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Abstract	<p>Expatriation in oil and gas exploration and production involves relocation or frequent mobility to geographically remote, climatically harsh, even dangerous locations. Living in camps, compounds or offshore rigs typically involves family separation for lengthy periods with little respite from a highly masculine social ethos. Women undertaking such assignments can experience limited opportunities for fulfilling social lives. Even city-based solo expatriation can prove to be isolating. Yet, extreme geographical locations do not preclude women's expatriation as benefits such as good career prospects, high monetary rewards and various forms of organizational support can potentially outweigh the disadvantages. Based on 12 interviews with solo expatriates, this chapter highlights the factors that influence women's decisions to undertake single status expatriation and their experiences of living in highly gendered geographies. Organizational policy that supports female assignees can help to make extreme expatriation more attractive to women.</p>	
Keywords (separated by " - ")	Women expatriates - Extreme environments - Organizational support - Expatriate camps - Single status - Oil and gas industry	

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Extreme Expatriation: The Effect
of Location Factors and Masculine
Environments on Women's
International Assignment
Participation in Oil and Gas
Exploration and Production

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Introduction

Oil and gas exploration and production organizations are major, and increasing, users of expatriates (Brookfield 2009a). Expatriates are defined as individuals working outside the country of their nationality and being based in another country (BP 2010); corporate expatriation is instigated by an employing organization and distinguished from self-initiated expatriation (Berry and Bell 2012; Cerdin and Le Pargneux 2010; Howe-Walsh and Schyns 2010). The terms 'international assignment' and 'expatriate' are used interchangeably within the literature (for example, Tung 2004) although the term 'international assignment' encompasses a wide variety of arrangements going beyond traditional expatriation out and back from the headquarters sending location (Banai 2004). Types of assignments used typically include long-term (usually defined as over a year in length) and short-term (generally between 3 months and 1 year long). The oil and gas industry also uses 'rotational' working (Brookfield 2011a), particularly offshore and in remote locations (Inwood 2007). This type of

expatriation is defined as rotation for a set period of time into another country (BP 2010).

The expatriate workforce has been and is today predominantly male (Adler 1984; Hardill 1998; Hutchings et al. 2012); women's share of expatriation across all industries ranges between 16 and 20 % (Brookfield 2010, 2011a, 2012; Permits Foundation 2012). In oil and gas, however, women's expatriate participation is just 7 % (ORC Worldwide 2007). Expatriation provides career benefits to individuals with international assignment experience considered a prerequisite to leadership (Caligiuri and Colakoglu 2007; Mendenhall et al. 2002; Orser and Leck 2010). Expatriation therefore presents significant advantages to those individuals who engage in it. Hence, it is not surprising to find women entering in increasing numbers what was historically a masculine expatriate preserve (Adler 1984; Julius 1982) and to see them increasingly taking up gender atypical employment roles (Watts 2009). Yet, women's share of oil and gas expatriate opportunities has risen only marginally from the 5 % recorded in 1990s (ORC/CBI 1992).

In the oil and gas industry, exploration and drilling involve 'extreme' expatriation: challenging geographical conditions beyond perceptions of traditional assignee environments, often with harsh climatic conditions and in remote locations. Camp and compound living is necessary in many such locations due to access and security

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63 factors, resulting in a restrictive environment
 64 whereby work and social life are inextricably
 65 intertwined. Such settings are highly masculine;
 66 women expatriates are not just in the minority but
 67 are highly visible. Yet, very little is known about
 68 expatriate compound life (Lauring and Selmer
 69 2009). Studies on women's expatriation provide
 70 only a patchwork of information by geography,
 71 having, in the main, addressed more traditional
 72 Western sending and receiving locations
 73 (Shortland and Altman 2011). There has also
 74 been little research into organizational support
 75 for expatriates (Kraimer et al. 2001) and studies
 76 of expatriate policies, terms and conditions rarely
 77 address specific concerns of women assignees
 78 based in non-Western host locations (Hutchings
 79 et al. 2008). The effect of extreme location issues
 80 on women's willingness to undertake expatriation
 81 is unknown.

82 To address these under-researched issues, this
 83 chapter empirically examines the extent to
 84 which – and how – geographical location factors
 85 (such as climatic extremes, remote/distant envi-
 86 ronments, poor security, and health concerns)
 87 affect women's willingness to undertake expatri-
 88 ation. It also examines the strategies female expa-
 89 triates use to manage their home, family and
 90 social lives in the context of working alone in
 91 male-dominated environments and in extreme or
 92 remote geographical locations. This exploratory
 93 research into the intersection between gender and
 94 geography in expatriation is framed by Perceived
 95 Organizational Support; being set within the con-
 96 text of the international human resource interven-
 97 tions provided currently by employers and the
 98 actions that they might take in the future with
 99 regard to their international assignment policy
 100 design and implementation practice to increase
 101 expatriate gender diversity in remote and chal-
 102 lenging host country environments.

103 Context

104 Organizations operating in remote or potentially
 105 unsafe locations establish expatriate compounds
 106 to provide an enclosed community for their expa-
 107 triate workers and their families. Such environ-

108 ments offer security and facilities to enable
 109 family life to continue comfortably (Lauring and
 110 Selmer 2009). Coles and Fechter (2008) suggest
 111 that such an expatriate community acts as a 'bub-
 112 ble' and this brings pressure to conform to
 113 acceptable behaviors. Indeed, Lauring and
 114 Selmer's (2009) study finds that national groups
 115 and 'in-groups' emerge in compound settings,
 116 norms of acceptable behavior are established (to
 117 which newcomers conform) and work and non-
 118 work boundaries blur. Expatriate compounds are
 119 highly gendered settings: men are the expatriates
 120 and in-compound support groups cater for wives
 121 (Coles and Fechter 2008; Lauring and Selmer
 122 2009). Where female expatriates are employed,
 123 they lead separate lives from expatriates' wives
 124 and do not (or do not wish to) involve themselves
 125 in wives' in-compound support groups (Fechter
 126 2008). Single expatriate women, in particular,
 127 face isolation and loneliness as social activities
 128 frequently revolve around children (Caligiuri and
 129 Lazarova 2002).

130 Besides family-oriented compounds (typi-
 131 cally servicing established drilling and produc-
 132 tion operations), the oil and gas industry operates
 133 camps where exploratory and early stage drilling
 134 operations take place. New discoveries are fre-
 135 quently in remote geographical areas or politi-
 136 cally unstable locations. Camps are likely to
 137 differ in social ethos from established expatriate
 138 compounds as they are not usually inhabited by
 139 expatriates on accompanied long-term assign-
 140 ments, rather they are serviced via unaccompa-
 141 nied, rotational working (Inwood 2007). While
 142 camps are shut off, fenced and have a company
 143 infrastructure (Fechter 2008) and, as such, bear
 144 some similarity to compound life, the assignment
 145 pattern servicing them results in a differentiation
 146 between camp and compound social and gender
 147 structures.

148 Rotation patterns involve regular periods on-
 149 shift interspersed with time off-shift; for example
 150 4 weeks on/4 weeks off, working 12 h days.
 151 Different groups of workers' shifts may overlap
 152 completely, partially or not at all, depending on
 153 business need, for example working arrange-
 154 ments with joint venture partners. As there are
 155 relatively few women undertaking assignments

156 in the oil and gas industry (ORC Worldwide
157 2007) and, in particular, rotational working, the
158 female population in such camp environments is
159 low (Inwood 2007). Long hours working also
160 limits opportunities for building social relation-
161 ships (Caligiuri and Lazarova 2002).

162 Forster (1999) reports that women assignees
163 have fewer options in terms of geographical des-
164 tinations, with their assignments typically based
165 in established Western destinations. Even in
166 developed countries, where assignees are under-
167 taking long-term expatriation, city-based office
168 locations and organizational cultures may not be
169 conducive to these women building friendships
170 (Caligiuri and Lazarova 2002). More junior
171 women colleagues may be uncomfortable social-
172 izing with them, while local women occupied
173 with family concerns may view them as a threat
174 through their foreign and single status (Napier
175 and Taylor 2002; Taylor and Napier 2001). As
176 Yeoh and Willis (2005: 211) report, female
177 assignees experience “considerable strain hold-
178 ing together geographically separate spheres of
179 productive and reproductive work across the
180 transnational terrain”. Women assignees on sin-
181 gle status would therefore be expected to be ‘self-
182 oriented’ (to cope with the requirement for social
183 adaptation) as well as ‘others-oriented’ (to
184 develop strong friendships locally wherever pos-
185 sible) to reduce assignment stress (Mendenhall
186 and Oddou 1985).

187 In some societies, where new discoveries are
188 of major importance to oil and gas, such as Russia
189 and the Central Asian ‘Stans’, men’s superiority
190 in the management hierarchy is highlighted
191 (Harry 2006; Mellow 1998). Local culture
192 demands that female expatriates modify their
193 behavior and appearance to a greater extent than
194 men (Coles and Fechter 2008) and building
195 friendships with male host country employees
196 may result in women assignees experiencing
197 social stigma (Caligiuri and Lazarova 2002). In
198 contrast, Verma (2008: 184) notes that living
199 away from home (from spouses/partners) allows
200 men “an enormous degree of freedom”, placing
201 strain on conjugal relations and trust. She sug-
202 gests that men’s freedom of movement can be
203 facilitated by host country’s reputations as sex

204 tourism destinations; expatriates can become
205 “sexpatriates”. Set against this backdrop, it might
206 be questioned why women elect to undertake
207 assignments in such locations. Fechter (2008)
208 reports women go to make a positive impact on
209 their host country, with the rewards of so-doing
210 outweighing the difficulties. Despite the chal-
211 lenges of being accepted as ‘one of the boys’ and
212 the high levels of confidence needed to cope in a
213 ‘macho’ male culture, women report high career
214 contribution, and the potential for friendship and
215 camaraderie in exploration environments
216 (Shortland 2011a). The expatriate experience
217 potentially provides solo women with an oppor-
218 tunity for reflexivity, self-discovery and empow-
219 erment (Thang et al. 2002).

220 Given the expected difficulties faced by
221 women on assignment in remote and gendered
222 geographies, organizational support is likely to
223 take on increased significance in their expatriate
224 participation decision-making and ability to com-
225 plete assignments once in post. While Perceived
226 Organizational Support concerns “the extent to
227 which the organization values their contribution
228 and cares about their well-being”, employers’
229 efforts to provide fair financial rewards and a
230 meaningful and interesting job will also affect
231 employees’ “emotional bond (affective attach-
232 ment)” to their organization (Eisenberger et al.
233 1986: 501). Kraimer et al. (2001) note that in an
234 expatriate context, organizational support com-
235 prises aid, affect and affirmation: aid refers to
236 information or assistance to reduce expatriate
237 stress; affect refers to supportive relationships;
238 and affirmation concerns the assignees’ ability
239 to cope with stress with reaffirming relationships.
240 Social support is therefore expected to be of par-
241 ticular importance to expatriates and this may be
242 provided by the organization, managers, co-
243 workers and family members.

244 Organizational support for expatriation
245 (including aid in the form of remuneration, allow-
246 ances, benefits, preparation and training; and
247 social support in post via relationships such as
248 mentoring, coaching and networking) is articu-
249 lated within international assignment policies.
250 Certain aid elements (for example, housing and
251 location payments) are viewed as ‘knock-out fac-

252 tors'; without their provision, the assignment
 253 would not be undertaken (Warneke and Schneider
 254 2011). Cost of living payments and healthcare
 255 are also cited as crucial (Sims and Schraeder
 256 2005). While policy governing the provision of
 257 allowances and benefits to expatriates is typically
 258 determined by Human Resource staff (typically
 259 in the headquarters) the delivery of the benefits
 260 on assignment takes place at local level in the
 261 host country by line managers. This may create
 262 tensions where policy provision and implementa-
 263 tion are not aligned (Perkins and Daste 2007).
 264 Notwithstanding this, the provision and delivery
 265 of expatriate allowances and benefits from the
 266 headquarters, the sending country or locally in
 267 the host country provides a supporting frame-
 268 work for expatriation: monetary satisfaction
 269 (Fish and Wood 1996), applicable benefits pack-
 270 ages (Konopaske and Werner 2005), and tax,
 271 pensions and social security concerns being
 272 addressed (Suutari and Tornikoski 2001) are
 273 important to assignment take-up. If the package
 274 is inadequate or recessionary pressures have
 275 trimmed it back too far, expatriate assignments
 276 may be unacceptable (Hardill and MacDonald
 277 1998). However, financial rewards are not a
 278 major motivator for expatriation (Pate and
 279 Scullion 2010) and are insufficient to "satisfy and
 280 commit expatriates to the organisation"
 281 (Tornikoski 2011: 61). Assignment support is
 282 generally acknowledged as more helpful to expa-
 283 triates in creating a meaningful and interesting
 284 job. For instance, mentoring helps to provide
 285 career enhancement for women (Linehan and
 286 Walsh 1999); coaching provides a highly person-
 287 alized form of training (Mendenhall and Stahl
 288 2000) and networking helps to reduce women's
 289 isolation as well as providing a career develop-
 290 ment intervention (Shortland 2011b).

291 Yet, remote geographies impact both
 292 employer-provided aid and support as well as the
 293 relationships that can reaffirm assignees' ability
 294 to cope with working away from home. In other
 295 words, although expatriates based in remote and
 296 challenging environments may receive generous
 297 compensatory allowances, the nature of their
 298 assignment location restricts the type of benefits
 299 provided. For instance, company-provided

300 accommodation (particularly in camps and
 301 compounds) is typically de-personalized and
 302 homogenous; everything is chosen and provided
 303 by the company (Gordon 2008). Supportive rela-
 304 tionships may also be limited by the gendered
 305 nature of the work location, the overlap of work
 306 and social space, restrictions on family members
 307 accompanying the assignee, and cultural norms
 308 and security constraints limiting freedom of
 309 movement external to compound and camp life.

310 Tuan (1977: 54) suggests that as humans, we
 311 need both space and place; our lives "are a dialect-
 312 ical movement between shelter and venture,
 313 attachment and freedom". While place represents
 314 security – and space, freedom – camp and com-
 315 pound life presents inhabitants with a restricted
 316 and restrictive corporate space, "marked off and
 317 defended against intruders" (ibid: 4). Freedom is
 318 therefore limited and although such corporate
 319 environments provide shelter and security, they
 320 do not provide the intimate and sentimental
 321 attachment – a centre of "felt value" (ibid: 4) –
 322 associated with the development of a sense of
 323 place. Tuan further suggests that it usually
 324 requires a period of lengthy residence to enable
 325 the creation of place.

326 Women who choose to expatriate to isolated
 327 destinations by themselves or who undertake
 328 city-based assignments, far from home on their
 329 own, require strategies to build social relation-
 330 ships, feelings of belonging and of home; to cre-
 331 ate a sense of place – a personal connection to a
 332 building, with a sense of privacy. Although
 333 places are always in formation, constructed by
 334 replication of daily practices, and hence are
 335 never truly finished (Cresswell 2004), short or
 336 intermittent assignments restrict ability to gain
 337 attachment to the surroundings, inevitably lead-
 338 ing to a temporary and/or disrupted sense of
 339 place. Gordon (2008) suggests that personaliz-
 340 ing corporate space (for example, with pictures
 341 and furnishings) can help to create a sense of
 342 place from depersonalized space. When indi-
 343 viduals surround themselves with familiar
 344 objects, they attempt to make their place feel
 345 like home (Cresswell 2004). Yet, while long-
 346 term assignees typically receive allowances to
 347 transport goods and belongings around the

348 world, assignees undertaking short-term assign- 393
 349 ments are limited under corporate policy as to 394
 350 the volume of belongings they may transport 395
 351 (Brookfield 2009b, 2010, 2011b). Rotational 396
 352 assignees based in camp locations do not receive 397
 353 organizational payments for shipments; suit- 398
 354 cases only would be the norm. As a result, apart 399
 355 from bringing small mementos with them, per- 400
 356 sonalization of corporate space requires a differ- 401
 357 ent approach. For example, cooking and eating 402
 358 away from company-provided canteen facilities 403
 359 helps create a sense of difference and individu- 404
 360 ality (Gordon 2008). 405

361 The research study reported below examines 406
 362 the effects of challenging geographical locations 407
 363 and male-dominated environments on women's 408
 364 willingness to take up expatriate roles where the 409
 365 conditions associated with international working 410
 366 are extreme, being far beyond usual perceptions 411
 367 of an expatriate lifestyle. The extant literature 412
 368 does not consider in detail women's lived reality 413
 369 in such environments nor the extent to which 414
 370 organizations attempt to support women's expa- 415
 371 triation under such circumstances. As such, this 416
 372 study addresses these gaps in our knowledge. It 417
 373 highlights the issues that women face when 418
 374 undertaking international assignments to remote, 419
 375 unsafe, climatically extreme and masculine envi- 420
 376 ronments and it contributes to our understanding 421
 377 of how gender diversity in expatriation might be 422
 378 widened through organizational supporting pol- 423
 379 icy and practice. 424

380 Method

381 This study's analysis draws upon data collected 425
 382 from two oil and gas exploration and production 426
 383 case study organizations with UK-based opera- 427
 384 tions whose female expatriate populations were 428
 385 drawn from 16 different home countries. The 429
 386 organizations were identified through conven- 430
 387 ience sampling (Saunders et al. 2007). The case 431
 388 studies were not considered to be unique or 432
 389 extreme cases (Yin 2009) as they were not oil and 433
 390 gas 'giants', rather they were representative of 434
 391 medium-sized oil and gas firms, employing under 435
 392 12,000 employees with exploration and produc- 436

tion operations based in 20–30 worldwide loca- 393
 tions on all continents. 394

A triangulated research approach was under- 395
 taken comprising analysis of organizational pol- 396
 icy supporting expatriation and its implementa- 397
 tion in practice. To carry this out, relevant interna- 398
 tional assignment policies and other Human 399
 Resource policies that supported expatriation 400
 were collected from both case study firms. The 401
 information contained within these was subjected 402
 to data reduction (Miles and Huberman 1994) to 403
 generate policy summaries from which the ele- 404
 ments of support relating to geographical loca- 405
 tion could be analysed. 406

In-depth, semi-structured interviews (30– 407
 90 min' duration) were conducted with 14 Human 408
 Resource personnel who held responsibility for 409
 the design and/or implementation of company 410
 policies relevant to expatriation to establish how 411
 organizational policy, as written, was imple- 412
 mented in practice in the organizations' various 413
 host countries of operation. In relation to location 414
 factors, the questions addressed where female 415
 assignees worked, how these host countries were 416
 classified in policy with respect to such issues as 417
 risk/health/isolation and the relationship between 418
 assignment location and women's participation. 419
 Supporting policy in respect of preparation and 420
 training, remuneration and benefits linked to 421
 extreme geographies, and social support were 422
 also addressed. 423

The two firms employed a total of 93 female 424
 expatriates: 27 in Company A and 66 in Company 425
 B, representing 8 % and 11 % respectively of the 426
 total expatriate populations employed. A 'census' 427
 survey of all of these women was conducted by 428
 e-mail, 19 replied from Company A (70 %) and 429
 52 (79 %) from Company B; making a total of 71 430
 responses (a response rate of 76 %). The survey 431
 participants were asked to provide information on 432
 the lengths and deployment patterns of the assign- 433
 ments that they had undertaken and their home 434
 and host countries; they were also asked to give 435
 their views on the importance of a wide range of 436
 supporting organizational policy aspects of rele- 437
 vance to their assignments (including recruitment 438
 and selection, preparation and training, develop- 439
 ment, reward and assignee support). 440

Specifically, in relation to location, the assignees were asked whether the following host country factors acted as disincentives or deterrents to their participation in respect of current and/or any previous expatriate assignments: extreme climate (weather); limited facilities; primitive healthcare; high security; cultural restrictions (such as alcohol, dress); and any other location factors. Questions in relation to preparation and training to address geographical factors concerned the training elements offered (language; cross-cultural differences; security; driving; country briefing and pre-assignment visits), whether the respondents undertook them and their importance to assignment participation. Survey participants were also asked to report on whether they received specific remuneration elements linked to location (for instance, foreign service premiums, rest and recreation leave, housing, security guards, home leave and flights for family reunification, club membership and so on). Again the participants were asked to state the importance of these policy elements to their assignment participation. Finally, in relation to assignment support, the survey asked for assignees' views on the importance of mentors, female role models and women's networks in their assignment participation decision-making.

To complete the data triangulation, in-depth, semi-structured interviews were carried out either by telephone or face-to-face in the UK with 26 of the survey respondents, each lasting between 60 and 90 min. Stratified sampling (Collis and Hussey 2009) was used to identify these assignees to include appropriate representation by current assignment type; un/accompanied status; sending and current host locations; job roles; and previous assignments undertaken. Questions addressed how employers could better support women expatriates through policy and practice. Assignees were asked to identify elements in the assignment package that were critical to taking up expatriation and those most helpful in supporting them once on assignment. The advantages and disadvantages of undertaking particular types of assignment in different geographical locations were addressed. How location and lifestyle factors were prioritized in

the assignment participation decision was explored. Support networks, (including mentors, role models and women's groups) were also examined in terms of their contribution to facilitating women's expatriation.

The Human Resource and expatriate interviews were transcribed and the data, together with the policy document summaries and the responses to open comment survey questions, were coded and analysed using CAQDAS software NVivo 8 during 2010/2011. Data were categorized within four themes using thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006): the perceived benefits of undertaking 'upstream' expatriation which could be weighed up against the disadvantages of 'extreme' geographies; and women's home, family and social life considerations which could be related to and set within the context of overlapping work and social male space.

With regard to research ethics, permission was sought and explicit agreement obtained from all parties before the interviews were taped and it was agreed that policy documentation would only be summarised briefly, not fully reproduced. All parties were guaranteed anonymity. As a result, participant numbers have been used throughout to ensure that the expatriates' names, roles and job titles cannot be identified; and locations have been generalized as far as possible to a regional level. It was also agreed that interview transcripts would not be fully reproduced; hence only short illustrative excerpts have been used.

Survey Findings

The survey results revealed that the 71 women assignees worked in 17 host countries. Although 25 women (35 %) were employed in the UK and the USA, reflecting the headquarters and main regional office locations of the two case study firms, it was notable that other expatriate destinations employed very few, sometimes only one female assignee. The majority (51 women, 72 %) were undertaking long-term assignments, defined in organizational policy as a year or longer, most typically 2–3 years. However, other assignment types were also represented. These included:

534 short-term assignments, undertaken by 12 women
 535 (17 %), defined as between 3 months and 1 year,
 536 although usually 6 months long; and rotational
 537 assignments, undertaken by five women (7 %)
 538 working 28 days on shift, 12 h a day, 7 days a
 539 week; followed by 28 days off shift in their home
 540 country. There were also three women (4 %) on
 541 extended international transfers in North
 542 America. Under organizational policy, provision
 543 was made for accompanied status for long-term
 544 assignments and extended international transfers;
 545 however, short-term assignments were typically
 546 undertaken on single status and rotational work
 547 was, by definition, unaccompanied. Table 23.1
 548 lists the survey respondents' host regions and
 549 their assignment lengths and patterns.

550 The survey population had considerable expa-
 551 triate experience: 34 women (48 %) had under-
 552 taken a previous expatriate assignment before
 553 their current expatriate role; 12 (17 %) had under-
 554 taken two previous assignments; five (7 %) said
 555 they had been on three; one woman had under-
 556 taken four. Their previous experience embraced
 557 long-term, short-term, rotational, extended inter-
 558 national transfers as well as international com-

t1.1 **Table 23.1** Host locations and assignment types of sur-
 t1.2 vey respondents

t1.3			Current assignment types
t1.4	Current host	Number	undertaken by numbers of
t1.5	region		female assignees
t1.6	Australasia	4	Long-term (3); Short-term
t1.7			(1)
t1.8	Caribbean	6	Long-term (5); Short-term
t1.9			(1)
t1.10	Central Asia	6	Long-term (3); Rotational
t1.11			(3)
t1.12	East Asia	11	Long-term (9); Short-term
t1.13			(2)
t1.14	Middle East	1	Long-term (1)
t1.15	North Africa	10	Long-term (5); Short-term
t1.16			(3); Rotational (2)
t1.17	North America	12	Long-term (7); Short-term
t1.18			(2); Extended transfer (3)
t1.19	West Africa	3	Long-term (3)
t1.20	Western	18	Long-term (15); Short-term
t1.21	Europe		(3)
t1.22	<i>n</i>	<i>71</i>	<i>Long-term (51); Short-term</i>
t1.23			<i>(12); Rotational (5);</i>
t1.24			<i>Extended transfer (3)</i>

559 muter assignments (being based in the home
 560 country but flying to and from the host country to
 561 service an expatriate role). With regard to marital
 562 status, 45 women (53 %) were married or part-
 563 nered and 26 (37 %) were single, divorced or
 564 widowed; 33 women (45 %) were accompanied
 565 on their assignments while 38 (54 %) were
 566 unaccompanied.

**Geographical Assignment
 Considerations**

569 Expatriation in the oil and gas exploration and
 570 production sector frequently involves extreme
 571 geographical considerations. Assignment loca-
 572 tions (other than the headquarters and main
 573 regional offices) are 'upstream', typically in
 574 developing or newly industrializing countries,
 575 often with security concerns and challenging cli-
 576 mate and health conditions. The survey partici-
 577 pants were asked to indicate whether location
 578 factors acted as a disincentive or as a deterrent to
 579 their participation in respect of their current and
 580 any previous expatriate assignments (see
 581 Table 23.2).

582 Security risks are inherent in many of the
 583 countries where upstream oil and gas exploration
 584 and production take place. Yet, the survey results
 585 indicated that only eight assignees reported secu-
 586 rity as an assignment disincentive. This can be
 587 explained by the emphasis placed within organi-
 588 zational policy and practice on the provision of
 589 security measures (security briefings, secure
 590 housing/compounds, guards, drivers and so on),
 591 helping to alleviate concerns:

I would be more hesitant to take up an assignment
 in a high security location, e.g. Nigeria, but I know
 the company would have adequate security
 arrangements in place. (6, North Africa)

596 The following quotations were representative
 597 of the attitudes of the female assignees who were
 598 prepared to work in potentially dangerous loca-
 599 tions; they were aware of the threats involved but
 600 detached themselves from them on a day-to-day
 601 basis. However, once threat became reality their
 602 willingness to remain in such locations ceased:

Table 23.2 Location factors as disincentives or deterrents to assignment participation

Location factor	Current assignment						Previous assignments											
	n		Yes ^a		No		N/A		n		Yes ^a		Yes ^b		No		N/A	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
An extreme climate (weather) in the assignment location	71	6	8.5	42	59.2	23	32.4	34	4	11.8	4	11.8	15	44.1	11	32.4		
Limited facilities in the assignment location	71	6	8.5	33	46.5	32	45.1	34	7	20.6	2	5.9	13	38.2	12	35.3		
Primitive health care in the assignment location	71	8	11.3	31	43.7	32	45.1	34	8	23.5	1	2.9	13	38.2	12	35.3		
A high security assignment location	70	8	11.4	26	37.1	36	51.4	33	7	21.2	1	3.0	11	33.3	14	42.4		
The cultural restrictions affecting expatriates in the assignment location (e.g. dress, alcohol)	71	3	4.2	39	54.9	29	40.8	33	5	15.2	2	6.1	13	39.4	13	39.4		

^aIt was a disincentive; but assignment was accepted

^bIt was a deterrent; assignment was turned down

603 ... you hear stories about safety and people ... go
 604 'oh my God, (it) is this horrible place', but it just
 605 might have been that they were unlucky ... the
 606 week that they were there. Also ... it has had
 607 bombings ... and I think that people are still a little
 608 leery about traveling here... (63, East Asia)
 609 I'm probably at just as much terrorist risk in London
 610 as here but in the time I've been here there have
 611 been four bombings at places where I go and could
 612 easily have been at the time. One of the reasons I
 613 left (Caribbean) was that I was starting to feel
 614 unsafe – I had my apartment broken into whilst I
 615 was there alone at night and there was a shooting at
 616 the local supermarket and colleagues had been sub-
 617 jected to armed robbery. (22, North Africa)

618 Yet, only one survey respondent reported turn-
 619 ing down a previous assignment on security
 620 grounds. She had young children and was unwill-
 621 ing to risk taking them to Brazil.

622 Eight women reported primitive healthcare in
 623 their host locations acted as a disincentive to
 624 going on assignment. While their organizations
 625 had set up clinics (or ensured that their employees

had access to them), emergency treatment in hos- 626
 pitals was often simply not accessible particu- 627
 larly from field locations: 628

Road safety is appalling ... Having the 4x4 and the 629
 driver mitigates that to some degree but I still feel 630
 like I am at risk every time I get in the car ... if you 631
 were in a car accident I think you'd have pretty 632
 much no chance of survival because you'd never 633
 get to hospital let alone receive any decent care 634
 once there. (22, North Africa) 635

Language barriers also acted as disincentives to 636
 assignment participation in respect of medical care: 637

... language is very much a barrier when visiting a 638
 clinic ... as I always like to know what is going on 639
 ... and my Russian is not that good. (14, Central 640
 Asia) 641

Yet, healthcare was only rarely cited as a 642
 deterrent to expatriation; only one woman turned 643
 down an assignment for this reason. 644

645	Six women noted extreme weather as a disin-	... because sometimes it is hard to find people who	691
646	centive to taking up their current assignment.	want to take on these assignments in remote areas,	692
647	Four, however, refused previous assignments due	it is often a positive thing for your career progres-	693
648	to excessively hot or cold climates. Those work-	... that you are willing to do that. (25, East	694
649	ing in extreme climates noted the limitations this	Asia)	695
650	had on their preferred lifestyle:		
651	... here the heat is such that you wouldn't go run-	The opportunity to make a difference to local	696
652	ning unless you go very early in the morning or	people was also stressed:	697
653	very late in the evening. (56, East Asia)	... it is the kind of environment ... where it is so	698
654	I don't mind the summer so much, but in the winter ...	easy to make a difference ... We have villages with	699
655	it is so cold, you just can't go out. (50, Central Asia)	no running water ... (26, Central Asia)	700
656	The women reported on the generous financial	The women reported on financial assistance	701
657	assistance given by their organizations to encour-	given by their organizations to encourage assign-	702
658	age assignment participation in extreme climates:	ment participation in remote locations. They also	703
659	... had an extreme climate in winter but the uplift	reported on practical help providing further sup-	704
660	on the salary made up for that. It made up for a lot	port to go:	705
661	of things! (29, Central Asia)	... distance from home was the main disadvantage	706
662	Cultural restrictions were cited as disincentives	but then I have got an agreement where I can take	707
663	by just three women in respect of their cur-	additional unpaid leave to spend with my parents.	708
664	rent assignments and two said that they had	(20, Australasia)	709
665	refused assignments for this reason. In the main	Facilities such as entertainment and cultural	710
666	though, female assignees believed that living and	and social events in remote and isolated upstream	711
667	working within a different culture was part of the	oil and gas drilling sites are limited and local cit-	712
668	attraction of expatriation:	ies (if accessible) may provide little attraction.	713
669	Abiding by the dress code is part of the deal and	Yet, only seven of the survey respondents	714
670	helps the individual fit in with society. Respecting	reported that limited facilities in the assignment	715
671	cultural and religious differences ... is again part of	location acted as a disincentive to their expatria-	716
672	the package and not a hardship. (38, North Africa)	tion and just two had turned down a previous	717
673	Remote environments did affect women's	assignment for this reason.	718
674	assignment participation decision-making par-		
675	ticularly if they had concerns about elderly par-	<hr/>	
676	ents in their home country or the assignment	Going Solo: Women Expatriates'	719
677	necessitated single status away from family	Lived Reality in Gendered Work	720
678	members and the distance between the home and	Settings	721
679	host locations precluded regular visits back:	I lived on a construction camp before ... and there	722
680	Every location where we drill ... are remote, and	were 300 men and two women, and you just can't	723
681	we even consider them sometimes as hardship. I	go anywhere without being stared at ... I carried	724
682	mean, I don't think we have any like in the middle	my bag over my crotch, so I didn't get grabbed. It	725
683	of Paris or in London! ... If you go on an interna-	was pretty grim, and in the evening, you don't want	726
684	tional assignment, you go to Africa or you go to	to go in the bar in the camps because you just get	727
685	Alaska. (65, North America)	hit on. (33, ex-Central Asia)	728
686	However, undertaking assignments in such	This quotation provides an example (albeit an	729
687	distant destinations and willingness to carry out	extreme and negative one) of what life in a	730
688	company duties in difficult and challenging loca-	virtually all-male environment might be like.	731
689	tions was considered to be career enhancing and	Once on assignment, one of the key issues faced	732
690	thus worthwhile:	by women assignees is how to build a home and	733

734 social life. This can be especially difficult in
 735 remote and isolated locations particularly where
 736 women have undertaken assignments on single
 737 status and there are few other women on site. The
 738 in-depth interviews with female assignees
 739 explored the problems that women undertaking
 740 unaccompanied assignments faced and how those
 741 who were single or who had left their husbands/
 742 partners/families behind while they were on
 743 assignment developed strategies to manage living
 744 alone, and to create a social life in male-
 745 dominated camps/rigs, secure compounds and in
 746 countries too far from home to enable regular and
 747 frequent face-to-face reunification with loved
 748 ones and friendship groups.

749 Of the 26 assignees who were interviewed, 20
 750 were married or partnered, and six were single,
 751 divorced or widowed. Twelve of them undertook
 752 single status assignments, carrying out a range of
 753 jobs including: engineering; exploration (geology
 754 and geophysics); information technology; com-
 755 mercial; and Human Resource roles. Of those
 756 who were married/ partnered and undertook single
 757 status assignments, two were alone on long-
 758 term assignments; three were on rotation and one
 759 was on a short-term assignment (see Table 23.3).
 760 All left their partners in the home country as they
 761 were unable to relocate due to employment and
 762 career reasons. This section reports on the issues
 763 faced by the 12 female assignees of different mar-
 764 ital statuses who went solo.

t3.1 **Table 23.3** Women assignees interviewed who were
 t3.2 undertaking single status assignments

t3.3		Single, divorced or
t3.4	Married or partnered	widowed
t3.5	# 10, long-term,	# 56, long-term, Central
t3.6	Australasia	Asia
t3.7	# 50, long-term, Central	# 65, long-term, North
t3.8	Asia	America
t3.9	# 26, rotational, Central	# 45, long-term, West
t3.10	Asia	Africa
t3.11	# 52, rotational, Central	# 62, long-term, Western
t3.12	Asia	Europe
t3.13	# 59, rotational, North	# 69, long-term, Western
t3.14	Africa	Europe
t3.15	# 3, short-term, North	# 25, short-term, East
t3.16	America	Asia

Managing Distant Relationships 765

Three of the women interviewed were undertak- 766
 ing assignments in North Africa and Central Asia 767
 on a rotational basis: 768

... we knew that it had a beginning, a middle and 769
 an end and that was something that I could person- 770
 ally cope with pretty well. (52, Central Asia) 771

However, managing relationships required 772
 effort and periods of separation could be difficult: 773

We find that it is difficult ... but it is workable ... 774
 He knows that when I am on shift and we can't ... 775
 discuss anything of any major importance really ... 776
 but when I am off shift ... we can effectively, but it 777
 is not easy. (26, Central Asia) 778

Nonetheless current assignees, and those with 779
 previous experience of rotation in isolated and 780
 insecure locations who had left partners/family 781
 behind, reported that this assignment type was 782
 preferable to longer periods of unaccompanied 783
 mobility: 784

... your life was quite disjointed but ... that would 785
 ... be easier to manage than a full assignment over 786
 there (North Africa). (69, Western Europe) 787

One woman left her partner at home while 788
 undertaking a 6-month short-term assignment. 789
 Although she considered this beneficial for her 790
 career, separation caused relationship problems: 791

I found it more difficult than I thought I would in 792
 terms of returning back home, because you both 793
 change and you get used to your own ways and it 794
 takes a while to settle back into that. (3, North 795
 America) 796

Two married/partnered women went on long- 797
 term assignments by themselves. Their locations 798
 were far from their home countries. They reported 799
 being very lonely on assignment and on difficul- 800
 ties rebuilding relationships on return: 801

... when you leave the office in the evening, and 802
 you come back into the office in the morning, there 803
 is damn good chance that you didn't talk to another 804
 human being ... (10, Australasia) 805
 Every time I come back, and I've been away for 806
 eight weeks ... the first two days are complete 807
 storming. It's a nightmare! And then it's okay but 808
 then I am dreading going back. (50, Central Asia) 809

810 The female assignees on single status postings
 811 placed high levels of importance on: organiza-
 812 tional policy providing flights home (on a quar-
 813 terly basis); travel days (time off extending
 814 periods of leave to compensate for time spent in
 815 transit); rest and recreation leave (time spent at
 816 home to compensate for working in challenging
 817 environments); and company provision of tele-
 818 phone calls/Skype facilities to maintain family
 819 relationships.

820 **Location Challenges to Building**
 821 **a Social Life**

822 Those who undertook single status assignments
 823 were based in a variety of locations: cities,
 824 onshore camps and offshore rigs. Each location
 825 presented a distinct set of challenges. For exam-
 826 ple, some cities offered very limited cultural and
 827 social activities:

828 The city ... is really boring. I mean, they have got
 829 beautiful old cities, but we are not there ... you've
 830 got nothing to do. (50, Central Asia)
 831 Socially as a single woman ... this is probably not
 832 the best place to be ... There are not many places
 833 to go and ... the bars and pubs are very smoky ... I
 834 do go out a lot, but... I wouldn't say it was my
 835 perfect social life. (56, Central Asia)

836 World cities offered a wide range of cultural
 837 pursuits and, as such, were usually considered as
 838 attractive host destinations presenting the possi-
 839 bility of an active and enjoyable lifestyle. Yet,
 840 while cultural activities were taken up, these did
 841 not compensate for the loneliness experienced:

842 I don't call what I have here a life because I'm by
 843 myself. So ... I go home and I am alone, and I am
 844 alone at the weekends, so I travel. So I go to muse-
 845 ums, and I see as much as I can ... but ... I don't
 846 have any friends here. (69, Western Europe)

847 Building a social life in a city-based location
 848 was considered to be more difficult than in more
 849 remote expatriate destinations for solo female
 850 assignees. City-based office staff already had
 851 their own social groupings and the female expatri-
 852 ates found these difficult to penetrate, especially
 853 where social activities were male-dominated:

I feel more lonely here ... than I felt ... in the mid- 854
 dle of the desert, because we ... were ... totally 855
 isolated and there was nothing else to do and we 856
 organized all kinds of stuff among the expats, and 857
 there was a lot more social interaction ... This 858
 office is in a major city ... there is no emphasis on 859
 having a social life centered around the office ... 860
 it's okay for a bunch of guys to go to the pub and 861
 have a couple of pints before going home. But that 862
 is not where I am going to make friends ... (69, 863
 Western Europe) 864

In contrast, rotational workers were all on sin- 865
 gle status potentially making it easier to build 866
 relationships: 867

... we're all very close ... It is such a small place, 868
 it is like a very, very small village ... Really one of 869
 the big influences ... is the friendship you get. It is 870
 like a family ... and that is something that I would 871
 never get anywhere else. (59, North Africa) 872

Building friendships with local people working 873
 in the camps was also described as rewarding 874
 although this did require language competencies: 875

I speak French fluently, so I had absolutely no 876
 problem working with the (North Africans) and I 877
 made very good friends. I was very inquisitive 878
 about their way of life, and I learnt so much about 879
 their culture... (69, Western Europe, previously 880
 based in North Africa) 881

Nonetheless, living in camps and insecure 882
 locations could present considerable challenges 883
 to women on single status assignments, restrict- 884
 ing their ability to build social lives outside of 885
 their work environment: 886

... there are ... considerations about being a female 887
 ... I would never go outside the camp by myself ... 888
 ever, whereas if I was a man that would be quite 889
 acceptable. (26, Central Asia) 890
 ... they provide you with a level of security and 891
 accommodation and logistics to ensure that your 892
 stay in is comfortable, and sometimes ... it is 893
 restrictive. (45, West Africa) 894

The male-dominated nature of the oil and gas 895
 exploration and production industry, particularly 896
 in upstream drilling locations, means that there 897
 are very few women with whom to socialize. For 898
 some of the expatriates interviewed this did not 899
 present a problem as they reported preferring 900
 male company. However, for the majority, the 901

- 902 lack of female companionship and male social
903 behaviors proved difficult:
- 904 ... it was probably one of my most difficult experi-
905 ences ... it was predominantly guys who were
906 working on sites and locations. It was a rough area
907 (East Asia) ... you just don't get accepted because
908 you are not the norm. (62, Western Europe)
909 There are a lot ... who lead completely parallel
910 lives. They have a life there and they have a life at
911 home. They have relationships there and they have
912 marriages and relationships at home, unfortu-
913 nately. And I think ... there are a certain popula-
914 tion who are probably attracted to that lifestyle.
915 (26, Central Asia)
- 916 This sometimes resulted in the female assign-
917 ees distancing themselves from what was going
918 around them by 'retreating' into their own solo
919 space:
- 920 The expats ... are all males, and so a lot of social-
921 izing is around men go into bars, and all that, and it
922 doesn't bother me. I just ignore them. But ... it
923 isn't particularly female friendly. (50, Central
924 Asia)
925 ... socially, I kept myself to myself. I recharge my
926 batteries by retreating ... (52, Central Asia)
- 927 Working on offshore rigs was reported as
928 being particularly challenging; there was no
929 escape from the male-dominated work and social
930 environment:
- 931 ... when I went to the jobsite ... I hardly see
932 women. (65, North America)
- 933 **Strategies to Cope with Living Alone**
- 934 Working longer hours and at weekends was
935 reported by all the single status female expatriates.
936 Women undertaking both long-term and short-
937 term assignments said that they had more time to
938 devote to work because they did not have family
939 responsibilities or many social engagements:
- 940 ... you have more time on your hands ... so you
941 can come to work on a Saturday ... So you tend to
942 work. (45, West Africa)
943 If I was out here with a family I wouldn't work the
944 same hours that I work out here at the moment ...
945 there isn't that much for me to do as a social life ...
946 and I will work hard... (25, East Asia)
- Those on short-term assignments noted that 947
the assignment length was too short to make 948
developing friendships possible or worthwhile: 949
- ... because it's such a short time, and I think they 950
also feel the same way that you'll be gone in how- 951
ever many months. So there's not much point 952
really in ... striking up too much of a friendship. 953
(3, North America) 954
- Those undertaking unaccompanied long-term 955
assignments identified rotational working as a 956
means of reducing their social isolation through 957
filling their time with work-related activities: 958
- ... you don't ever have a day off, so you haven't 959
got time to be melancholy ... whereas ... sitting 960
here in the evenings ... and I have many weekends, 961
but I don't speak to anyone else, unless I'm on the 962
phone. (50, Central Asia) 963
- Women on rotation or who had experienced 964
this assignment pattern agreed. However, long 965
hours working was not felt to be a good strategy 966
to cope with a poor social life, regardless of 967
assignment type: 968
- I prioritize work willingly even if not necessarily 969
pleasurably. (10, Australasia) 970
...you have to pace yourself. You don't want to fall 971
apart after one week because you are working 972
15 hour days. (69, Western Europe) 973
- A more fulfilling strategy (more commonly 974
used by single status female assignees than those 975
who were accompanied on their postings) con- 976
cerned undertaking further study. Five women 977
were undertaking Masters Degrees on-line or by 978
correspondence with periods of face-to-face 979
tutoring while at home; one woman was also tak- 980
ing a language course. This meant that much of 981
their free time was spent studying: 982
- I usually work in the evening after work, so at the 983
moment it is quite a head down one ... but in terms 984
of socially I wouldn't really say that I have had my 985
life balanced out here. (25, East Asia) 986
- The assignees enjoyed their studies reporting 987
that their courses were extremely valuable to 988
their future careers and being on assignment, 989
with little social activity beyond work, enabled 990
them to devote time easily to their further educa- 991
tion. Organizational support for further education 992

993	was good – the organizations met the cost of	The assignees stressed the importance of man-	1040
994	course fees for Masters Degrees and other train-	agement understanding the need for lone female	1041
995	ing (language, cultural courses and so on) – and	expatriates to balance their work and their social	1042
996	this was considered supportive and was very	engagements:	1043
997	much welcomed by assignees.		
998	Female expatriates also spoke about the enjoy-	Don't ... ask them to skip the social engagement	1044
999	ment they gained from looking after new women	... to meet a conference call, because that social	1045
1000	arrivals who were readily taken under the wing of	engagement is disproportionately important to	1046
1001	established assignees:	their state of mind. (10, Australasia)	1047
1002	Often ... when women are coming ... I have got		
1003	my friends in HR, calling me and saying can you	Not surprisingly, very few assignees spoke of	1048
1004	look after her please? ... A few of us do try to	the social activities that they engaged in. When	1049
1005	make it easy for new women moving down. (59,	they did, they reported enjoying cooking for	1050
1006	North Africa)	themselves rather than eating company-provided	1051
1007	...we know who is coming ... other women assign-	meals in the canteen's male space. While they	1052
1008	ees and get to know them ... (65, North America)	reported that their male colleagues visited local	1053
1009	This provided a source of social introductions	villages for a change of fare, cooking and eating	1054
1010	and the potential to build friendships for estab-	on-site with other women provided a sense of	1055
1011	lished assignees as well as valuable support for	occasion for the female assignees who were	1056
1012	the newcomers, resulting in reciprocal benefits to	unable to leave camp:	1057
1013	both groups:		
1014	I learnt a lot from ... her being able to provide me	We will do special things ... we might hire one of	1058
1015	with guidance and ... if there were company func-	the bungalows, as ... the bungalows have kitchens	1059
1016	tions ... she would ... invite you ... so that you	... cook a meal for ourselves. And we have a	1060
1017	don't feel left out. (45, West Africa)	Nintendo Wii and we will get together and play.	1061
1018	Two female assignees mentored and coached	We might play cards one night. (26, Central Asia)	1062
1019	local female staff and/or other expatriates. This was	Accommodation in camp locations was Spartan:	1063
1020	considered to be a self-development tool, a means	... you don't take your stuff ... you just live in a	1064
1021	of helping others and a way of developing networks	room, like Butlins. (50, Central Asia)	1065
1022	and friendships. The assignees requested further		
1023	organizational support to assist with networking	As a result of this, the women placed particu-	1066
1024	and also in pairing new expatriate arrivals with	lar emphasis on the importance of the facilities	1067
1025	locals to help understand cultural implications.	provided by their employers (gyms, self-catering	1068
1026	Social activities were very limited in camp	kitchens, etc.). Yet, women on assignments in	1069
1027	locations and typically there were few women on	city locations also valued the facilities in their	1070
1028	site to share in them:	accommodation and other support that they were	1071
1029	There's (name) and I ... Now we only have two	given to help create a sense of home. For example,	1072
1030	weeks together on every shift ... and obviously I	they preferred to cook for themselves, rather than	1073
1031	never see my (colleague as we work) back-to-back.	eating out (alone):	1074
1032	She is a woman, but we are never there at the same	... they started giving us a small allowance ... It is	1075
1033	time. (26, Central Asia)	cheap to eat out, but much more expensive to cook	1076
1034	Yet, single status expatriation, regardless of	for yourself, which I wanted to do. (3, North	1077
1035	location, was frequently misconstrued:	America)	1078
1036	... there is, unfortunately, an attitude that single	Human Resource staff recognized the impor-	1079
1037	status assignees have a whale of a time ... partying	tance of such support for female assignees and did	1080
1038	it up ... and no acknowledgement ... it is not. (10,	their best to negotiate with local line management	1081
1039	Australasia)	to help address women's requirements to create a	1082
		sense of home, even differentiating between wom-	1083
		en's and men's needs in this respect:	1084

1085 ... (for) the single female unaccompanied expats
 1086 ... the home is more important. We had an ... engi-
 1087 neer ... and ... her therapy was cooking, and they
 1088 gave her initially a little apartment with an appall-
 1089 ingly tiny kitchen ... I intervened ... I think (for)
 1090 women your personal space is more important. For
 1091 a bloke, it's just about having a hot shower and a
 1092 comfortable bed, and they're not really that both-
 1093 ered. (HR – International Assignments)

1094 Given the lack of (or very few) women expa-
 1095 triates with whom to socialize in the remote and
 1096 isolated camp environments, women assignees
 1097 commented on the need to be accepted by their
 1098 male colleagues if they were to build effective
 1099 work and social relationships and to combat
 1100 extreme loneliness. They reported that this
 1101 required them to demonstrate that “you are not
 1102 too sensitive” if they were to be accepted as “one
 1103 of the lads”. They concluded that expatriation to
 1104 remote geographies with male-dominated social
 1105 space may appeal to only a limited number of
 1106 women:

1107 ... often it takes a special kind of character to be
 1108 able to work like this ... you can't be too feminine
 1109 ... if you like your bit of luxury, you don't get it
 1110 there! (59, North Africa)

1111 **Discussion**

1112 This exploratory research provides fresh insight
 1113 into the lived experiences of women expatriating
 1114 to remote and challenging host country locations.
 1115 It adds to the literature in finding that although
 1116 geographical location factors influence women's
 1117 decisions to undertake expatriation these do not,
 1118 in the main, preclude women's assignment par-
 1119 ticipation. The effect of the weather (too hot or
 1120 too cold) was the main factor that appeared to
 1121 influence their acceptance decision in so far as
 1122 the female expatriates could pursue preferred lei-
 1123 sure pursuits. It is notable that while the home
 1124 normally “feels more intimate in winter than in
 1125 summer”, as “winter reminds us of our vulnera-
 1126 bility and defines the home as shelter” (Tuan
 1127 1977: 137), the solo female expatriates in this
 1128 study working in intensely cold winters in loca-
 1129 tions such as Central Asia lived alone in Spartan

accommodation in the cities or rotated into 1130
 camps. As such they had little sense of a place 1131
 that felt like home – a place where they could be 1132
 themselves (Cresswell 2004). 1133

1134 Women undertake expatriate assignments in 1134
 remote oil and gas exploration and production 1135
 geographies for career growth and, for those 1136
 working in functions such as corporate social 1137
 responsibility and sustainability, to make a differ- 1138
 ence by helping to improve environmental condi- 1139
 tions for local people. They work a variety of 1140
 assignment lengths and patterns, yet regardless of 1141
 the type of assignment undertaken (rotational, 1142
 short-term or long-term), single status assign- 1143
 ments are lonely and potentially damaging to 1144
 existing personal relationships (although rota- 1145
 tional working does provide extended periods at 1146
 home enabling extended periods of home life 1147
 with family). A further part of the price of expa- 1148
 triate existence is that mobility results in individ- 1149
 uals suffering loss or disruption of the ‘feel’ of a 1150
 place and its special character (Tuan 1977). 1151
 Despite this some women thrive on the challenge 1152
 and sense of adventure that results from going 1153
 solo and the self-discovery that flows from this. 1154

1155 Aligned with the limited literature on expatriate 1155
 compound life, this research finds that unac- 1156
 companied female assignees working in such 1157
 environments experience blurring of work and 1158
 non-work boundaries and requirements to con- 1159
 form with local behavioral norms (Coles and 1160
 Fechter 2008; Lauring and Selmer 2009). While 1161
 their male counterparts experience a social life 1162
 that revolves around the workplace with male 1163
 colleagues and also have the freedom to leave 1164
 camp and compound environments to seek social 1165
 links and support external to the worksite (Verma 1166
 2008), women's mobility is restricted to a greater 1167
 extent by cultural and security considerations. 1168
 This results in loneliness and social isolation due 1169
 to lack of female friendship in these highly gen- 1170
 dered settings. Even in city destinations (regard- 1171
 less of whether these are in developed countries 1172
 or not) women undertaking unaccompanied 1173
 mobility experience loneliness, finding it difficult 1174
 to make friends, again aligning with the literature 1175
 (Caligiuri and Lazarova 2002). While lone female 1176
 assignees in this research report all expatriate 1177

1178	destinations (cities, camps and rigs) challenging	facilities (such as self-catering and dining)	1226
1179	as relationship building is hindered by overlap-	enabling women to entertain friends (Gordon	1227
1180	ping male work and social space, this research	2008). However, such accommodation is highly	1228
1181	suggests that extreme expatriation in remote and	restricted in camp locations; private space (a fur-	1229
1182	isolated locations may appeal only to certain	nished room) is homogenous with limited oppor-	1230
1183	characters such as those who are particularly out-	tunity to personalize it and company space	1231
1184	going. Added to this, in male-dominated environ-	(canteens, bars and gyms) is male-dominated.	1232
1185	ments gender comes to the fore and "women	While organizational policy does provide support	1233
1186	must find ways of navigating this tricky terrain"	in the form of aid, affect and affirmation (Kraimer	1234
1187	(Wright 2011: 247). Women cannot be 'too femi-	et al. 2001), tensions are in evidence between	1235
1188	nine'; rather they have to operate as 'one of the	policy design, implementation and assignees'	1236
1189	lads' or as "a good bloke" (Watts 2007: 261) to	needs (Perkins and Daste 2007), particularly in	1237
1190	be accepted and to be able to deal with masculine	respect of the provision of local facilities (such as	1238
1191	banter and social activities. It is notable that	accommodation, security, health and recreation)	1239
1192	women who enjoy male company in preference	and practical support for work and non-work	1240
1193	to that of other women are more willing to take	related relationship building. Nonetheless,	1241
1194	advantage of building social relationships within	women expatriates acknowledge organizational	1242
1195	camp environments, particularly amongst expa-	support and very much welcome what is	1243
1196	triate employees.	provided.	1244
1197	In remote and insecure environments, access		
1198	to a social life beyond the male-dominated work-		
1199	place is difficult, sometimes impossible. This	Implications for Practice	1245
1200	research finds that single status female assignees	Support systems are highlighted as being of sig-	1246
1201	living alone in a male-dominated environment	nificance to women's assignment participation.	1247
1202	use four main coping strategies. As suggested by	In particular, the provision of health and medical	1248
1203	the literature, cooped up in camp, or with few	care in remote locations is of concern to assign-	1249
1204	city-based friends, they elect to work long hours	ees in their decision to take up an assignment.	1250
1205	(Caligiuri and Lazarova 2002). They also work at	Employer-provided clinics and access to emer-	1251
1206	the weekends to fill their time, and to relieve	gency treatment are thus important support inter-	1252
1207	boredom and loneliness. Moreover, some lone	ventions. Security briefings, secure housing/	1253
1208	female assignees undertake educational courses	compounds, guards and drivers are necessary to	1254
1209	to improve their career potential, develop them-	provide a secure environment. Yet, provision of	1255
1210	selves personally and fill their spare time produc-	this support may be insufficient by itself: lan-	1256
1211	tively. These activities also provide positive	guage and cultural training are needed to enable	1257
1212	learning and relationship outcomes (Linehan and	assignees to understand what is happening around	1258
1213	Walsh 1999; Mendenhall and Stahl 2000). A fur-	them, so that they can manage stressful health	1259
1214	ther strategy involves catering for friends, rather	and security issues effectively. Assignees who	1260
1215	than eating in the male-dominated canteen	undertake unaccompanied expatriation place	1261
1216	(Gordon 2008). This research suggests yet	value on being reunited with family and friends.	1262
1217	another strategy adopted by solo female expatri-	Organizational policy providing flights, time off	1263
1218	ates: providing guidance and support to female	for travel, rest and recreation and other interven-	1264
1219	newcomers and mentoring and coaching locals.	tions such as company-subsidized telecommuni-	1265
1220	These activities help to build social relationships	cations are viewed by female assignees as critical	1266
1221	and companionship, generating a sense of	to their assignment participation. Consideration	1267
1222	belonging within friendship groups.	might thus be given within policy design to	1268
1223	Women's ability to create a sense of place and	include more frequent fly-outs. Single status	1269
1224	of home is possible through bringing personal	assignees might also be allowed to extend home	1270
1225	possessions and where accommodation provides		

1271 leave or business trips to their home country to
1272 enable additional periods of family reunification.

1273 While on assignment, employer support for
1274 education and further study lead to employee
1275 development. This provides an enjoyable and
1276 productive activity for expatriates; it is thus
1277 mutually beneficial for employers and assignees.
1278 Hence, education assistance is valuable as a
1279 support intervention. Employer action to assist
1280 assignees to engage in mentoring, coaching and
1281 networking arrangements also provides a mutu-
1282 ally beneficial support mechanism; organiza-
1283 tions, assignees and other employees all gain
1284 from such development. Female assignees
1285 entering male-dominated environments benefit
1286 from being linked to women already established
1287 in the host location, while the latter benefit from
1288 developing new friendships. Further, assistance
1289 with networking (with other expatriates and
1290 locals) helps to build familiarity and cultural
1291 understanding. Moreover, while such employer
1292 policy is gender-neutral, the provision of activi-
1293 ties and facilities that recognize individuals'
1294 desire to retreat or escape from overlapping
1295 work and social space in restrictive camp and
1296 compound environments is particularly helpful
1297 to female expatriates in building a sense of
1298 home and non-work related social relationships.
1299 Thus, provision of sport, recreation and self-
1300 catering facilities should be included in policy.
1301 Given one problem that female expatriates can
1302 encounter is sexual harassment, company poli-
1303 cies should also address this. Finally, selection
1304 policy should also ensure the best person for the
1305 expatriate role, and care should be taken to
1306 determine one's suitability for working in
1307 remote geographies. Assignees must be able
1308 socially to cope alone, be 'self-contained' and
1309 independent, and yet be able to develop friend-
1310 ships rapidly.

1311 **Directions for Future Research**

1312 This study provided a snapshot of women's non-
1313 work and social lives in remote geographies.
1314 Future research could address women's work
1315 experiences in these highly gendered settings.

Women stated that they undertook extreme
expatriation to further their careers and to make
a difference to the lives of local people; longitu-
dinal research might help to establish whether
women's expatriation does indeed help them to
achieve these objectives. Further, this research
was set within two medium-sized oil and gas
exploration and production firms. Further
research is needed within other industries, among
organizations of different sizes, and across a
wider range of potentially challenging locations
to understand further female expatriates' experi-
ences and how they are supported by their
employers. Moreover, male expatriates' views on
location issues could also be researched to estab-
lish differences between men's and women's
experiences of extreme expatriation. Finally, fur-
ther comparative research is also needed to exam-
ine how women build a sense of home and
belonging in city destinations (in developed,
newly industrializing and less developed coun-
tries) when undertaking expatriation on single
status.

With respect to organizational support, further
research is also required into that which provides
the greatest benefit to women when they under-
take expatriate assignments. In particular,
research might examine the effects of interna-
tional assignment policy and practice interven-
tions in providing support to single status
assignees, in particular to women expatriating
solo. In this way, future research can help to
establish whether and how organizational support
through policy and practice can widen expatriate
gender diversity.

Conclusions

Women comprise a relatively small proportion of
the expatriate workforce. The literature has
lamented this for decades and yet women's repre-
sentation in the elite ranks of career-enhancing
expatriate positions has changed little. The oil
and gas industry is a major user of expatriates in
its exploration and production functions – yet
here women are even more sparsely represented
in internationally mobile roles than across the

- 1361 wider industry. If greater female expatriate par- 1409
 1362 ticipation could be achieved in the high expatri- 1410
 1363 ate usage sectors, such as oil and gas exploration
 1364 and production, it would be expected that wom-
 1365 en's overall share of expatriation could poten-
 1366 tially increase and with it their access widened to
 1367 more senior positions, which frequently require
 1368 such international experience. Yet, the locations
 1369 in which industries such as oil and gas explora-
 1370 tion and production operate are typically remote,
 1371 male-dominated and even insecure. As such, they
 1372 do not appear attractive to women assignees, par-
 1373 ticularly as the expatriate roles in such locations
 1374 are frequently carried out on single status.
 1375 Despite this, this study demonstrates that extreme
 1376 geographical factors do not necessarily preclude
 1377 women from accepting career-enhancing interna-
 1378 tional assignments. It adds further to our knowl-
 1379 edge of expatriation by revealing the lived reality
 1380 of women who pursue careers in highly gendered
 1381 work settings: their lives on single status assign-
 1382 ments are, in the main, far from enjoyable; they
 1383 frequently report loneliness and isolation and
 1384 working long hours as a means of coping with
 1385 this.
- 1386 There is no doubt that women's attempts to
 1387 create a sense of place, home and belonging in
 1388 such gendered geographies is taxing and, as a
 1389 result, their assignment participation is hindered,
 1390 even with organizational support provided.
 1391 Nonetheless, this does not mean that the potential
 1392 for remote and isolated geographical expatriate
 1393 host locations to attract women expatriates should
 1394 remain unchallenged. Women who report enjoy-
 1395 ing male company say they can build fulfilling
 1396 social lives in male-dominated camp environ-
 1397 ments. Those who prefer to build friendships
 1398 with other women do so by supporting, guiding,
 1399 mentoring and coaching new female arrivals and
 1400 locals. Perceived Organizational Support is
 1401 important for women's participation. Specific
 1402 organizational policy and practice is required to
 1403 identify and support female assignees and to
 1404 assist them to develop their social relationships
 1405 through provision of appropriate space and facili-
 1406 ties. When the camaraderie of extreme expatria-
 1407 tion is viewed as attractive to women and remote
 1408 locations are not considered just to be a male pre-
 serve, the potential for women to secure a greater
 share of expatriation becomes a real possibility.
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-
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