the role of being an expatriate spouse, especially regarding the dependency on one's partner. In general, expatriate spouses experience greater dependency on the expatriate than vice versa, financially, socially, and emotionally (Kupka & Cathro, 2007; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001) and this is generally considered one of the major drawbacks an international assignment brings along (e.g., Global Connection, 2009). That is, the new occupation abroad offers the expatriate not only financial means but also instantly a new social network of colleagues. In contrast, the expatriate spouse seldom has a job upon arrival in a new country, and therefore lacks financial independence and a connected social network. Furthermore, belongingness needs are primarily projected onto the expatriate because they are the primary source for self-validation. This asymmetry in dependence is likely to enhance feelings of vulnerability and insecurity among expatriate spouses—issues that increase sensitivity to clues about how one is appreciated and respected by the other person (cf. Miedema, Van den Bos, & Vermunt, 2006; Van den Bos, 2001).

This role effect on the sensitivity to procedural justice issues is likely to be intertwined with and reinforced by status and gender issues. That is, because of the abovementioned financial and occupational positions, expatriate spouses can be considered lower in status compared to their partners. Furthermore, and despite a growing number of women expatriates, trailing spouses are still predominantly women (Brookfield, GRS, 2009). Research shows that lower status individuals as well as women attach greater importance to manifestations of procedural (in)justice. For low status individuals, fair treatment may be an important source to confirm their value within the relationship, while women generally tend to be more relationally oriented (cf. Kluwer et al., in press; Kluwer, Tumewu, Van den Bos, 2009; Lind & Tyler, 1988; Sweeney & McFarlin, 1997). These joint effects of dependence and status asymmetry as well as gender issues may result in expatriate spouses having a stronger appreciation of clues about how one is appraised and respected. Therefore, such clues may more easily give rise to affective conflict issues among expatriate spouses.

*Hypothesis 3: The relationship between procedural justice and affective conflict is stronger for expatriate spouses than for expatriates.*

Research in the domain of close relationships clearly shows that interpersonal conflict has negative consequences for mental and physical well-being (Kluwer, 2000; see also De Dreu et al., 2002). In the present study, we therefore expect that interpersonal conflict is negatively related to psychological adjustment. This negative effect is expected to be stronger for affective conflict than for task conflict. Task conflict seems to be less detrimental in its effects than affective conflict because particularly affective conflict undermines a person's self-esteem and self-identity (Giebels & Janssen, 2005; Simons & Peterson, 2000). Indeed, several studies indicate that personal incongruities as compared to task-related conflict issues are more strongly negatively related to well-being, health complaints, stress and satisfaction (De Dreu et al., 2002; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Giebels & Janssen, 2005). Therefore, we posit:

*Hypothesis 4: Affective conflict and task conflict are negatively related to psychological adjustment. This relationship is stronger for affective conflict than for task conflict.*

Furthermore, we expect that feelings of injustice result in reduced adjustment because it causes conflict situations. Generally, research suggests that perceptions of (in)justice influence an individual's well-being, mental health, and satisfaction (e.g., Hegtvedt, 1990; Michaels, Edwards, & Acock, 1984; Sprecher, 1986; Sweeney & McFarlin, 1997). In line with these findings, we expect a positive association between distributive and procedural justice perceptions and psychological adjustment. However, we expect this relationship to exist because feelings of injustice and wrongdoing manifest themselves through conflict (cf. Hegtvedt, 1990; Skarlicki & Folger, 1997). It is this experience of interpersonal conflict that is primarily responsible for reduced adjustment. This leads to:

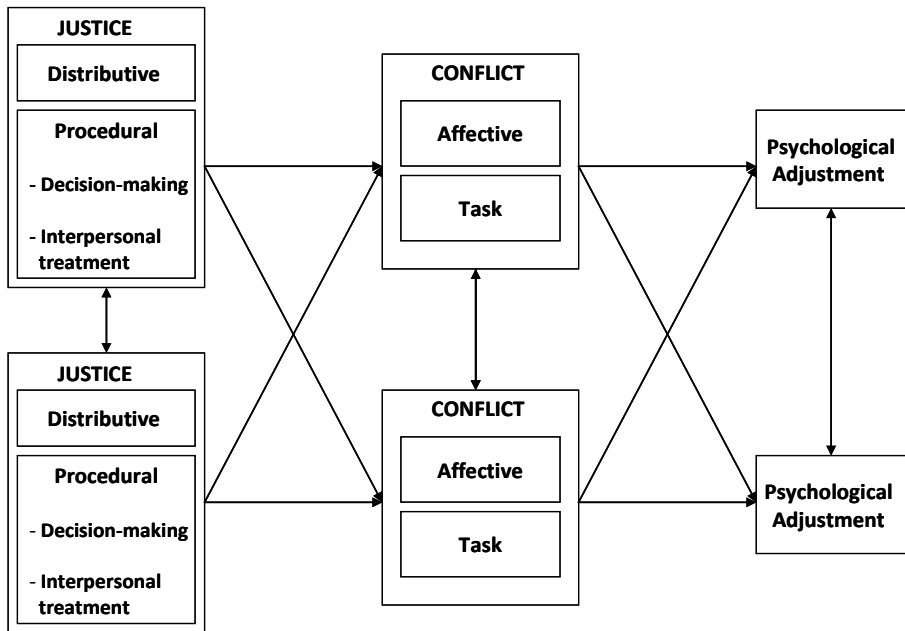
*Hypothesis 5: Interpersonal conflict mediates the relationships between distributive and procedural justice on the one hand and psychological adjustment on the other hand.*

### *Interpersonal effects*

An important contribution of this study is that it explores the way in which two partners in the expatriate couple influence each other. Especially in expatriate relationships, it is essential to take such interpersonal or cross-party effects into account. Leaving behind significant social networks in the home country, partners' lives become more interdependent in the host country situation (e.g., partners undertake more leisure activities otherwise undertaken with friends, together as a couple). In this situation, interpersonal effects may

be amplified (e.g., Van der Zee, Ali, & Salomé, 2005; Takeuchi et al., 2002). Therefore, we used the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model with distinguishable parties (APIM) to analyze our data (Campbell, Simpson, Kashy, & Rhoads, 2001; Cook & Kenny, 2005; Kenny et al., 2006). The APIM model accounts for the influence of both parties' behavior on their own outcome variables (i.e., intrapersonal effects) as well as interpersonal effects: the influence of one party's behavior or attitude on his/ her partner's outcome measure (Kenny et al., 2006). This distinction is important because we expect that individuals' justice perceptions are negatively related to their own conflict levels *and* to their partner's conflict levels (see Figure 2.1). For instance, unfairness experienced by one partner is likely to be noticed by the other partner and may give rise to irritations and frustration. Similarly, when one's partner experiences conflict, this is likely to be noticed (e.g., this person is sad, irritated, or avoids interaction) and in turn affect one's own psychological adjustment.

**EXPATRIATE**



**EXPATRIATE SPOUSE**

Figure 2.1 Proposed model, based on the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model



## Method

### *Respondents*

Participants were approached through Global Connection (GC), an internet-based contact group for expatriate spouses. An e-mail was sent to all 545 Dutch GC-members, explaining the purpose of the research and requesting their participation: 154 members and their partner consented to participate. Additionally, a multinational company sent the questionnaire to their 36 Dutch expatriate employees currently living abroad with their partner. Finally, a request for participation in the study was published in a Dutch online expatriate magazine, to which 14 couples responded. Hence, 408 participants (204 couples) received a questionnaire in Dutch by mail, including a self-addressed stamped envelope and an introduction letter. The introduction letter explained that the study focused on expatriate couples' experience, the challenges couples face when moving abroad, and the way in which partners cope with those challenges as a couple. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured. Each party was instructed to fill out the questionnaire independently.

A total of 240 participants (58.8%) returned the questionnaire, with data obtained from 105 complete couples (210 participants, 51.5%). Only these complete couples were included in the analyses. Additionally, two couples filled out the questionnaire inappropriately or had extreme scores on almost all variables. Consequently, they were removed from the dataset. The remaining 206 participants were between 24 and 64 years of age ( $M = 40.88$ ,  $SD = 8.73$ ). Expatriates were predominantly men (91.3%); expatriate spouses predominantly women (89.3%; our sample contained one homosexual couple). The majority of the participants were married (88.3%), the other 11.7% were cohabiting. Relationship duration was on average 17.23 years ( $SD = 9.54$ , range 1.5 - 37.0 years).

All expatriates were of Dutch nationality. Seven expatriate spouses had a different nationality than Dutch, but indicated that they were fluent in the Dutch language. These individuals originated from Poland, Bosnia, Indonesia, South Africa, the U.S. and Germany. Analyses revealed no significant differences between Dutch and non-Dutch expatriate spouses.

About 55.3% of the couples reported having children under the age of 18. In all but one case, underage children accompanied their parents. Additionally, five couples were accompanied by children older than 18 years. The age of the eldest child (for families with trailing children) lay between 0 and 27 years ( $M = 9.10$  years,  $SD = 6.08$ ).

The majority of the participants (84.5% of the expatriates; 74.8% of the expatriate spouses) had finished an education at university or higher vocational level. Most expatriate spouses did not have a paid job ( $n = 78$ , 75.7%). Eight out of the 25 expatriate spouses with a paid job worked fulltime, but mostly indicated this work was below their educational level. The remaining 17 participants worked between 8 and 25 hours a week ( $M = 15.53$

hours,  $SD = 5.72$ ). Participants were located in 44 different countries. Twenty-four different organizations were cited as the assigning organization.

### *Instruments*

*Justice perceptions.* Because especially procedural justice received very little attention in close relationship research in general, and—as far as we know—justice perceptions have not been examined within the domain of expatriate relationships, we developed a 14-item justice scale in the first phase of our research project. To this end, we interviewed 6 expatriates and 20 expatriate spouses using an interview protocol based on the Critical Incidents Technique (Flanagan, 1954). Participants were asked to reflect explicitly on the international assignment and to recall, from that perspective, important positive and negative occasions regarding justice in their relationship. All interviews were audiotaped and transcribed. Remarks about justice were categorized and translated into concrete items to measure different justice aspects (see also Jones, 1985). A pilot test among a convenience sample of 33 respondents confirmed the applicability and relevance of the items. A principal component analysis (PCA) on the current sample provided support for three subscales. Next to items referring to distributive justice, items referring to decision-making and interpersonal treatment loaded on separate factors (see Table 2.1 for items and factor loadings). We therefore composed three scales: one scale for distributive justice (5 items;  $\alpha = .92$ ), and two subscales for procedural justice: decision-making fairness (5 items;  $\alpha = .80$ ), and fairness of interpersonal treatment or, abbreviated, interpersonal justice (4 items;  $\alpha = .86$ ; all measured on a 5-point Likert-type scale; 1 = *never*, 5 = *always*). Please note that these scales resemble justice scales that were developed for organizational settings (e.g., Van Yperen, Hagedoorn, Zweers, & Postma, 2000) including ones that were recently applied to close relationships (Kluwer et al., in press; Study 1 and 3).

**Table 2.1** Pattern matrix regarding Principle Component Analyses on justice scales and conflict scales

Justice	1	2	3
<b>Distributive Justice</b>			
<i>I feel that ..</i>			
I put more energy into my relationship than it is worth.	.91		
I make too much an effort considering my outcomes	.89		
the rewards I receive from my relationship are not proportional to my investments	.88		
I invest more in my relationship than I receive in return	.83		
I put a great deal of time in our relationship but get very little appreciation	.69		
<b>Procedural Justice: Decision-Making</b>			
In our relationship we confer with each other before taking a decision.	.86		
In our relationship resolutions are taken together.	.85		
In our relationship we makes choices together	.71		
We take decisions without consulting each other	.65		
My partner and I discuss important issues .	.56		
<b>Procedural Justice: Interpersonal Treatment</b>			
My partner is understanding towards me			.86
Ik feel supported by my partner			.82
I feel I'm valued in our relationship.			.75
My partner treats me with respect			.63
Variance explained	42.1%	16.0%	8.7%
Total variance explained -	66.8%		
<hr/>			
Conflict	1	2	3
<b>Household conflict</b>			
<i>How often do you and your partner have ...</i>			
divergent ideas on the executions of household tasks?	.91		
different visions on household tasks?	.90		
different opinions on the organization of household work?	.86		
different notions on the cause and solution of problems related to household	.85		
<b>Work conflict</b>			
<i>How often do you and your partner have ...</i>			
different visions on paid work?			.91
different opinions on the organization of paid work?			.85
different notions on the cause and solution of problems related to work			.82
divergent ideas on the executions of paid work			.70
<b>Affective conflict</b>			
<i>How often are there ...</i>			
tensions between you and your partner?	.94		
emotional conflicts between you and your partner?	.92		
controversies between you and your partner?	.90		
personal clashes between you and your partner?	.79		
Variance explained	46.9%	15.2%	13.9%
Total variance explained -	76.0%		

Note: coefficients smaller than .30 are suppressed

*Task conflict and affective conflict.* We used the validated Task and Relationship Conflict scales developed by Jehn (1995). The 4-item original Task Conflict Scale was adapted to measure (a) conflict on household tasks and (b) conflict regarding (paid) work.<sup>4</sup> For example, the original item “how often do you and your *colleagues* have different visions on *work*” was modified into “how often do you and your *partner* have different visions on *household tasks*?” The internal consistencies of both scales were high (household conflict,  $\alpha = .90$ ; work conflict,  $\alpha = .85$ ). The 4-item Relationship Conflict Scale was used to measure affective conflict ( $\alpha = .92$ ). All conflict items were measured on 7-point scale (1 = *never*, 7 = *always*). A PCA on all conflict items rendered three factors (i.e., affective conflict, household conflict, and work conflict) explaining 76% of the variance. See Table 2.1 for further details.

*Psychological adjustment* was measured using the Dutch translation of the scale for psychological health ( $\alpha = .75$ , 5 items) drawn from the RAND-36 (Van der Zee & Sanderman, 1993; cf. RAND Health Science Program, 1992). Participants were asked to indicate how they were feeling during the past 4 weeks on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Sample items were “how often... have you felt downhearted and blue?” and “how often... have you been a happy person?”

*Control variables.* We included the following demographic characteristics: gender, age, relationship duration, country of residence, whether the present assignment was the couple's first assignment or not, years living abroad, whether they had accompanying children. Furthermore, we included relationship satisfaction and interpersonal trust as control variables, because research shows that general relationship satisfaction may influence important aspects of the close relationship (e.g., Van Yperen & Buunk, 1991; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998), while the concept of trust is crucial to conflict situations (Simons & Peterson, 2000; De Dreu, Giebels, & Van de Vliert, 1998). For relationship satisfaction ( $\alpha = .92$ ) we used a 5-item scale from the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult et al., 1998), while trust ( $\alpha = .89$ ) was measured with the 3-item generalized interpersonal trust scale (De Dreu et al. 1998).

### Statistical analysis

The proposed model (Figure 2.1), with individuals nested in couples, was estimated using a multilevel approach (Kenny et al., 2006, Chapter 7; see also Kashy, Campbell, & Harris, 2006), and the software MLwiN 2.00 (Rasbash, Browne, Healy, Cameron, & Charlton, 2004). Furthermore, we use a “two-intercept approach” (Cook & Kenny, 2005; Raudenbush, Brennan, & Barnett, 1995) to distinguish between effects for expatriates and effects for

<sup>4</sup> A critical issue in marital conflict is the division of labor. In this regard, two issues are applicable to almost every relationship: household tasks and paid work (e.g., Kluwer et al. 1997). We therefore distinguished between these two different aspects, particularly because of the asymmetrical task division that may result from expatriation. The questionnaire included a scale regarding childcare tasks as well, but since almost half of the couples reported not to have children (accompanying them), this scale was not included in further analyses.

expatriate spouses. The proposed APIM-model (Figure 2.1) was estimated in two parts, first testing the effects of the three justice components on task conflict (household as well as work aspects) and affective conflict (Hypotheses 1-3). Next, we tested the effect of conflict on adjustment (Hypothesis 4) and the mediating role of conflict in the relationship between feelings of (in)justice and adjustment (Hypothesis 5). To control for correlations among the conflict types, and similarly, the justice components, we included all aspects into one equation in both analyses. A model containing only the intercept for expatriates and expatriate spouses (i.e., the empty model) was compared to models that included justice and/or conflict in subsequent steps. Model improvement was tested through the difference in deviance using a chi-squared test. The deviance is an inverse goodness of fit measure. The smaller the deviance the better the model fits the data, and the more the deviance has decreased, the more the model has been improved.

In all analyses, the independent variables were centered. We used “role-wise” centering, that is, separate centering for expatriates and expatriate spouses based on their separate means. In this way, we model “relative” differences among expatriates and expatriate spouses. Furthermore, preliminary analyses showed that the scales for justice, conflict and psychological adjustment exhibit skewness. Therefore, we checked whether our results changed when using the natural log transformation of these scales. This was not the case. We therefore report analyses of the untransformed data. Finally, no significant effects emerged when demographic variables were included. Furthermore, although the control variables relationship satisfaction and trust showed some associations with justice and conflict perceptions, their inclusion in the model did not change the overall pattern of results.<sup>5</sup> We therefore decided to exclude all control variables from our final analyses.

## Results

### *Descriptives and Correlations*

Means and standard deviations of all variables are given in Table 2.2. Expatriates and expatriate spouses did not differ significantly on these variables, with one exception: Expatriates reported higher levels of psychological adjustment,  $t(102) = 3.61, p < .001$ .

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<sup>5</sup> Probably due to an increase in power, some effects turned out to be stronger, most notably with regard to the mediation analyses. Furthermore, we found one additional significant effect for expatriate spouses (similar to the one we found for expatriates) reflecting a relationship between distributive justice and affective conflict.

**Table 2.2** Means and standard deviations

	N	total sample			expatriates		spouses	
		min-max	mean	s.d.	mean	s.d.	mean	s.d.
<b>Justice</b>								
distributive	206	2.80 - 5.00	4.53	0.57	4.55	0.54	4.52	0.61
decision-making	206	3.00 - 5.00	4.34	0.42	4.30	0.42	4.39	0.40
interpersonal treatment	205	2.75 - 5.00	4.49	0.47	4.53	0.43	4.45	0.51
<b>Conflict</b>								
household	205	1.00 - 6.00	2.73	1.12	2.76	1.03	2.70	1.21
work	203	1.00 - 5.00	2.40	0.95	2.48	1.00	2.33	0.91
affective	206	1.00 - 5.75	2.55	0.97	2.59	0.97	2.51	0.96
<b>Psychological adjustment</b>	206	2.80 - 5.00	4.29	0.44	4.39	0.40	4.20	0.46
<b>Age</b>	206	24.00 - 64.00	40.88	8.72	41.77	8.75	40.00	8.66
<b>Relationship duration</b>	206	1.50 - 37.00	17.23	9.54	17.23	9.57	17.23	9.57
<b>Years living abroad</b>	203	0.15 - 40.00	6.89	6.69	7.20	6.54	6.57	6.86

*Note:* All variables are measured on a 5-point scale, except: affective conflict, household conflict and work conflict, measured on a 7-point scale; age, relationship duration and years living abroad, measured in years.

Table 2.3a shows the correlations between the variables separately for expatriates and expatriate spouses. For both partners, the three constructs of justice (distributive, decision-making and interpersonal treatment) were highly correlated. In line with prior research in organizational settings (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; meta-analytic mean  $r = .52$  for task and affective conflict), the scales for personal and task conflict showed strong positive correlations ( $.33 \leq r \leq .51$ ). Personal and task conflict were negatively correlated to the three justice components except for expatriate spouses' decision-making fairness which was only associated with affective conflict and not with the two task conflict scales. Table 2.3b represents the correlations between expatriates' and expatriate spouses' measures. The correlations on the diagonal indicate a positive, moderate to high degree of interdependence between all variables, except for the work conflict subscale of task conflict ( $r = .12, ns$ ).

**Table 2.3a** Correlation coefficients and Cronbach's  $\alpha$

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>Justice</b>							
1. distributive	<b>.92</b>	.26**	.67***	-.27**	-.28**	-.56***	.32**
2. decision-making	.40***	<b>.80</b>	.39***	-.03	-.18	-.34***	.07
3. interpersonal treatment	.54***	.47***	<b>.86</b>	-.22*	-.30**	-.64***	.28**
<b>Conflict</b>							
4. household	-.31**	-.36***	-.38***	<b>.90</b>	.41***	.37***	-.09
5. work	-.41***	-.28**	-.31**	.47***	<b>.85</b>	.33***	-.19
6. affective	-.60***	-.36***	-.48***	.50***	.51***	<b>.88</b>	-.31**
7. <b>Psychological adjustment</b>	.26**	.14	.15	.02	-.19	-.27**	<b>.75</b>

Note: correlation coeff. for expatriates below the diagonal, for expatriate spouses above the diagonal; Figures on the diagonal (bold) represent Cronbach's  $\alpha$ ; n varies between 101 and 103  
 \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ , (2-tailed)

**Table 2.3b** Correlation coefficients of expatriates' and expatriate spouses' measures

	expatriate spouse	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
<b>expatriate</b>								
<b>Justice</b>								
1. distributive	<b>.39***</b>	.12	.49***	-.11	-.07	-.49***	.17	
2. decision-making	.23*	<b>.33***</b>	.27**	.06	-.13	-.30**	.11	
3. interpersonal treatment	.30**	.22*	<b>.41***</b>	-.19	-.08	-.30**	.05	
<b>Conflict</b>								
4. household	-.24*	-.23*	-.25*	<b>.27**</b>	.16	.30**	-.06	
5. work	-.21*	-.08	-.24*	.10	<b>.12</b>	.21*	-.20*	
6. affective	-.42***	-.27**	-.58***	.14	.20*	<b>.56***</b>	-.15	
7. <b>Psychological adjustment</b>	.12	-.10	.22*	-.07	-.07	-.14	<b>.26**</b>	

Note: figures on the diagonal (bold) represent a measure of interdependence of expatriate and expatriate spouse; n varies between 101 and 103.  
 \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ , (2-tailed)

### *The relationship between justice and conflict*

We conducted a multivariate multilevel analysis to test the impact of justice perceptions on household, work, and affective conflict simultaneously. Results of the full model are displayed in Table 2.4. Adding actor and partner effects of justice to the empty model improved the model's fit to the data to a large extent,  $\Delta \chi^2(36) = 138.00, p < .001$ . We will discuss the actor effects for expatriates and expatriate spouses separately, followed by the partner effects.

*Actor effects, expatriates.* Hypothesis 1 stated that distributive justice and the decision-making component of procedural justice would influence task conflict. Results support this hypothesis, and show that distributive justice was particularly associated with work-related task conflict ( $B = -0.57, p < .01$ ). We found no relationship between decision-making fairness and the task conflict scales. We found no support for Hypothesis 2. Both procedural justice components showed no significant relationship with affective conflict. Instead, we found a significant negative relationship between distributive justice and affective conflict ( $B = -0.63, p < .001$ ).

*Actor effects, expatriate spouses.* Among expatriate spouses, we found partial support for both Hypothesis 1 and Hypothesis 2. In line with Hypothesis 1 distributive justice influenced task conflict, but especially the household component ( $B = -0.46, p < .05$ ). Work conflict was not influenced by any justice component and there were no effects of the decision-making component of procedural justice. In line with Hypothesis 2, affective conflict was influenced by the interpersonal treatment component of procedural justice ( $B = -0.69, p < .01$ ), but not the decision-making component ( $B = -0.31, ns$ ). Supporting Hypothesis 3, the relationship between interpersonal justice and affective conflict was marginally significantly stronger for expatriate spouses than for expatriates ( $t = 1.44, p < .10$ , one-tailed). Finally, and similar to findings for expatriates, results for expatriate spouses displayed a significant negative association for distributive justice with affective conflict ( $B = -0.32, p < .05$ ).

*Partner effects.* The overall pattern of significant relationships was replicated by the partner effects, particularly regarding Hypothesis 2 and 3. Interpersonal justice experienced by the expatriate spouse significantly predicted affective conflict of the expatriate ( $B = -0.62, p < .01$ ). In line with Hypothesis 3, expatriate spouses' interpersonal justice had a stronger negative effect on expatriates' affective conflict than vice versa ( $t = 2.92, p < .01$ ). Furthermore, expatriate's perception of distributive justice had a negative effect on the expatriate spouse's feelings of affective conflict ( $B = -0.45, p < .01$ ). Finally, we found that expatriates' interpersonal justice was negatively associated with expatriate spouses' experience of household conflict ( $B = -0.60, p < .05$ ). We will come back to this in the Discussion section.

In sum, and in support of Hypothesis 1, both partners' distributive justice perceptions influenced task conflict, but only regarding the actor effects. The results furthermore



indicated that this concerned work-related task conflict for the expatriate, but household-related task conflict for the expatriate spouse. Moreover, Hypothesis 2—proposing a relationship between procedural justice and affective conflict—was supported, but only for the interpersonal treatment component of procedural justice. Specifically, the expatriate spouse's experience of interpersonal justice influenced both his/her own experience as well as the expatriate's experience of affective conflict. Finally, and unanticipated, both partners' feelings of distributive justice influenced their experience of affective conflict, and this effect was reinforced by the expatriate's perception of distributive justice also influencing his/her partner's experience of affective conflict.

#### *The relationship between conflict and psychological adjustment*

Hypothesis 4, proposing a negative effect of task conflict and especially affective conflict on psychological adjustment, was tested by adding actor and partner effects of personal, household and work conflict to the empty model (see Table 2.5). Compared to the empty model the model significantly improved,  $\Delta \chi^2(12) = 27.7, p < .01$ .

*Actor effects.* In line with Hypothesis 4, affective conflict negatively affected expatriates' and expatriate spouses' psychological adjustment ( $B = -0.13, p < .05$  for expatriates;  $B = -0.18, p < .01$  for expatriate spouses). Neither type of task conflict showed significant associations with psychological adjustment. Supporting the second part of Hypothesis 4, the negative effect of conflict was stronger for affective conflict than for household-related task conflict;  $\chi^2(1) = 6.23, p < .05$  for expatriates,  $\chi^2(1) = 8.35, p < .01$  for expatriate spouses. We found no significant differences in coefficients of work-related task conflict and affective conflict.

*Partner effects.* One significant partner effect emerged: Expatriates' experience of work-related task conflict negatively influenced expatriate spouses' adjustment ( $B = -0.10, p < .05$ ).

#### *The mediating role of conflict*

The fifth and final hypothesis posited that a direct relationship between justice perceptions and psychological adjustment is mediated by the experience of conflict. Baron and Kenny (1986) formulated three conditions under which a variable functions as a mediator. First, the independent variable (justice) should be significantly associated with the presumed mediator (conflict). Second, this mediator should be significantly related to the outcome variable (psychological adjustment). Third, the strength of the association between the independent variable and the outcome variable should decrease when the mediator is added to the equation.

**Table 2.4** Multivariate multilevel analysis for the effects of justice on conflict for both the expatriate and the expatriate spouse. Fixed and random effects

		Conflict type		Household		Work		Affective	
		B	s.e.	B	s.e.	B	s.e.	B	s.e.
<b>Fixed effects</b>									
<b>Intercept</b>	expatriate	2.78	.10	2.48	.09	2.60	.07		
	expatriate spouse	2.71	.10	2.35	.09	2.52	.07		
<b>Justice Variables</b>									
<b>actor effect expatriates</b>									
	distributive justice	-.21	.25	-.57**	.21	-.63***	.17		
	decision-making justice	-.39	.29	-.27	.25	-.11	.20		
	interpersonal treatment justice	-.49	.30	-.13	.27	-.27	.20		
<b>actor effect expatriate spouses</b>									
	distributive justice	-.46*	.23	-.19	.19	-.32*	.15		
	decision-making justice	.07	.29	-.17	.25	-.31	.20		
	interpersonal treatment justice	-.15	.31	-.42	.26	-.69**	.21		
<b>partner effect expatriates</b>									
	distributive justice	-.16	.23	-.03	.20	-.01	.15		
	decision-making justice	-.30	.29	.06	.25	-.15	.20		
	interpersonal treatment justice	.09	.31	-.06	.27	-.62**	.21		
<b>partner effect expatriate spouses</b>									
	distributive justice	.11	.25	.15	.21	-.45**	.17		
	decision-making justice	.58	.30	-.15	.25	-.13	.20		
	interpersonal treatment justice	-.60*	.30	.09	.26	.23	.20		
<b>Variance and covariance</b>									
		<b>Couple level</b>				<b>Individual level</b>			
		var	s.e.			var	s.e.		
	$\tau^2$ ( $\sigma^2$ ) hh conflict	.25	.11			.81	.11		
	$\tau^2$ ( $\sigma^2$ ) w conflict	.06	.08			.70	.10		
	$\tau^2$ ( $\sigma^2$ ) affective conflict	.09	.05			.38	.05		
	covariance hh-w	.05	.07			.28	.08		
	covariance hh-affective	.04	.05			.20	.06		
	covariance w-affective	.01	.04			.15	.05		
	$\rho$ household-work	.43				.37			
	$\rho$ household-affective	.23				.37			
	$\rho$ work-affective	.17				.29			
<b>Deviance</b>		<b>1455.08</b>							

Note : hh refers to "household"; w refers to "work";  
n = 608 (203 respondents × 3 conflict variables minus missing values)  
\*\*\* p < .001; \*\*p < .01, \* p < .05.

**Table 2.5** Multilevel analysis of conflict on psychological adjustment for both the expatriate and the expatriate spouse: Fixed and random effects

	B	s.e.
<b>Fixed effect</b>		
<b>Intercept</b> expatriate	4.39	.04
expatriate spouse	4.21	.04
<b>Conflict Variables</b>		
<b>actor effect expatriates</b>		
household conflict	.09	.05
work conflict	-.06	.05
personal conflict	-.13*	.06
<b>actor effect expatriate spouses</b>		
household conflict	.04	.04
work conflict	-.07	.05
personal conflict	-.18**	.06
<b>partner effect expatriates</b>		
household conflict	-.03	.04
work conflict	-.00	.05
personal conflict	.02	.06
<b>partner effect expatriate spouses</b>		
household conflict	.04	.05
work conflict	-.10*	.05
personal conflict	.07	.06
<b>Variance and covariance</b>		
	var.	s.e.
Couple level		
$\tau^2$	.04	.02
Individual level		
$\sigma^2$	.12	.02
Deviance	196.08	

*Note:* Total effective  $n$  for the analysis is 200

(206 respondents minus missing values).

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

**Table 2.6** Multilevel analysis to test the mediating effect of conflict for both the expatriate and the expatriate spouse: Fixed and random effects

		<b>Model 01</b>		<b>Model 02</b>		<b>Model 03</b>	
		B	s.e.	B	s.e.	B	s.e.
<b>Fixed effect</b>							
<b>Psychological adjustment</b>							
<b>Intercept</b>	expatriate	4.39	.04	4.39	.04	4.39	.04
	expatriate spouse	4.20	.04	4.20	.04	4.20	.04
<b>Justice Variables</b>							
<b>actor effect expatriates</b>							
	distributive justice			.19**	.07	.11	.10
<b>actor effect expatriate spouses</b>							
	distributive justice			.19*	.09	.16	.09
	interpersonal treatment justice			.09	.10	.01	.12
<b>Conflict Variables</b>							
<b>actor effect expatriates</b>							
	personal conflict					-.08†	.05
<b>actor effect expatriate spouses</b>							
	personal conflict					-.09†	.06
<b>Variance and covariance</b>							
		var.	s.e.	var.	s.e.	var.	s.e.
Couple level							
	$\tau^2$	.05	.02	.04	.02	.04	.02
Individual level							
	$\sigma^2$	.14	.02	.13	.02	.13	.02
	Deviance	230.57		212.34		207.19	
	$\Delta$ Deviance			18.23***		5.15†	
				df = 3		df = 2	

Note: Total effective  $n$  for the analysis is 205: 206 respondents minus missing values.

\*\*\* $p < .001$ , \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ , † $p < .10$

Non-significant results from the previous analyses already indicated the preclusion of several mediating paths. Consequently, only the variables with significant results were included in the analysis. First, the appropriate actor effects of the justice variables were entered as independent variables (Table 2.6, Model 02). The model improved significantly,  $\Delta \chi^2(3) = 18.23$ ,  $p < .001$ . Significant effects emerged for expatriates' as well as expatriate spouses' distributive justice (actor effect,  $B = 0.19$ ,  $p < .01$ , for expatriates,  $B = 0.19$ ,  $p < .05$ , for expatriates spouses). Expatriate spouses' interpersonal justice was not significantly associated with psychological adjustment. Adding partner effects of distributive and interpersonal justice did not improve the model significantly,  $\Delta \chi^2(2) = 1.64$ ,  $ns$ , and these

were therefore excluded from the analysis. Subsequently, we particularly tested the mediating role of affective conflict in the relationship between distributive justice and psychological adjustment. When affective conflict was added to the equation, the overall model improved marginally,  $\Delta \chi^2(2) = 5.16, p < .10$  (Model 03). Follow-up analyses showed that the association between distributive justice and adjustment decreased by 43% to  $B = 0.11, ns$  for expatriates and by 16% to  $B = 0.11, ns$  for expatriate spouses. Correspondingly, Sobel-tests for calculating the significance of a possible mediation, were marginally significant (Sobel's  $z = 1.50, p < .07$ ,<sup>6</sup> for expatriates; Sobel's  $z = 1.28, p < .10$ , for expatriate spouses). In sum, there was some evidence that conflict acted as a mediating variable, but particularly concerning the actor effects and especially regarding the distributive justice-affective conflict-adjustment relationship link.

## Discussion

There is cumulative evidence that the collective, dyadic coping of expatriate couples with the new situation abroad is the most important factor determining expatriate adjustment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Hechanova et al., 2003). In this study, we proposed an interdependence model that treats psychological adjustment of the expatriate and the expatriate spouse as a function of their own *and* their partner's justice perceptions and feelings of conflict. As such, this study is among the first to gather information regarding relational processes associated with expatriation simultaneously from the expatriate and the expatriate spouse.

In line with the self-interest model (Thibaut & Walker, 1975), we found partial support for our expectation that distributive and procedural justice (especially the decision-making component) would influence the experience of task-related conflict issues. Distributive justice indeed affected the occurrence of task-related conflict issues, but this effect was different for expatriates and expatriate spouses. For expatriates, we found a relationship between distributive justice and work-related task conflict, while for expatriate spouses distributive fairness was connected to household-related task conflict. Arguably, household issues rather than work issues may be more central to expatriate spouses, while the opposite may be true for expatriates. No effects were found for procedural justice, neither for the decision-making component nor for the interpersonal treatment component. However, interpersonal justice experienced by the expatriate was negatively related to the expatriate spouse's household-related task conflict. An explanation for this unanticipated finding might be that the less respect expatriates experience from their partners, the less they will

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<sup>6</sup> We used a one-tailed test criterion for the Sobel-test since we applied it after the direction of significant a and b paths were established using the primary regression results.

be inclined to lend a helping hand in household tasks, subsequently leading to a higher experience of household-related task conflicts by expatriate spouses.

Furthermore, and in line with the group-value model, particularly the expatriate spouse's experience of interpersonal justice influenced both partners' experience of affective conflict. This is in line with our expectation that the expatriate spouse attaches greater value to fair interpersonal treatment by their partner than vice versa.

Interestingly, we found a consistent and unanticipated pattern of relationships between perceptions of distributive justice and the occurrence of affective conflict. Both partners' own feelings of distributive justice influenced their experience of affective conflict, and this effect was reinforced by the expatriate's perception of distributive justice also influencing expatriate spouse's experience of affective conflict. This may indicate that, although unfair outcomes can be coincidental (cf. Hagedoorn, Buunk, & Van de Vliert, 1998), distributive justice may also hold clues about how one is appreciated by the other person. An interesting question in this regard is whether this finding is characteristic for expatriate couples. Maybe the transition abroad increases the importance of distributive fairness: The way outcomes are distributed may have prolonged effects, because two partners become more interdependent.

As expected, and both for expatriates and for expatriate spouses we found evidence that their own experience of affective conflict negatively influenced their own psychological adjustment. Furthermore, for both partners lower levels of distributive justice were associated with lower levels of psychological adjustment, and for both associations affective conflict mediated this relationship. Thus, affective conflict ultimately reducing both partners psychological adjustment was influenced by both partners' perception of distributive justice and the expatriate spouse's perception of interpersonal justice. Together, these findings support the idea that both the self-interest model and the group-value model are relevant to expatriate couples (see e.g., Conlon, 1993; Tyler, 1994; Tyler & Lind, 1990).

As discussed in the Introduction section, the differential findings for expatriates and expatriate spouses with regard interpersonal justice may be explained by asymmetrical dependency following differences in social roles, status perceptions and gender. Usually, expatriate spouses experience a greater financial and social dependency on the expatriate than vice versa. Furthermore, and as is the case in our sample, most expatriate spouses are women, of which only few work fulltime or have a job well paid. Because this may enhance feelings of vulnerability and insecurity among the expatriate spouses, they may have an increased sensitivity to fairness concepts that include strong clues about how one is appreciated. This reasoning is supported by the finding that interpersonal justice was somewhat more strongly related to affective conflict among expatriate spouses than among expatriates.

In general, our findings point at the importance of reframing expatriate assignments as *family relocations* (cf. Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005) and to include the perceived treatment of the expatriate and the expatriate spouse in attempts to increase the adjustment of the family system. This conclusion is especially relevant in light of previous research and observations from practice, that the expatriate spouse receives far less attention than the expatriate.

Furthermore, our findings point at the importance of taking into account procedural justice issues in close relationship research (Kluwer et al., in press). Following research from other domains (e.g., Colquitt et al., 2001), we showed that decision-making justice and interpersonal justice can be considered distinct factors with differential effects: Especially the interpersonal treatment component influenced feelings of conflict and psychological adjustment. The decision-making component on the other hand showed no significant effects. Possibly, couples see mutual decision-making as the norm rather than the exception in close relationships. That is, decision-making is not merely a sign of respect towards each other but a vital way of communication in order to have an efficiently functioning relationship.

An alternative explanation is that the relative importance of decision-making justice and interpersonal justice changes due to the transition abroad. By deciding to move abroad, other important issue may be determined as well (e.g., length of stay, expatriate working hours), therewith reducing to some extent the usefulness of, for example, decision-making in these domains. In future research it is thus important to investigate whether the associations between perceived justice, conflict, and psychological adjustment differ among partners in expatriate couples, compared to partners in non-expatriate couples. In this regard, couples undergoing other transition processes, such as a national rather than an international move, might provide an interesting comparison group. Furthermore, future studies may not only want to include fairness of decision-making and interpersonal treatment, but also a fourth justice concept, that has recently been introduced in organizational settings This concept is labeled informational justice, referring to the explanations provided to people about why certain procedures were used or why outcomes were distributed in a certain way (Colquitt et al., 2001).

A final contribution of our research is that not only within the organizational domain, but also in close relationships, affective and task conflict can be regarded distinguishable constructs. Moreover, we found clear evidence that both their antecedents and effects differ. Notably, affective rather than task conflict has a negative effect on psychological adjustment. This finding parallels research within organizational and legal settings which also reveal that particularly conflict referring to personal incongruities is harmful in its effects. This finding is especially important considering the central role of conflict in close relationships (e.g., Fincham & Beach, 1999; Kluwer et al., 1997; 2002). Still, protracted task conflict can turn into affective conflict (e.g., continuous nagging about a household issue,

may eventually turn into a heated personal debate; cf. De Dreu, 1997; Jehn, 1997). Since we entered task conflict and affective conflict simultaneously to the equation (to control for each other's effect), such delayed effects of task conflict may have disappeared.<sup>7</sup>

#### *Limitations and suggestions for future research*

A basic assumption in this study is that expatriate couples will experience more conflict and less justice due to the transition phase they are going through. However, all couples in our study were already living abroad and no pre-assignment measures were available. Although previous research clearly indicates that transition situations are associated with higher levels of conflict (Choi & Marks, 2008; Kluwer & Johnson, 2007), future research should consider including pre-assignment measures or a control group, something that has hardly been done in research on expatriation (Hechanova et al., 2003).

Second, although we assumed that the additive effects of asymmetrical dependency, status differences, and gender are responsible for the differential effects for expatriates and expatriate spouses, we only found indirect support for this assumption. Future research might want to provide more direct evidence, especially because research on gender effects does not paint a clear picture, sometimes displaying weak and inconsistent results (Foley, Hang-Yue, & Wong, 2005; Lee & Farh, 1999; Lee, Pillutla, & Law, 2000). Additionally, there is some evidence suggesting that the *salience* rather than the "level" of one's status, determines the value one attaches to procedural justice (Van Prooijen, Van den Bos, & Wilke, 2002; 2005). However, particularly for expatriation research it may be difficult to disentangle role, gender and status effects, so future research might try to include less traditional relationships.

Finally, although we assume a causal relationship between justice, conflict, and adjustment, a cross-sectional study cannot rule out different directions of the causal relationships. Thus, low adjustment may also give rise to the experience of injustice and/or conflict issues. Therefore, and considering the fact that our findings regarding conflict as a mediator are only marginal, future research should try to include a longitudinal research design (Hechanova et al., 2003).

#### *Practical Implications*

Our findings may not only be valuable for expatriate couples, who could actively try to enhance feelings of justice and reduce harmful conflict in their relationship, but also for multinationals. Such organizations often focus primarily on the expatriate, while expatriate spouses are hardly being involved in (pre-)assignment procedures and preparations. Furthermore, support generally consists of "ready-made" solutions such as cultural training and pre-departure visits to the host country. Our research clearly indicates that not only expatriates' but expatriate spouses' justice perceptions as well, are an important factor to

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<sup>7</sup> We thank an anonymous reviewer for this valuable suggestion.



address. This may be particularly important in light of research showing that features of the home domain may “spillover” to the work domain (e.g., Van Steenbergen, Ellemers, & Mooijaart, 2007). Hence, assigning organizations could benefit from acknowledging the important role of the expatriate spouse by creating more awareness and providing policies and support systems that enhance feelings of work-to-home *and* home-to-work “facilitation” for *both* partners. For instance, they may facilitate access to professional support systems in case of relational problems or invest in ways to find appropriate work for the expatriate spouse. As such, companies should proactively acknowledge the challenges an international assignments entails, not only in the work domain, but also in the private domain, and not only for the expatriate, but even more so, for the expatriate spouse.

# 3

## **Let it be: The upside of avoiding conflict**

This chapter is a modified version of an article that is submitted as:  
Van Erp, K. J. P. M., Giebels, E., Van der Zee, K. I. & Van Duijn, M. A. J.  
Let it be: The upside of avoiding affective conflicts.





Due to globalization, companies increasingly assign their employees to overseas postings. These expatriate employees are often accompanied by their partner (Brookfield Global Relocation Services [GRS], 2009). Until recently, research has focused on explaining the success or failure of expatriation from the sole perspective of the expatriate (e.g., Abe & Wiseman, 1983; Wang & Takeuchi, 2007). The expatriate spouse has received much less scholarly attention, and research considering both the expatriate and the expatriate spouse is scarce. This is remarkable since the few studies incorporating expatriate spouses show that these trailing partners are an essential factor for the success of an international assignment, particularly in terms of successful adjustment to the new situation (e.g., Shaffer & Harrison 2001; Shaffer, Harrison, Gilley, & Luk, 2001; see also e.g., Black et al., 1991). In fact, a recent meta-analytical study clearly shows that the single most important factor for explaining expatriate's adjustment is the expatriate spouse's adjustment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., p. 272; see also e.g., Shaffer & Harrison, 1998; Takeuchi et al., 2002).

Recent research by Van Erp, Giebels, Van der Zee, and Van Duijn (in press) has emphasized the importance of understanding the interaction between the expatriate and the expatriate spouse in order to identify *how* they adjust to the new situation together. Especially following an international assignment, interpersonal disagreements and frictions may occur. Generally, the destructive effects of such conflicts are well known (cf. De Dreu & Weingart, 2003). This particularly concerns *affective conflicts*—conflicts characterized by personalized disagreement or individual disaffection, attributed to factors in the other party or the relationship with the other party (Amason & Schweiger, 1994; Bono, Boles, Judge, & Lauver, 2002; Jehn 1995). Within the domain of intimate relationships, but also in other domains (e.g., research in organizations), affective conflict has been negatively associated with both individual as well as relationship outcomes, such as individual well-being, physical health, and relationship satisfaction (e.g., Fincham & Beach, 1999; see also Amason & Schweiger, 1994). In line with this, Van Erp et al. (in press) showed that the more affective conflicts the expatriate couple experienced, the lower their psychological adjustment to the new situation abroad. As psychological adjustment usually refers to internal psychological outcomes such as mental health and personal satisfaction (Van der Zee, Ali, & Haaksma, 2007; Van Oudenhoven, Mol, & Van der Zee, 2003; cf. Leong, 2007; Ruben & Kealey, 1979; Searle & Ward, 1990), the Van Erp et al. (in press) study suggests that expatriation-related conflicts are an essential predictor of both partners' general well-being associated with assignment success.

A factor not taken into account by Van Erp et al. (in press) is how expatriate couples cope with the affective conflicts at hand. Previous research has shown that the detrimental effect of conflict depends on how people cope with conflict or—more precisely—on the kind of conflict management strategies used by the conflicting parties (DeChurch & Marks, 2001; Tjosvold, 1998). Therefore, this study will examine conflict management as a moderator of

the relationship between affective conflict and psychological adjustment. We will focus our analyses on avoidance behavior, one of the least examined conflict management strategies (Roloff & Ifert, 2000; Wang, 2006), but one that seems to play a prominent role in spousal conflict (e.g., Kluwer, Heesink, & Van de Vliert, 2000; Verhofstadt et al., 2005). In order to examine the mutual influence of expatriates and their partners, we will include both partners in our study. Furthermore, to explore how the effects of conflict and avoidance unfold over time, we gathered data both in an early stage of the assignment and one year later. This is particularly important because research on the process of expatriate acculturation suggests that, after an initial phase of delight and fascination, a more difficult period full with dilemmas associated with living abroad, starts to manifest itself (Black & Mendenhall, 1991; see also Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005).

This study contributes to the expatriation literature by studying the underexposed role of spousal conflict interaction following an international assignment for a couple's adjustment. Our work also contributes to the domain of close relationships by focusing on relationship processes of couples going through a transition phase. Finally, by using a statistical model specifically suitable for analyzing interdependent, dyadic interaction at two moments in time (Kenny et al., 2006), we are able to take into account these dynamic relational phenomena appropriately.

#### *Affective conflict and avoidance behavior*

We define affective conflict as the perceived interpersonal incongruities between parties (Jehn, 1995). For example, one party may be agitated because he or she perceives the other as not being emotionally supportive to him or her. The frequently observed harmful effect of affective conflict (e.g., De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Fincham & Beach, 1999) likely arises from the damage it does to an individual's self-esteem and identity (Giebels & Janssen, 2005). This may be particularly true for conflicts with an intimate partner. An intimate relationship is built on a sense of shared beliefs and a mutual identity. Affective conflicts defy this sense of sharing, thus threatening both the individual and the relationship. As such, affective conflict is a stressor that puts pressure on the ability to healthily adjust (Van Erp et al., in press; see also e.g., Spector & Jex, 1998; Keenan & Newton, 1998). The way in which individuals cope with stressors such as affective conflicts likely influences the relationship between these stressors and psychological adjustment.

Although an infinite number of ways to cope with stressful life events can be identified, two higher-order coping categories can be distinguished: engagement coping, referring to responses directed toward a stressor, and disengagement coping, which is oriented away from a stressor (Connor-Smith et al., 2000; see also Roth & Cohen, 1986). Similarly, the specific domain of conflict management research suggests that conflicting parties basically have the choice of actively dealing with the conflict at hand or avoiding the issue and the interaction with the other altogether (e.g., Dijkstra et al., 2009).

Approach strategies are generally considered constructive (e.g., problem solving) or efficient (e.g., forcing), and particularly effective when combined (e.g., forcing plus problem solving; Van de Vliert et al., 1999). Avoidance behavior, on the other hand, has traditionally been considered a more destructive conflict management strategy. Avoidance is characterized by attempts to ignore the conflict, withdrawing from discussions involving the conflict, or doing as little as possible in a negotiation process (e.g., Carnevale & Pruitt, 1992; Pruitt, 1983). Not surprisingly, it is thought to originate from low concern for one's own and the other's interests (e.g., Pruitt, 1983), a desire to circumvent obligations (Dijkstra et al., 2005), and an attempt to leave things "as they are" (Kluwer et al., 1997; 2000).

Although situations of stress and tension oftentimes elicit avoidance behavior (Roth & Cohen, 1986; see also Dijkstra et al., 2005; Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, & DeLongis, 1986) this more evasive strategy has generally received much less attention in the conflict literature than approach behaviors (Rolloff & Ifert 2000; Wang, 2006). Furthermore, within the domain of close relationships it has usually been examined as part of an interaction pattern, where one party brings up a conflict issue and resorts to pressure and forcing behavior, whereas the other party tries to avoid the conflict and refuses to discuss it (e.g., Heavey, Layne, & Christensen, 1993). For example, Kluwer et al. (1997; 2000) argued that in conflicts between partners, one party typically asks for the other party's participation in a task, while the other party tries to maintain the *status quo* (i.e., contributing less) by avoiding discussions regarding participation. This demand-withdraw pattern is considered one of the most typical of spousal interactions in reaction to conflict (Kluwer et al., 2000; Verhofstadt et al., 2005). Moreover, it is believed to be a deleterious pattern (Heavey et al., 1993) that may harm, for example, relationship satisfaction (Weger, 2005).

However, research on demand-withdraw behavior has usually approached this interaction pattern as a single phenomenon. Using items such as "one party tries to start a discussion while the other tries to avoid a discussion," and "one party pressures, nags, or demands while the other withdraws, becomes silent, or refuses to discuss the matter further" (Communication Pattern Questionnaire; Christensen, 1988), it is difficult to establish which partner's behavior drives the (negative) effects. Consequently, it is difficult to draw conclusions on the effects of demand and avoidance separately. The few studies that did investigate demand and avoidance separately indeed reveal different results for demanding and avoidance. For example, Heavey et al. (1993) found that it is particularly the demanding aspect and not the avoiding element that works out negatively. Recently, scholars advocated a brighter look on avoidance behavior, particularly when it comes to affective issues in enduring and valued interdependent relationships.

First, there is research evidence that suggests that avoidance may be beneficial because it serves as a defense mechanism when one's personal or social identity is under threat. For example, in a study among organizational teams, De Dreu and Van Vianen (2001) showed

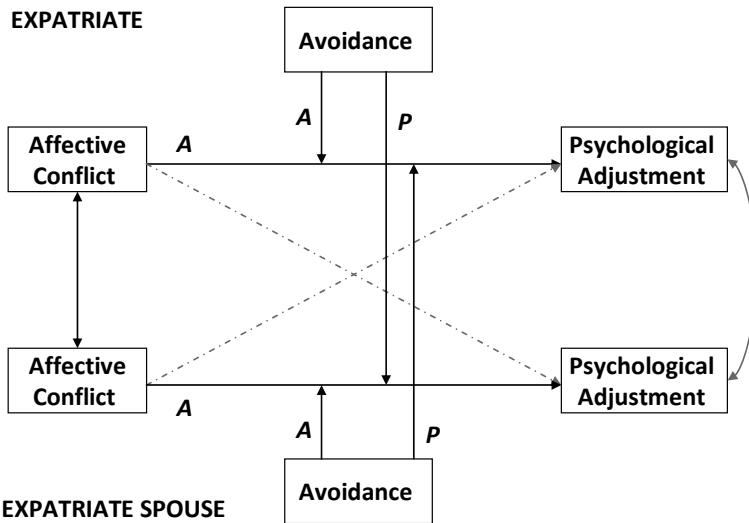
that avoidance may work out positively when issues are irresolvable and opinions ingrained. This is especially true for conflicts that are more relational and affective and evolve around personal norms, values and preferences. Such conflicts require a change in “issues fundamental to one’s personal identity” (De Dreu & Van Vianen, 2001, p. 313), something that may be difficult if not impossible to establish. Within the close relationship domain, Roloff and Ifert (2000, p.152) follow a similar reasoning stating that “our prevailing scholarly approach ignores the possibility that some conflicts are effectively irresolvable or that the costs arising from trying to resolve others may be too severe to justify addressing them.”

The idea that circumventing potential threats emanating from such identity-related arguments may be advantageous is also supported by close relationship research on empathic accuracy (Buysse & Ickes, 1999; Simpson, Oriña, & Ickes, 2003). For example, Simpson et al. (2003) show that empathic *inaccuracy*, a manifestation of motivated cognitive avoidance, may actually be beneficial for relationship quality, especially when the issues at stake are severe and threaten the relationship. In such contexts “motivated avoidance can be interpreted as a line of defense against potential relational threat” (Buysse & Ickes, 1999, p. 353), and may therefore reduce the negative effects of such threat.

Recently, Wang (2006) took this one step further and argued that high rather than low concern for the other party and the relationship may be one’s motivation to display avoidance behavior. That is, avoidance behavior may also represent a cooperative effort to stop engaging in undesirable social interaction (Wang, 2006). As such, it can strengthen an interdependent identity and harmony (Ohbuchi & Atsumi, 2010), and may even reaffirm the success of the relationship (Tjosvold & Sun, 2002). This may be particularly true for close relationships because romantic couples are together on a voluntary basis, and we can assume they have predominantly positive feelings towards each other. Therefore, when one’s partner shows avoidance behavior this may signal high concern for the intimate relationship and sympathy for one’s partner. As such, it may smooth relationship hurdles, and reduce tension (Verhofstadt et al., 2005).

Taken together, there is cumulative evidence that points at a positive side of avoidance behavior, both from one’s own perspective (by neutralizing identity threat) as well as the other partner’s perspective (signaling high concern for the other partner and the relationship). These mechanisms may particularly play a role within the context of intimate relationships because relationships are built on a sense of shared beliefs and a mutual identity, especially during a transition phase where partners become more dependent upon each other. We therefore expect that one’s own avoidance behavior as well as one’s partner’s avoidance behavior have a mitigating effect on the affective conflict-adjustment relationship (see Figure 3.1).

*Hypothesis 1: The relationship between affective conflict and psychological adjustment will be moderated by avoidance behavior, such that avoidance reduces the harm conflict does to psychological adjustment.*



**Figure 3.1** The proposed model: Actor (A) and partner (P) effects of avoidance moderate the affective conflict-psychological adjustment for expatriate couples

*The influence of role and time*

We further expect the affective conflict-avoidance-adjustment relationship to be influenced by two factors: the role of being an expatriate versus being an expatriate spouse, and time. First, being an expatriate notably differs from being a trailing partner. Specifically, the new occupation abroad offers the expatriate financial means as well as a new social network of colleagues. In contrast, the expatriate spouse seldom has a job upon arrival in a new country. Therefore, he or she lacks a connected social network as well as financial independence. Indeed, in Shaffer and Harrison’s qualitative research (2001; Study 1), expatriate spouses often mentioned the substantial transformation in their personal and social situation. For example, expatriate spouses said, “I wasn’t an equal anymore—I was just a stupid housewife” (p. 240), and “I didn’t get close to anybody in my building except for another American” (p. 242). Another spouse mentioned that “[American women] had a lot of trouble becoming housewives again. They used to say that in the working world in America they were somebody—they had a meaningful position. When they moved to Germany, they felt like they lost their stature” (p. 241). These remarks suggest that expatriate spouses experience more social isolation and greater financial, social, and emotional dependence on the expatriate than vice versa (cf. Kupka & Cathro, 2007).



From a power-dependence perspective (Emerson, 1962), expatriate spouses' relatively limited access to valued assets may cause them to be more sensitive to the content of interpersonal interaction within their relationship (cf. Halloran, 1998). After all, the outcomes of such interactions may affect them more strongly than the less dependent party. Scholars within the close relationship domain have indeed proposed that differences in power-dependence influence individuals' reactions. Higher levels of dependency, and thus vulnerability, create more attentiveness and lead to a stronger reaction to interpersonal interactions such as conflict (Rusbult, Arriaga, & Agnew, 2001; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). Such an effect was empirically demonstrated in a study by Loving and colleagues on physiological reactions to spousal conflict: Lower power partners displayed higher levels of the stress hormone adrenocorticotrophic (ACTH) after experiencing a conflict with their life partner (Loving, Heffner, Kiecolt-Glaser, Glaser, & Malarkey, 2004).

In the present study, we therefore argue that expatriate spouses attach greater value to conflict processes occurring during the assignment. We therefore expect that conflict management strategies directed at handling interpersonal affective conflicts may have a greater impact on expatriate spouses compared to expatriates.

*Hypothesis 2a: The negative relationship between affective conflict and psychological adjustment and the moderating effect of avoidance behavior is stronger for expatriate spouses than expatriates.*

A second factor expected to influence the conflict processes surrounding expatriation is time. That is, a close relationship is a dynamic phenomenon because of the interpersonal interactions and mutual influences that are at play (cf. Karney & Bradbury, 1995; Fincham & Beach, 1999). This may be especially true for expatriate couples, because they go through a transition phase. Although one might argue that being away from the extended family has a positive impact on the couple, expressed in supporting each other and enjoying the positive experiences of living abroad, this might be particularly true in the very first phase of the assignment—oftentimes labeled the “honeymoon phase”. However, this initial phase of excitement is generally short (i.e., 2 month; Black & Mendenhall, 1991) and followed by a period in which the difficulties and challenges associated with life abroad become more pronounced (Black & Mendenhall, 1991). Although this general decline in adjustment is well recognized within the expatriation literature (e.g., Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; DeCieri, Dowling, & Taylor, 1991; Ruben & Kealey, 1979), there is only little insight into the specific processes, particularly in terms of the intimate relationship, that may be associated with this decline. In line with our previous reasoning, we propose that the further couples are into their assignment, the more their imbalanced roles become noticed, leading to reoccurring

and seemingly irresolvable issues (cf. Van Erp et al., in press).<sup>8</sup> Such a lack of progress in finding a solution may arguably impact the couple's general well-being and adjustment.

This reasoning also fits Hobfoll's Conservation of Resource Theory (COR; Hobfoll, 1989). The COR model states that individuals seek to acquire and maintain resources, including tangible issues (e.g., money), conditions (e.g., married status), energies (e.g., time) and personal characteristics (e.g., self-esteem). Particularly changes that result in an actual or potential loss of resources are a source of stress (see e.g., Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). The continued experience of personal incongruities and the associated threat to the successful and satisfying continuation of the relationship (cf. Roloff & Solomon, 2002), increasingly draw upon valuable resources and forecast (potential) resource losses. Next to valuable resources like self-esteem and self-identity (Giebels & Jansen, 2005), other resources may also be at stake (e.g., conflicts may cost energy; less "quality time" is enjoyed; cf. Grandey & Cropanzano, 1999). As a consequence, conflict management strategies that may alleviate these negative consequences and that not necessarily draw on (other) resources become increasingly important. We therefore anticipate that, over time, the mitigating role of conflict management used to protect one's identity and to sooth relationship hurdles become more important and valued.

*Hypothesis 2b: The negative relationship between affective conflict and psychological adjustment and the moderating effect of avoidance behavior becomes stronger over time.*

## Method

### *Respondents*

Participants were approached through Global Connection (GC), an internet-based expatriation contact group; through a multinational company from the Netherlands; and via a request for participation published in a Dutch online expatriate magazine (for further details, see Chapter 2 of this dissertation; Van Erp et al., in press;). Ninety-six of a total of 103 expatriate couples included in a previous study described in Chapter 2, indicated to be willing to participate in a follow-up study. They received the follow-up questionnaire one year following the first measurement. This first measurement was about two months after the start of the assignment, thereby excluding the first turbulent period of the move. The questionnaire, in Dutch, was sent by mail, including a self-addressed stamped envelope and an introduction letter. Similar to the questionnaire at T1, the introduction letter explained that the study focused on expatriate couples' experience, the challenges couples

<sup>8</sup> Similar processes have been observed in other transition periods of intimate couples, such as after the birth of a first child (e.g., Doss, Rhoades, Stanley, & Markman, 2009; Kluwer, et al., 2002; Kluwer & Johnson, 2007).

faced when moving abroad, and the way in which partners dealt with those challenges as a couple. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured. Each partner was instructed to fill out the questionnaire independently. Out of the 96 couples, 54 complete couples (56.3%) returned eligible questionnaires. However, 9 of these couples had moved, either to another host-country or back to their home country, the Netherlands. The analyses are therefore based on the remaining 45 couples.<sup>9</sup> To check whether our sample was selective, we compared participants who participated at T1 only with participants who participated both at T1 and at T2 (including the 9 couples that had moved). ANOVAs on the key constructs (i.e., affective conflict, avoidance, psychological adjustment) revealed no significant differences for expatriates or for expatriate spouses (all  $F$ 's < 1.00, *ns*, except for expatriates' avoidance,  $F(1, 100) = 2.53$ ,  $ns^{10}$ ). ANOVAs on control variables age, relationship duration, level of education, and years in host-country, revealed no significant differences either.

The 90 participants that were included in our study were between 24 and 64 years of age ( $M = 41.20$ ,  $SD = 9.17$ ) at the time the first questionnaire was administered. Expatriates were predominantly men (88.9%); expatriate spouses predominantly women. The majority of the participants were married (88.9%), and the other 11.1 % were cohabiting. Relationship duration was 17.39 years on average ( $SD = 9.55$ , range 1.5 - 37.0 years, at T1). All expatriates were of Dutch nationality. Four expatriate spouses had a nationality other than Dutch, but indicated that they were fluent in the Dutch language. These individuals originated from Bosnia, Indonesia, and South Africa. Analyses revealed no significant differences between Dutch and non-Dutch expatriate spouses. About 53.3 % of the couples reported having children under the age of 18. In all but one case, underage children were accompanying their parents. The age of the eldest child (for families with trailing children) ranged between 0 and 17 years ( $M = 7.30$  years,  $SD = 4.88$ ). The majority of the participants (expatriates, 82.2%; expatriate spouses, 77.8 %) had finished an education at university or higher vocational level. The majority of expatriate spouses (62.2 %) did not have a paid job. Only a few expatriate spouses had a paid, full-time occupation ( $n = 5$ ; 11.1%), while those with part-time jobs mostly worked "half-time" ( $M = 19.20$  hours a week,  $SD = 9.62$ ). Participants were located in 28 different countries, and 14 different organizations were cited as the assigning organization.

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<sup>9</sup> ANOVAs on key constructs (affective conflict, avoidance, psychological adjustment) and on control variables revealed no differences between "movers" and "stayers", at T1 nor at T2, with two exceptions. Among expatriates, relationship satisfaction was higher for movers, than for stayers,  $F(1, 52) = 5.05$ ,  $p < .05$  at T1 and,  $F(1, 52) = 4.139$ ,  $p < .05$  at T2. Second, at T1 movers had lived in the host-country longer than stayers,  $F(1, 52) = 6.04$ ,  $p < .05$  for expatriates,  $F(1, 52) = 6.87$ ,  $p < .05$  for expatriate spouses.

<sup>10</sup> F-test of square root of avoidance measure. Levene's test of homogeneity of variances showed variances of the groups differed significantly. Hence, we took the root of every value of avoidance and re-analyzed these values. In this case, variances were equal.

### *Instruments*

*Affective conflict* was measured with the 4-item Affective (Relationship) Conflict Scale developed by Jehn (1995;  $\alpha_{T_1} = .90$ ;  $\alpha_{T_2} = .86$ ). Although this scale was originally developed for organizational contexts, it has been successfully applied to more personal settings as well (e.g., roommates, Bono et al., 2002; close relationships, Rispens, Jehn, & Rexwinkel, 2010). Items were rated on a 7-point scale (1 = *never*, 7 = *always*). A sample item is “how often are there emotional conflicts between you and your partner?” All scales were in Dutch. To reflect on measuring their current state, scales asked for participant’s experience of conflict at the current moment (the same applied to avoidance behavior).

*Avoidance behavior.* Departing from an existing scale that focuses on dyadic interaction between partners (i.e., the Communication Pattern Questionnaire Short Form, CPQFS; Christensen, 1988), we searched for a similar scale that measures individual avoidance behavior. Items of the avoidance scale of the Dutch test for conflict handling (DUTCH; Janssen & Van de Vliert, 1996) appeared to be highly comparable to the mutual avoidance and demand-withdraw scales of the CPQFS measures. For example, the avoidance part of the CPQFS-item “my spouse tries to start a discussion, while I try to avoid a discussion” is almost equivalent to the DUTCH item: “I avoid a confrontation about our differences”. As the Dutch has been validated and used in many other studies (see e.g., De Dreu, Evers, Beersma, Kluwer, & Nauta, 2001; Giebels & Janssen, 2005) we decided to adopt the DUTCH 4-item scale for avoidance ( $\alpha_{T_1} = .77$ ;  $\alpha_{T_2} = .77$ ; items are rated on a 7-point scale; 1 = *to a low extent*, 7 = *to a high extent*).

*Psychological adjustment* was measured using a scale for psychological health ( $\alpha_{T_1} = .72$ ;  $\alpha_{T_2} = .82$ , 5 items) drawn from the RAND-36 (Van der Zee & Sanderman, 1993; cf. RAND Health Science Program, 1992), which has been used in previous expatriation research (Van der Zee et al., 2007; Van Oudenhoven et al., 2003; see also Leong, 2007; Searle & Ward, 1990). Participants were asked to indicate their feelings during the past four weeks on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Sample items were “how often have you felt downhearted and blue?” and “how often have you been a happy person?”

*Covariates.* We controlled for the following demographic characteristics: gender, age, relationship duration, years living abroad, whether the present assignment was the couple’s first assignment, and whether participants had (accompanying) children. Furthermore, we controlled for relationship satisfaction ( $\alpha = .92$ ) using the 5-item scale from the Investment Model Scale (Rusbult et al., 1998).

### *Statistical analysis*

In this study, we were particularly interested in how the parties within the expatriate couple influence each other, and how this may change over time. To take all interdependencies into account, we used the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model with distinguishable

parties (APIM; Kenny et al., 2006) to analyze our data. The APIM model accounts for the influence of both parties' behavior on their own outcome variable (i.e., actor effects) while, simultaneously, interdependence is modeled through partner effects: the influence of one party's behavior or attitude on his/ her partner's outcome measure (Kenny et al., 2006). Importantly, this distinction allows us to analyze the moderating effects of both one's own avoidance behavior as well as the avoidance behavior of one's partner on the affective conflict-adjustment relationships simultaneously. That is, the APIM approach allows for estimating statistically independent paths for actor and partner effects.

We estimated our model with MLwiN 2.00 software (Rasbash et al., 2004). To distinguish between effects for expatriates and effects for expatriate spouses we use the "two-intercept approach" (Cook & Kenny, 2005; Raudenbush et al., 1995). The equation of the so-called empty model (without covariates) with separate intercepts for expatriates and expatriate spouses can be represented as:

$$Y_{ij} = (\text{expatriate})_{ij} \beta_{e0} + (\text{expatriate spouse})_{ij} \beta_{s0} + U_j + R_{ij} \quad (1)$$

where  $Y_{ij}$  is the outcome variable for individual  $i$  in couple  $j$ . The term  $(\text{expatriate})_{ij}$  denotes a dummy variable, taking on value 1 if the individual is the expatriate and 0 if not;  $(\text{expatriate spouse})_{ij}$  is a similarly defined dummy variable for the expatriate spouse (cf. Cook & Kenny, 2005; Raudenbush et al., 1995; Snijders & Bosker, 2004). The terms  $\beta_{e0}$  and  $\beta_{s0}$  are the intercepts for the expatriate and the expatriate spouses respectively. The final two terms are residuals for the individuals (within couples)  $R_{ij}$  and for the couples  $U_j$ . These residuals are independent with mean zero and variance  $\sigma^2$  and  $\tau^2$ , respectively, representing the within-couple and between-couple variance. In order to model time, we introduce a dummy variable  $T2$  to the equation.  $T2$  takes on the value 1 if the specific measure was gathered at  $T2$  and the value 0 if not. Furthermore, we model separate but correlated residuals for the couple members (expatriates versus expatriate spouses) and the two time point ( $T1$  versus  $T2$ ; i.e., expatriates  $T1$  is  $\text{expt1}$ , expatriates  $T2$  is  $\text{expt2}$ , expatriate spouses  $T1$  is  $\text{spst1}$ , and expatriate spouses  $T2$  is  $\text{spst2}$ ). Thus, a fully saturated model is specified for the four observations of each couple, rendering the level 1 residual  $R_{ij}$  superfluous:

$$Y_{ij} = (\text{expatriate})_{ij} \beta_{e0} + (\text{expatriate})_{ij} T2_{ij} \beta_{e1} + (\text{expatriate spouse})_{ij} \beta_{s0} + (\text{expatriate spouse})_{ij} T2_{ij} \beta_{s1} + U_{j,\text{expt1}} + U_{j,\text{expt2}} + U_{j,\text{spst1}} + U_{j,\text{spst2}} \quad (2)$$

or, simplified:

$$Y_{ij} = (\text{expatriate})_{ij} [\beta_{e0} + T2_{ij} \beta_{e1}] + (\text{expatriate spouse})_{ij} [\beta_{s0} + T2_{ij} \beta_{s1}] + U_{j,\text{expt1}} + U_{j,\text{expt2}} + U_{j,\text{spst1}} + U_{j,\text{spst2}} \quad (2')$$

Due to the addition of the dummy variable T2,  $\beta_{e0}$  becomes the general or baseline intercept for the expatriate (i.e., the intercept at T1), whereas  $\beta_{e1}$  indicates the change of the intercept at T2 *as compared to* T1. Note that, as a result, adding  $\beta_{e1}$  to  $\beta_{e0}$  gives the intercept *at* T2. The same applies to expatriate spouses. Thus, by using these interaction effects with time, we can investigate whether the strength of these relationships remains the same (i.e., nonsignificant effect of time) or has changed at T2 as compared to T1 (i.e., showing a significant effect of time). Note that a significant change *over time* is conceptually different from a significant effect *at* T2. In the tables we will report the effects at T1 as well as the change *at T2 as compared to T1*. Furthermore, in case a significant difference occurs, we perform a follow-up analysis to estimate whether the effect at T2 was significant or not. Finally, the covariance matrix provides information on the correlation between expatriates and expatriate spouses at both time points and the correlations between the two time points for both partners (see Table 3.3b).

Model improvement can be tested through the difference in deviance using a chi-squared test. The deviance is an inverse relative goodness-of-fit measure: the smaller the deviance, the better the model fits the data and the larger the decrease in deviance, the more improvement of the model fit. In all analyses, the independent variables were centered. We used “role-wise” centering, that is, separate centering for expatriates and expatriate spouses based on their (separate) means.

Furthermore, we found that affective conflict had a positive skew and psychological adjustment had a negative skew. Therefore, we checked whether our results changed substantially when using the natural log transformation of these scales. This was not the case. We therefore report analyses of the untransformed data. Additionally, we checked whether our results changed when we included the demographic variables (see Method section).<sup>11</sup> Because the key model results were not influenced by these control variables, we did not include them in our final analyses. Controlling for relationship satisfaction did not change the overall pattern of results.

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<sup>11</sup> It is likely that the effect of an extra year in the host-country is more influential after half a year's stay than after a three-year stay. To account for this, a natural logarithm of the length of stay was calculated. However, no significant results emerged for this transformed measure either. Similarly, the natural logarithm of relationship duration was calculated, but this measure also yielded no significant results.

## Results

### *Descriptives and Correlations*

Means and standard deviations are shown in Table 3.1a and 3.1b. Both for expatriates and for expatriate spouses, levels of affective conflict and avoidance at T2 did not differ from levels at T1 (expatriates' affective conflict and avoidance respectively;  $t(44) = 0.87, ns$ ;  $t(44) = 0.92, ns$ ; expatriate spouses' affective conflict and avoidance respectively,  $t(44) = 0.27, ns$ ;  $t(34) = -0.35, ns$ ). Psychological adjustment was significantly lower at T2 than at T1 for expatriates,  $t(44) = 3.01, p < .01$ , and expatriate spouses,  $t(44) = 2.01, p = .05$ . Some differences between expatriates and expatriate spouses emerged. Expatriates tended to avoid more than expatriate spouses, especially at T1; paired t-test: T1,  $t(43) = 2.78, p < .01$ ; T2,  $t(44) = 1.97, p < .06$ . Moreover, at T1 expatriates' psychological adjustment was significantly higher than expatriate spouses' adjustment,  $t(44) = 2.36, p < .05$ .

**Table 3.1a** Means, standard deviations, and range for expatriates and expatriate spouses at T1

	Expatriate			Expatriate spouse		
	min - max	<i>M</i>	<i>sd</i>	min - max	<i>M</i>	<i>sd</i>
<b>Affective conflict</b>	1.00 - 5.25	2.66	0.90	1.25 - 5.00	2.62	1.02
<b>Avoidance</b>	1.00 - 6.50	3.51	1.21	1.00 - 5.25	2.81	1.13
<b>Psychological adjustment</b>	2.80 - 5.00	4.36	0.47	3.40 - 5.00	4.16	0.48
<b>Age</b>	26.00 - 60.00	41.98	9.06	24.00 - 64.00	40.42	9.30
<b>Relationship duration</b>	1.50 - 37.00	17.39	9.55	1.50 - 37.00	17.39	9.55
<b>Years in host country</b>	0.15 - 5.50	1.53	1.07	0.15 - 5.50	1.49	1.04

Note:  $n = 45$

**Table 3.1b** Means, standard deviations, and range for expatriates and expatriate spouses at T2

	Expatriate			Expatriate spouse		
	min - max	<i>M</i>	<i>sd</i>	min - max	<i>M</i>	<i>sd</i>
<b>Affective conflict</b>	1.25 - 4.25	2.57	0.74	1.25 - 4.50	2.58	0.83
<b>Avoidance</b>	1.50 - 7.00	3.37	1.22	1.00 - 4.75	2.84	1.04
<b>Psychological adjustment</b>	2.40 - 5.00	4.19	0.51	2.00 - 5.00	3.99	0.64

Note:  $n = 45$

In Table 3.2a, the correlations between the variables are shown for expatriates and expatriate spouses separately. For both partners, correlations between T1 and T2 measures were high. Table 3.2b represents the correlations between expatriates' and expatriate spouses' measures. The correlations on the diagonal are a measure of interdependence between the expatriate and the expatriate spouse. No significant correlations existed between expatriates' and expatriate spouses' avoidance behavior at T1 or at T2. Apparently, to what extent one uses an avoidant conflict handling approach is not related to one's partner's avoidance behavior.

**Table 3.2a** Correlation coefficients for expatriates and expatriate spouses separately

	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>Time 1</b>						
1. <b>Affective conflict</b>	<b>.91</b>	.20	-.30*	.61***	-.22	-.29
2. <b>Avoidance</b>	.14	<b>.79</b>	.02	-.12	<b>.52***</b>	-.03
3. <b>Psychological adjustment</b>	-.30*	-.03	<b>.72</b>	-.30*	.18	<b>.47**</b>
<b>Time 2</b>						
4. <b>Affective conflict</b>	.62***	.12	-.20	<b>.86</b>	-.19	-.54***
5. <b>Avoidance</b>	.29	.68***	-.11	.03	<b>.73</b>	-.14
6. <b>Psychological adjustment</b>	-.27	-.10	.71***	-.36*	-.08	<b>.80</b>

Note:  $n = 45$ ; Correlation coefficients for expatriates are printed below the diagonal, coefficients for expatriates spouses are printed above the diagonal. Cronbach alpha's are on the diagonal, in bold \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ , two-tailed.

**Table 3.2b** Correlations between expatriates' measures and expatriate spouses' measures

	expatriate spouse	1	2	3	4	5	6
<b>expatriate</b>							
<b>Time 1</b>							
1. <b>Affective conflict</b>	<b>.52***</b>	.10	-.12	.39**	-.29	-.13	
2. <b>Avoidance</b>	.09	<b>-.12</b>	-.13	.06	-.27	.10	
3. <b>Psychological adjustment</b>	.09	-.04	<b>.34*</b>	-.07	.08	.15	
<b>Time 2</b>							
4. <b>Affective conflict</b>	.44**	-.03	-.25	<b>.40**</b>	-.27	-.37*	
5. <b>Avoidance</b>	.17	-.09	-.15	.11	<b>-.27</b>	.19	
6. <b>Psychological adjustment</b>	-.02	-.22	.29	-.02	-.09	<b>.21</b>	

Note:  $n = 45$ ; Correlations coefficients on the diagonal (bold) are a measure of interdependence \*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ , two-tailed



### Analyzing the Model

The multilevel analysis was performed in successive steps. Starting from a base model that contained only the intercept and the effect of time, we first entered actor effects of conflict for both partners, and its interaction with time (i.e., sub-headings “time” indicates whether the effect changed over time; Table 3.3a). Overall, the model improved significantly,  $\Delta\chi^2(4) = 29.3, p < .001$ . However, the inclusion of partner effects of affective conflict did not improve the model,  $\Delta\chi^2(4) = 4.4, p = .35$ . Therefore, they were not included in the remainder of the analysis.<sup>12</sup>

In order to investigate the interaction effect of avoidance, we first controlled for main effects of (own and other’s) avoidance; next, we added the interactions of avoidance by affective conflict and their interactions with time (i.e., conflict by avoidance by time). Specifically, for expatriates and expatriate spouses, both the interaction of own affective conflict by own avoidance behavior (i.e., “actor interactions”) as well as the interaction of own affective conflict by other’s avoidance behavior (i.e., “partner interaction”) were added to the equation. The model significantly improved,  $\Delta\chi^2(8) = 19.0, p = .015$ , and is as such depicted in Tables 3.3a and 3.3b. First, the significant *B* coefficient of the main effect of time (under the heading “intercepts”, Table 3.3a) indicates a significant decrease of psychological adjustment over time, both for expatriates and for expatriate spouses. Nonetheless, both at T1 and at T2, psychological adjustment was relatively high and comparable to scores in other, larger samples (Van der Zee & Sanderman, 1993). Furthermore, Table 3.3b indicates a strong association between participants’ T1 and T2 measures of psychological adjustment.

Second, for both partners, one’s own experience of affective conflict is negatively related to psychological adjustment. In support of Hypothesis 2a and 2b, this harmful effect amplified significantly over time, but only for expatriate spouses. Additional tests revealed that, at T2 (but not at T1), the negative effect of affective conflict on psychological adjustment was stronger for expatriate spouses than for expatriates, T1  $\chi^2(1) = 0.38, p = .54$ ; T2  $\chi^2(1) = 8.01, p = .005$ . This finding was reflected in a decrease in variances; more observed variance was taken up by the model.

Finally, we will explore the results regarding the interaction effects. While there were no significant interaction effects for expatriates, two significant interaction effects for expatriate spouses emerged, but only at T2: First, we found a positive interaction between expatriate spouses’ perceptions of affective conflict and their own avoidance behavior. Although this effect was not significant at T1, it seemed to gain strength over time (Model 03, Table 3.3a), which is in line with Hypothesis 2b. Indeed, additional tests revealed that at T2 the effect was significant ( $t = 3.03, p < .004$ ). In Figure 3.2a, expatriate spouses’ psychological adjustment is plotted as a function of their perceived affective conflict at T2, with separate lines for high versus low (own) avoidance behavior. As hypothesized, the negative relationship between

<sup>12</sup> The remainder of the results did not change significantly when partner effects were added.

affective conflict and psychological adjustment is weaker when there is high rather than low avoidance.

A similar effect emerged for the moderating effect of expatriates' avoidance behavior on the conflict-adjustment relationship of expatriate spouses (i.e., partner-interaction effects of expatriate spouses). Although this interaction effect was, again, not significant at T1, it significantly increased over time, which is, again, in line with Hypothesis 2b. Additional tests indeed indicated that *at* T2, the interaction effect was significant ( $t = 4.37, p < .001$ ). Figure 3.2b depicts the moderating effect of the expatriate's avoidance behavior on the relationship between expatriate spouse's conflict and adjustment at T2. This figure clearly shows that the negative effect of the expatriate spouses' conflict perceptions on their own psychological adjustment was mitigated when the expatriate exhibited high instead of low avoidance. Finally, we explored whether expatriate spouses' actor and partner interaction effects were significantly stronger than expatriates' nonsignificant interaction effects. Again, and in support of Hypothesis 2a, interaction effects were significantly stronger for expatriate spouses: actor interaction effects at T2,  $\chi^2(1) = 4.95, p = .03$ , partner interaction effects at T2  $\chi^2(1) = 6.37, p = .01$ .

In sum, our results support all three hypotheses, and paint a clear and consistent picture. Both actor and partner avoidance had a positive effect on the relationship between affective conflict and psychological adjustment. These effects emerged for expatriate spouses only and were stronger at a later stage of the expatriate assignment.

**Table 3.3a** Fixed effects of affective conflict and avoidance behavior on psychological adjustment

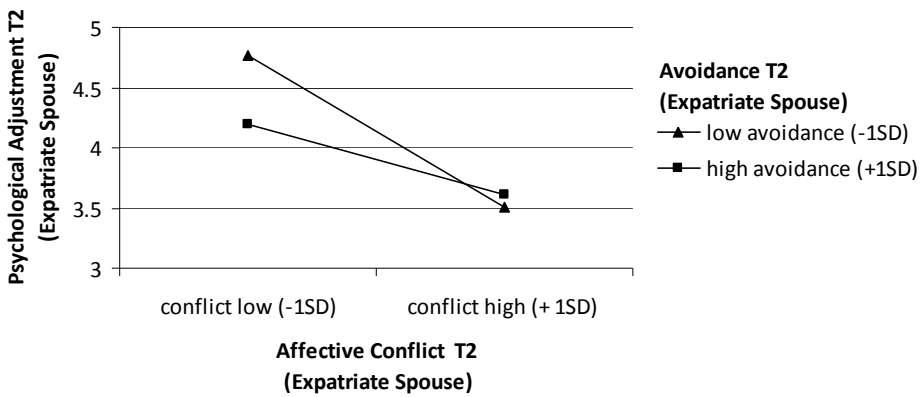
Fixed effect	Final Model	
	B	s.e.
<b>Intercepts</b>		
Intercept expatriate	4.36	.07
time	-.14*	.05
Intercept spouse	4.18	.07
time	-.16*	.06
<b>Main Effects</b>		
<i>actor effect expatriates</i>		
Affective conflict	-.16**	.06
time	-.12	.08
Avoiding	.03	.04
time	-.06	.05
<i>actor effect spouses</i>		
Affective conflict	-.21**	.06
time	-.37***	.08
Avoiding	.02	.05
time	-.14*	.07
<i>partner effect expatriates</i>		
Avoiding	.02	.05
time	-.13*	.06
<i>partner effect spouses</i>		
Avoiding	.00	.05
time	.14*	.06
<b>Interaction Effects</b>		
<i>actor effect expatriates</i>		
actor-Conflict *actor- Avoiding	.03	.04
time	-.04	.08
<i>actor effect spouses</i>		
actor-Conflict *actor- Avoiding	.06	.05
time	.15††	.08
<i>partner effect expatriates</i>		
actor-Conflict *partner- Avoiding	.04	.05
time	-.01	.07
<i>partner effect spouses</i>		
actor-Conflict *partner- Avoiding	-.01	.04
time	.28***	.07
Deviance	154.3	
	<i>n</i> =	178

*Note:* Due to missing values *n* = 178, instead of 180 (i.e., 45 couples, that is 90 individuals at two points in time)  
 \*\*\* *p* < .001, \*\* *p* < .01, \* *p* < .05, †† *p* < .07, two-tailed.

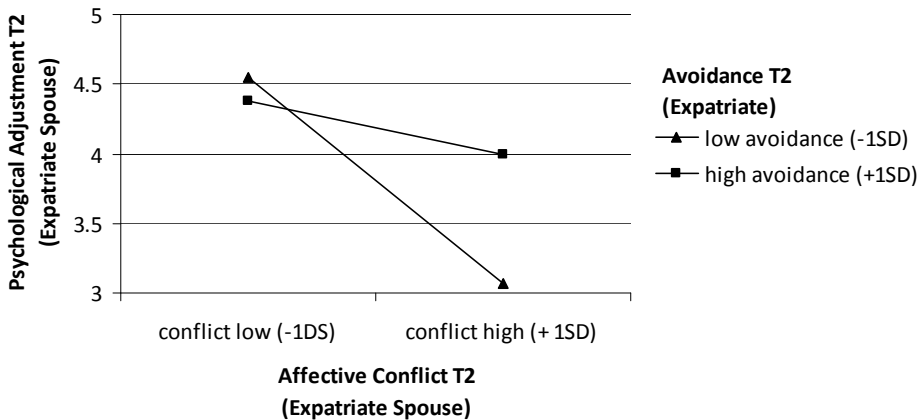
**Table 3.3b** Random effects: variances, covariances, and correlation coefficients

	Variances and covariances				Correlations		
	exp t1	exp t2	sps t1	sps t2	exp t1	exp t2	sps t1
	var (s.e.)	var (s.e.)	var (s.e.)	var (s.e.)			
expatriate time 1	.20 (.04)						
expatriate time 2	.15 (.04)	.22 (.05)			.74***		
spouse time 1	.09 (.03)	.07 (.04)	.20 (.04)		.45**	.32*	
spouse time 2	.06 (.03)	.03 (.03)	.11 (.03)	.19 (.04)	.30*	.17	.58***

\*\*\*  $p < .001$ , \*\*  $p < .01$ , \*  $p < .05$ , two-tailed.



**Figure 3.2a** Expatriate spouse’s psychological adjustment at T2: Actor effect affective conflict (T2) under conditions of high versus low avoidance behavior (T2)



**Figure 3.2b** Expatriate spouse’s psychological adjustment at T2: Actor effect affective conflict (T2) under conditions of high versus low avoidance behavior of expatriate (T2)

## Discussion

The dyadic coping of expatriate couples with the new situation abroad is an important factor determining expatriate adjustment (see also e.g., Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). That is, effective adjustment to the new situation abroad can be seriously hampered if one or both partners in the expatriate couple are dissatisfied with the new arrangement. The aim of this research was to gain further insight into the dynamics of expatriate relationships, and the effects on psychological adjustment. We focused our analyses on the effect of affective conflicts on psychological adjustment, and particularly on how conflict avoidance may influence this relationship. Contributing to close relationship research in general, and expatriation research in particular, we adopted a multilevel approach specifically suitable for our nested data by using an Actor Partner Interdependence Model. This way, we took into account the expatriate and expatriate spouse simultaneously, which allowed us to explore the relational dynamics at play that influenced both partners' psychological adjustment. It further allowed for an exploration of possible differences between expatriates and expatriate spouses. Additionally, we used a longitudinal design, enabling us to examine the dynamics over time during the stay abroad.

Overall, our findings largely supported our main hypothesis that avoidance behavior can reduce the negative consequences of affective conflict for psychological adjustment. Contrary to much previous research, recent studies have pointed at such a potential positive side of avoidance. Especially when interpersonal conflicts seem irresolvable or concern identity threatening affective issues, one's own avoidance may be used as a defense mechanism (e.g., Buysse & Ickes, 1999; De Dreu & Van Vianen, 2001; Roloff & Ifert, 2000; Simpson et al., 2003). Additionally, one's partner's avoidance may signal care and consideration towards the (intimate) relationship and towards the other party (Wang, 2006; Ohbuchi & Atsumi, 2010; Tjosvold & Sun, 2002). As such, the present study further corroborates research stressing the potential positive side of conflict avoidance.

Our results revealed two boundary conditions. First, the effects were particularly observed for expatriate spouses, but not for expatriates. This is in line with previous research showing that expatriate spouses have an increased sensitivity to (harmful) interpersonal affective interactions (Van Erp et al., in press), which can be explained in terms of power-dependence discrepancies originating from role differences between the two partners. That is, whereas the expatriate usually has direct access to financial and social resources, the expatriate spouse is largely dependent on the expatriate for those resources during an international assignment. Therefore, expatriate spouses were expected to be more sensitive to the content of the interpersonal interaction in their relationship (cf. Halloran, 1998; Loving et al., 2004; Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003; Rusbult et al., 2001). The second boundary condition involved time. We only found effects at T2 suggesting that over time, changes in

a couple's mutual roles become more prominent, and its consequences more visible. These results were additionally reflected in the finding that expatriates and expatriate spouses alike report decreasing levels of psychological adjustment. As there were no differences between those who filled out both questionnaires versus those who filled out the T1 questionnaire only, this decrease cannot directly be attributed to self-selection processes and a biased sample. Rather, the decrease in psychological adjustment may reflect relational processes during a taxing and stressful phase in the expatriation assignment where partners experience a general decrease in valuable resources (cf. Hobfoll, 1989). The Conservation of Resources theory clearly suggests that such resources are important to cope with challenging events such as life abroad (Hobfoll, 1989; see also e.g., Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis, & Jackson, 2003). Notably, our findings suggest that relational processes may play an important role in explaining why such a recession phase is oftentimes observed in expatriation.

An important contribution of our research is that we anticipated and demonstrated a positive side of avoiding behavior in close relationships going through a challenging life event. Although it would be too simplistic to say that avoidance is just simply good, the present study clearly suggests that conflict avoidance may be beneficial to the self, the relationship and ultimately one's adjustment abroad. However, as the adventure of moving abroad together may be undertaken especially by partners who are satisfied with, and committed to their relationship, this effect may particularly concern healthy relationships. For such relationships, avoidance may reflect tolerance of irresolvable issues and acceptance of each other's unchangeable vices (Roloff & Solomon, 2002; cf. Pike & Sillars, 1985). In other words, conflict avoidance may reflect "an ideology of tolerance in which one allows individuals to follow their own path even if disagreeing with it" (Roloff & Ifert 2000, p. 161). This strategy might also be fed by the idea that the assignment is temporary and things might change again for the better upon one's arrival back home.

Interestingly, Figure 3.2a seems to indicate that the moderating effect of avoidance was somewhat more pronounced when conflict perceptions were low. Specifically, when conflict levels are low, expatriate spouses particularly benefitted from their own *low* instead of high avoidance behavior. Presumably, when conflict levels are low rather than high, a satisfactory solution is more easily reached. As such, own low avoidance under low levels of conflict is somewhat more beneficial, whereas high avoidance in these circumstances may "prompt processes [like mulling and obsessive thought] that cause the individual to see the problems as serious" (Roloff & Ifert, 2000, p. 154).

#### *Limitations & directions for future research*

Clearly, our research comes with limitations and directions for future research. First, although our analyses revealed a consistent pattern of results, in view of the small sample, the findings should be considered with some caution. Second, we argued that different

patterns for expatriates and expatriate spouse result from a power-dependence imbalance. Although previous studies indeed suggest such an imbalance (e.g., Punnett, 1997; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001), future research may want to use more specific measures to determine the perceptions of dependence versus power among expatriates and expatriate spouses. For example, drawing from Rusbult's investment model, the potential outcomes of alternative involvements, the investments made in the relationship, and the degree to which the relationships caters for one's needs, may be taken into account (see e.g., Rusbult et al., 2001).

Gaining better insight regarding the power-dependence relationship among expatriate couples is furthermore important because of the presence of a confounding factor. Since expatriates were primarily men, and expatriate spouses primarily women, *gender* may offer an alternative explanation for our findings. Research has indicated that gender may influence interpersonal reactions. For example, women have a tendency to demand, whereas men tend to withdraw (e.g., Verhofstadt et al., 2005), and women are usually more relationally oriented (e.g., Cross, Bacon, & Morris, 2000). Nevertheless, such gender differences are not consistently found (e.g., Vogel & Karney, 2002), and it is believed that possibly confounding factors such as (role-related) status and power play an important role in gender-related findings (Watson, 1994). Although in the present study gender may have acted as a catalyst, we believe that role differences offer a better explanation for our findings than gender differences. As we only found effects at T2, these results suggest that with time, and as the assignment unfolds, changes in a couple's mutual roles become more prominent, and its consequences more visible. Nonetheless, future research is needed to shed more light on these issues, which may come within reach, as the number of female expatriates accompanied by a male spouse is slowly increasing.

Another limitation of the present study is the absence of a comparison group. Although expatriation research has up till now hardly made use of control groups (see Hechanova et al., 2003), it could provide useful further insights. For example, using a control group of domestic couples may clarify to what extent the assumed dependency imbalance and the found effects are indeed a consequence of the transition to living abroad. Furthermore, using couples that go through other types of transition phases may extend our knowledge on the impact of relational dynamics in such trajectories and give further insight into the broader generalizability of the findings. Another possibility regarding comparison measures is to include pre- and post assignment data. Although we gathered data at two points in time, giving us some insight in the dynamics over time, including more data points will be helpful in understanding the changes that occur as a result of the assignment (see e.g. Van Oudenhoven & Van der Zee, 2002).

In this respect it may also be interesting to direct future research at the interplay between passive and more active coping strategies, such as problem-focused and emotion-focused coping. Coping with stressful events may be viewed more specifically as a dynamic process in which people may adopt various coping strategies sequentially as well as simultaneously (Connor-Smith et al., 2000; Folkman & Lazarus, 1980). For example, Folkman and Lazarus (1985) demonstrated that both problem-focused coping strategies and emotion-focused coping strategies were used in all stages of a stressful event (i.e., college examination period), be it to different extents. As such, they argued that “unless we focus on change, we cannot learn how people come to manage stressful events and conditions” (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985, p.150). Indeed, such focus may answer, for example, the question of what happens during later stages of the assignment. Recent meta-analytical results suggest that a recession phase may take an extensive period of time (i.e., up to 4 years; Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). Our participants were on average 1.5 years in the host-country (T1). The processes we observed may therefore even intensify for some time. Yet, after such a period, expatriate couples may find a way to resolve the underlying issues (e.g., the expatriate spouse finding a job of his/her own) or they may simply disappear (i.e., when going back home).

Finally, our study was restricted to psychological adjustment. Although considered a key construct for international adjustment (cf. Ruben & Kealey, 1979), future research may want to focus on other aspects of adjustment. For example, the extent to which one is adjusted to the daily problems encountered abroad, socio-cultural adjustment- or the new work environment—professional adjustment—are important as well (see e.g., Black et al., 1991; Searle & Ward, 1990). Future research may explore to what extent relational dynamics experienced within an expatriate relationship can facilitate or hinder a broader, multidimensional, concept of intercultural adjustment. This would allow us to capture more thoroughly the influence of interpersonal interactions on all facets of the adaptation process.

### *Practical Implications*

This study clearly indicates that relational dynamics and particularly the expatriate spouse play a pivotal role in the success of assignments abroad. These insights are important from the perspective of the couple themselves, therapists or counselors that may get involved when things go wrong, and—of course—the assigning company.

First, couples should not only be focused on the practical issues surrounding the move and the cultural differences to be encountered, but also on the importance of changes the move will bring to the home domain. As couples anticipate the conflicts that these changes bring about, they may regard them as less troublesome and will be better able to handle them adequately. They may also acknowledge the fact that sometimes it may be good to turn away from the conflict and leave the situation as it is, particularly when problems appear irresolvable and disclosing one’s disapproval may undermine one’s sense of self and “sharedness” with the other.



For counselors and relationship therapists confronted with expatriate couples having relationship problems, our research may help them to get to the core of problems more easily. With the increasing availability of internet-facilitated counseling, such help is also more easily within reach, even when one is in a country far away. In general, the dynamic processes addressed in our research may also be indicative for intimate partners going through other transition phases changing mutual roles.

Finally, multinational companies usually focus solely on the expatriate, whereas expatriate spouses are barely involved in (pre-)assignment procedures and preparations. These organizations may consider to invest more in addressing the circumstances likely responsible for causing the problems. For example, expatriate spouses may be provided with valuable resources, including help with finding a job in the new country or easy access to social networks. It might also be worthwhile to facilitate a network where experienced expatriate couples can advise first time expatriate couples. Organizations should not only be interested in such measures out of responsibility, but also because there is clear evidence that stress and strain as well as well-being and satisfaction “cross over” from one party to the other (Demerouti, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2005) and both positive and negative features of the home domain “spill over” to the work domain (e.g., Van Steenbergen et al., 2007). As such, happy couples may assure productive workers, which is clearly important considering the high costs associated with expatriation (Selmer, 2001; cf. McNulty & Tharenou, 2005).

# 4



## **Lean on me: Own and partner intercultural personality dimensions**

This chapter is a modified version of an article that is submitted as:  
Van Erp, K. J. P. M., Van der Zee, K. I., Giebels, E., & Van Duijn, M. A. J.

Lean on me: The importance of own and partner intercultural  
personality dimensions for the success of an international assignment.



Business exchanges more and more occur in a global context, increasingly urging organizations to send their employees to overseas postings. Expectations are that the number of expatriate employees will keep growing in the future (Brookfield Global Relocation Services [GRS], 2009). Because expatriates usually fulfill key positions and transition costs are high, there are huge investments necessary for realizing such international postings. Furthermore, the costs involved in a failed assignment or even a premature return of the expatriate are high (e.g., Selmer, 2001; cf. McNulty & Tharenou, 2005). Therefore, expatriate's effective adjustment to the professional aspects of the international assignment as well as to the non-work elements of life abroad is of great importance (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). Unfortunately, effective adjustment is not a matter of course: Moving abroad is often characterized by high levels of uncertainty due to unfamiliarity with the new circumstances, and often loss of control (see Van der Zee & Van der Gang, 2007). To cope with these potentially taxing aspects of an international assignment, personality seems to provide an important resource (e.g., Shaffer et al., 2006; see also e.g., DeLongis, & Holtzman, 2005; Hobfoll, 1989). Personality not only determines whether individuals perceive potential stressful events as threatening or not, it also influences whether they are capable of constructive behavioral reactions to those events (Connor-Smith & Flachsbart, 2007).

In the present study we will investigate the relationship of personality with psychological and socio-cultural adjustment. Additionally, we will focus on the relationship between personality and professional adjustment, in terms of job performance and organizational commitment. Since the expatriate's new function abroad is the main reason for the international move, such work-related outcomes may be an ultimate criterion for success. Indeed, there is a lot of empirical work on possible determinants (e.g., previous overseas experience, cultural novelty) of expatriates' work-related outcomes (for an overview see Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. 2005; Hechanova et al., 2003). Although in the 1960's and 1970's several studies focused on personality-based criteria predicting expatriate success, results were not unequivocal and a unifying framework was lacking. As a result, after the 1970's the focus in research shifted to other criteria for international success (see Ones & Viswesvaran, 1997). However, there is a regained interest in personality predictors of expatriation (work) outcomes (e.g., Shaffer et al. 2006; Caligiuri, 2000; for an overview see Mol, Born, Willemsen, Van der Molen, 2005). Here, we attempt to gain further insight into the relationship between personality dimensions and expatriation. Moreover, we are not only interested in the expatriate but also in the trailing partner, the expatriate spouse.

The expatriate spouse seems to play an important role during the assignment abroad. First of all, the vast majority—about 90%—of expatriate employees is accompanied by their spouse or life partner (Brookfield GRS, 2009). More important, the adjustment of the expatriate spouse has been found to be an essential factor for the adjustment of the expatriate (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005), and recent findings point at the significance

of characteristics of the close relationship (Van Erp, Giebels, Van der Zee, & Van Duijn, in press). However, up till now most studies on personality and expatriation have aimed primarily at the expatriate him or herself. Only a limited number of studies has focused on the relevance of personality traits among expatriate spouses (e.g., Ali et al., 2003), and studies simultaneously considering both partners' perspective are virtually non-existent. Focusing on both the expatriate and the expatriate spouse simultaneously is therefore an important contribution of this study.

#### *Personality as an internal and external coping resource*

Next to many positive sides (e.g., interesting experience, good salary, nice weather), an international assignment may be stressful and taxing as well. In order to cope effectively with the new situation abroad, it is important to have enough *coping resources*—personal characteristics and social circumstances—at one's disposal (see e.g., Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis, & Jackson, 2003). Ironically, an international assignment also poses a threat to one's coping resources. For example, expatriates lose the proximity of family and friends, and an expatriate spouse—turning from independent working mother to dependent fulltime housewife—may experience a loss of identity. Especially under these circumstances *personality traits* may become particularly valuable as important internal coping resources. For example, being open minded helps to appraise a potential threatening or stressful situation (which would lead to depletion of resources) as challenging (which protects resources; Van der Zee, Van Oudenhoven, & De Grijs, 2004). In the context of an intimate relationship, one may draw from one's partner's resources as well. Specifically, we expect that if one's own personality dimensions are insufficient, the personality dimensions of one's partner may be a helpful and beneficial substitute. For example, being low in social initiative is not necessarily prohibiting effective adjustment abroad if one's intimate partner takes initiatives to go out, or invites people over. Studies focusing on the importance of coping resources derived from significant others usually focused on social support; the possibility of the personality of a significant other to act as a coping resource has, as far as we know, not been studied before (see e.g., Thoits, 1995).

In sum, in the present study we expect that high levels of intercultural personality traits (i.e., having sufficient internal resources) may facilitate effective adjustment abroad. Furthermore, at the couple level, a low level on an intercultural trait in one partner may be compensated by a higher level of this trait in the other party (i.e., external coping resource). In order to draw substantiated conclusions regarding cause and effect, next to a cross-sectional analysis, part of our research will rely on a longitudinal design.

### *Intercultural personality dimensions*

Previous research has underscored the relevance of personality dimensions for individual well-being and satisfaction. For example, personality dimensions have been found to be related both to non-work outcomes, such as marital quality and marital satisfaction (e.g., Barelds, 2005; Robins, Caspi, & Moffitt, 2000; Watson, Hubbard, & Wiese, 2000) and to work-related outcomes such as job performance and job satisfaction (Barrick, Mount, Judge, 2001; Judge, Heller, & Mount, 2002). Not surprisingly, also in the domain of expatriation personality dimensions have been found to be substantial predictors of adjustment (e.g., Shaffer et al., 2006; Van der Zee et al., 2007; Van Oudenhoven, Mol, & Van der Zee, 2003). Some of these studies supported the role of general personality traits, such as the Big Five dimensions, as determinants of intercultural success (e.g., Caligiuri, 2000; Huang, Chi, & Lawler, 2005). Others reveal the importance of personality dimensions specifically associated with intercultural situations such as cultural empathy and open mindedness (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000; 2001; see Leong, 2007; Ali et al., 2003; Peltokorpi, 2008). These more specific traits seem better tuned to the intercultural context, and have additional value in predicting intercultural success (see Leone et al., 2004; Van der Zee, Van Oudenhoven et al., 2004).

In the present research, we focus on three intercultural personality dimensions: emotional stability, open mindedness and social initiative. *Emotional stability* refers to the tendency to remain calm in stressful situations versus a tendency to show strong emotional reactions under stressful circumstances (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000; 2001). Particularly individuals who are high in emotional stability seem to have the resources at their disposal to cope with stressful and unfamiliar aspects of an international assignment. At the same time, an international assignment can be regarded as a challenging situation with opportunities to literally and metaphorically expand one's boundaries. Especially social initiative and open mindedness provide personal resources to embrace the challenges of diversity, because these traits help to connect with and to learn from others in a foreign context. Specifically, *social initiative* refers to a tendency to actively approach social situations and to show initiative, whereas *open mindedness* refers to an open and unprejudiced attitude toward out-group members and toward different cultural norms and values (Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000; 2001). In the present study we will link emotional stability, social initiative, and open mindedness to expatriates' and expatriate spouses' adjustment outcomes. In line with previous studies (e.g., Black et al., 1991; Searle & Ward, 1990), we adopt a multi-dimensional view of international adjustment. Specifically, we will distinguish between psychological, socio-cultural and professional adjustment.

*Non-work outcomes: Psychological and socio-cultural adjustment*

Psychological adjustment refers to “internal psychological outcomes such as mental health and personal satisfaction”, whereas socio-cultural adjustment refers to external psychological outcomes that link the individual to the new environment, such as the ability to deal with daily problems like general living conditions, transportation, entertainment, and health care services in the host country (Ali et al., 2003, p 565; cf. Van der Zee et al., 2007). In order to reach higher levels of psychological adjustment expatriates and expatriate spouses will especially benefit from the ability to cope with expatriation-related stress and uncertainty in an emotionally balanced way. Not surprisingly, past research indicated emotional stability as the most important intercultural personality trait influencing psychological adjustment (Van der Zee et al., 2007; Van Oudenhoven et al., 2003; see also Van der Zee, Atsma, & Brodbeck, 2004).

Moreover, social initiative and open mindedness may be positively associated with psychological as well as socio-cultural adjustment. In this regard, studies on extraversion—a general personality dimension closely related to social initiative—show that individuals who score high on this trait are more likely to experience positive emotions (Costa & McCrae, 1985). Additionally, recent research indicates that social initiative induces individuals to experience intercultural situations as a challenge rather than a threat (Van der Zee & Van der Gang, 2007). We therefore expect that individuals high in social initiative will experience a better mental health and higher levels of personal satisfaction (i.e., psychological adjustment). Furthermore, persons high in social initiative are better able to develop and maintain new social contacts in the host-country culture and they will actively seek out to solve the daily problems an international assignment entails. This will enable them to reach more effective levels of socio-cultural adjustment.

Second, similar results have emerged regarding open mindedness. An open attitude helps individuals to appraise stressful situations as challenging rather than threatening (Van der Zee, Van Oudenhoven et al., 2004). As such, it may enhance psychological adjustment. Indeed, studies have revealed a positive relationship between open mindedness and psychological adjustment (Van Oudenhoven & Van der Zee, 2002; cf. Ali et al., 2003). Furthermore, open minded individuals seem less deterred by new and unknown customs and daily problems. This enables them to swiftly adjust socio-culturally to the new environment (e.g., Huang et al., 2005; Caligiuri, 2000; Ali et al., 2003). In sum, we posit:

*Hypothesis 1a: Emotional stability is positively associated with expatriates’ and expatriate spouses’ psychological adjustment.*

*Hypothesis 1b: Social initiative is positively associated with expatriates’ and expatriate spouses’ psychological and socio-cultural adjustment.*

*Hypothesis 1c: Open-mindedness is positively associated with expatriates' and expatriate spouses' psychological and socio-cultural adjustment.*

#### *Work-outcome: Professional adjustment*

In the section above we discussed personality as a predictor of psychological and socio-cultural adjustment among both the expatriate and the expatriate spouse. However, and especially for the assigning organization, *expatriates' professional adjustment*, seems to be the ultimate criterion for a successful international assignment. As indicators of expatriates' professional adjustment we will include *job performance* as well as *organizational commitment*. First, as the expatriate's new position is the main reason for the international move, meeting the requirements of the job is of major importance, both to the expatriate employee, and to the assigning organization (e.g., Mol, Born, & Van der Molen, 2005). Additionally, given the high monetary and immaterial cost involved in premature termination of an international assignment, dedicated and loyal expatriates are of great importance to the organizations as well. Individuals who are highly committed to the organization more strongly identify with its goals and values and are willing to make an effort for the benefit of the company. Studies suggest that highly committed employees are eager to stay a member of the organization and are less likely to leave (e.g., Naumann, Widmier, & Jackson 2000; cf. Mowday, Steers & Porter, 1979). Therefore, organizational commitment may be considered crucial to actual completion of the international assignment (e.g., Naumann et al., 2000; Guzzo, Noonan, & Elfron, 1994; see also Tett & Meyer, 1993).

Domestic studies have explored the importance of personality traits for work-related outcomes such as job performance (Barrick et al., 2001) and job satisfaction (Judge et al., 2002). Increasingly, scholars have started to investigate the role of personality dimensions for professional adjustment in the international context (e.g., Ones & Viswesvaran, 1997; Shaffer et al., 2006; see also Mol, Born, Willemsen et al., 2005). From these studies we can derive hypotheses regarding relationships between the intercultural personality traits of interest to the present study and work outcomes.

As mentioned earlier, emotional stability makes persons less susceptible to unpleasant surprises and more capable of dealing effectively with the unsettled situation resulting from the international move (Shaffer et al., 2006). Applied to the work situation, emotional stability may help expatriates to meet the requirements of their international job, because they are more confident and will more easily deal with various complications and obstructions on the job. We therefore anticipate a positive relationship between emotional stability and job performance. Indeed, domestic studies (Barrick et al., 2001) as well as studies in the expatriation domain (Mol, Born, Willemsen et al., 2005) established a positive relationship of emotional stability (as indicated by a general Big Five measure) with job performance. In contrast, studies usually failed to find a relationship between emotional stability and



individual's commitment to the norms and values of the organization or the willingness to make an effort for the organization (e.g., Tziner, Waismal-Manor, Vardi, Brodman, 2008; Westerman & Simmons, 2007; see also Erdheim, Wang, & Zickar, 2006). In the current study we therefore posit;

*Hypothesis 2a: An expatriate's emotional stability is positively associated with his or her job performance.*

Second, social initiative is expected to be related to both job performance and organizational commitment. As mentioned earlier, individuals high in social initiative may perceive the intercultural situation as a challenge rather than a threat (Van der Zee & Van der Gang, 2007). Furthermore, they will more easily connect to others. As a consequence, expatriates high in social initiative may develop fruitful and pleasant social contacts on the job. Smooth interactions with co-workers and more active engagement in the team, may facilitate learning on the job (e.g., Barrick et al., 2001). Additionally, high levels of social initiative may cause expatriates to experience being a member of the organization as more rewarding. In line with findings in expatriation and domestic contexts, we therefore argue that social initiative is positively related to both job performance and organizational commitment (e.g., Barrick et al., 2001; Mol, Born, Willemsen et al., 2005; Shaffer et al., 2006; Westerman & Simons, 2007).

*Hypothesis 2b: An expatriate's social initiative is positively associated with his or her job performance and organizational commitment.*

Finally, open minded expatriates are expected to achieve higher levels of professional adjustment. Open mindedness is associated with curiosity, eagerness to learn, and having wide interests. Furthermore, low prejudice towards the new situation on the job helps to arrive at more accurate interpretations in the new work environment (Huang et al., 2005). This may enable expatriates to master the job's requirements more promptly (e.g., Barrick et al., 2001). Indeed, previous studies endorse the relationship of open mindedness with expatriates' adjustment to work in general (Huang et al. 2005) and with expatriates' job performance in particular (Barrick et al., 2001; Shaffer et al., 2006). Additionally, because open minded individuals likely feel encouraged rather than discouraged by new and unknown customs, it may enhance expatriates' willingness to remain on the international project. Moreover, their open and unprejudiced attitude may increase expatriates' identification with the norms and values of a foreign work environment (cf. Tziner et al., 2008).

*Hypothesis 2c: Open-mindedness is positively associated with expatriate job performance and organizational commitment.*

#### *The mediating effect of psychological and socio-cultural adjustment*

In the previous sections we discussed the association between intercultural personality traits and non-work outcomes and the association between intercultural personality traits and professional outcomes separately. However, adjustment in non-work areas is probably intertwined with adjustment in the work domain. Hence, high levels of distress in one's personal life likely affect one's professional life as well. In the present study we expect that the relationship between intercultural personality traits and professional adjustment is—at least partly—mediated by expatriate's psychological and socio-cultural adjustment.

The idea that being successful and effective at work is not isolated from one's general (i.e., psychological and social) well-being and adjustment, has indeed been emphasized by numerous studies in the domestic domain (e.g., Byron, 2005; Edwards & Rothbard, 2000; Demerouti, Bakker, & Voydanoff, 2010). A wide range of studies explored the interference of the work situation with the home situation (work-to-home interference) and vice versa (home-to-work interference; Demerouti et al., 2010; Demerouti, Geurts, & Kompier, 2007). These studies reveal that difficulties (or positive incidents) experienced in one domain, may inhibit (or facilitate) an individual's functioning in other domains. Especially for expatriates, work and private lives are highly intertwined. However, only a limited number of studies investigated the interconnectedness of the different domains (e.g., Caligiuri, Hyland, Joshi, & Bross, 1998; Kraimer, Wayne & Jaworski, 2001; Takeuchi et al., 2002).

*Hypothesis 3a: Psychological adjustment mediates the relationship between emotional stability and social initiative on the one hand and professional adjustment on the other.*

*Hypothesis 3b: Socio-cultural adjustment mediates the relationship between social initiative and open mindedness on the one hand and professional adjustment on the other.*

#### *Determining the causal effect of intercultural personality dimensions*

In the present research we expect intercultural personality dimensions to influence levels of adjustment among expatriates and expatriate spouses. However, using a cross-sectional design, one can not exclude the alternative interpretation that individuals who are better adjusted, are inclined to perceive their own intercultural personality traits more positively. In order to draw definite conclusions on the impact of these traits on expatriates' and expatriate spouses' levels of adjustment, a cross-sectional analysis on a sample of expatriate couples was followed by a longitudinal analysis (testing Hypothesis 1-3), on a subsample that participated in a follow-up survey one year later.

### *Intercultural personality dimensions and mutual influence*

The process of getting adjusted is not something that happens in a vacuum. On the contrary, expatriates and expatriate spouses likely influence each others' adjustment (cf. Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. 2005). In fact, the international assignment may even increase their mutual dependency. That is, moving abroad, the expatriate and expatriate spouse likely become more reliant on each other, because familiar social networks are left behind. Indeed, a recent study suggested that in adjusting to the new situation expatriates and expatriate spouses are receptive to each others' perceptions and reactions (Van Erp et al., in press).

As mentioned before, the international assignment is a stressful undertaking that calls for coping resources. At the same time, it is also an experience that involves plenty of potential resource losses (e.g., loss of proximity of family and friends, identity loss). To compensate for these losses, individuals may employ other resources available to them. Employing such other resources however, may—again—result in a depletion of these resources. For example, energy can be used up or self-esteem can be at stake (Hobfoll, 1989, Thoits, 1995). Therefore, the higher one's resource, or the bigger one's arsenal of resources, the better the individual will be able to cope with taxing or threatening events.

Earlier we discussed that, whereas one's own intercultural personality traits may function as an internal coping resource, one's partner's intercultural personality dimensions may provide a supportive, external coping resource. Thus, not only one's own intercultural traits may facilitate adjustment, high levels of these traits in one's partner may facilitate adjustment as well. Although external coping resources such as social support received some scientific attention, the mechanisms of how such external resources and personal (internal) resources interact are still relatively unknown (Thoits, 1995; see e.g., Ross & Mirowsky, 1989). The extent to which one's partner's intercultural personality traits may function as a supportive external coping resource has, as far as we know, not been explored.

In the present study we assume that if one's intercultural traits are not sufficient, such resources in one's partner may function as a "resource-buffer" to cope with work and non-work settings abroad. For example, an individual who is low in social initiative may profit from high levels of social initiative in his or her partner, when this partner invites people over and builds up a social network. We thus assume an *exchange of resources* effect such that, when the expatriate's own personal resources are insufficient he/she may rely on the resources of the expatriate spouse (and vice versa):

*Hypothesis 4: Personality of one's partner (emotional stability, social initiative, open mindedness) acts as a moderator in the relationship between one's own personality (emotional stability, social initiative, open mindedness) and adjustment: Particularly at low levels of a respective intercultural personality trait, the level of this trait in one's partner will be positively associated with one's adjustment.*

## Method

### *Respondents*

Participants were approached through Global Connection (GC), an internet-based contact group for expatriate spouses. An e-mail was sent to all 545 Dutch GC-members, explaining the purpose of the research and requesting their participation: 154 members and their partner consented to participate. Additionally, a multinational sent the questionnaire to their 36 Dutch expatriate employees currently living abroad with their partner. Finally, a request for participation in the study was published in a Dutch online expatriate magazine, to which 14 couples responded. Hence, 408 participants (204 couples) received a questionnaire in Dutch by mail, including a self-addressed stamped envelope and an introduction letter. The introduction letter explained that the study focused on expatriate couples' experience when moving abroad, and the way in which partners cope with those challenges as a couple. Anonymity and confidentiality were assured. Each party was instructed to fill out the questionnaire independently. A total of 240 participants (58.8%) returned the questionnaire, including 105 complete couples (210 participants, 51.5%). Two couples filled out the questionnaire inappropriately or had extreme scores on almost all variables. Consequently, they were removed from the dataset. Additionally, we excluded 5 couples who were living in the host-country for 7 years or longer. The remaining 196 participants were between 24 and 64 years of age ( $M = 40.30$ ,  $SD = 8.44$ ). Expatriates were predominantly men (90.8%), expatriate spouses predominantly women (88.8%; our sample contained one homosexual couple). The majority of the participants were married (87.8%), the remaining 12.2% were cohabiting. Relationship duration was on average 16.54 years ( $SD = 9.24$ , range 1.5 - 37.0 years).

All expatriates had the Dutch nationality. Five expatriate spouses had a different nationality than Dutch, but indicated that they were fluent in the Dutch language. These individuals originated from Bosnia, Indonesia, South Africa, and the U.S. Analyses revealed no significant differences between Dutch and non-Dutch expatriate spouses. About 54.0 % of the couples reported having children under the age of 18. In all but one case, underage children accompanied their parents. Additionally, four couples were accompanied by children older than 18 years. The age of the eldest child (for families with trailing children) varied between 0 and 22 years ( $M = 8.79$  years,  $SD = 5.69$ ).

The majority of the participants (86.7% of the expatriates, and 77.6% of the expatriate spouses) had finished an education at university or higher vocational level. Most expatriate spouses did not have a paid job ( $n = 76$ , 77.6%). Those who had, in majority indicated their work was below their educational level. Eight out of the 22 expatriate spouses with a paid job worked fulltime. The remaining 14 participants worked between 8 and 32 hours a week ( $M = 14.57$  hours,  $SD = 5.68$ ). Participants were located in 43 different countries. Twenty-four different organizations were cited as the assigning organization.

*Participants at T2.* In order to test Hypothesis 1-3 in a longitudinal design we requested participants to participate in a follow-up study. The 96 couples that indicated (at T1) to be willing to participate, received the follow-up questionnaire one year following the first measurement. Fifty-four (56.3%) complete couples returned eligible T2 questionnaires. However, 9 of these couples had moved, either to another host-country or back to their home country, the Netherlands. The longitudinal analyses are therefore based on a subsample of the remaining 45 couples.<sup>13</sup>

### *Instruments*

All scales were included both in the T1 and the T2 questionnaire, with the exception of the intercultural personality traits, that were solely included at T1.

*Control variables.* In the analyses the following demographic characteristics were included as control variables: gender, age, whether the present assignment was the couple's first assignment or not, years living in the host country, whether they had accompanying children, cultural difference between host and home country.

*Intercultural Personality Dimensions.* The scales for emotional stability, social initiative and open-mindedness were drawn from the Multicultural Personality Questionnaire (MPQ, Van der Zee & Van Oudenhoven, 2000; 2001). Examples of items from the emotional stability scale (20 items;  $\alpha = .88$ ) are "is not easily hurt" and "keeps calm at ill-luck". The scale for social initiative (17 items;  $\alpha = .87$ ) includes items such as "takes initiative" and "easily approaches other people". Finally, open-mindedness (18 items;  $\alpha = .86$ ) has items such as "is fascinated by other people's opinions" and "has a broad range of interests". Respondents could provide their answers on a 5-point Likert-type scale (1 = *not at all applicable*, 5 = *totally applicable*).

*Psychological adjustment.* Psychological adjustment was measured using the Dutch translation of the scale for psychological health ( $\alpha = .72$ , 5 items) drawn from the RAND-36 (Van der Zee & Sanderman, 1993; cf. RAND Health Science Program, 1992). Participants were asked to indicate how they were feeling during the past 4 weeks on a 5-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*). Sample items were "how often... have you felt downhearted and blue?" and "how often... have you been a happy person?"

*Socio-cultural adjustment.* In order to measure expatriates' and expatriate spouses' adjustment to the general, external environment in the host country, ten items ( $\alpha = .86$ ) were drawn from Black's (1988) study on adjustment. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they are adjusted to a number of areas of life in the host country (e.g., health care facilities, children's schooling). Answers were given on a 7-point scale (1 = *not adjusted at all*, 7 = *completely adjusted; not applicable*).

<sup>13</sup> ANOVAs on key constructs (i.e., emotional stability, social initiative, open mindedness, psychological, socio-cultural and professional adjustment) and control variables revealed no difference between participants who filled out the questionnaire at T1 only and participants who filled out the T1 and T2 questionnaires.

*Professional adjustment.* First, job performance was measured by a 6-item scale ( $\alpha = .82$ ) drawn from Denison, Hooijberg, and Quinn (1995). This 7-point scale includes items like “as a manager, my overall effectiveness is *very ineffective* (= 1) to *very effective* (= 7)” and “my performance as a role model is *very poor* (= 1) to (= 7) *excellent*”. Second, for organizational commitment we used the Organizational Commitment Questionnaire (OCQ;  $\alpha = .88$ ) by Mowday et al. (1979). In order to enhance the reliability of this scale one item from the original, 9-item, scale was removed (i.e., “I would accept almost any kind of job assignment in order to keep working for this organization”). The scale included items like “I really care about the fate of this organization” and “I find that my values and the organization’s values are very similar”. Answers were given on a 5-point Likert type scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 5 = *strongly agree*).

### *Statistical analysis*

An important contribution of this study is that it explores the way in which both partners’ intercultural personality traits influence each others’ adjustment. To do so properly, we will use the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model with distinguishable parties (APIM; Campbell et al., 2001; Kenny & Cook, 1999; Kenny et al., 2006) to analyze our data. First, the APIM model accounts for the influence of both partners’ behavior on their own outcome variable(s), that is, the *actor*. Second, interdependence is modeled through *partner effects*: the influence of one party’s intercultural personality on his/ her partner’s outcome measure (Kenny et al., 2006). Importantly, this distinction allows us to analyze the interaction of own-by-others’ personality on adjustment for expatriates and expatriate spouses simultaneously. The APIM approach allows for estimating statistically independent paths for actor and partner effects.

We used the MLwiN 2.00 software (Rasbash et al., 2004) to analyze our data. We distinguished between effects for expatriates and effects for expatriate spouses by using a two intercepts approach (Cook & Kenny, 2005; Raudenbush et al., 1995).<sup>14</sup>

We estimated two models: one for expatriates’ and expatriate spouses’ non-work adjustment and one for expatriates’ professional adjustment. In order to control for interrelatedness of the two non-work aspects of adjustment we relied on multivariate analysis and included psychological and socio-cultural adjustment simultaneously into one equation. Similarly, we used a multivariate approach by including expatriates’ job performance and organizational commitment simultaneously as dependent variables. The proposed models were estimated in several steps. First, we tested a model containing only the intercepts for expatriates (and expatriate spouses, where applicable). This is a “base-line” model. Next, to explore the effects of (own) intercultural personality traits on the adjustment measures (Hypothesis 1a-c, 2a-c), actor effects of the intercultural personality

<sup>14</sup> The dependent variables of professional adjustment are merely applicable to expatriates. The APIM approach is therefore only necessary for psychological and socio-cultural adjustment. However, for reasons of parsimony, the data regarding professional adjustment will also be analyzed using the MLwiN 2.00 software.

traits were entered. Subsequently, to test the mediation hypothesis (Hypothesis 3a-b), expatriates' psychological and socio-cultural adjustment were entered as *antecedents* of professional adjustment. Finally, in order to test the interaction hypothesis (Hypothesis 4), we first controlled for partner effects of intercultural personality, and then entered the interaction effects into the equation: own-by-other (i.e., actor-by-partner) effect of emotional stability, own-by-other's social initiative, and own-by-other's open-mindedness. Model improvement was tested through the difference in deviance using a chi-squared test. The deviance is an inverse goodness of fit measure: The smaller the deviance the better the model fits the data, and the more the deviance has decreased, the more the model has been improved.

In all analyses, the independent variables were centered. We used "role-wise" centering, that is, separate centering for expatriates and expatriate spouses based on their separate means. Finally, no significant effects emerged when we controlled for demographic variables. We therefore decided to exclude all control variables from our final analyses.

## Results

Means, ranges, and standard deviations of the key variables at T1 are presented in Table 4.1a. Paired t-tests on these variables revealed that expatriates scored higher on emotional stability,  $t(97) = 4.15, p < .001$ , and psychological adjustment,  $t(97) = 3.60, p = .001$ , than expatriate spouses. Expatriate spouses on the other hand had somewhat higher scores on socio-cultural adjustment ( $t(91) = -2.12, p = .04$ ). Means, ranges, and standard deviations in the subsample at T2 are depicted in Table 4.1b.

**Table 4.1a** Ranges, means and standard deviations for expatriates and expatriate spouses; full sample, T1.

	Expatriate			Expatriate spouse		
	min - max	M	sd	min - max	M	sd
<b>Emotional stability</b>	2.85 - 4.70	3.89	0.37	2.65 - 4.80	3.64	0.45
<b>Social initiative</b>	2.71 - 4.76	3.82	0.40	2.59 - 4.71	3.74	0.49
<b>Open-mindedness</b>	2.89 - 4.61	3.84	0.37	2.22 - 4.61	3.82	0.44
<b>Psychological adjustment</b>	2.80 - 5.00	4.38	0.40	3.00 - 5.00	4.19	0.46
<b>Socio-cultural adjustment</b>	3.20 - 6.90	5.49	0.84	3.50 - 7.00	5.72	0.79
<b>Job performance</b>	3.00 - 6.67	5.62	0.51			
<b>Organizational commitment</b>	2.38 - 5.00	3.97	0.60			

$n = 98$

$n = 98$

**Table 4.1a** Ranges, means and standard deviations for expatriates and expatriate spouses; subsample, T2.

	Expatriate			Expatriate spouse		
	min - max	M	sd	min - max	M	sd
<b>Psychological adjustment</b>	2.40 - 5.00	4.19	0.51	2.00 - 5.00	3.99	0.64
<b>Socio-cultural adjustment</b>	3.50 - 6.75	5.33	0.80	3.67 - 7.00	5.53	0.87
<b>Job performance</b>	4.17- 6.33	5.49	0.47			
<b>Organizational commitment</b>	2.38 - 5.00	4.06	0.66			
	<i>n</i> = 45			<i>n</i> = 45		

**Table 4.2a** Correlations for expatriates and expatriate spouses separately (full sample, T1)

	1	2	3	4	5
<b>1. Emotional stability</b>	<b>-.03</b>	.41***	.35***	.64***	.07
<b>2. Social initiative</b>	.25*	<b>.16</b>	.61***	.16	.19
<b>3. Open-mindedness</b>	.17	.47***	<b>.22*</b>	.13	.20
<b>4. Psychological adjustment</b>	.45***	.19	.09	<b>.26**</b>	.04
<b>5. Socio-cultural adjustment</b>	.03	.13	.32**	.05	<b>.20</b>
<b>6. Job performance</b>	.26**	.31**	.08	.32**	-.04
<b>7. Organizational commitment</b>	.24*	.34***	.21*	.24*	.02

Note: Correlation coefficients for expatriates are printed below the diagonal, coefficients for expatriates spouses are printed above the diagonal. Intercorrelations between expatriates' and expatriate spouses' measures on the diagonal (in bold); *n* = 98  
 \*\*\* *p* < .001, \*\* *p* < .01, \* *p* < .05, two-tailed.

**Table 4.2b** Correlations for expatriates and expatriate spouses separately (subsample, T2)

	1	2	3	4	5
<b>1. Emotional stability (T1)</b>	<b>-.16</b>	.52***	.34*	.61***	.16
<b>2. Social initiative (T1)</b>	.39**	<b>.02</b>	.53***	.37*	.16
<b>3. Open-mindedness (T1)</b>	.16	.51***	<b>.29</b>	.17	.51***
<b>4. Psychological adjustment (T2)</b>	.40***	.06	.16	<b>.21</b>	.06
<b>5. Socio-cultural adjustment (T2)</b>	.08	.09	.23	.17	<b>.24</b>
<b>6. Job performance (T2)</b>	.10	.19	.20	.28	.08
<b>7. Organizational commitment (T2)</b>	.33*	.41**	.09	.05	-.11

Note: Correlation coefficients for expatriates are printed below the diagonal, coefficients for expatriates spouses are printed above the diagonal. Intercorrelations between expatriates' and expatriate spouses' measures on the diagonal (in bold); *n* = 45  
 \*\*\* *p* < .001, \*\* *p* < .01, \* *p* < .05, two-tailed. Expatriates' and spouses' separate



Expatriates' and expatriate spouses' individual correlation coefficients are depicted in Table 4.2a. In line with research on personality similarity in romantic couples, expatriates' and expatriate spouses' intercultural personality dimensions were not strongly correlated, with open mindedness as an exception (cf. McCrae, 1996). Additionally, the correlations revealed that while both partners' indicators of psychological adjustment were significantly correlated, their indices of socio-cultural adjustment were correlated only marginally ( $r = .20, p = .06$ ). Correlations in the subsample at T2 are depicted in Table 4.2b.

### *Analyzing the Model*

*Main effects of intercultural personality dimensions: Cross-sectional results.* As mentioned in the Method section we used an APIM approach to account for the interdependencies existing between the expatriate and the expatriate spouse. Furthermore, we applied a multivariate analysis to control for the associations between psychological and socio-cultural adjustment. Table 4.4a and 4.4b depict the fixed effects of psychological and socio-cultural adjustment, whereas the random effects are depicted at the bottom of Table 4a. Model 0 (Table 4.4a, 4.4b) represents the baseline model, that includes only the intercepts. We expected emotional stability to be positively associated with psychological adjustment (Hypothesis 1a). Additionally, we expected social initiative (Hypothesis 1b) and open mindedness (Hypothesis 1c) to be positively associated with both psychological and socio-cultural adjustment. To test these hypotheses we added actor effects of the three intercultural personality dimensions for expatriates and expatriate spouses separately (Model 01, Table 4.4a-b). This significantly improved the overall model,  $\Delta \chi^2(12) = 89.5, p < .001$ . Supporting Hypothesis 1a, a significant positive relationship between emotional stability and psychological adjustment emerged for both partners ( $B = 0.44, p < .001$ , for expatriates;  $B = 0.69, p < .001$ , for expatriate spouses, Table 4.4a). Additionally, and in line with Hypothesis 1c, open-mindedness was significantly and positively associated with socio-cultural adjustment, but only for expatriates ( $B = 0.70, p = .004$ , Table 4.4b). Finally, no significant effects emerged for social initiative, thus Hypothesis 1b is not supported.

The relationship between the intercultural personality traits and professional adjustment was explored in a similar fashion: A multivariate approach was used to control for the association between job performance and organizational commitment. Because these outcome measures are applicable to only one party (i.e., the expatriate), this is not a multilevel analysis (i.e., we only have the individual level). For reasons of clarity we will use the same (APIM) idiom, and the same representation as in the before mentioned analysis.

Table 4.5a-b depicts the fixed effects and variances. Model 0, including only the intercepts, is our baseline model. Next, we added expatriates' own intercultural personality traits as independent variables (Model 01, Table 4.5a-b). This way we could explore 1) whether emotional stability was positively associated with job performance (Hypothesis 2a);

and 2) whether social initiative (Hypothesis 2b) and open mindedness (Hypothesis 2c) were positively associated with both job performance and organizational commitment. The overall model significantly improved,  $\Delta \chi^2(6) = 28.6, p < .001$ . Specifically, supporting Hypothesis 2a, expatriates' emotional stability positively influenced job performance ( $B = 0.27, p = .04$ ). Hypothesis 2b is supported as well, since social initiative was positively associated with both expatriates' job performance ( $B = 0.40, p = .005$ ) and their organizational commitment ( $B = 0.38, p = .02$ ). No significant effects emerged for open mindedness, so Hypothesis 2c is rejected.

Next, we tested Hypothesis 3a-b, predicting that psychological and socio-cultural adjustment would act as (partially) mediating variables in the intercultural personality-professional adjustment relationship. Table 4.2a already revealed that there was no significant association between socio-cultural adjustment and professional adjustment. It is therefore not surprising that the multivariate analyses revealed no significant effect of socio-cultural adjustment either. Hypothesis 3b is thus rejected, and the analysis including socio-cultural adjustment was omitted from Table 4.5a- 5b; Only the analysis that included psychological adjustment was depicted. Adding expatriates' psychological adjustment did significantly improve the model,  $\Delta \chi^2(2) = 6.7, p = .04$ , Model 02, Table 4.5a. Results showed that expatriates' psychological adjustment significantly, positively influenced his or her job performance ( $B = 0.28, p = .03$ ). At the same time, the initially significant effect of emotional stability decreased to a non-significant level (from  $B = 0.27, p = .04$  to  $B = 0.14, p = .32$ ), suggesting a mediation by psychological adjustment. Testing this mediation reveals results that approach significance<sup>15</sup> (Sobel test,  $z = 1.93, p = .053$ ). Thus, it seems that emotionally stable persons have higher levels of psychological adjustment, which in turn enhances their job performance. Expatriate's organizational commitment was not significantly related to his/ her psychological adjustment. Hypothesis 3a is thus partially supported.

*Main effects of intercultural personality dimensions: Longitudinal results.* We expected intercultural personality traits to influence expatriates' and expatriate spouses' adjustment over time. We therefore additionally tested the abovementioned hypotheses in the subsample of 45 couples who returned both questionnaires at T1 and T2. Controlling for T1 measures of adjustment we analyzed the influence of the intercultural personality dimensions (as measured at T1) on adjustment at T2.<sup>16</sup>

<sup>15</sup> The three test statistics that were computed revealed similar results. Sobel test,  $z = 1.93, p = .053$ ; Aroian test,  $z = 1.89, p = .058$ ; Goodman test,  $z = 1.98, p = .043$ . To calculate the test statistics we made use of the emotional stability-psychological adjustment coefficient as estimated in Table 4a. Because this is the multivariate model this is a more conservative estimation.

<sup>16</sup> In order to generate reliable results from the smaller subsample we used an univariate approach instead of a multivariate approach for the longitudinal analysis. Note that the longitudinal results are not depicted in a table.

First we analyzed the longitudinal effects of intercultural personality traits on non-work adjustment. In line with Hypothesis 1a, emotional stability emerged as a significant positive predictor of psychological adjustment, but only among expatriate spouses ( $B = 0.64, p = .001$ ). In line with the cross-sectional results, no significant effects emerged for social initiative. Hypothesis 1b is therefore, again, rejected. In line with Hypothesis 1c, open mindedness was significantly and positively associated with socio-cultural adjustment (T2). Interestingly, whereas at T1 this relationship was significant only among expatriates, the longitudinal results revealed that especially expatriate spouses seemed to benefit from high levels of open mindedness (expatriates,  $B = 0.55, p = .10$ ; expatriate spouses,  $B = 0.81, p = .006$ ).

Second, we analyzed the longitudinal effects of intercultural personality traits on professional adjustment. Contrary to Hypothesis 2a, emotional stability did not influence job performance (T2). Thus, Hypothesis 2a is not supported in a longitudinal design. In line with Hypothesis 2b, and similar to the cross-sectional results, social initiative positively influenced organizational commitment (T2,  $B = 0.33, p = .04$ ). However, unlike the cross-sectional results, no significant effect of social initiative on job performance emerged. Thus, partial support was found for Hypothesis 2b. Regarding Hypothesis 2c on the effect of open mindedness, mixed results emerged. Whereas open mindedness indeed positively influenced job performance ( $B = 0.32, p = .02$ ), it was negatively related to organizational commitment ( $B = -0.39, p = .02$ ). This unexpected latter result should be interpreted with caution, since the bivariate correlation coefficient failed to reach a level of significance. Finally, when testing Hypothesis 3a-b no significant results appeared.

In sum, our results clearly show that specific intercultural personality dimensions influence specific domains of adjustment. First, emotional stability emerged as an important resource for psychological adjustment (Hypothesis 1a) and job performance (Hypothesis 2a). Second, social initiative was significantly related to job performance and organizational commitment (Hypothesis 2b), but showed no associations with non-work adjustment (Hypothesis 1b). Third, open-mindedness was significantly associated with socio-cultural adjustment (Hypothesis 1c), and professional adjustment (Hypothesis 2c). These findings were largely endorsed by the longitudinal results.

*Moderating effect of partner's intercultural personality dimensions.* In order to investigate the presumed interaction effects of both partners' intercultural personality (Hypothesis 4), we made use of the larger, cross-sectional sample.<sup>17</sup> Before adding the presumed interaction effect, we first controlled for partner effects. Both for non-work adjustment measures (Table 4.4a-b), and for professional adjustment (Table 4.5a-b)

<sup>17</sup> The longitudinal subsample is too small to generate reliable results when the number of independent variables becomes large.

partner effects did not improve the overall model,  $\Delta \chi^2(12) = 12.1, p = .44$  (Model 02, Table 4.4a), and  $\Delta \chi^2(6) = 4.2, p = .65$  (Model 03, Table 4.5a). Next, we added the interaction terms for the three intercultural personality dimensions, both for expatriates and for expatriate spouses (when applicable). For example, for expatriates we added the interaction term of expatriates' own emotional stability (i.e., actor effect) by expatriate spouses' emotional stability (i.e., partner effect), and vice versa for the expatriate spouse. Equivalent interaction terms were entered for social initiative and open-mindedness.

Regarding non-work adjustment, introducing the interaction terms significantly improved the overall model;  $\Delta \chi^2(12) = 21.6, p = .04$ , Table 4.4a. Significant interactions emerged for psychological adjustment as well as socio-cultural adjustment and among expatriate spouses only. First, own-by-other's open-mindedness interaction showed a negative association with psychological adjustment ( $B = -0.60, p = .003$ , Table 4.4a). In Figure 4.1a we plotted psychological adjustment as a function of expatriates' open mindedness, with separate lines for low ( $-1SD$ ) and high ( $+1SD$ ) values of expatriate spouses' open mindedness in our sample. As expected, expatriate spouses who score low on open mindedness are positively influenced by expatriate's open mindedness. However, the figure suggests that expatriate spouses who score relatively high are negatively influenced by partner's open mindedness. Additional analyses<sup>18</sup> reveal that this is indeed the case for relatively high levels of open mindedness. This implies that, when both partners in a couple are very open minded, it may have a downside for their psychological well-being. We will come back to this in the discussion.

Second, own-by-others' social initiative showed a negative association with socio-cultural adjustment ( $B = -1.03, p = .02$ , Table 4.4b). In Figure 4.1b we plotted the separate slopes for low ( $-1SD$ ) and high ( $+1SD$ ) values of expatriate spouses' social initiative in our sample. Expatriate spouses low in social initiative have higher scores on socio-cultural adjustment, the higher their partner's social initiative score.

For professional adjustment as well, the interaction terms significantly improved the overall model,  $\Delta \chi^2(6) = 15.4, p = .02$ , Table 4.5a. More specifically, a significant interaction effect of own-by-other emotional stability on job performance emerged<sup>19</sup> ( $B = -0.53, p = .04$ , Table 4.5a). In Figure 4.2a we therefore plotted separate lines for low ( $-1SD$ ) and high ( $+1SD$ ) values of expatriate's emotional stability in our sample. Expatriates low in emotional stability reported a better job performance the higher their partner scored on emotional stability

<sup>18</sup> Following Preacher, Curran and Bauer (2006), we calculated the region of significance for the simple slopes.

<sup>19</sup> Additional analysis revealed that the interaction term "own-by-other's emotional stability" was only marginally significant when the mediator (psychological adjustment), was not added to the equation. This result should thus be interpreted with caution, as it may be an suppressor effect.

Finally, for organizational commitment, a significant interaction between expatriate and expatriate spouse social initiative emerged ( $B = -0.67, p = .01$ , Table 4.5b). Figure 4.2b depicts the separate lines for low ( $-1SD$ ) and high ( $+1SD$ ) levels of expatriates' social initiative. For expatriates low in social initiative organizational commitment is higher the higher expatriate spouses' social initiative.

In sum, several results emerged in support of an *exchange of resources effect* within expatriate couples (Hypothesis 4). That is, a lack of a resource in oneself (in terms of intercultural personality traits), could be compensated by the availability of this intercultural personality trait in the other party. Interaction effects of all three intercultural personality dimensions were found to influence expatriate spouses' psychological and socio-cultural adjustment and expatriates' job performance and organizational commitment, such that being low in a certain dimension, can be compensated by high levels in one's partner. Solely for open mindedness, the combination of both partners being high in the dimension concerned, led to lower levels of adjustment.

**Table 4.4.a** MLA Multivariate analysis on psychological and socio-cultural adjustment; part 1:  
Psychological adjustment as DV

		Model 0		Model 01		Model 02		Model 03	
Fixed effects		B	s.e.	B	s.e.	B	s.e.	B	s.e.
<b>Psychological Adjustment</b>									
<b>Intercept</b>	expatriate	4.38	.04	4.38	.04	4.38	.04	4.39	.04
	expatriate spouse	4.19	.04	4.19	.04	4.19	.04	4.21	.04
<b>MPQ</b>									
<b>actor effect expatriates</b>									
	ES			.44***	.10	.47***	.10	.43***	.10
	SI			.09	.10	.08	.11	.08	.11
	OM			-.01	.11	-.05	.11	-.05	.11
<b>actor effect expatriate spouses</b>									
	ES			.69***	.09	.71***	.09	.71***	.09
	SI			-.08	.09	-.09	.09	-.06	.09
	OM			-.07	.10	-.04	.10	-.10	.11
<b>partner effect expatriates</b>									
	ES					.07	.09	.10	.09
	SI					.01	.09	.00	.09
	OM					-.01	.11	-.04	.11
<b>partner effect expatriate spouses</b>									
	ES					.14	.10	.12	.10
	SI					.04	.11	.02	.11
	OM					-.09	.11	-.10	.11
<b>interaction expatriates</b>									
	ES (actor * partner)							.16	.20
	SI (actor * partner)							-.27	.18
	OM (actor * partner)							-.06	.20
<b>interaction expatriate spouses</b>									
	ES (actor * partner)							.03	.20
	SI (actor * partner)							-.08	.18
	OM (actor * partner)							-.60**	.20
<b>Variance and covariance</b>		<b>var.</b>	<b>s.e.</b>	<b>var.</b>	<b>s.e.</b>	<b>var.</b>	<b>s.e.</b>	<b>var.</b>	<b>s.e.</b>
<b>Couple level</b>									
	τ <sup>2</sup> psych	.05	.02	.03	.01	.03	.01	.03	.01
	τ <sup>2</sup> socio	.13	.07	.11	.06	.10	.06	.11	.06
	covariance	.04	.03	-.01	.02	-.01	.02	-.01	.02
	ρ	.52		-.11		-.11		-.25	
<b>Individual level</b>									
	σ <sup>2</sup> psych	.14	.02	.09	.01	.09	.01	.09	.01
	σ <sup>2</sup> socio	.53	.08	.50	.07	.47	.07	.43	.06
	covariance	-.02	.03	.02	.02	.01	.02	.01	.02
	ρ	-.09		.07		.05		.06	
<b>Deviance</b>		666.7		578.2		563.3		541.7	
<b>Δ Deviance</b>				89.5***		14.9		21.6*	
				df = 12		df = 12		df = 12	

Note: ES = emotional stability, SI = social initiative, OM = open mindedness

*n* = 385 out of 392 cases (196 participants, times 2 dependent variables, minus missing cases)

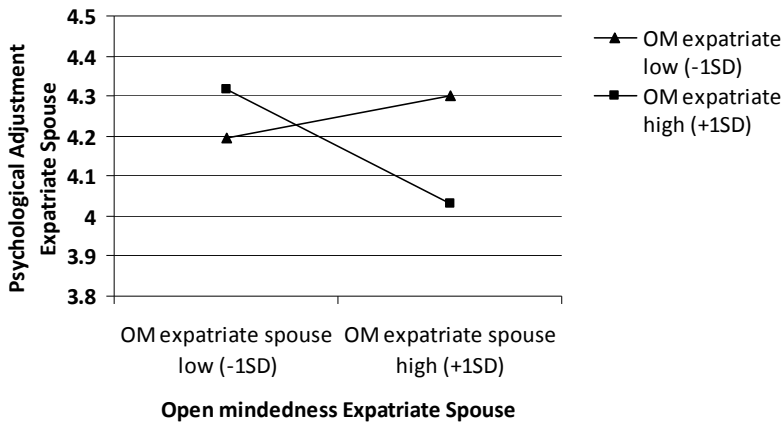
\* *p* < .05, \*\* *p* < .01

**Table 4.4.b** MLA Multivariate analysis on psychological and socio-cultural adjustment; part 2: Socio-cultural adjustment as DV

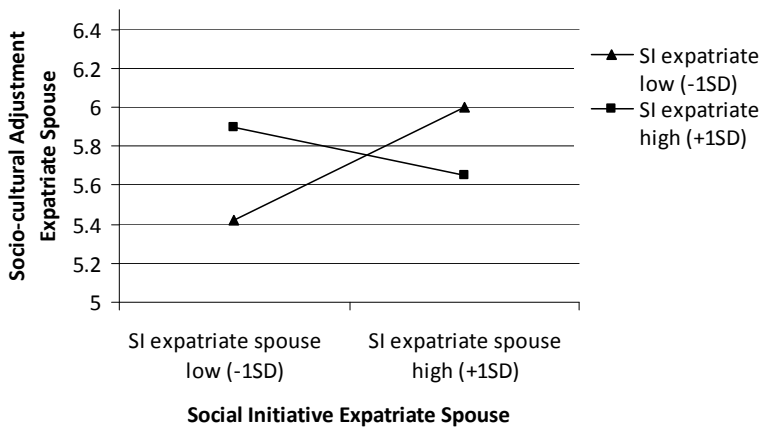
		Model 0		Model 01		Model 02		Model 03	
Fixed effects		B	s.e.	B	s.e.	B	s.e.	B	s.e.
<b>Socio-cultural Adjustment</b>									
<b>Intercept</b>	expatriate	5.49	.08	5.49	.08	5.49	.08	5.48	.08
	expatriate spouse	5.72	.08	5.71	.08	5.71	.08	5.74	.08
<b>MPQ</b>									
<b>actor effect expatriates</b>									
	ES			-.13	.22	-.06	.22	-.05	.23
	SI			-.05	.24	-.13	.24	-.12	.24
	OM			.70**	.24	.72**	.25	.73**	.24
<b>actor effect expatriate spouses</b>									
	ES			-.08	.20	-.09	.20	.04	.20
	SI			.20	.21	.18	.21	.17	.20
	OM			.31	.24	.32	.25	.30	.25
<b>partner effect expatriates</b>									
	ES					.36	.20	.36	.20
	SI					-.02	.20	.02	.20
	OM					-.19	.24	-.20	.24
<b>partner effect expatriate spouses</b>									
	ES					.46*	.23	.28	.24
	SI					.00	.25	.08	.24
	OM					.31	.25	.27	.25
<b>interaction expatriates</b>									
	ES (actor * partner)							.25	.44
	SI (actor * partner)							.40	.43
	OM (actor * partner)							-.07	.44
<b>interaction expatriate spouses</b>									
	ES (actor * partner)							.76	.45
	SI (actor * partner)							-1.03*	.44
	OM (actor * partner)							-.61	.48

Note: ES = emotional stability, SI = social initiative, OM = open mindedness

\* p < .05, \*\*p < .01



**Figure 4.1a** Interaction of expatriate's by expatriate spouse's open mindedness on expatriate spouse's psychological adjustment.



**Figure 4.1b** Interaction of expatriate's by expatriate spouse's social initiative on expatriate spouse's socio-cultural adjustment



**Table 4.5a** Multivariate analysis on job performance and organizational commitment; part 1: Job performance as DV

	Model 0		Model 01		Model 02		Model 03		Model 04	
Fixed effects	B	s.e.	B	s.e.	B	s.e.	B	s.e.	B	s.e.
<b>Job Performance</b>										
Intercept (expatriates)	5.62	.05	5.62	.05	5.62	.05	5.62	.05	5.60	.05
<b>MPQ: actor effects</b>										
ES			.27*	.13	.14	.14	.18	.15	.25	.15
SI			.40**	.14	.37*	.14	.33*	.14	.31*	.14
OM			-.14	.15	-.13	.14	-.17	.15	-.16	.14
<b>Psychological adjustment</b>										
actor effect psychological adjustment					.28*	.13	.27*	.13	.31*	.13
<b>MPQ: partner effects</b>										
ES							.11	.12	.05	.12
SI							.02	.12	.02	.12
OM							.03	.14	.09	.14
<b>Interaction effects</b>										
ES(actor * partner)									-.53*	.26
SI (actor * partner)									.32	.23
OM (actor * partner)									.28	.27
	Model 0		Model 01		Model 02		Model 03		Model 04	
	var.	s.e.	var.	s.e.	var.	s.e.	var.	s.e.	var.	s.e.
<b>Variance and covariance</b>										
<b>Couple level</b>										
τ <sup>2</sup> jper	.26	.04	.22	.03	.21	.03	.21	.03	.19	.03
τ <sup>2</sup> oc	.33	.05	.30	.04	.29	.04	.29	.04	.26	.04
covar jper-oc	.01	.03	-.03	.03	-.04	.02	-.04	.03	-.03	.02
ρ jper - oc	.02		-.13		-.16		-.15		-.13	
<b>Deviance</b>	313.2		284.6		277.9		275.6		260.2	
Δ Deviance			28.6***		6.7*		2.3		15.4*	
			df = 6		df = 2		df = 6		df = 6	

Note: ES = emotional stability, SI = social initiative, OM = open mindedness

*n* = 195 out of 196 cases (98 expatriate participants, times 2 dependent variables, minus missing case)

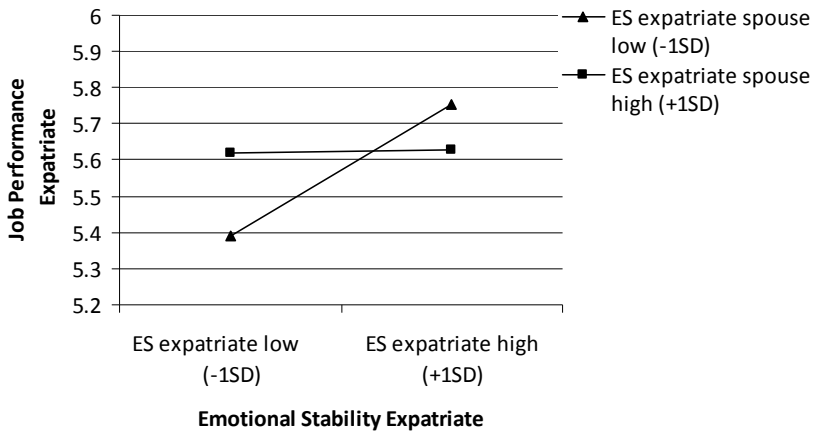
\* *p* < .05, \*\**p* < .01

**Table 4.5a** Multivariate analysis on job performance and organizational commitment; part 2: Organizational commitment as DV

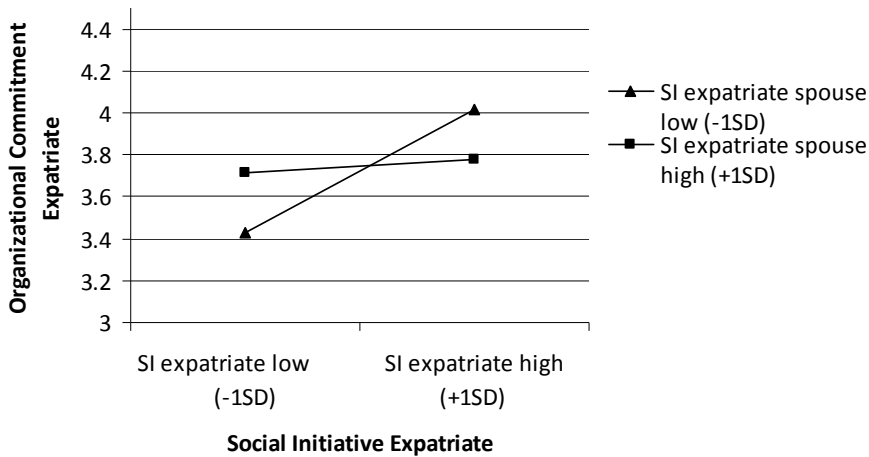
Fixed effects	Model 0		Model 01		Model 02		Model 03		Model 04	
	B	s.e.	B	s.e.	B	s.e.	B	s.e.	B	s.e.
<b>Organizational Commitment</b>										
Intercept (expatriates)	3.72	.06	3.72	.06	3.73	.06	3.73	.06	3.73	.05
<b>MPQ: actor effect</b>										
ES			.20	.15	.12	.17	.09	.17	.02	.17
SI			.38*	.16	.36*	.16	.39*	.17	.42*	.16
OM			.09	.17	.09	.17	.11	.17	.12	.17
<b>Psychological Adjustment</b>										
actor effect psychological adjustment					.18	.16	.19	.16	.13	.15
<b>MPQ: partner effects</b>										
ES							-.12	.14	-.05	.14
SI							.10	.15	.03	.15
OM							-.05	.17	-.04	.16
<b>Interaction effects</b>										
ES(actor * partner)									.38	.31
SI (actor * partner)									-.67**	.27
OM (actor * partner)									.54	.31

Note: ES = emotional stability, SI = social initiative, OM = open mindedness

\* p <.05, \*\*p<.01



**Figure 4.2a** Interaction of expatriate's by expatriate spouse's emotional stability on expatriate's job performance



**Figure 4.2b** Interaction of expatriate's by expatriate spouse's social initiative on expatriate's organizational commitment

## Discussion

This study demonstrated the importance of expatriates' and expatriate spouses' intercultural personality dimensions (emotional stability, social initiative and open mindedness) as a resource for their adjustment abroad. Furthermore, this study contributes to coping research in general and expatriation research in particular, by suggesting new implications of Hobfoll's (1989) COR theory: Intimate partners can exchange (intercultural) personality resources among themselves when one of both partners is lacking a sufficient level on each of these traits. Finally, the longitudinal analyses largely replicated the cross-sectional analyses, therewith confirming the expected causal direction. Since only a limited number of studies on expatriation have used a longitudinal research design (Hechanova et al., 2003; for some exceptions see Caligiuri et al., 1998; Shaffer et al. 2006; Wang & Takeuchi, 2007), this is another important contribution of the present study.

### *The importance of emotional stability, social initiative, open mindedness*

Results showed that emotional stability arose as the single most important intercultural personality trait influencing psychological adjustment. For expatriate spouses, the longitudinal analysis further confirmed this finding. Furthermore, we found that the positive relationship between expatriates' emotional stability and job performance could be explained by their higher levels of psychological adjustment. The ability to remain calm and relaxed in stressful situations helps an expatriate to psychologically adjust. This, in turn,

enables the expatriate to perform better on the job. Feeling good in the private sphere, thus seems to enhance one's professional performance (cf. Byron, 2005). Consequently, organizations should not only focus on the work-related aspects of the expatriate in order to enhance or predict job performance. Rather, taking into account aspects of expatriate's private domain as well is important to ensure healthy functioning expatriates on the job (cf. Van Erp et al., Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. 2005). Reframing expatriate assignments as *family relocations* seems to be an important improvement in expatriation research (cf. Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). However, in contrast to this implication, socio-cultural adjustment was not related to professional adjustment. Earlier studies also failed to find an association between socio-cultural adjustment and adjustment in the professional field (Takeuchi et al. 2002; Kraimer et al. 2001). It seems that the relevance of psychological well-being and satisfaction is stronger than the relevance of being able to adjust to the daily encounters with, for instance, local housing conditions, or health care facilities.

Second, actively approaching social situations and showing initiatives facilitates better performance on the job and a stronger commitment towards the assigning organisation. In the longitudinal analyses social initiative remained important, especially for organizational commitment. Surprisingly, social initiative was not significantly associated with psychological and socio-cultural adjustment. We had expected that being high in social initiative enables individuals to appraise stressful situations as challenging and to take initiative in solving daily problems.

Since we controlled for the effect of the other two intercultural personality traits—emotional stability and open mindedness—it may be that no effect emerged because it was partialled out by the shared variance of social initiative with emotional stability and open mindedness. However, the correlation coefficients between social initiative on the one hand, and psychological and socio-cultural adjustment on the other hand (Table 4.2a), are relatively low and non-significant for both expatriates and expatriate spouses. Alternatively, it may be that showing initiatives and being extraverted is not embraced in every society. Whereas the Dutch are well known for their directness and this may not be appreciated to the same extent in different countries. In the work context, however, cultural differences are generally smaller, and, as a result, positive effects of social initiative may have emerged indeed, only in the work domain

Finally, open mindedness was important to several facets of adjustment. Having an open and unprejudiced mindset helps to deal with daily problems (i.e., socio-cultural adjustment). Additionally, it turned out to be an important trait for expatriates' job performance at T2. It may be that a good performance on the job requires different manners in different stages of the assignment. For example, especially at the start of the assignment being emotionally stable comes in handy to deal with the new, stressful and bustling situation. Later on, being open to new experiences may become increasingly valuable for job performance (cf. Van Oudenhoven & Van der Zee, 2002).

### *Exchange of resources*

A new insight provided by the results is that getting adjusted abroad is not only a matter of who you are, but also of who you are with. In line with our exchange of resources expectation, results revealed that expatriates and expatriates spouses can draw from each other intercultural personality dimensions. Specifically in the situation that one's own intercultural traits are insufficient, high levels of these traits in one's partner may act as a complementary resource to benefit one's adjustment. As a consequence, lower scores on specific intercultural traits are not necessarily an impediment, as long as one's partner is sufficiently high in the specific trait. For all three intercultural personality dimensions such interaction effects emerged. Interestingly, for open mindedness an additional result emerged. In addition to the expected complementary effect—being low in a trait can be counteracted by higher levels of the trait in one's partner—an “overload effect” seemed to emerge as well. The data showed that expatriate spouses who score high on open mindedness are *less* psychologically adjusted the *higher* their partner's level of open mindedness. Presumably, expatriate spouses' high open mindedness may not only make them more curious and inquisitive but also more reluctant to follow their intimate partner in their curious adventures. Apparently, when both partners are incessantly looking for adventure, there is no room to let the features of the new situation calmly sink in. This may reduce one's psychological adjustment.

Interestingly, interaction effects on non-work adjustment were significant for expatriate spouses, whereas interaction effects on professional adjustment were significant for expatriates. This suggests that, in the non-work domains of adjustment, it is especially the expatriate spouse who benefits from the expatriate, while for professional adjustment, the expatriate spouse may provide resources to the expatriate. It seems that expatriates and expatriate spouses can complement each other to a certain extent in order to reach higher levels of adjustment. As such, our data confirm the idea that it is not just the expatriate spouse who supports the expatriate, or the expatriate who supports the expatriate spouse. Rather, they pull each other through and complement one another where necessary.

### *Implications, limitations & future research*

Together, these results have scientific as well as practical implications. The results suggest new implications of Hobfoll's (1989) COR model. Although there has been some research on the interplay of personality dimensions in close relationships, such studies generally focused on its impact on the quality of the relationship. For example, a number of studies explored the extent to which similarity or, by contrast, dissimilarity in personality dimensions leads to mutual attraction and positive perceptions of relationship quality (e.g., Barelds & Barelds-Dijkstra, 2007; Dijkstra & Barelds, 2008). On the other hand, research that specifically focused on coping resources, has hardly investigated the interplay between external and

internal coping resources (Thoits, 1995). Further research may dig more deeply into the interplay of external and internal resources, specifically regarding (intercultural) personality dimensions.

This is especially important in the light of some of the limitations of this study. For one, although the exchange of resources interactions were significant and contributed to exploration of the value of the trailing spouse for the expatriate and vice versa, in practical terms the impact was quite small. It may be that our sample has been biased through self-selection, therewith reducing the variance on the scores of the intercultural personality dimensions. More specifically, the participants in this study already made the (voluntary) decision to work and live abroad, quite likely because it appealed to them. Their affinity with working or living abroad may be partly the outcome of higher levels of intercultural personality dimensions such as emotional stability, social initiative and open mindedness.

Because we did not use a comparison group, we do not know to what extent such self-selection may have taken place. Future research should therefore try to include comparison groups as well, something that has rarely been done in expatriation research (Hechanova et al., 2003). For example, exploring samples that do encounter intercultural situations, but in a less voluntary manner (i.e., individuals living in neighbourhoods with a wide variety of nationalities) may provide further insight into the applicability of the exchange of resources effect of intercultural personality dimensions in other contexts. Finally, some practical implications may be drawn from these results. Overall, the study emphasizes the importance of intercultural competence for a successful international assignment. Therefore, the intercultural capacities of potential expatriate candidates should be taken into account during a selection process. For such purposes questionnaires or interviews to measure intercultural personality traits may provide a valuable tool to increase the likelihood of finding the right expatriate for the job, and giving the right advice to those who consider going abroad. However, a major implication of this study is that *both spouses* are informative factors in the process of adjustment. The drawbacks of having insufficient resources in one's own intercultural personality traits can be overcome by high levels of the trait in one's partner. In assessing whether to send an employee to a foreign posting, companies should not just establish the *expatriate's* intercultural effectiveness; they should establish the *expatriate spouse's* intercultural effectiveness as well. As a result, the intercultural profile of the couple as whole can be considered. With this knowledge both the international assignment and the expatriate couples have valuable information at their disposal that can guide or advise them whether or not to accept the assignment. Furthermore, it can make the expatriate couple more aware of their strength and weaknesses, which makes them better prepared for the upcoming challenges.

In addition, it seems valuable to not only coach the expatriate as a preparation for and support during the international assignment, but to coach the expatriate spouse as well.

On the one hand, this will help the assigning organization to better predict and understand whether and why expatriate couples successfully adjust abroad; on the other hand it will help couples to be better prepared for the challenges they will face together.

# 5

## General Discussion







Although the literature has acknowledged the importance of the trailing partner to expatriate success for more than 30 years (e.g., Hays, 1971; Tung, 1982; 1987) this research is among the first to take the viewpoint of both partners into account. This is remarkable considering the costs and risks involved in international assignments and the unfavorable consequences of premature returns for both organizations and expatriates. Furthermore, the growing number of dual-career and dual-earner couples as well as the high rates of potential candidates that withdraw from an assignment for the benefit of their spouse's career or other family-related issues, make the need for research into the relational dynamics surrounding expatriation more pressing than ever (Harvey & Buckley, 1998; Punnett, 1997).

The present dissertation explored the influence of intra-relational processes in close expatriate relationships on the adjustment of the expatriate couple. The goal was twofold: First, I aimed to gain further insight into the relational dynamics of justice perceptions and spousal conflict surrounding the move abroad, and explored how these processes may impact effective adjustment. Second, I focused on intercultural personality traits as internal and external coping resources for expatriates and expatriate spouses. I explored to what extent intimate partners can exchange these resources amongst each other, in order to achieve reasonable levels of adjustment.

International adjustment refers to “the degree of comfort and absence of stress” regarding the new situation abroad (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005, p. 257). It is considered a multi-dimensional construct (e.g., Black et al., 1991; Searle & Ward, 1990). At the core, psychological adjustment, refers to internal psychological outcomes like mental health and personal satisfaction (Van der Zee et al., 2007; Van Oudenhoven, et al., 2003; cf. Searle & Ward, 1990), and can be considered essential to successful expatriation projects (Ruben & Kealey, 1979; cf. Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005). In addition, socio-cultural adjustment refers to the ability to deal with daily problems, and professional adjustment refers to the ability to adapt to the new work context.

## Summary of findings

### *The relationship between justice, conflict and psychological adjustment*

“I gave up my job—a way of life—for my partner’s wish to live and work abroad. For me, that was a difficult decision. I think it is unfair that my partner does not acknowledge my position. It is a lack of appreciation”

“Just before lunch break, my wife called me and asked me to do some grocery shopping. I thought that was unfair: At this moment [during the international assignment] the situation is such that I work

and my wife does the housekeeping. In my opinion, that includes grocery shopping, especially on weekdays.”

As becomes evident from these quotes,<sup>20</sup> moving abroad uproots couples’ prior arrangements. In Chapter 2, I argued that moving abroad has important implications for the way in which a couple’s life is organized. The expatriate’s new function abroad often implies more responsibilities, demanding extra time (see e.g., Ones & Viswesvaran, 1997). Meanwhile, the expatriate spouse—often without a job—has extra time left. As a result, tasks and responsibilities—like who takes care of household issues and who is responsible for the family income—will (have to) be arranged differently and this may accentuate feelings of unfairness. I demonstrated that expatriates’ and expatriate spouses’ feelings of injustice give rise to frustrations and irritations and ultimately result in lower psychological adjustment for both partners. Moreover, these processes can clearly be considered *relational dynamics* since they entailed not only intrapersonal associations but interpersonal associations as well. First, in line with self-interest theory (Thibaut & Walker, 1975), especially feelings of distributive injustice influenced the occurrence of task-oriented conflict. For expatriates, feelings of distributive unfairness (e.g., perceiving one invests more time and energy in the relationship than receiving in return) were associated with conflicts regarding work issues. For expatriate spouses on the other hand, feelings of distributive injustice were related to irritations and frustrations regarding household issues. Second, and in line with group-value theory (Lind & Tyler, 1988), interpersonal injustice was associated with affective conflict. Specifically, a lack of respect and support perceived by the expatriate spouse was associated with higher levels of affective conflict for both partners.

Unexpectedly, expatriates’ and expatriate spouses’ distributive injustice perceptions also influenced their experience of affective conflict, suggesting that fair outcomes and fair distributions of time and tasks may be interpreted as clues of appreciation and respect. Moreover, for both partners, distributive justice influenced psychological adjustment *through* affective conflict. Put differently, affective conflict emerged as a mediating variable in the relationship between distributive justice and psychological adjustment.

### *The importance of the conflict management strategy avoidance*

“I hear this story from a lot of expatriate spouses: They feel guilty because they do not work, and thus do not contribute to the family income. I don’t have those feelings at all. Why not? Because my husband and I never argue about it. He doesn’t think it as an issue.”

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<sup>20</sup> These and upcoming quotes in this Discussion chapter are derived from interviews I held with expatriates and expatriate spouses as part of preliminary examinations for the present dissertation.

In Chapter 3, I further built upon the findings of Chapter 2 by examining whether the way intimate partners deal with the conflicts at hand, influences the affective conflict-adjustment relationship. Specifically, the data showed that, as expected, avoidance alleviated the negative effect of affective conflicts. Two mechanisms may explain this alleviating effect. First, instead of a lack of interest, avoidance behavior may arise from concern for the relationship and the other partner (Ohbuchi & Atsumi, 2010; Tjosvold & Sun, 2002; Wang, 2006). Second, avoidance may function as a defense mechanism against the potential threat of an affective conflict to one's relationship and one's self-identity (Buysse & Ickes, 1999; Simpson et al., 2003). Avoidance may be an effective response to affective conflicts, because such conflicts often involve issues that refer to deeply-rooted personal values, that are identity related (see e.g., De Dreu & Van Vianen, 2001; Roloff & Ifert, 2000).

Furthermore, I found that the effects of avoidance particularly occurred for expatriate spouses and especially as time went by. Arguably, the new arrangements abroad result in a greater dependency of the expatriate spouse on the expatriate than vice versa. Therefore, the potential threat that affective conflicts are to valued resources, may be more pronounced for expatriate spouses. This imbalance in roles will become increasingly noticed over time. This is in line with the "expatriation curve"<sup>21</sup>, stating that expatriation-related problems surface especially later on in the assignment. According to the Conservation of Resources Theory (COR), this may be explained by the increasing threat to one's resources over time (e.g., self-identity; energy, continuation of the relationship), caused by the enduring experience of (seemingly irresolvable) personal incompatibilities (Hobfoll, 1989). Consequently, conflict management strategies that may alleviate the harmful effects of conflict and that not necessarily draw on (other) resources, become progressively important.

### *Personality resources as predictors of different types of adjustment*

"My partner enjoys it when I invite people over. The social initiatives are mostly my department, and my partner is glad for that. If it wasn't for me, it would just be our small family"

Coping with the stressors and challenges of an international transition requires resources from both partners. In this regard the expatriate and the expatriate spouse do not arrive abroad completely blank. Intercultural personality traits may help them to cope with the taxing and stressful events of life abroad. As Hobfoll (1989) argues in his COR theory, resources are helpful in order to cope with taxing circumstances like an international assignment, but they are also prone to depletion. Therefore, it is important to have enough resources at one's disposal. The results of Chapter 4 revealed that intercultural personality

<sup>21</sup> (i.e., after an initial short "honeymoon phase", a longer lasting period in which difficulties of the assignment surface sets in)

traits—emotional stability, social initiative, open mindedness—enhanced expatriate couples’ psychological, socio-cultural, and professional adjustment. Even more interesting I found support for an exchange of resources effect showing that these internal resources may function as external resources as well. To be precise, when one’s own resources did not suffice, one’s partner’s resources partly buffered the deficiency and as such provide partners with some extra coping resources.

The exchange of resources effect manifested itself differently for expatriates and expatriate spouses. Whereas it was related to for psychological and socio-cultural adjustment among expatriate spouses, it emerged only for work-related aspects of adjustment among expatriates. As such, these findings further endorse the role-related differences that emerged in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3, implying the need to not only investigate expatriates and expatriate spouses simultaneously, but also investigate them as unique entities in the expatriation process.

## **Contributions of the present research**

### *Importance of relational dynamics for expatriate couples’ adjustment*

Previous research on expatriation has demonstrated that levels of adjustment of expatriates’ and expatriate spouses’ are highly associated (e.g., Shaffer & Harrison, 2001; Takeuchi, et al., 2002; Caligiuri, et al., 1998). Nevertheless, the relational processes that may underlie this mutual influence have not received much attention in the expatriation literature (Van der Zee, et al. 2005). The present dissertation provides new insights revealing how relationship processes as well as (interchangeable) personality resources affect expatriate couples’ adjustment. Specifically, I found that partners may influence each other in several ways: On the negative side, perceptions of injustice resulting from renegotiating tasks and duties may hamper psychological adjustment because they evoke affective conflicts. These processes may be dampened by one’s own and one’s partner’s avoidance behavior signaling high concern for the other party and the relationship. On the positive side, one’s own and one’s partner’s intercultural personality resources—emotional stability, social initiative and open mindedness—facilitated higher levels of psychological, socio-cultural and professional adjustment. Together, these findings suggest that expatriate assignments may be framed as “family relocations” with the relational dynamics influencing both partners’ adjustment (Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001).

### *Differences between expatriates and expatriate spouses*

This dissertation also showed that, in line with a power-dependence perspective (Emerson, 1962), expatriate spouses attach greater value to and are more receptive of the interpersonal

interactions under investigation. Spouses are generally more dependent on the expatriate than vice versa, making them prone to rely more heavily on the interplay with and the resources of their partner. Specifically, expatriate spouses experienced stronger effects of their own interpersonal justice perceptions, affective conflict and avoidance reactions to such conflict. These results are reinforced by additional role-driven results. Expatriates' distributive justice perceptions affected the work-related conflicts they experienced; expatriate spouses' distributive justice perceptions affected the household-related conflicts they experienced (Chapter 2). In a similar vein, an exchange of resources effect was discovered on psychological and socio-cultural adjustment among expatriate spouses but only on work-related adjustment among expatriates (Chapter 4). The empirical chapters thus revealed unique processes for expatriates and expatriate spouses.

It must be noted that the assumed imbalance in dependency between expatriates and expatriate spouses, which has also been referred to in previous research (e.g., Shaffer & Harrison, 2001; Kupka & Cathro, 2007), was inferred rather than *directly measured*. Future research needs to include more specific measures to further quantify the power-dependence balance. For example, in line with Rusbult's investment model, studies may incorporate the potential outcomes of alternative involvements, the investments made in the relationship, and the degree to which the relationship caters for one's needs (see e.g., Rusbult, Arriaga & Agnew, 2001; Rusbult, Johnson, & Morrow, 1986).

#### *Justice and conflict as multidimensional constructs*

In the present research I found support for the usefulness to distinguish between distributive, decision-making and interpersonal justice among expatriates and expatriate spouses. These concepts work out differently for outcomes like conflict and adjustment (Chapter 2). In addition, and as one of the first to do so, I showed that when studying close relationship partners, a distinction can be made between content-oriented, cognitive conflicts (or task conflicts) and personal, affective conflicts. Although this distinction is commonly used in organizational settings (for exceptions, see Bono et al., 2002; Rispens et al., 2010) this dissertation revealed the relevance of the distinction between cognitive and affective conflicts for intimate relations as well. Specifically, the results of Chapter 2 showed that feelings of injustice sparked both task-related, cognitive and affective conflicts. Yet, particularly affective conflicts were negatively associated with psychological adjustment (see for example De Dreu & Weingart, 2003, for comparable findings in organizational context). For task conflicts, the only significant association with psychological adjustment that emerged was between expatriate's work-related task conflicts and expatriate spouse's psychological adjustment. Household-related task did not influence psychological adjustment. Presumably, task-related conflict issues are less threatening to one's identity and may be more easily solved, and as such are less harmful to one's wellbeing and personal satisfaction.

An important limitation of the present dissertation is that the effect of task and affective conflicts was only investigated for psychological adjustment. Possibly, other aspects of adjustment may be negatively associated with both affective and task-related, cognitive conflicts. That is, the aforementioned meta-analysis (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003) revealed that task and affective conflicts are equally harmful for work outcomes such as team *performance*. Therefore, and elaborating on studies on home-to-work-interference (e.g., Demerouti, et al., 2010), future research may further investigate this issue, for example by exploring whether expatriate couples' work-related conflicts affect expatriates' professional adjustment.

An additional limitation is that I did not take into account the role of the assigning organization as a possible (indirect) conflict party. Such a perspective may provide further insight into expatriation-related dilemmas, given that the assigning organization determines expatriate couple's private life to a great extent (e.g., where to live, when to leave, where to send the children to school to). That is, it may well be that perceptions of injustice experienced within the relationship are also associated with fairness perceptions involving the assigning company. For example, an expatriate spouse explained "*In my opinion, it would be fair if my partner would stand up for my rights with the company a bit more. But he just says that the company is within its rights. I think that's ridiculous*". In this regard, an expatriate spouse may feel unfairness because of the overtime the expatriate spends at work, instead of at home with the family. The expatriate, in turn, may experience tension between the demands from home and the obligations toward the company. As such, the expatriate may feel as if (s)he has to negotiate with the expatriate spouse on behalf of the company (e.g., "Let us take our holidays in that month, that would suit the company better") or negotiation with company on behalf of the expatriate spouses ("My partner would like to enroll in a cultural course, can the company provide some funding for that?"). Experiencing (in)justice from the side of the company may in turn impact the expatriate couple's adjustment, either directly, or indirectly through intra-relational processes (e.g., conflict) triggered by (un)fair treatment.

#### *The upside of avoidance behavior*

An interesting and new insight from the present dissertation is that avoidance behavior may be beneficial for the adjustment of the expatriate couple. Whereas it is usually assumed that avoidance behavior has detrimental effects, the present results revealed that the consequences of avoidance may be more complex than generally assumed. In line with recent studies (De Dreu & Van Vianen, 2001; Roloff & Ifert, 2000), the results of Chapter 3 suggest that especially when conflicts are (seemingly) irresolvable and concern issues that are essential to one's personal identity, avoidance can be a constructive response. Future research may focus on additional factors that facilitate such beneficial effects of avoidance, like the degree to which one's relationship is trusting and satisfying.

The possibility that avoidance may work out positively has practical implications as well. Intimate partners, and presumably everybody else who is in an interdependent relationship with someone else (friends, siblings, neighbors), may be keen to fix problems and solve issues that arise. However, this dissertation emphasizes that sometimes it is advisable to turn away from the conflict and leave the situation as it is, particularly when problems appear irresolvable and disclosing disapproval may come at a high cost. In the same vein, counselors and therapists (e.g., marriage counselors, neighborhood mediators), may want to take into account this beneficial side of avoidance when supporting and advising persons.

It is important to note that this dissertation studied avoidance behavior in an isolated manner. That is, I did not consider how it related to other more active, conflict management strategies (e.g., problem solving, forcing). Usually, people will use several ways to manage their conflicts. Future research should focus on conflict handling as a complex process in which several types of conflict management strategies are used sequentially (cf. Van de Vliert et al., 1999). As such, not only will certain strategies under certain circumstances work out better than others, certain strategies may also work out better when combined with other certain strategies.

#### *Exchange of resources effect*

In the present thesis I found support for an *exchange of resources* effect indicating that a deficiency in one's own coping resources can at least be partly buffered by one's partner's resources. This is an important finding as it demonstrates that (intercultural) personality dimensions are not only valuable as an internal coping resource, but can be considered an external coping resource as well. Furthermore, it gives insight into how internal and external coping resources may interact, which has hardly been studied before (Thoits, 1995). Although previous research has focused on the role of personality in close relationships, these studies mainly focused on whether differences or similarities in partners' personalities predicted relationship quality (e.g., Barelds & Barelds-Dijkstra, 2007; Dijkstra & Barelds, 2008). However, these studies did not specifically focus on how (and whether) partners could benefit from each other's personality resources. Finally, the exchange of resources effect suggests that, in order to properly advise people who consider moving abroad, not only a person's own personality dimensions should be taken into account, but the trailing partner's personality dimensions should be considered as well.

#### *The Actor Partner Interdependence Model*

Since the beginning of the new millennium, the Actor-Partner Interdependence Model is increasingly adopted in close relationship studies (e.g., Campbell, Simpson, Kashy & Rholes, 2001). This dissertation is among the first to apply an Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (APIM; Kenny, Kashy & Cook, 2006) to investigate relational processes among expatriate couples. The advantages of using the APIM approach are many. It allowed me to not only



take into account both partners simultaneously, but also enabled me to explore whether they acted and reacted differently as well. For example, in Chapter 2 the two-level model with partners who were nested in couples revealed how the relational dynamics between two partners influenced their adjustment. In a similar vein, in Chapter 3 and 4 it enabled me to study the effect of “time”. In Chapter 4 it allowed me to further confirm the direction of the causal relationship between personality and psychological adjustment.

#### *General limitations and directions for future research*

Throughout the chapters I have discussed specific limitations regarding the chapter concerned as well as more general limitations of the overall dissertation. For example, I have pointed at the limitations arising from the confounding effect of role and gender, and the low rate of female expatriates accompanied by a male spouse in order to further clarify the influence of role versus gender. Furthermore, I mentioned the recommendation to future studies to include a control group of “regular” couples.

In addition to these important topics, I like to add two general limitations of this dissertation. First, although variables under considerations varied across studies, the findings of the three empirical chapters are based on data that were gathered from one sample. I gathered the data through various methods. Furthermore, participants were living in various host-countries, and were working for different organizations. Nonetheless, I can not be completely sure about the representativity of the sample. Thus, in order to further establish the generalizability of the findings, future research on the impact of relational dynamics of expatriate couples’ adjustment is recommended.

In addition, the results of the empirical chapters are based on data gathered through self-report method. Although self-reports can be a valuable source of information, especially when the variables under investigations refer to feelings or perceptions (e.g., justice, conflict) or to behavior that may be less easily observed (e.g., avoidance behavior), future research should preferably use multiple data sources, like observational data or peer-reports. For example, the inclusion of colleague-rated professional adjustment of the expatriate, combined with expatriate’s self-reported professional adjustment may create more reliable results.

#### *Practical Implications*

The results of this dissertation clearly showed that relational dynamics within the expatriate couple are important factors influencing expatriate couples’ adjustment. These insights are important both to international organizations and to the expatriate couples themselves.

For one, this dissertation clearly emphasized the need—not only for research but for assigning companies even more so—to (re)frame these international transitions as family relocations. Companies should more actively acknowledge the importance of the family

system and create higher levels of awareness among couples that are assigned abroad. Armed with higher awareness, and in the knowledge that the challenges they face are inevitably part of the uprooting process of an international assignment, difficulties may appear less troublesome for expatriate couples, and couples will be able to cope with it more adequately. In the same vein, such higher awareness may help expatriates and expatriate spouses to better support each other. For example, knowing that respect and acknowledgment of one's position (Chapter 2) is especially important to expatriate spouses can help expatriates to better support their trailing counterpart. Additionally, the knowledge that avoiding conflict may sometimes be beneficial, may help expatriate couples to deal with issues that may be irresolvable due to the restrictions emanating from the international assignment (Chapter 3).

International organizations usually focus solely on the expatriate, whereas expatriate spouses are barely involved in (pre-)assignment procedures and preparations. This dissertation shows that the trailing spouse is an essential factor for the success of the international assignment. Consequently, companies should take into account both the expatriate and the expatriate spouse when sending people to foreign postings. This further enables them to adequately advise people about their trip abroad.

Furthermore, international organizations may more actively support the expatriate spouse and acknowledge the special circumstances expatriate couples face. First, such acknowledgment may strengthen the relationship between the company and the expatriate employee, as such increasing essential factors like organizational commitment and even job performance. Indeed, recent research focusing on neighbor-to-neighbor relationships reveals that the mere acknowledgement of an undesired situation by a professional party improves the quality of the relationship between neighbors (Ufkes, Giebels, Otten, & Van der Zee, submitted). Second, organizational support could be aimed at tackling the mechanism that may be responsible for the difficulties couples face abroad. For example, to minimize possible dependency imbalances, companies may help expatriate spouses in finding a job in the new country. Furthermore, organizations could help couples face these challenges more successfully by providing access to (online) training and coaching facilities.

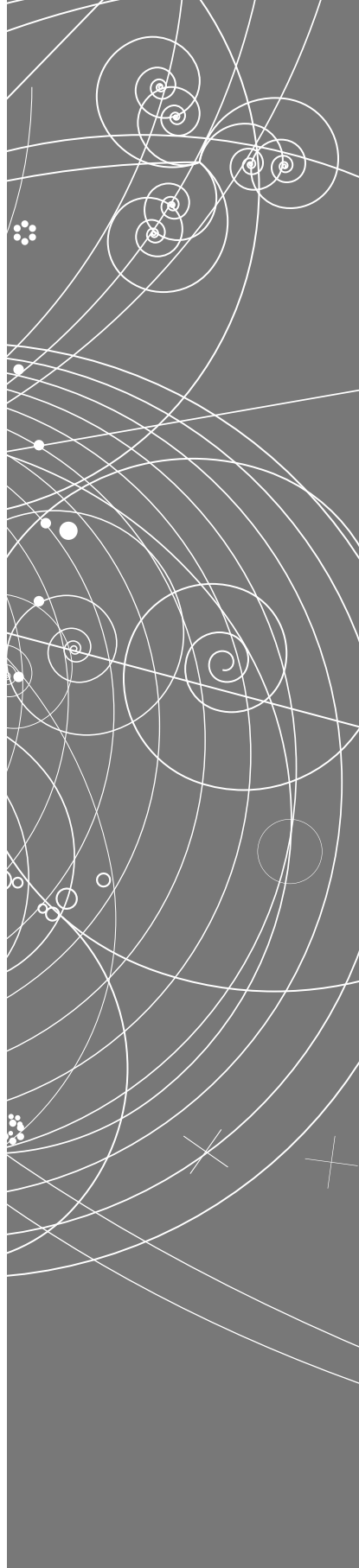
Overall, this dissertation suggests that expatriate couples, international organizations, and of course researchers should pay more attention to the relational dynamics influencing expatriate couples' adjustment and as such the success of the international assignment. After all, it seems that couples who make it, make it together.



**Nederlandse Samenvatting**

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**Summary in Dutch**





Al meer dan 30 jaar onderkent de wetenschappelijke literatuur het belang van de meereizende partner voor het succes van de expatriate. Toch is de huidige dissertatie één van eersten die daadwerkelijk het gezichtspunt van beide partijen – de expatriate en de expatriate-partner – meeneemt in een onderzoek naar de aanpassing van expatriate-koppels in het buitenland. Dit is opmerkelijk omdat er hoge kosten en risico's gepaard gaan met het uitzenden van personeel. Bovendien heeft een mislukte uitzending en een voortijdige terugkeer van een expatriate negatieve consequenties, zowel voor de organisatie als voor de expatriate zelf.

Kenmerkend voor een internationale uitzending is dat het besluit van één persoon om in het buitenland te gaan werken – de expatriate – grote gevolgen heeft voor beide partners. Een verhuizing naar het buitenland kan de rolverdeling binnen koppels behoorlijk ontregelen. In het thuisland hebben beide partners vaak een baan en een carrière. Zij dragen beiden bij aan het gezinsinkomen en zij verdelen de huishoudelijk taken en de kinderopvang. In het buitenland is de expatriate de kostwinner en degene die zijn of haar carrière ontplooit. Daarbij komt dat de expatriate via de werkkring vanaf het begin een sociaal netwerk om zich heen heeft. Expatriate-partners daarentegen hebben vaak geen baan in het buitenland. Zij zijn hierdoor financieel afhankelijk(er) van de expatriate en het ontbreekt hen aan een sociaal netwerk. De expatriate-partner wordt daardoor sterker afhankelijk van de expatriate dan andersom. Deze disbalans kan leiden tot ontwikkelingen binnen de relatie die van invloed zijn op de aanpassing van beide partners. Het belang van onderzoek dat zich richt op de processen die zich binnen de relatie afspelen neemt toe gezien het groeiend aantal *dual-career* koppels en het hoge aantal expatriates dat een buitenlandse aanstelling afbreekt voor de carrière van diens partner (zie ook, Harvey & Buckley, 1998; Punnett, 1997). Het doel van de huidige dissertatie is om antwoord te geven op de vraag op welke wijze relationele processen de aanpassing van expatriate-koppels beïnvloeden.

Een essentiële factor in intieme relaties is afhankelijkheid (zie bijv. Emerson, 1962; Kelley & Thibaut, 1978). Die afhankelijkheid komt voort uit de behoefte van een partner om de relatie met de ander te behouden, om zo diens eigen doelen te bereiken. In intieme relaties kunnen partners elkaars uitkomsten en doelen beïnvloeden: Wat de ene partner doet of nalaat heeft effect op de uitkomsten van de andere partner.

In de transitiefase waarin expatriate-koppels zich bevinden lijken er veranderingen op te treden op twee aspecten van afhankelijkheid: het *niveau van afhankelijkheid* en de *wederkerigheid van afhankelijkheid*. Het niveau van afhankelijk verwijst naar de mate waarin de uitkomsten van de ene partner worden beïnvloed door de daden van de andere partner. Met de wederkerigheid van afhankelijkheid bedoelen we de mate waarin partners gelijkwaardig van elkaar afhankelijk zijn (Rusbult & Van Lange, 2003). De buitenlandse uitzending zorgt ervoor dat het niveau van afhankelijkheid versterkt wordt, terwijl de wederkerigheid van de afhankelijkheid juist afneemt. De wederkerigheid van afhankelijkheid neemt af omdat de rollen van expatriates and expatriate-partners meer verschillen en minder gebalanceerd

zijn dan vóór de verhuizing. Zoals gezegd wordt de expatriate-partner meer afhankelijk van de expatriate dan andersom. Dit kan leiden tot gevoelens van onrechtvaardigheid en conflicten die op hun beurt de aanpassing van het expatriate-koppel kunnen belemmeren. Tegelijkertijd zorgt de international uitzending ervoor dat het niveau van afhankelijkheid tussen de expatriate en de expatriate-partner groeit. In de afwezigheid van andere bronnen van sociale en emotionele steun, zoals vrienden en familie, zijn partners vooral op elkaar aangewezen. Naast zich te verlaten op de eigen persoonlijke interne resources, kunnen partners mogelijk ook profiteren van de competenties van de andere partner. Op die manier creëren zij additionele bronnen om de uitdagingen van de nieuwe situatie het hoofd te bieden.

Deze dissertatie heeft als doel verder inzicht te verwerven in de manier waarop deze twee processen tussen expatriate en partner hun aanpassing beïnvloeden. In lijn met eerder onderzoek maak ik onderscheid tussen psychologische, sociaal-culturele, en professionele aanpassing (Black, Mendenhall, & Oddou, 1991; Searle & Ward, 1990). Met psychologische aanpassing worden de interne psychologische uitkomsten zoals geestelijke gezondheid en persoonlijke tevredenheid bedoeld. Sociaal-culturele aanpassing verwijst naar de externe psychologische uitkomsten die een individu verbinden met de nieuwe omgeving, zoals het vermogen om met dagelijkse problemen om te gaan (Ali, et al., 2003, p 565; cf. Van der Zee, et al., 2007). Professionele aanpassing verwijst naar adaptatie van de expatriate aan de nieuwe werksituatie.

In drie empirische hoofdstukken maak ik gebruik van een steekproef van ruim honderd expatriate-koppels. Expatriate en expatriate-partner vulden afzonderlijk van elkaar een vragenlijst in. Een subsample vulde een jaar later een vervolgvragenlijst in. Om beide partners tegelijkertijd mee te nemen in het onderzoek en te controleren voor de interafhankelijkheid maak ik in alle drie beschreven studies gebruik van het Actor-Partner Interdependence Model (Kenny, Kashy & Cook, 2006) om de data te modelleren.

## Hoofdstuk 2

In Hoofdstuk 2 onderzoek ik hoe gevoelens van rechtvaardigheid—via conflict—van invloed zijn op de psychologische aanpassing van het expatriate-koppel. De verhuizing zorgt voor belangrijke veranderingen binnen de structuur van de intieme relatie. Terwijl de nieuwe functie van de expatriate meer verantwoordelijkheden met zich meebrengt en zodanig meer tijd van de expatriate opeist, heeft de expatriate-partner—vaak zonder baan—juist meer tijd over. Daardoor worden taken en verantwoordelijkheden, binnen- en buitenshuis, op een andere, vaak minder egalitaire manier verdeeld, wat kan leiden tot gevoelens van onrechtvaardigheid. In Hoofdstuk 2 wordt aangetoond dat gevoelens van onrechtvaardigheid

leiden tot conflicten, en dat dit uiteindelijk samenhangt met een lagere psychologische aanpassing van beide partijen. Bovendien blijkt dat partners niet alleen hun eigen, maar ook elkaars uitkomsten beïnvloeden.

In het onderzoek onderscheid ik verschillende categorieën van rechtvaardigheid en conflict. Bij rechtvaardigheid maak ik onderscheid tussen distributieve rechtvaardigheid (de rechtvaardigheid van de verdeling van uitkomsten en inbreng), besluitvormingsrechtvaardigheid (het hebben van inspraak in belangrijke beslissingen) en interpersoonlijke rechtvaardigheid (behandeld worden met respect en erkenning). Wat betreft conflict onderscheid ik cognitieve conflicten, die gaan over de inhoud en uitvoering van een taak en affectieve conflicten, die persoonlijk van aard zijn en gebaseerd op persoonlijke waarden en normen (zie ook Jehn, 1995).

Distributieve onrechtvaardigheid blijkt, in lijn met de “self-interest theory” vooral van invloed te zijn op cognitieve conflicten (zie bijv. Thibaut & Walker, 1975). Bij expatriates leidt distributieve onrechtvaardigheid tot werkgerelateerde conflicten, bij expatriate-partners juist tot conflicten betreffende huishoudelijke zaken. Interpersoonlijke onrechtvaardigheid leidt tot affectief conflict. Dit is in lijn met de “group-value theory” (Lind & Tyler, 1988). Naarmate expatriate-partners minder interpersoonlijke rechtvaardigheid ervaren, ondervinden zijzelf en de expatriate meer affectief conflict. Een onverwacht resultaat is dat zowel bij expatriates als bij expatriate-partners distributieve onrechtvaardigheid leidt tot affectief conflict. Deze bevinding suggereert dat ook de eerlijke verdeling van uitkomsten als tijd en taken een teken kan zijn van waardering en respect. Voor beide partners zorgt distributieve onrechtvaardigheid—via affectief conflict—voor een verminderde psychologische aanpassing.

### Hoofdstuk 3

In Hoofdstuk 3 onderzoek ik of de manier van omgaan met conflict invloed heeft op de relatie tussen conflict en psychologische aanpassing. De focus ligt hierbij op conflictvermijdend gedrag. De resultaten laten zien dat de negatieve uitwerking van conflict op aanpassing minder sterk is wanneer conflicten worden vermeden. Twee gerelateerde mechanismen kunnen een dergelijk verzachtend effect van vermindering verklaren. Ten eerste kan vermijdingsgedrag voortkomen uit sympathie voor de relatie en de partner, in plaats van uit desinteresse (Ohbuchi & Atsumi, 2010; Tjosvold & Sun, 2002; Wang, 2006). Ten tweede werkt vermijdingsgedrag als een beschermingsmechanisme tegen potentiële bedreigingen van de (voortgang van de) relatie en van de eigen identiteit (Buysse & Ickes, 1999; Simpson et al., 2003). Affectieve conflicten gaan vooral over diepgewortelde persoonlijke waarden en meningen. Ze raken aan de eigen identiteit en zijn (of lijken) daardoor vrijwel onoplosbaar.



Vooral in deze situaties lijkt vermijding soms effectief te zijn (zie De Dreu & Van Vianen, 2001; Roloff & Ifert, 2000).

In Hoofdstuk 3 blijkt dat het verzachtende effect van vermijden in het bijzonder bij expatriate-partners en vooral na verloop van tijd intreedt. Zoals gezegd leidt de uitzending tot een grotere afhankelijkheid van de expatriate-partner. De potentiële dreiging die uitgaat van affectief conflict voor de eigen identiteit en de relatie is daarom sterker voor expatriate-partners. Bovendien wordt, naarmate de tijd verstrijkt, de disbalans in rollen steeds duidelijker waardoor de effecten van conflict en de reactie daarop groter worden. Deze beredenering sluit aan bij de expatriation-curve, die aangeeft dat expatriation-gerelateerde problemen vooral later in de uitzending naar boven komen. Een verklaring is te vinden in de Conservation of Resources theorie (Hobfoll, 1989). Aanhoudende, lastig op te lossen persoonlijke conflicten vormen een dreiging voor resources (identiteit, energie, voortgang relatie). Het belang van een conflicthanteringsstrategie die de negatieve effecten verzacht en die bovendien geen beslag legt op andere resources, neemt dan toe.

## Hoofdstuk 4

In Hoofdstuk 4 richt ik me op persoonlijkheid. Ik onderzoek de mate waarin de interculturele persoonlijkheidsdimensies emotionele stabiliteit, sociaal initiatief en openmindedness van invloed zijn op de psychologische, sociaal-culturele en professionele aanpassing. Met emotionele stabiliteit wordt het vermogen om kalm te reageren in stressvolle situaties bedoeld. Sociaal initiatief verwijst naar de neiging om sociale situaties actief te benaderen en initiatief te nemen. Openmindedness verwijst naar een open en onbevooroordeelde houding tegenover andere groepen en afwijkende culturele normen en waarden. De resultaten uit Hoofdstuk 4 tonen aan dat hogere scores op deze drie dimensies zorgen voor een betere psychologische, sociaal-culturele en professionele aanpassing.

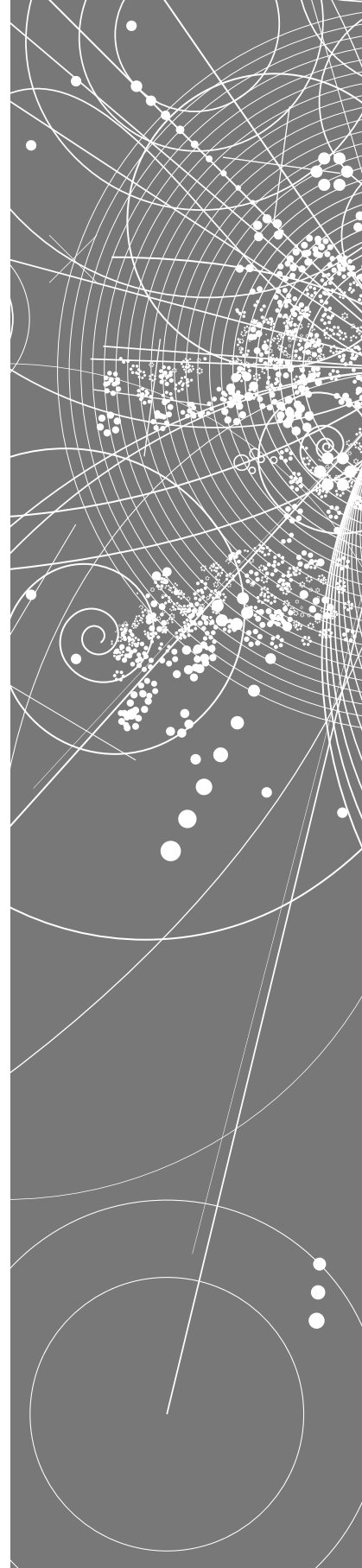
Bovendien laten de bevindingen in Hoofdstuk 4 zien dat ook de persoonlijkheidsdimensies van de partner van belang zijn voor een goede aanpassing. Voor personen die laag scoren op een interculturele dimensie, kan een hoge score van de partner op die dimensie als buffer werken tegen dit tekort. De interculturele persoonlijkheidsdimensies werken dus niet alleen als interne, maar ook als externe resource. Dit betekent een uitbreiding van resources zoals onderscheiden in Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources theorie. Dit "exchange of resources" effect werkt anders uit voor expatriates dan voor expatriate-partners. Bij expatriate-partners helpt het exchange of resources effect voor het handhaven van het psychologische en sociale welbevinden. Bij expatriates wordt het effect alleen gevonden voor werkgerelateerde aanpassing. Deze bevindingen onderschrijven de gevonden rolgerelateerde verschillen uit Hoofdstuk 2 en 3, en wijzen op de noodzaak om

expatriates en expatriate-partners weliswaar gelijktijdig maar ook als unieke entiteiten in het expatriationproces te onderzoeken.

De resultaten van Hoofdstuk 2, 3, en 4 verschaffen inzicht in de relationele processen binnen expatriate relaties die van invloed zijn op de aanpassing van expatriates en expatriate-partners. Op die manier geeft dit onderzoek dus inzicht in de manier *waarop* expatriates en expatriate-partners elkaars aanpassing beïnvloeden.



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*Kim*

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