THE MALE EXPATRIATE SPOUSE: WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MAN WHO FOLLOWS

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Abstract
Objective of Study: Expatriate spouses have received increasing attention in empirical studies on expatriation and adjustment. Often these studies were conducted through a human resource management lens with samples that were mostly female. Drawing on gender role theory, masculine coping schema, and known phenomena of intercultural adjustment, my study researched the lived experience of male spouses of expatriate workers. I used a social work lens to explore male role and identity paradigms as constructed through cultural and social upbringing, and how those paradigms impact a man's transition to a "trailing spouse" who is influenced by expatriate work culture and host country culture.

Methods and Results: This was a phenomenological qualitative research study. The sample consisted of male spouses of expatriates who were working overseas through U.S. Diplomatic missions. I used a purposive, non-probability snowball sampling technique to recruit ten American men from nine different countries. These participants provided me with qualitative data during single-session interviews conducted over Zoom. I analyzed the data using a concept-driven thematic coding process with a combination of deductive and inductive analytical methods. I organized my results into five major themes and 18 subcategories. My major themes are: Perceiving oneself as a male expatriate spouse; Evaluating gender-based identity and roles; Negotiating culture; Adjusting to a process; and Cultivating a lifestyle.

Conclusions: Most participants in this sample made a pre-determined choice to live the expatriate lifestyle; they did not “trail” or “follow” their wives overseas in a submissive sense, but instead were achieving the goal of expatriation in tandem with their spouses. These men were comfortable in their roles supporting their breadwinner spouses who were pursuing their careers abroad. Most participants created their own metrics for success and constructed a modern form of masculinity based on personal adaptability, which allowed them to feel comfortable in their roles. Participants were largely uninfluenced by host country cultures or their spouses' organizational cultures, found connection with the expatriate cultures they interfaced with, and expressed some conflict in resolving the traditionally masculine elements of their home country cultures. Half of my participants maintained a desire to pursue their chosen careers and considered that to be a significant part of their identities.

Implications: This study allows for a better understanding of how male expatriate spouses perceive their worlds, which can inform proactive and reactive mechanisms to support this population. Future studies should thoroughly explore the particular needs of male spouses of expatriates through the lenses of gender, culture, and work.

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THE MALE EXPATRIATE SPOUSE:
WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A MAN WHO FOLLOWS

Justin Grotelueschen

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These pages contain the life experiences of the participants in my study, the men who support their spouses as they pursue their careers overseas. Hearing the honest stories of these men gave me the inspiration I needed to work much more quickly to finish this dissertation. The perceptions and ideas within those stories gave me the strength I needed to cross the finish line. I thank them for helping me to complete my journey and did my best to represent them honestly.
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**Implications:** This study allows for a better understanding of how male expatriate spouses perceive their worlds, which can inform proactive and reactive mechanisms to support this population. Future studies should thoroughly explore the particular needs of male spouses of expatriates through the lenses of gender, culture, and work.

**Keywords:** expatriate spouse adjustment, male expatriate spouse, intercultural adjustment, gender role theory, male roles, masculine identity, socially constructed masculinity, international social work
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Chapter 1: The Experience of Expatriation

Introduction

Spouses who accompany their expatriate partners on overseas work assignments face significant challenges in adjustment (Copeland & Norell, 2002). A commonly used pejorative for an expatriate spouse is “trailing spouse” (Bralove, 1981), a term formerly used in a colonial context to describe professionally idle wives that does not fit with the current reality. Numerous studies have shown that modern expatriate spouses of all genders experience a shift in role and responsibility as they adapt to new social and professional cultures, which can lead to significant psychosocial stressors (Chen & Shaffer, 2018; Collins & Bertone, 2017; Copeland & Norell, 2002; Harvey & Wiese, 1998; McNulty, 2012). The traditional concept of female spouses who “follow” their older, white, Western husbands on overseas assignments is being challenged (McNulty, 2014). A more recent phenomena is the growing number of male spouses who accompany their expatriate wives or husbands overseas (Anderson, 2001; Cole, 2012; Davoine et al., 2013; Harvey & Wiese, 1998; McNulty, 2014). Spouses who follow expatriates overseas tend to experience more difficulties in adjustment than the rest of their family members (Cole, 2012). Male spouses experience this adjustment differently than their female counterparts (Collins & Bertone, 2017).

The aim of this study is to address the gap in the current body of literature regarding the adjustment of male spouses of expatriate workers through their current perceptions. I examined

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1 I will continue to refer to male spouses of expatriates as trailing spouses, not because I believe the term should be normalized but because it has historical context that should continue to be examined and challenged. This pejorative term minimizes the role of a spouse (regardless of gender) in executing a conscious decision to jointly expatriate a family.

2 See previous footnote regarding trailing spouses; that same line of thinking informs my use of the term “follow”, in quotations. This term appears in the Findings and is analyzed in the Discussion as well.
phenomena specific to males who accompany their expatriate spouses to work locations outside of the United States. If we consider that a person can be defined by their gender, as a lens in how they see the world, my study intends to explore what it means to be a man who is married to someone whose career path is a driving focus for how that couple (or family) lives their lives. That man has his goals, his pride, and his idea of living. Does a male expatriate spouse have a specific set of characterological and/or personality qualities that make him less or more able to flourish in that role? Does his role threaten or enhance his masculinity? How is his status influenced by the culture he was socialized in and the cultures he now interacts with? Does his reaction to his status inhibit or strengthen his ability to cope with simple stressors in life? Does it affect how he operates within his family, or his social or professional circles? This man has a story to tell; his narrative describing how his life has, is, and will evolve is the primary data in this study. My research attempts to better understand the male expatriate spouse experience while giving consideration to identity, culture, gender role performance, methods of coping, and sources of support. Such a study has implications not only on short-term psychological relief for male expatriate spouses, but on long-term support for personal and professional identity; reduction of stress levels within marriages and families; and mitigation of negative impacts on the psychology, work performance, and livelihood of the expatriate.

This chapter will begin with an overview and history of work-related expatriation, followed by a look at how expatriates and their families endure psychological and intercultural adjustment to a foreign (host) country. I will then zero in on the specific adjustment concerns of spouses of expatriates through a review of relevant literature. Finally, I will introduce adjustment and coping schema for this population as a transition into the next chapter.
Roots of Work-Related Expatriation

In the 20th century, technological advances related to modes of travel, particularly in the aviation industry, brought with it the ability for people to move around the world for business and pleasure. These advances facilitated access to places that for most people were previously inaccessible, at least without considerable effort. The first sector to substantially profit - both figuratively and literally - from these advances was international business. Companies and organizations saw a benefit in moving workers to overseas locations in order to access new markets and pursue short and long-term projects that were previously inaccessible or impractical. Business and government entities began to set up satellite offices in foreign countries that agreed to host them.

While these entities often employed the local workforce in order to fulfill their programs and missions, expertise and management was often desired from home countries in order to maximize productivity, increase accountability, and ensure a home-centric yet international cultural perspective (Tahir & Egleston, 2019). While countries across the globe were taking advantage of advantages in travel in order to globalize their operations, typically countries on the higher end of the socioeconomic scale were the first ones to warm to an international way of thinking and of doing business (Caligiuri et al., 1998; Mohr & Klein, 2004).

Who Are Expatriates and What Do They Do?

Individuals who move overseas are defined as expatriates (McNulty, 2012). Expatriates are typically considered to be upwardly mobile individuals who have voluntarily chosen to migrate to another country for a defined period of time (Berry et al., 2011). Expatriates are differentiated from refugees, who can be defined as individuals who are somehow forced or displaced from their home of origin, and from other immigrants who leave their home countries
due to insufficient economic opportunities (Andresen et al., 2014). Expatriates also encompass upwardly mobile individuals who choose to move abroad for other non-work reasons including studying abroad, conducting research, taking an extended vacation or sabbatical, pursuing new or maintaining current romantic partnerships, engaging in religious proselytization, and other related activities. These individuals are sometimes called self-initiated expatriates (Doherty, Richardson, & Thorn, 2013). In most cases and in most popular literature, expatriates are defined by their identities and statuses as workers, first and foremost (Inkson et al., 1997).

Expatriates are often people employed through public or private companies, foreign governments, or non-governmental organizations. These entities often already operate internationally through offices set up in other countries, but other times are looking to initiate work abroad or wants to expand to and set up offices in a new country. Expatriates serve a specific function for their employers, and it is a multifaceted function (Tahir & Egleston, 2019). Expatriates first and foremost are workers under the umbrella of one company who are sent to work at a satellite office; therefore, they function as contacts and coordinators between the home office and their satellite office. Secondly, expatriates are responsible for transferring knowledge (systems, ways of working, organizational culture) from the home office to the satellite office. Thirdly, expatriates are tasked with collecting information about how that home office knowledge impacts the work culture in the new satellite office, and how that process of disseminating information may need to be modified by executives in the home office and managers at the satellite office in order to be more effective and appropriate to that foreign environment. Lastly, expatriates absorb the realities of the foreign environment (customs, ways of living and working, professional capacity of workers) and transmit their perspectives back to

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3 Self-initiated expatriates, as a small subset of all expatriates, are not the focus of this dissertation.
their home office in order to create a new, multi-national work culture. In many ways, expatriates are ambassadors for multiple cultures: their home country culture, their new host country culture, and their multi-national organizational culture (instigated by the home office and filtered through the peculiarities of a satellite office impacted by host country culture). Expatriates, then, become experts on transmitting and translating culture.

**Process of Expatriation**

Expatriates often voluntarily choose to be moved overseas by their company (Doherty et al., 2013). In some cases employers may be seen as coercing an employee to expatriate for work, but considering that an expatriate is an individual who has elected to work for a particular entity for a salary, it is assumed that an individual is choosing to become an expatriate due to an opportunity presented to them by their employer. In exchange for an employee making this choice, the employer is typically responsible for facilitating the expatriation process for that individual. Reductively, this process includes helping the expatriate leave their life in their home country and set up life in a new country (also known as host country).

Multi-national companies and entities often commit considerable resources to semi-permanently move an employee abroad. The includes perks and benefits including competitive salaries; provision of free housing or housing stipends; and moving personal effects and vehicles. This also includes facilitating work or residential permits, licenses, and other bureaucratic particulars in the country they will be moving to. Companies also account for lives these expatriates leave behind, including paying for storage containers with personal effects left behind and providing the expatriate with regular trips home to their home of record.

**Gender and Expatriation**
Statistics, demographics, and movements of the global expatriate workforce has been loosely tracked since the late 1970s. While an expatriate can be someone of any gender expression, the gender demographics of the expatriate workforce in the early years mirrored that of the workforce in those home countries, which in the 20th century was majority male (Shortland, 2009). While there is no definitive statistics on the gender breakdown among these expatriates, it is assumed that 85% of the global expatriate workforce is male, averaged across sectors (Organization Resources Counselors Worldwide, 2008). Certain sectors such as non-profit and charitable organizations could have a higher representation of female expatriates at 30%, while technical fields such as construction and engineering could be as low as 6% female representation.

While gender is not a determinant on whether or not someone might identify as an expatriate, gender may and has determined whether or not someone chooses or is selected to become an expatriate. For years it was speculated that companies thought men were better suited to become expatriates for a variety of reasons, mostly culturally and socially constructed (Shortland, 2009). This included personal characteristics and attributes that were long associated with a patriarchal mindset that men are more likely to excel in the workplace because they are confident, logical, and unemotional. Females also were thought to be more vulnerable, and thusly not fully accepted in foreign environments where they may be disrespected in traditionally male-dominant management structures and subject to sexual harassment by local men (Hutchings et al., 2013).

Regardless of the reasoning or reality, the majority of expatriates historically have been and continue to be of the male gender, although that reality is gradually changing as gender equity has permeated the multi-national entities that hire and expatriate workers. More
international companies are starting to seek to hire female expatriates by choice, seeing them as ‘model global managers’ (Tung, 2004). This happens even though women in the workforce take on traditional responsibilities outside of the office. Female expatriates continue to assume ongoing household tasks such as cooking and cleaning, along after having children taking on the burden of caring for and breastfeeding them while they are young (McNulty, 2014). However, egalitarianism in the family structure has engaged men more fully in family life and lifted some of the family burden off of the female expatriate, which has made international work assignments much more palatable to those women. This is in part due to an increasing number of male spouses who hold strong beliefs in gender equality and therefore take on a greater burden in the home, regardless of their career aspirations (Drago et al., 2005).

**Expatriating a Life and a Family**

Expatriates who are partnered, married, and/or have children need to consider their families when being offered or accepting an overseas assignment (Sterle et al., 2018). In this case, most expatriation arrangements mean the movement of one individual worker - not both spouses in a family - to an overseas location. While some married couples who work for the same employer could both chose or be chosen to expatriate for work, the norm is for one individual employed by an organization being sent overseas to work.

Although specific numbers fluctuate, statistics have shown that approximately 73 percent of expatriates are married and just under 50 percent move overseas with their children (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2016). These expatriates often must choose to bring their family along with them for some of all of that assignment. Family is defined in the literature as two committed partners, with or without children (Caligiuri et al., 1998). The conceptualization of family, however, has evolved in previous decades. McNulty (2014)
described a family as “married, de facto, live-in, or long-term partners of the opposite or same sex, with or without children, with family members that reside in one or many locations; and legally separated or divorced (single) adults with children, with family members that reside in one or many locations” (p. 7). While organizations might consider life or dating partners as family members for expatriation purposes, typically partner means a spouse through a legally binding marriage. This conceptualization too has evolved. Today many entities will provide resources to move an unmarried romantic partner or even a parent with the expatriate on their assignment. Regardless, considering the assumed gender breakdown of expatriation and the prevalence of heterosexual marriages, males are historically more likely to be in the role of expatriate while females are in the role of family member or partner who follows (Harvey & Wiese, 1998).

The viability of expatriating an entire family depends on a number of factors. This includes the length of the assignment; the desire and financial implications of the employer to move that family overseas and support them while they are there; and the immigration laws in the host country that would allow that family to live in that country during the expatriate’s work assignment. Companies and organizations commit significant financial resources to moving expatriates, and their families if applicable, abroad. Resources for family members include travel costs to and from the host country; housing; resident permits; stipends or full payments for education of school-age children; and more. Because of this extensive financial commitment, these multi-national companies also consider and commit resources to ensuring not only that the expatriate and their chosen family unit are committed to moving abroad, but that they will feel supported throughout the course of the expatriate’s assignment.
Supportive resources for families while expatriating can be provided from someone or some entity inside the company, such as company management and the human resources department. Management in charge of supporting the expatriate and family are in the home office and often in the satellite office; human resources are likely centralized in the home office, and in some cases can be represented at least minimally in the satellite office. Expatriate concerns are usually directed to either of these sources either home or in the satellite office, and when an expatriate onboards and/or goes through pre-departure training before going overseas, the mechanism for addressing concerns about the expatriation process are detailed. The mechanism for addressing family concerns may be the same mechanism or an alternate route.

Supportive services for expatriates include ongoing cross-cultural training and sometimes the instruction of the foreign language, often if required for an expatriate’s job function. Support for families sometimes include financial support for educating school-age children in a local or international school, as well as employment assistance and psychological support for adult family members (Sterle et al., 2018). Services for adult family members usually are geared towards holistically supporting a sense of belonging and purpose in a new culture, such as providing activities to engage an adult in the expatriate or host country community they live in. Employers can and will be more or less generous with the provision of these support services for family members, depending on the needs, priorities, and financial resources of the employer.

**Psychological Adjustment**

Adjustment is a psychological concept to describe the degree an individual is getting their needs met by their environment (Searle & Ward, 1990). This is typically a short-term response that results in psychological discomfort for the individual until they have either fulfilled one or more needs or adjusted to living without a particular need. Adjustment can be broken down into
subcategories, including cultural and social adjustment. Ongoing difficulties with adjustment can result in negative mental health symptoms including anxiety and depression.

An individual who marries an expatriate has numerous non-work life factors that affect their psychological adjustment in a foreign country (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). This includes biographical characteristics such as age; age when marrying the expatriate; physical health; previous marital status; children before and in current marriage; ages and number of children; and health and other special need factors of those children. Individual characteristics and preferences of an expatriate spouse also have an effect on their ability to adjust to foreign life, including gender expression; life goals and preferences; values, both traditional and non-traditional; and desire to live in certain geographies, whether closer to or farther from home. Past personal experiences endured by that expatriate spouse, including traumas that occurred either inside or outside the relationship with the expatriate, can also express acute or chronic mental health concerns that could affect the expatriate spouse’s ability to adjust to expatriating overseas and living in a new environment.

**Intercultural Adjustment**

Culture is defined as the values and behaviors manifest by a group of people, specifically in their interpretation of life (Hofstede, 2011). Interculturalism is the intersection between people of different cultures, particularly in relation to interpersonal communication. This engagement between cultures often occurs in a dialogue that can result in friction and misunderstanding, as an individual works to understand the differences between the home culture where they come from and the host culture they are now encountering, which results in a period of psychological adjustment for that individual.
Intercultural adjustment, also called cultural adaptation or acculturation, is defined by Black and Gregerson as the “degree of psychological comfort with various aspects of a host country” (1991, p. 463). Intercultural adjustment is also the process of becoming familiar with and comfortable in that new cultural environment. Early studies on adjustment with a new host country considered it to be a singular process before Black and Stephens (1989) expanded this concept to multidimensional to include work adjustment, interaction adjustment, and general living adjustment. This multidimensional process is experienced both by the expatriate and their family members.

The concept of intercultural adjustment for the expatriate is not so neatly defined, as it is not only multidimensional but also is situated at the intersection of cultures: host country, home country, organizational, and even family culture. An expatriate not only needed to become comfortable with working for a company in a unique (foreign) geographical location – sometimes the same company they had already been working for, but in some cases a new company altogether – but the expatriate also needed to become comfortable with operating under a new set of rules for working based on local work culture norms and etiquette; working directly with host country nationals who utilize different methods for communicating and interacting; and navigating local culture for living life, such as living in neighborhoods surrounds by people from another culture, eating new food, shopping at different stores, driving according to local laws and norms, and more. Expatriation for the worker meant a fully encompassing shift for an individual in terms of being a human and interacting with the world.

The expatriate family experienced intercultural adjustment on a similar plane, but with unique nuances. Family members also operate at the intersection of cultures but are relative outsiders to the organizational culture that support the expatriate and give them purpose (Ramos
et al., 2017). Those family members also have other cultures that may dominate their ability to adjust, including school culture as well as the culture within other organizations the expatriate spouse may choose to associate with through their own employment or volunteer work.

Considering the complexity of these cultures as well as the intricacies of individual interactions with those cultures, the multidimensional expatriation model developed by Black and Stephens was expanded upon by Parker and McEvoy (1993) to include characteristics specific to each level in the multidimensional intercultural adjustment process, including:

- Individual expatriate characteristics (including prior international experience; work preparation; host language fluency; extraversion; nationality; gender);
- Organizational characteristics (compensation and benefits; promotion opportunities; length of assignment; organizational culture and size); and
- Contextual characteristics (urban/rural location; family and spouse adaptation; cultural novelty)

These characteristics provided more subtlety and refinement that gave justice to the complexities of expatriation on individuals and their families. Some of the characteristics in this model were unique to expatriation versus other types of intercultural adjustment and came out of the findings of the first studies on expatriate adjustment. For example, regarding contextual characteristics, the concept of cultural novelty was introduced by Black et al. (1991) as a characteristic of a host country culture that an individual needs to overcome. Based on the social learning theory that was developed by Bandura (1977), cultural novelty was defined to detail how expatriates who enter a foreign culture will focus on elements of the culture that seem similar to their own culture. This focus on cultural similarity, it was determined, will ultimately makes it more difficult for that individual to adjust to that foreign location (Black et al., 1991).
Cultural novelty then became a concept that has been studied in numerous studies on expatriation to this day.

**Intercultural Competence**

In order to effectively adjust to life in new cultures, an expatriating individual must learn skills, behaviors, and even ways of thinking to navigate interpersonal intercultural interactions. This need frames the concept of intercultural competence, which has come to be known as the ability to function effectively in another culture (Martinez-Hernaez et al., 2021). In earlier definitions, intercultural competence was often conceptualized in three dimensions: an affective dimension (personality, attitudes); a cognitive dimension (knowledge); and a communicative, behavioral dimension (Gertsen, 1990). These three dimensions are intertwined and develop in concert. More recent definitions have redefined these dimensions and incorporated structural elements (Martinez-Hernaez et al., 2021). Because of its perceived need to those who work and interact with individuals from cultures unique to their own, intercultural competence has been a staple for employment trainings for expatriates.

In certain companies, the concept of intercultural competence has been used to determine how expatriates are selected and trained for overseas positions. Expatriates began to be given pre-departure trainings on how to develop intercultural competence (Gertsen, 1990). These were seen as a set of skills that could be learned, but this competence was based on personal characteristics that were inherent in the employee. If the expatriate understood the complexities of how culture was affecting their intra-psychic processes during a period of adjustment to a foreign culture, they were more likely to be able to navigate any bumps in the road that would cause them stress. An expatriate with greater intercultural competence then had a greater chance of managing that stress and successfully completing their full work contract.
Regardless of how interculturally competent an individual is, it is also assumed that a
time-limited process of adjustment is unavoidable. Historical literature on intercultural
competence focuses on how all individuals who expatriate to other cultures will endure a multi-
stage adjustment process. The model developed by Oberg (1980), which breaks adjustment down
into four stages, is sometimes tweaked but is still widely used. Usually this entire process occurs
in six to twelve months, but individual characteristics and situational circumstances can alter that
timeline. The four stages are not linear and are often overlapping.

1. Honeymoon: characterized by fascination and enthusiasm, individual is fascinated with
   the local culture and engages in superficial yet friendly manner with locals.
2. Crisis: individual experiences “culture shock”, meaning differences between language,
   values, and other characteristics of home country culture clash with what is found in host
country culture, resulting in negative feelings such as loss, frustration, anxiety, and anger.
3. Recovery: individual gradually learns more about culture of host country, including
   language and customs.
4. Adjustment: individual accepts and even appreciates cultural differences; negative
   feelings can still occur but with less frequency and intensity.

While this multi-stage model was determined to be a typical process for intercultural
adjustment, specificities of each stage were unclear. For example, some individuals may
experience culture shock – which usually occurs within the first six months - very intensely,
while others experience it mildly or not at all (Torbiom, 1982). Also, it was not determined if
experiencing more or less culture shock was a positive or negative in terms of overall adjustment
to foreign life (Gertsen, 1990). More recent studies have not adequately clarified this position.
Nevertheless, companies previously efforted to screen potential expatriates to determine their level of intercultural competence and if culture shock would become an issue in their performance. Pre-departure training on the impact of culture was part of this process. This included cultural-specific training (host country culture) combined with general cultural training, which includes self-reflection about one’s own cultural background (home country culture). For the expatriating organization, training the expatriate became an on-going procedure that was monitored throughout the process of an individual’s transition to overseas life, particularly for expatriate managers as well as executives in the human resource department.

An expatriate who developed adequate intercultural competence became associated with successful outcomes during the expatriation process. Successful outcomes of expatriation, then, often came down to an expatriate fulfilling their work contract. Most failures to fulfilling a work contract involve curtailing from their new job and moving back to their home country, as most expatriates (and their spouses and families) are only legally permitted within a host country due to their association with an international company who assumes legal responsibility and liability for those employees and their families. If an expatriate curtailed from their job, it usually was attributed to either personal problems or with issues adjusting to the host country culture (Tung, 1981) – in other words, issues with intercultural adjustment for the expatriate, their accompanying family members, or both. Interestingly, the inability for the expatriate spouse and the family to adjust to the local culture was claimed to be the most common reason for expatriation failure.

**Additional Factors for Cultural Adjustment**

Cultural adjustment for the expatriate and their family is not only a multi-stage process for individual psychological adjustment. Those processes occur through the interactions of
multiple levels of culture. Any worker comes from a culture (home country culture) and brings that culture into their workplace (organizational culture). The worker considers, filters, and exudes values from his home country culture in their daily interactions with his organization; accordingly, his organizational culture forces the expatriate to examine, and potentially evolve, his values. The worker’s family is considered regularly throughout that interaction. For the expatriate and family, a third culture – the culture of country he has expatriated to (host country culture) – adds another layer of complexity to the understanding of culture: a new set of values, identities, and ways of being that impact their ability to think, behave, and live. Fourthly, the culture the expatriate has established within their family, which adapts to life within a new host country culture, and to their new identities as an expatriate family for whatever length of time the expatriate is determined (by their contract) to need to stay abroad. More recent literature places greater weight on how an expatriate family’s constant negotiation of culture affects their ability to adjust to their new lives and identities (Sterle et al., 2018).

For some expatriates and their families, adjustment is not a one-time process. Some employers have an extensive international presence in multiple overseas locations. As such, some employers may choose to move an expatriate from one country to another. This could be a pre-arranged, time-limited work agreement as part of their contract (for example, an expatriate’s contract specifies they work for two years in one country, then two in another); an expectation of the employer as a possibility (e.g., an expatriate in under a blanket contract with an employer that specifies their terms of employment overseas, which is amended if they are moved from one country to another); or an ad-hoc arrangement (e.g., an expatriate receives a new contract for each transition to a new country). Regardless, an expatriate and potentially their family could be required to endure the adjustment cycle (honeymoon, crisis, recovery, adjustment) in one
country, and then be moved to another country to go through the process all over again. This multi-stage adjustment process could have compounding psychological effects on the expatriate family depending on the length the expatriate contracts; the number of countries an expatriate and family are asked to move to and live in; the cultural novelty the expatriate experiences in those countries; the amount and types of support available to the expatriate and family; and the degree of connection between the expatriate family and their home country culture (e.g., paid trips to their home country to reconnect with family and friends), among other factors.

**Impact of Expatriation on Families**

For a family, expatriation could be seen as an exciting opportunity to experience new cultures and a unique way of living (Kempen et al., 2015). While some individuals view moving to a new country for a professional opportunity and experiencing these changes in lifestyle as an exciting and fulfilling prospect, others may experience negative psychosocial stressors either before or during that transition (Brown, 2008). The changes they undergo may not be readily apparent. Expatriates and their families undergo reformation of their identities and redefinition of social and personal roles when integrating into a new culture, along with gradually disconnecting with the roles and routines established in their home culture, which leads to changes in personality (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). These changes are unique for the expatriate as well as for each family member. Depending on the length of expatriation, temporary role and identity changes could morph into long-term role and identity reformation, which could have lasting impacts on the psychosocial health of each individual and the overall mental health of the family as a unit. While exact numbers are not known, an earlier study noted that as many as 40 percent of expatriation tours end early (Wederspahn, 1992) and issues with adjustment among family members are still cited as the top reason for expatriation failure (Lazarova et al., 2010).
Impact of Expatriation on Spouses

Of all expatriating family members, the most significant psychological burden might fall on the partner of the expatriate.\textsuperscript{4} Compared to expatriates, adjustment for partners and spouses is a different experience with greater intensity (Cole, 2012). Throughout the process of expatriating to a new country, expatriates may carry with them their identities as breadwinners and roles as workers for a certain employer. Expatriate partners, however, often struggle with their shifting professional identity and family identity (Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012). That identity shift can be tied to the fact the spouse has left a career or job behind and/or is taking on different roles in the family, such as managing the family’s move to new countries; setting up and managing the new home; and finding schools for their children and ensuring attendance (Harvey & Wiese, 1998).

This shift in identity and role can lead to a new array of stressors in that spouse’s life that they are not always prepared for. Expatriates often expect their spouses to forego paid employment to instead take on the role of problem-solver in the family, and to remain flexible in doing so (Harvey & Wiese, 1998). This role change often starts with any unexpected challenges with the family’s transition abroad, whether with housing, personal effects, or management of unresolved tasks necessary to facilitate the move. Shaffer and Harrison (2001) found that expatriate spouses are under considerable stress when the family is undergoing relocation and when they are unprepared. The task of the expatriate family being prepared also primarily falls

\textsuperscript{4} The terms spouse and partner will be used interchangeably in this section. This is because expatriating companies have evolved in their concept of what a life “partner” means, and therefore who they will financially support to accompany the expatriate to an overseas post. This phenomenon is due to a number of factors including advances in gender equity as well as instances of same-sex marriage that are not recognized either on a federal level in the United States or in certain host countries. While research in the late 20\textsuperscript{th} century only referred to “expatriate spouses”, modern studies reference “expatriate partners” or “expatriate life partners” in researching the same phenomenon: people who move overseas and maintain a committed relationship, and family, with that expatriate.
on the expatriate spouse, as the expatriate is occupied with navigating their new employment environment and the complexities of their new job.

Cultural Considerations for Expatriate Spouses

Regarding the adjustment of a family to a new foreign environment, studies have shown that expatriate partners often need to integrate more intensely with the local culture than the rest of the expatriate family (Ali et al., 2003). Rosenbach and Cseh (2012) studied cross-cultural adjustment of expatriate families through a family systems model, utilizing a mixed method approach on 15 expatriate families. They found that cultural stress had the most impact on cross-cultural adjustment, particularly for the expatriate spouse. Cultural stressors and adjustment challenges included navigating cultural difference, learning the local language and working to be understood by host country nationals. Additional adjustment phenomena included emotional symptoms including feelings of loneliness, depression, and anxiety; physical health, stress, and weight gain; difficulty in maintaining stability and comfort within their family unit; and making new friends and maintaining old friendships (Rosenbusch & Cseh, 2012). Since that study, Sterle et al. (2018) found that most recent studies on adjustment of expatriate spouses did not fully take the cultural peculiarities of relocation into account.

History of Spousal Adjustment

The psychological struggles of expatriating a family to pursue a career has been well documented (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). While initial research was focused on how the expatriate was able to adjust to his or her new environment and how that adjustment affected their job performance, research has increasingly turned to the psychological effects of a move on expat family members and their ability to acclimate to a new host country. Studies have shown that spouses of expatriates often have a more difficult time in adjusting to his or her new
surroundings than the expatriate (Copeland & Norell, 2002). While expatriates have structure, goals, and opportunities for financial and professional advancement in their lives through their new positions, spouses are often left to determine their own professional and personal trajectories, often after having given up such opportunities in the transition overseas (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001).

In spite of evidence that spouses are at a disadvantage in the expatriation process, expatriate spouses have not exactly been praised for taking on the challenge of navigating an expatriate family’s newfound lifestyle. Mary Bralove of the Wall Street Journal introduced the term “trailing spouse” (1981) to describe a wife who leaves her home country to travels overseas with her husband’s employment. Female spouses who follow male expatriates overseas for work opportunities was, at that time, not only the norm but the expected arrangement in an expatriate family. As professional and personal roles and realities morphed in the 21st century, and more white-collar families were supported by two working parents who each pursued independent career tracks, a trailing spouse began to mean whichever spouse chose to forgo their career advancement for that of their expat spouse. Harvey and Wiese (1998) published what was possibly the first journal article on spouses of expatriates that used the term trailing spouse; the authors were researching new realities for dual-career couples who were expatriating, which described the challenges of the expatriate spouse as largely a matter of employment opportunities or lack thereof (incidentally, that article was one of the first academic articles or studies that detailed the phenomenon of the male expatriate spouse).

Since that article by Harvey and Wiese, multiple studies have used the term trailing spouse to refer to spouses of expatriates, regardless of the gender of that spouse (Cangià, 2018; McNulty, 2012; Van Bochove & Engbersen, 2015; Webber & Vögel, 2019). The focus of these
studies (at least early on) was largely on the success of the expatriate in terms of adjusting to a foreign culture in order to fulfill their assignments, and secondarily on the struggle of the expatriate spouse to find meaning in lieu of the career they left behind. This focus is not without merit. Today, many individuals who marry an expatriate have already established a career of their own before their marriage, including investing in their own education at the bachelor level and above. Some have already achieved a considerable amount of work-related success in one or more professional positions, perhaps even in international work or as an expatriate themselves. Others could be retired or are on some sort of sabbatical but are on the lookout for professional opportunities either through an organization or as an entrepreneur. In some cases, professionally viable spouses may struggle even more to adjust because of feelings of lack of fulfillment due to professional and personal opportunities left behind (Collins & Bertone, 2017; Kupka & Cathro, 2007). An expatriate spouse often puts their professional identity on the backburner for the sake of spouse and/or family and as a result “can experience unprecedented job instability, due to their fixed-term contracts, employment, and job flexibility, along with constant changes of destination” (Cangià, 2018, p. 8). But while the issue of expatriate spousal adjustment has been compelling to organizations in the context of worker productivity and a spouse’s loss of work identity, it also has clear implications for mental health practitioners interested in psychosocial phenomena and support for the spouse.

**Adjustment Schema for Expatriate Spouses**

After studies on models and schema for adjustment during expatriation began to find a home in academic journals, researchers turned that same focus to the specific adjustment needs of the spouse of the expatriate. The spouse was found to be a key factor in the adjustment of that expatriate to their new overseas life, and thusly to the success in the workplace (Black &
Gregersen, 1991). In an early study of major multi-national corporations such as Ford and IBM, Tung (1981) found that the needs of spouses were not considered when workers were considered for expatriate assignments. Spouses rarely received any pre-departure cross-cultural adjustment training to prepare them for life abroad and were given very little time overall to decide to move overseas before it actually happened. Additionally, the fact that a spouse might be dissatisfied with any potential disruption to their career at home were not considered as a factor for the expatriate being content during their time overseas (Torni, 1982). As a result, management and human resource journals took notice and began to publish articles and studies relating to the needs of spouses to adjust to foreign life in tandem with the expatriate.

Black and Stephens (1989) created the first adjustment schema for expatriate spouses, though in relation to the influence of the spouse on expatriate success in international work assignments in the Pacific Rim. Based on a quantitative sample of 250 expatriates (not spouses) in four countries in Southeast Asia, the authors found that spouses who had more interest in moving abroad for an international assignment had a higher rate of adjustment than those who had less interest, and that a spouse’s adjustment to overseas life was positively related with an expatriate’s desire to continue their assignment overseas. The correlations between the desires of the expatriate spouse and overall adjustment for the couple were illuminating from a standpoint of a successful expatriation experience for a family, but the study was unfortunately still firmly entrenched in outcomes for the expatriate, not for the spouse.

The conceptual model for measuring adjustment factors for expatriate spouses was first presented by Margaret Shaffer, an academic in human resource management, and David Harrison, a widely published organizational psychologist. Shaffer and Harrison (2001) developed their theory from the stress and coping framework and interdependence theory created by
Folkman and Lazarus in 1984, which was then filtered through theories on identity as well as follow-on research on adjustment factors for expatriate workers, notably the 1989 study by Black and Stephens. Starting in 1998, Shaffer and Harrison engaged in a number of in-depth qualitative interviews with expatriate spouses to determine a number of key factors specific to an expatriate spouse adjusting to a foreign environment, which they then used to create quantitative adjustment scales that were administered to 221 couples working in 37 countries. The pair of researchers then analyzed the data using correlation and regression techniques.

In their findings, Shaffer and Harrison developed a model showing the linkage between individual, interpersonal, and environmental origins of spousal identity and personal, interaction, and cultural spousal adjustment (2001). Individual characteristics included foreign language fluency (correlated with spousal adjustment) and change in employment status (negatively correlated with spousal adjustment). Interpersonal relationship factors included positive relationships with spousal adjustment among all types of family-related characteristics (such as support from extended family and the expatriate’s adjustment) as well as characteristics of the spouse’s social network (size of their personal network, relationship depth from both locals and other expats). Environmental factors included the positive correlation of favorable living conditions and certainty about the length of the family’s overseas assignment with overall spousal adjustment. The study was groundbreaking for these categories of factors but also for other findings. Shaffer and Harrison also found that, one, a spouse’s prior identity had no impact and potentially was a detriment to the ability of her or him to adjust to a new host country environment. Two, they found the spouse needed to proactively integrate with the local culture (social support, learning the local language, engaging in volunteer or employed work) in order to adapt and adjust. The latter two findings situated an expatriate spouse’s identity in their actions
in the present, not the past, and their ability to take action to embrace their change in identity as an individual living abroad.

In 2012, McNulty launched a study using Shaffer’s and Harrison’s spousal support model, noting the re-construction of identity as an important issue for a trailing spouse in adjusting to a host country. More importantly, McNulty focused on the spouse as a primary determinant of the ability for expatriate and family to adjust to an international assignment, and thus focused in on the combination of family systems theory and different models for organizational support for a spouse. The dual-career scenario for expatriate and spouse as well as their level of marital stress were also considered as key components within this framework. McNulty developed a quantitative study using descriptive and exploratory approaches as well as inductive analysis to explore the phenomenon, collecting data from 264 spouses (241 females) between 2001 and 2005. McNulty created three quantitative Likert measures based on existing literature: perception of organizational support; perceived adjustment rooted in dual-career issues and marital stress; and adjustment coping mechanisms. The latter measure also contained several open-ended questions such as, “What are the major causes of stress in your relationship when you relocate?” The tools were pre-tested with three trailing spouses and then reviewed by human resource placement professionals, and the measures were then circulated via email and through international professional associations using a snowball sampling technique. Spouses ranked a strong marriage with less stress, time to adjust, and manageable job demands for the expatriate as some of the top issues in a successful adjustment. McNulty ultimately found that professional, social, and practical support, regardless of whether or not that was actually provided, were deemed to be the most important factors for spousal adjustment.
Other expatriate adjustment studies used Shaffer’s and Harrison’s adjustment scales and model supported by increasingly varied and deepening theory. Studies focused on open-mindedness and adaptability of spouses (Ali et al., 2003) to updated social role expectations (Davoine et al., 2013) to relationships between social and institutional support (Gudmundsdottir et al., 2019) to consideration of the expatriate partner’s subjective well-being in relation to gained and lost resources in personal interactions, employment, and living environment (Kanstren & Mäkelä, 2020). These studies continued to use a human resources and management lens that focused primarily on the success of the expatriate, though with increased focus on well-being of the spouse. Samples for all of these studies were mostly female.

In 2018, Sterle et al. developed a more recent meta-model of adjustment for expatriate spouses, highlighting three categories that were based on Shaffer’s and Harrison’s model and reinforced with prior research in the subject area. The first category of spouse adjustment includes individual characteristics such as emotional stability, social initiative, and open-mindedness, which mapped favorably to psychological and sociocultural adjustment of expat spouses (Ali et al., 2003; Van Erp et al., 2014). The second category centered on re-establishing identity in a new foreign culture, including on the individual/personal level (acquisition of language), interpersonal/social level, and environmental/situational base of identity (culture novelty, good living conditions) (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). The third category included social support from the expatriate’s organization; host country nationals; other expatriate partners; and old friends as well as new acquaintances (Ali et al., 2003; Cieri et al., 1991; Copeland, 2004). This model seemed to more comprehensively describe the myriad of factors that potentially determine how well an expatriate spouse begins to cope with their new environment.
How Expatriate Spouses Cope

Adjustment studies began to link the ability for an expatriate spouse to adjust with their ability to cope with stressful life circumstances during overseas assignments. Coping refers to individual efforts, both cognitive and behavioral, to manage stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Coping schema can involve thoughts, behaviors, or actions to mitigate and reduce stressful feelings that occur either in the short or long term.

Expatriate spouse adjustment is dependent on their ability to use coping strategies to combat all types of stress in a foreign environment (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). Strategies for them to cope with stress include methods to reduce environmental stress (e.g. underemployment, visa restrictions) and internal demands (e.g. disruption of identity, feelings of isolation) while living overseas. McNulty (2012) found that expatriate spouses experience stress emanating from three sources: stressors, which are one-off life events (such as setting up a new house); strains, which are unresolved tensions from stressors that build up (such as giving up a career and adjusting to a new role in the home); and daily hassles (driving in bad traffic).

Coping strategies during the expatriation process were identified by Lazarus and Folkman in 1984. They developed a coping framework for expatriates that consisted of two types of coping strategies: problem-focused and emotion-focused. Expatriates who utilize problem-focused coping strategies tend to look for actionable solutions to their stressors, such as learning the host country language in order to land a local job, while spouses who utilize emotion-focused strategies focus on alleviating their symptoms of stress, such as by primarily spending time with other expatriates from their own culture.

In 2018, Margaret Shaffer teamed up with Yu-Ping Chen to administer three previously validated quantitative tools to 191 spouses from 37 countries to measure coping strategies
(problem-focused and emotion-focused) of expatriates and their spouses; adjustment factors for both; and cultural novelty for the spouse (Chen & Shaffer, 2018). The study had two major findings: one, a spouse who utilized problem-focused coping strategies was positively correlated with better cultural adjustment for both the spouse and expatriate than a spouse who utilized emotion-focused strategies, and; two, expatriate adjustment was found to be a mediator between a spouse’s use of problem or emotion-focused coping strategies and that spouse’s adjustment. Of the 194 accompanying spouses sampled, only 11 were male; the researchers concluded that additional empirical research was needed to understand the unique coping strategies utilized by the expatriate male spouse.

For spouses to develop positive coping strategies, they need support mechanisms to help them through the process. McNulty (2012) found positive coping strategies in a spouse are facilitated by support from the expatriate’s organization. Two studies found that social support from family, friends and host country nationals had a significant direct effect on perceived wellbeing of expatriate spouses and their ability to cope with stress (Copeland and Norell, 2002; Ramos et al., 2017). On the contrary, McNulty (2012) found that expatriate spouses who were not supported through career and relationship stress during the expatriation process developed poor coping mechanisms to career and relationship strife, which affected how they reconstructed their identity and ultimately perceived their own adjustment to their new surroundings.

**Summary**

This chapter described trends in expatriation and the hidden impacts of the expatriation process, notably the psychological and cultural adjustment concerns of expatriate family members. Expatriate spouses have adjustment concerns and coping strategies that have warranted inquiry in the literature. The following chapter will further the discussion by looking
at the unique experiences of male expatriate spouses, supported by concepts of masculinity, cultural considerations, and gender role theories. Finally, the study will be introduced; the research questions presented; and a short justification will be made for the study population, in relation to the themes presented thus far.
Chapter 2: Theoretical Framework and Research Questions for Male Expatriate Spouses

Overview of Masculinity

Masculinity is a set of attributes, behaviors, and roles ascribed to the male sex (Thompson & Bennett, 2015). Certain masculine attributes, such as sexual organs, are biologically male. However, social learning theories suggest that male gender expression is a social rather than as a biological construct. Behaviors and roles traditionally associated with the male sex are socially constructed and dependent on culture (Thompson & Pleck, 1995). The social constructionist perspective suggests that gender roles such as masculinity and femininity are performances, independent of sex (Butler, 1990). Families replicate the expression of masculinity and femininity through gender role performances that are often rooted in family tradition, local culture, and broader societal norms.

Sociologists and psychologists have historically described masculinity as a collection of "cultural things – bodies of ideas, doctrines, myths, and expectations that reflect the gender constructions within and, sometimes, across groups, communities, and societies" (Thompson & Bennett, 2015, p. 2). Traditional and cultural expressions of gender “undergird power differences between men and women by defining masculinity as dominance and aggression and femininity as submissiveness and nurturance” (Levant & Powell, 2017, p. 16). While men (and women) were capable of breaking beyond these stereotypes, masculine concepts and gender role norms for boys and men were ingrained at a young age, and the individual man without guidance was largely tasked with reformulating his image on his own.

Process of Acculturation and Socialization of Men

In the social sciences, the bioecological systems theory developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in 1974 is one of the most widely used explanations of human development
(Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017). Bronfenbrenner suggested that human development is a transactional process between an individual and their environment, starting with an individual and moving through a concentric circle of systems including their relationship with their parents and caregivers; this family's conditions at work, school, and within their community; and finally broader social, policy, and cultural concerns. The outer layer, culture, which was suggested by Bronfenbrenner to be as an external factor with cursory effects on the individual, has in recent years been argued to be prevalent in every area of a person's life, and evident in all "daily routines and practices in families, peer settings, and child care and school settings" (Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017, p. 909).

The development of a person is place, culture, gender, race, and time-based (Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017). Some of these characteristics, namely place of birth, are pre-determined for a person and not chosen. Other characteristics are fluid through a person’s lifetime, such as relationship with religion or spirituality. An individual’s personality develops across the lifespan through constant negotiation with one’s cultural environment, with particular focus on the influence of people such as caregivers, friends, and authority figures. Therefore, the culture an individual matures and develops in – which is tied to place – can directly influence a person's framework for relating to other people. This includes relating to those of the same gender expression, such as male, with those of another gender expression, such as female. For example, a straight white male of European heritage growing up in rural Alabama in the 1950s will not only have different perspectives, values, goals, and behaviors than a similar male growing up in New York City in the 2000s; they will treat the people around them differently based on who and what those people are, including their expression of gender.

Masculinity ideology can be thought of as the “individual’s endorsement and
internalization of cultural belief systems about masculinity and the male gender” (Pleck, 1995, p. 19). A man reflects concepts of masculinity based on the cultural influences of his upbringing. In some countries, men are expected to be as caring and as modest as its women; in others, men are expected to be competitive and assertive while women the opposite (Hofstede, 2011). Some Western cultures such as America are rooted in the latter, though nontraditional men in those cultures can exude qualities usually associated with traditional women. Gender ideals for men and male roles are geographically, racially, and generationally rooted but share certain fixed qualities throughout history (Thompson & Bennett, 2015). These ideals result in masculinity becoming “normative and compulsory, which in turn is encoded in everything from the neural pathways of individuals to social interactions” (Fausto-Sterling, 2000, p. 25).

**Social Construction of Male Role and Identity**

Early gender theorists posited that social construction - specifically socialization and attitudes about gender roles framed within culture - plays into how gender roles are expressed within a household. Gender scholars more recently debated if and how gender roles can be transmitted through the performance of specific roles in the home, or "doing gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1987). Gender norms are rooted in culture and the expression of gender identity and role can sometimes go against what is typical in that culture. An individual either accepts the traditional socialization into their assigned gender role or does not. If they choose a role that is contrarian in their culture, they risk ostracization from the culture they live in.

American culture, in addition to many cultures around the world, is historically patriarchal as a majority (Haas, 1995). In 20th century American culture, men were represented in media and popular culture for all of their glaring stereotypes: tough, rigid, lacking feeling and empathy. In what is defined as traditional masculinity in American culture, masculine roles as
performed in the home and in larger society reflected these stereotypes (Levant & Powell, 2017). Men traditionally were expected to be the heads of their households and to provide for their families, while women were expected to maintain the household and care for the children. While expectations around the ability and desire for middle- and upper-class spouses to work has evolved in the 20th century, certain subsets of culture remain steadfast in their desire to maintain this dynamic (Harvey & Wiese, 1998).

The roles of men within the home have morphed gradually throughout American history, most noticeably within the family dynamic. The traditional role of the man as the primary breadwinner and chief decision maker within a household became internalized as the dominant masculine identity in the United States. As American culture has modernized, in some cases presenting a man as the primary caretaker of his children and an equal partner to his spouse in terms of making decisions for their family future, a nontraditional view on masculine identity has emerged. This phenomenon has been coined as the “modern man”, a man who is equally comfortable fulfilling any role in the home, regardless of cultural and historical norms (Harvey & Wiese, 1998). In this way American culture had finally caught up with other non-Western cultures. In Finland, for example, gender equity has long been entrenched, and it has been common for women to be a family’s breadwinner while the husband has been the stay-at-home parent (Kanstren & Mäkelä, 2020).

The performance of roles has direct impact on identity, but traditional and nontraditional identities for men are not locked in a binary construct. Gee (2000) posited that identity can be explained by how someone performs roles in various social situations rather than a single cohesive construct. Therefore, a man can have multiple identities that are dictated by life circumstances. While the historical identity of a man in America was that of worker and primary
breadwinner, many men have embraced a more fluid and gender-equitable choice to support their spouse and their household, without feeling any significant conflict or undue social pressure (Harvey & Wiese, 1998).

**Gender Role Theories and Male Intrapsychic Conflict**

Gender role theories account for the degree of difference between the performance of social roles by males and females. For example, men and women who perform roles based on traditional gender norms, such as when men work outside of the home and their wives work in the home, will behave and hold attitudes that more closely align with traditional gender norms. When males perform social roles that are similar to those expected to be performed by females, such as when men work in the home while their wives work away from home, those men will behave and hold attitudes that are more similar to those women (Pleck, 1995). These theories map those role performances to either positive or negative psychological outcomes, depending on a host of factors including individual preferences, culture, social norms, and the like. Gender role theories can therefore help us better understand how men perform roles and consider their identities in relation to cultural upbringing and social norms, as filtered through their personal psychology.

**Gender Role Strain, Discrepancy Strain, and Gender Role Conflict**

The Gender Role Strain Paradigm (GRSP), which was developed by Joseph Pleck in 1981, is currently seen as the primary theoretical paradigm on modern male and masculine psychology (Levant & Powell, 2017). This developed from earlier theories of masculinity based on psychoanalytic drive theory, which assumed individuals have a strong psychological need to conform their gender role to their biological sex; men who failed to become adequately “masculine” would become homosexual and/or adopt negative perceptions of women (Pleck,
1981). This gender role identity paradigm (GRIP), as Pleck coined it posthumously in 1981, was prevalent in masculine research from approximately 1930 to 1980. This ideology hierarchically situates men above women (Gergen, 1985). Also in 1981, Pleck developed the updated GRSP theory, which is rooted in feminist scholarship that views gender roles as socially constructed and performed through traditional gender ideology. This GRSP was based on ten principles (Pleck, 1981):

1. Gender roles are performed through stereotypes and norms regarding appropriate behavior for men and women;
2. Gender roles are contradictory and inconsistent;
3. Most people violate gender roles;
4. Those who violate gender roles may be socially condemned;
5. Violation of gender roles often leads to negative psychological outcomes;
6. Those who believe they have violated gender roles may respond by overconforming to their gender roles;
7. Men have higher consequences for violating these roles than do women;
8. Certain gender role traits, such as male aggression, are dysfunctional;
9. Gender role strain is experienced by both men and women in both paid work and in family roles; and
10. Gender role strain can be caused by historical changes.

According to the social constructionist perspective, masculinity and femininity are “performances” that are independent of sex, which can be and are performed regardless of gender (Butler, 1990). Gender role strain, then, is personal psychological conflict with how a man or woman is acting out his or her role. For men, this conflict can also result in discrepancy
strain, which is a personal failure to achieve an idealized sense of manhood; dysfunction strain, where achieving the requirements of manhood is costly to the man; and trauma strain, which says men being socialized into cultural roles is inherently traumatic (Pleck, 1995). This can lead to socially constructed and stereotypically male behaviors including riskiness, boldness, and brashness (Swartout et al., 2015). Gender role strain and discrepancy strain is not always a lifelong phenomenon and can occur temporarily during sensitive life stages (Levant & Powell, 2017).

Within a patriarchal society, socially constructed and “sex-typed” gender roles are often rewarded while failure to perform can lead to consequences (Pleck, 1981, 1995). A key aspect of the GRSP is that role strain varies according to cultural context and social location (Levant, 2011; Pleck, 1981, 1995). Another gender role theory that places masculinity in the context of culture is the Gender Role Conflict (GRC), a framework that juxtaposes cultural masculine norms with a man’s self-concept and any resulting intrapersonal or intrapsychic punishment (O’Neil, 2008). Gender role conflict is defined as a psychological state in which socialized gender roles have negative consequences on the person or others. This conflict exists on four levels: 1, cognitive (personal thoughts on gender roles; 2, affective (personal feelings about gender roles); 3, behavioral (how we respond in an interpersonal context); and 4, unconscious (our lack of awareness on our behavior results in intrapsychic conflict) (O’Neil, 2008). O’Neil posits that men experience this conflict when they deviate from gender norms; try yet fail to meet gender norms; and noticed differences in their actual expression of masculinity and their ideal expression; and the like. An example of this would be a man who feels conflicted when asked to take on a role in the home that culturally and historically seen as a female role, such as serving as a primary caretaker for his children.
Gender role strain and gender role conflict reflect how individual mental health struggles can result from conflicts with cultural norms, both learned (from upbringing) and in real-time. Quantitative scales have been used in the literature to measure these conflicts, but these theories have also been used in qualitative work to assess how men from patriarchal and culturally rigid societies interact with more progressive cultural ideas, whether inside their own culture or in a new/foreign culture.

**Help-Seeking Behavior among Men in America**

Overarching cultural stressors around gender roles and the (silent) impacts on the male psyche are concerning as a mental health issue. The mental health concerns of men and the concept of social support has been the topic of focus of researchers who believe that gender is socially (culturally) constructed and not determined by biology (McKenzie et al., 2018). A related and intertwined issue is of cultural stereotypes around masculinity that dissuade men from reaching out for help from peers, service providers, and even family members. A recent study found that men are less able and interested than women in fostering supportive relationships with others (McKenzie et al., 2018). Some men have been found to have difficulties in seeking support from existing connections, while others desire independence and reject the need for social support.

Men also lag in seeking support outside of social circles. Similar to what is observed in many Western countries, mental health service usage among men has been observed to be lower in the United States than among women. In comparison to women, men tend to have a negative attitude regarding the usage of mental health support (Yousaf et al., 2015). These attitudes have largely resulted in men being less willing to seek out mental health services (Gonzalez et al., 2011). In order to receive help from mental health providers, men need to engage in tasks such as
recognizing their own emotional problems; admitting that they need help; and depending on others to receive help – tasks that are in discord with the cultural ideas that men absorb about being tough, emotionally controlled, and self-reliant (Pleck, 1995).

The degree in which men subscribe to more or less extreme masculine ideologies is what perplexes researchers to study the phenomena (Thompson & Pleck, 1995). For example, men who subscribe to the concept of self-reliance may choose to seek out help in certain circumstances, while men who embrace more progressive ideologies may express homophobic thoughts and behaviors. Because individual ideologies vary wildly across situations and contexts, researchers are still working to better understand and facilitate male help-seeking behavior in different cultural contexts (Thompson & Pleck, 1995).

**Introducing the Male Expatriate Spouse**

An increasing trend is the female (or male) expatriate who moves overseas for work and accompanied by a male spouse (Selmer & Leung, 2003). The specific breakdown of male spouses living overseas at any one time is unknown. According to a recent global mobility trends survey of 11 million employees from 163 global companies, approximately 73 percent of all expatriates relocate overseas with a spouse or partner (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2016), and another survey found that approximately 15 percent of the global expatriate workforce is female averaged across sectors (Organization Resources Counselors Worldwide, 2008). These number do not account for the relationship status of those female expatriates, and with those who are partnered, the gender or ethnic status of those partners.

Other than one study by Cole in 2012 that was from an international human resource perspective, research on the experiences, specific needs, role, and identity concerns of male expatriate spouses has been limited. Similar to research on expatriate spouses regardless of
gender, the needs of male spouses have practically been relegated to footnotes in studies on maximizing the performance of expatriates. This is primarily due to the fact that adjustment concerns of expatriate spouses have been studied through mostly female samples (Ali et al., 2003; Davoine et al., 2013; Gudmundsdottir et al., 2019; Kanstren & Mäkelä, 2020).

In the earliest looks at the needs of male expatriate spouses, researchers focused on their identity as a partner in a dual-career couple. To that end, male spouses of expatriates have been found to have unique gender-specific needs in comparison to female spouses, largely due to change in professional role (Anderson, 2001). This change in professional role could mean taking a job out of their career field, working for a lower salary on the local economy, or not working at all in lieu of an increased role in the home. This change may not be a welcome one for the male spouse. Limited research on male expatriate spouses has shown that certain males might reject a role that is discordant with the traditional male “breadwinner” role and the socially constructed ideology of masculinity (Cole, 2012).

Similar to what was found in general research on adjustment of expatriate spouses to international life, positive outcomes for any expatriate spouse’s adjustment is rooted in their ability to accept their new identity. Part of the spouse’s identity is helping to facilitate the adjustment needs of their expatriate partner and potentially their children to life abroad. A male spouse could face an overwhelming need to diminish or alter their own identity for the sake of supporting their expatriate spouse, their relationship, and/or their family (Collins & Bertone, 2017; Kupka & Cathro, 2007). This change in identity is not without implications for certain men. A male spouse with socially constructed views of masculinity could feel his identity is threatened, which could alter his perceptions on how to cope with stress in a healthy manner (Ridge et al., 2011).
Research on Adjustment for the Male Expatriate Spouse

The phenomena of how expatriate spouses adjust to foreign life has evolved in the last thirty years, but the lens for looking at that phenomena has not adequately considered the male perspective. The limited research on male spouses has largely focused on the relationship between men and work identity while sidelining the importance of role, identity, culture, personal perspective, coping schema, and resulting biopsychosocial concerns. The earliest studies on spouse adjustment primarily sampled females and thusly viewed spousal concerns through a female perspective, which was to consider the importance of family, friendships, and other social support for spouse adjustment (Copeland & Norell, 2002). While interdependence theory shows that social relationships are key for psychological security, an updated perspective was needed to see if the same theories applied to the need of male spouses. A perspective on how men take on new roles and gradually identify as expatriate spouses was needed before considering such psychological security.

This perspective began to formulate in 1992, when a small exploratory study was published in a human resources journal on the perspective and concerns of dual-career couples when expatriating for the female expat’s job. The researchers interviewed 23 female expats and seven of their male spouses for up to two hours each, focusing on work-related concerns for the male spouse in their new foreign location (Punnett et al., 1992). Their findings were a list of over 15 suggestions for “activities designed to assist spouse finding career-oriented activities in the foreign location” (p. 588), including executive search services; leads for jobs in same organization as expat; provision of unemployment benefits; funds for career-oriented research or education. The authors admitted that the small sample in each group made it inappropriate to
statistically analyze the data, but the findings were still revelatory in terms of shedding light on a new phenomenon that shifted perspective on traditional gender roles.

Years later, Harvey and Wiese published an article in a human resources journal on expatriation of dual-career couples (1998). This was not a study but an analysis of the challenges that human resource executives and their multi-national corporations were facing when sending female employees abroad, based on data culled from articles and research studies from the prior fifteen years. By centering the article on two composite cases of male spouses who expatriated with their wives, the authors produced the seemingly unintended result of exposing and preliminarily detailing the experience of the male expatriate spouse (in the late 1990s). The authors highlighted not only job concerns for the male spouse but the concept of men who live in non-traditional families (those with female breadwinners); difficulties adjusting to the trailing spouse identity and an increased role in the home; and suggestions for a number of support programs to assist the female expatriate and spouse through the process. The authors found that future research was needed not only into the male spouse’s career concerns, but into developing organizational support programs to address “the male trailing spouse’s career orientation”; any “family role stressors” he would experience; and his adjustment to “cultural dimensions of the host country”, among other options (Harvey & Wiese, 1998, p. 380).

Harvey and Wiese’s call would be soon answered in 2001 by Barbara Anderson when she published a small collection of interviews with male expatriate spouses, which were lifted from a larger study on the management practices of 21 private, public, and non-governmental organizations on the expatriation and repatriation process. While Anderson’s small-scale study did not analyze the data from those semi-structured interviews with 35 male spouses, the findings confirmed that male expatriate spouses required support overseas to confront “change in
status, isolation, and ostracism” as well as the inability to find employment in host countries (Anderson, 2001, p. 111).

Selmer and Leung (2003) also expanded upon the findings of Harvey and Wiese through a “highly exploratory study” (p. 20) of mostly British female expatriates working in Hong Kong, with the goal of determining how to keep those female expats happy through the provision of corporate support to their male spouses. A sample of 20 female expatriates completed a scale developed by Punnett (1997) that touched on 14 corporate support areas, which they ranked from less than sufficient to more than sufficient. The researchers ultimately found that male spouses needed more counseling support for finding work or activities; financial support for career-oriented research; and even creation of work positions for the male spouse. As the researchers concluded, in respect to male spouses, "to ignore the distinctive needs of trailing spouses would increase stress to both parties" (Selmer & Leung, 2003, p. 20).

In the years after 2003, studies continued to be published on the need for companies to address spousal and family adjustment with the goal of increasing expatriation success. It wasn’t until Cole (2012) published a study in the Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources that the first methodological study to frontline the experience of the male trailing spouse through an entirely male sample was realized. Cole focused on organizational employment support as a primary factor in male spouse adjustment but used social role theory to examine the change in role for a male spouse in a household where the female expatriate was the breadwinner. Cole designed a mixed methods study that started as quantitative research with an opt-in qualitative piece. The study participants were already part of a study on expatriate partner adjustment, which in total was a pool of 238 spouses recruited through professional associations, international organizations, chambers of commerce, consulates and more organizations. Cole found 45 male
spouses from that pool to complete the quantitative tool and another 33 to opted into a qualitative interview. The quantitative measures consisted of the same partner adjustment tool developed by Shaffer and Harrison in 2001; a self-made tool to measure perceived value of partner-provided employment assistance; and a demographic-based measure that gathered employment-related information about the spouse. The ensuing semi-structured qualitative interview focused on perceptions of employer-provided employment support for the spouse, with some open-ended follow-on questions regarding the perceptions of that employment support along with a question about perception of a male spouse’s role in a female breadwinner household.

Cole found that most of the interviewed respondents were comfortable in a female breadwinner household. Two-thirds of the male respondents saw themselves as career-oriented and two-thirds of respondents reported disruption in their careers. One third of the respondents, also reported symptoms of isolation and despondency in their new role. Even with a small N of 33 and with a focus on employment-related issues, Cole concluded that social role theory should be explored among males in this lifestyle and cultural factors need to be considered as a contributing factor to adjustment, specifically in relation to cultural norms of a male’s home country and the impact of culture imparted from a new host country.

**Updating the Lens on Expatriate Spouse Adjustment for Men**

Because it was more common for female spouses to follow expatriate men overseas, implications of gender on the male spouse began to be investigated much later than for women. Limited research on males in the role of trailing spouse found that these men still contend with situations that challenge cultural male norms, including primary breadwinner status (Cole, 2012; Collins & Bertone, 2017). While women are assumed to transition more easily into a secondary breadwinner status, or into an increased role in the home in lieu of paid employment, men might
feel more conflict with traditional family roles and therefore take on this new role reluctantly (Harpster & Monk-Turner, 1998).

Emanating from this new perspective on male roles, the impact of home-country culture began to become an important component for the male spouse experience. As the phenomena of the male trailing spouse grew, particularly after the year 2000, researchers found “the marital roles of spouses living in male-dominated cultures can be shaped by the traditional gender-role ideology of such societies” (Gupta et al., 2012, p. 3). This gave importance to the impact of culture on traditional gender roles and focused more directly on personal psychological impact to the spouse experiencing role transition that was out of step with the host country culture. Mohr and Klein (2004) noted that spousal role acceptance was equally as important to adjustment as was interacting with foreign culture and host country nationals. Going back to interdependence theory, perhaps the male expatriate spouse would find importance in perceiving the quality of social support in their lives, but their identity as a man in the trailing spouse role would first need consideration.

Taking into account the increased number of male spouses who enter a phase of their lives where they accompany their partners on overseas assignments, the lens on spousal adjustment can and will further evolve to consider the unique characteristics of the male spouse role and how men perceive this time of life. Cole (2012) posited that male and female spouses perceived and interpreted roles differently, which called for future study particularly of men who suffer more deeply from alterations to their identity (Harvey & Wiese, 1998). Further understanding is needed on how the role of expatriate spouse affects the mental health, psyche, and coping strategies of these men.
On Male Spouses and Coping

Coping strategies specific to male spouses of expatriates remain misunderstood and should be rooted not only in their role as an expatriate spouse, but also a male experiencing mental distress. Ridge et al. (2011) considered males across cultures and their help-seeking patterns in stressful situations. They posited that males cope with stress differently than females, often preferring to keep their problems to themselves, struggling to find words to describe emotions, and self-managing their emotions through potentially self-destructive behaviors or until releasing them in an outburst. Brody (1999) hypothesized that men avoid expressing emotions in attempts to maintain self-control, while Levant (2011) found men to place high priority on being emotionally tough by avoiding powerless emotional reactions such as fear and pain.

Male spouses have specific needs for managing stress based on their cultural upbringing, internalization of social norms, and patterns of help-seeking behavior. Those needs are first addressed within their families. Tung (2004) found that male expatriates cope with loneliness by spending time with their families, while Cole (2012) found that family systems evolve their own internal coping mechanisms to support the male spouse. Male spouses often reach out to people beyond their family systems when coping with stress, but they need help meeting those people, whether other male spouses or work-related networking contacts (Cole, 2012). When they do go outside the family for stress-relieving activities, Tung (2004) found that males often drank alcohol and played sports or engaged in other athletic activities with others.

While male spouses of expatriates should not be lumped together in terms of their abilities and preferences in coping with stressful situations, a lack of understanding on how male spouses cope with stress, particularly when living in host countries cultures that value traditional
ideologies of masculinity, is a cause for additional research in terms of their ability to adjust to their new surroundings in a healthy manner.

**Justification and Significance of Study**

Considering the lack of understanding of life experiences of male expatriate spouses, I will embark on a study that will enable their perspectives to be heard. While the limited prior research on male expatriate spouses been qualitative in design yet presented through a human resource and management lens (Cole, 2012; Harvey & Weise, 1998; Selmer & Leung, 2003), I feel additional empirical qualitative research on this population is needed from a social work perspective. I will examine how gender role theories and masculine coping schema in this population intertwine with known phenomena of intercultural adjustment to encompass the male spouse experience, and how this man interprets and tells the story of his experience as it relates to his personal identity in terms of self-acceptance, passion for life, psychological flexibility, self-regulation, and positive regard for his future. In asking what it means to be a man who is an expatriate spouse, I will be exposed to the lived experiences of men in that role. I will seek to learn what that lived experience means to this man as a moment in his life, and how it challenges him to examine his past and speculate on his future in a manner that is constructive, destructive, or somewhere in between. Through this study I will ask myself, as a researcher who is also part of this population (see Reflexivity Statement): how does a man who is the spouse of an expatriate worker present himself to me, and why does he focus on certain aspects of his himself in telling that story?

My study will approach the life experience of male spouses of expatriate workers from a strengths perspective, and to highlight the characterological and behavioral factors evident in male spouses as they continue to navigate their lives as husbands, fathers, friends, and colleagues.
in a foreign environment while living a role that is traditionally feminine. There is a need to study how male spouses cope in order to adjust to their roles as trailing spouses. Studying these male spouses could help inform the creation of proactive interventions, programs, and skill trainings to better support spouses before or through any crisis in identity. This research could potentially improve outcomes for expatriate families and improve work performance of expatriates, but the primary focus is to improve mental health outcomes for male spouses by considering the unique circumstances of their roles and identities within an environment with limited support resources.

**Research Questions**

I chose a phenomenological approach for this study to better understand the following: What does it mean to be a male expatriate spouse? How does that experience affect what it means for him to be a man, and how has it changed him? How has his masculine identity and role been impacted by culture? How does he cope and how is he supported? What do the answers to these questions mean to him, and how does he talk about it in the context of his journey?

**Theoretical Perspective on the Population**

Earlier studies on expatriate spouses focused on expatriate populations working abroad through various entities, from corporations to international NGOs to governments. For this dissertation, I chose to sample spouses of expatriates who are working at and through U.S. Embassies around the world (more on this in Study Design). The U.S. Government maintains 273 diplomatic posts worldwide, including 168 Embassies (Lowy Institute, n.d.). Embassies are managed by the Department of State, a legislative executive body that handles foreign diplomatic affairs. Embassies contain representations from various foreign affairs agencies including the
State Department; U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID); the Department of Defense; and the U.S. Peace Corps (Dorman & American Foreign Service Association, 2011).

Even with modern advances in gender equity, diplomacy has historically been a domain for male expatriates with ingrained norms, behaviors, and communication styles that are inherently masculine (Aggestam & Towns, 2019). As a specific agency, the U.S. State Department diplomatic corps has traditionally been male-dominated, until recently (Wamala, 2015). While there are currently 13,000 American foreign service officers and another 11,000 civil servants in the field (“U.S. Department of State Mission,” n.d.), State Department statistics from 2016 show nearly 40 percent of American diplomats are female (Kralev, 2016) compared to 20 percent in 1985 (Wamala, 2015). It is also approximated that the diplomatic community is over 80% white (Kralev, 2016), which is a much higher percentage in comparison to the overall U.S. population. The likelihood of those officers marrying is relatively high, based on recent statistics on expatriate marriage (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2016). The diplomatic career field is such that officers work in the field for up to 20 years or sometimes longer. These statistics indicate a potential for uncovering unique and significant phenomena for spouses who accompany expatriates on long international journeys.

In 2013, Davoine et al. published a qualitative study on expatriate spouse adjustment that was not entirely focused on male spouses but that did feature a unique perspective on gender roles. This comparative study of spouses in the Swiss diplomatic field answered the call from Cole (2012) for further exploration of social role theory, but this time on role enactment in an expatriate couple through the dramaturgical approach. This small qualitative study of 14 male and 26 female spouses, which was administered almost equally by email, phone, and in-person interview, measured tendencies in role expectations. The authors analyzed the findings through
the concept of dramaturgy from sociologist Erving Goffman, who formulated the idea that life is akin to a never-ending play and we the people are the actors. From this lens, an expatriate spouse’s perception on his or her behavior was broken down into two major categories, front-stage (public-facing, representational) and back-stage (psychological, social, emotional support for the expatriate), and through different “repertoires”: supportive expatriate partner; representative of a country (Switzerland, in this study); and resource manager for the family. The authors not only found that the role repertoire approach was appropriate in this setting, but that male role should be specifically studied in future research. Males, the authors found, were more likely to combine their roles and behaviors with work outside the home than commit to full-time support of the family. This marked difference from the traditional role of submissive “trailing” spouse revealed a new set of concerns for spouses in roles outside of prescriptive social norms. The authors also determined the diplomatic setting, which could generally be experienced by spouses as more structured than that of an international company, provides implications (in the case of this dissertation, opportunities and enlightening characteristics) that are unique in understanding spousal support.

A recent and larger quantitative worldwide study on spouses of diplomats working in the EU showed a relationship between adjustment and their level of social support and their overall satisfaction with life (Gudmundsdottir et al., 2019). This research found little difference between male spouses (N=44, 16% of participants) and female spouses in needing emotional and instrumental support (services, material and financial resources) support to better adjust cross-culturally. The study concluded that gender was not adequately controlled for this female-heavy sample and more research within the diplomatic community to this end was needed.
For this dissertation, I surmised that focusing on a diplomatic organizational culture that was traditionally masculine – yet featured a growing population of female expatriates and male spouses – would fit together nicely in studying how home country, host country, and organizational cultures intersected to impact spouses of expatriates. Considering the impactful studies on the unique perspective of expatriate spouses in the diplomatic field (Davoine et al., 2013; Groeneveld, 2008; Gudmundsdottir et al., 2019) and their recommendations for future male-focused studies, this dissertation can take a male-centric approach to advancing the discussion on expatriate spouse adjustment via gender roles, identity, and coping, all through a social work lens.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

Study Design

This exploratory qualitative study investigated commonly occurring situational phenomena experienced by male spouses of expatriate workers living in many countries around the world. The population is comprised of male spouses of expatriates from first-world countries who received job placements overseas and who willingly chose to pursue such job placements along with their families (the distinction is made to differentiate these workers from refugee populations and those subject to forced-labor arrangements). While male spouses of American and other first-world workers who are placed overseas by multinational corporations may also have similar and relevant stories to contribute to this study, the specific sub-population of men that I sampled includes spouses of American diplomats and other American workers serving under Chief of Mission authority at U.S. Embassies overseas. While these Embassies contain multiple agencies that each have their own cultural peculiarities and ways of working, this sample specification allowed me to control a specific set of parameters in this study by seeking out male expatriate spouses who share a particular culture and experience under of the auspices of U.S. government work. This includes but is not limited to shared language, vetting process, rules of management, and way of living in each country. This does not invalidate the experience and story of other expatriate male spouses living and working in foreign countries, but rather gives some grounding to this research that can and should be expanded upon in future studies.

Methodology

Phenomenology is a qualitative research approach to illuminate commonalities in how members of a particular group perceive their lived experiences (Groenewald, 2004). While researchers should always work to eliminate potential biases, phenomenologists take the
approach that inquiry cannot be entirely objective, as the researcher brings presuppositions that are inherently partisan (Hammersley, 2000, p. 2). Bentz and Shapiro (1998) said that bracketing is a process of conducting inquiry from the perspective of the researcher, while allowing participants to provide data via “rich descriptions of phenomena and their settings” (p. 104). I felt that my formulation of theoretical constructs in developing my research questions around masculinity, culture, and identity was my form of bracketing. I would use the qualitative interview as a data collection tool in order to then capture the rich data I wanted from my population. The qualitative interview format is intended to elicit the perceptions of the participants, with particular focus on the words they choose as well as their ideologies and constructs (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008).

**Sample Size and Recruitment Procedures**

I used a purposive, non-probability and snowball sampling techniques to recruit participants in this study. Participation was equally possible from participants in any country with a diplomatic post. It is not possible to know the exact number of male spouses of expatriates working through these posts, based on the movement of expatriates in and out of the field as well as their fluctuating marital statuses. The number of diplomats in the field is estimated at almost 16,000 (Nutter, 2020) though this number does not account for other smaller agencies working through U.S. Embassies abroad. Considering these numbers as well as the estimated marriage rate of 80% among foreign service workers, I ballparked the population to be several thousand.

In past studies on the topics of expatriate spouse adjustment, males had a low rate of participation versus females (Black & Gregersen, 1991; Chen & Shaffer, 2018; Heidi & Bertone, 2017; Kupka & Cathro, 2007; McNulty, 2012). This is partially explained through historical norms of a larger percentage of female accompanying spouses to males, but this does not account
for male spouses who simply choose not to take part in such studies. A relevant qualitative study that surveyed male spouses alone, albeit through a human resource lens, had a sample size of 45 (Cole, 2012). Although the sample in this study was much smaller and perhaps an incentive was not needed, I chose to give participants a $20 Amazon gift card to show that I valued their participation and to entice additional participants (see Subject Payments, below).

I recruited participants through direct email messages (see Appendix C) to individuals who I either knew directly or were recommended by someone I knew directly. Those men who participated in my study confirmed to meeting my study criteria by receiving the consent form before the interview and agreeing to it before participating in the interview. Eligibility criteria included needing to agree he is the male spouse of an expatriate who is currently serving overseas. While a participant was required to be male, he could have been the spouse of either a female or male. Marital status was to be assumed to be legal among those who participated in the study (I did not take steps to verify validity of marriage). Some of the studies I referenced for this dissertation interchanged “partner” and “spouse”. I chose my criteria to include “spouse”, both in consideration of continuity of my sample (similar frame of mind and life circumstances) and the strength of the relationship with the expatriate (marriage may or may not increase accountability in an expatriate relationship versus a partnership that is not legally binding, but at the very least increases the homogeneity of relationship status across the sample).

I chose to exclude male spouses who were placed in tandem with the expat, meaning those who were assigned together as workers in a particular mission; these workers would not share the experiences of those male spouses who were not considered an expat themselves, i.e. those who are moved by a company or organization to a country for a work assignment.
The full consent form seen at Appendix A lists the following inclusion and exclusion criteria:

**Inclusion Criteria**

- Male (identifying as)
- Adult (18 and older)
- Legally married in the United States to an expatriate of any gender
- Spouse of expatriate who is working full-time under Chief of Mission authority at a diplomatic mission of the United States in another country, and who is on that expatriate’s travel orders
- Considers current country as semi-permanent home, e.g. intends to live with expatriate at post for a minimum of eight (8) months out of the year
- Willing to sign an informed consent form for participation in the study
- Able to access an Internet-connected device (computer, laptop, phone) that would allow access the Zoom format for video interviews

**Exclusion Criteria**

- Spouse in a dual-career situation with expatriate (e.g. spouses working in same organization as expatriate and whose job relocation was considered equally with expatriate when determining foreign assignment)

**Data Collection**

The data collection period lasted between three and four months. Each participant completed one open-ended interview designed to last 60-90 minutes. The qualitative interviews were intended to capture a cross-section of time in the lives of these men. This also ensured that attrition would not be a factor, as participants were interviewed during a one-time process and
not over multiple sessions. All recruitment and interviews were conducted online, which included marketing the study and also collecting the data through Zoom interviews with participants (see Process for Collecting, Storing, and Analyzing Data).

Interviews were intended to be fully structured. My interview guide (Appendix B), which I honed through the interview process but without significant alteration, was around 30 questions for each interview. I arranged my guide into themes, content questions, and prompts. I attempted to focus on the flow between the themes and underlying questions in order to bring the participant deeper into his experience, and to gradually introduce the language of my study and thereby soften the impact of my questions. I chose the themes to try to get a general sense of the male spouse experience with particular regard for masculine identity and role as situated in culture. I felt the questions I crafted for the guide approached these issues from multiple vantage points, trying to use varying entry points and comparative angles to get each participant to provide a holistic view of their life within the framework of my research questions.

I began each interview by asking basic demographic and descriptive information such as age, race, number of children, time spent in current location, total number of years living abroad. Such data was used comparatively during the data analysis and discussion. The interviews were completed in single sessions to account for the participant’s current perceptions in a moment of time. Three interviews were at one point disconnected due to technical difficulties, likely weak Internet connections on either my side or the participant’s side. In each of those cases the calls were reconnected in a matter of minutes, and data collection resumed from the previous point of disruption.

Most of my interviews lasted between 60 and 90 minutes. I slightly adapted my questions over the course of the ten interviews, as I sometimes relaxed the wording of my questions to
make them more conversational. After interview six I decided to try introducing an ad hoc semi-structured process for certain interview items that I found compelling by asking follow-up questions. After interview eight lasted a lengthy 150 minutes, however, I decided that I should return to a structured script for my last two interviews in order to limit the sheer amount of data I was collecting.

**Administrative Arrangements**

Because this study was conducted online and marketed through direct emails, administrative arrangements were minimal. Example of the text used in those direct emails can be found in Appendix C.

**Compensation for Participants**

After reviewing previous studies, I decided to offer a small incentive to each interview participant. This stipend was both meant to stimulate participation in the study in my emails to potential participants, and to respect the time that these male spouses gave me to schedule and conduct each interview. After consulting with my chair, I settled on offering a $20 Amazon gift card to each participant.

**Protection of Human Subjects**

Before initiating a human subjects review process, I completed the CITI program course on Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research. I applied for and was granted IRB review exemption on March 12, 2021, IRB Protocol # 848492.

Before conducting each respective interview, I sent the consent form (Appendix A) by email to each participant. The form was used to confirm each participant was 18 years of age (though the population of my study was essentially guaranteed to be above this age). Immediately before conducting each interview I confirmed that the participant received the
consent form, understood its contents, and consented to continue with the interview. All ten of the participants who initially agreed to the interview also consented to these terms.

The design of my study allowed for sufficient protection of research participants. Participants needed to opt-in to this study. Before the interview, I affirmed their right to leave during the interview if they became uncomfortable, and that in such case I would delete their data and not include it in my study. Physical, psychological, social, legal, and other risks in this study were minimal, largely due to it being opt-in and conducted online. Participants agreed to be interviewed during one single session; this prevented any psychological impact that could occur by engaging a participant in multiple sessions on the same personal subject matter. Risks to confidentiality were also minimal, as participants agreed to participate in the study through direct email communication, and all data was protected and associated with pseudonyms throughout the process.

As stated in the consent form (Appendix A), there was no benefit to the participant other than the subject payment. Participation in this study helped me as the researcher to understand adjustment of male spouses, which may benefit the participants indirectly. Though my committee and I assumed that participants would not experience negative psychological symptoms from participating in this study, participants were given the option to reach out to a clinical social worker at any time after the interview to address negative symptoms.

**Process for Capturing and Storing Data**

I conducted video interviews via Zoom to facilitate global reach of participants. After finalizing my preliminary interview guide and consent form, I began selectively reaching out to several interviewees whom I had relationships with and was certain fit my inclusion criteria. I conducted a pilot interview in Colombo, Sri Lanka, where I was living at the time; I found a
willing participant to conduct the interview and test my process using the Zoom format. This first interview took relatively longer because the participant agreed to help me, from a participant’s viewpoint, to tweak the language of my questions in order to increase clarity. After the interview I made additional changes to my interview guide and conducted a second interview with another acquaintance who fit my criteria in a country outside Sri Lanka.

To set up each interview, I emailed each potential participant an invite to a Zoom meeting and attached the consent form. Before engaging in the interview, I affirmed each participant read through the consent form and confirmed their eligibility considering the inclusion criteria, their knowledge of their rights during and after participation in the interview and their consent to recording the interview. I then conducted each interview while using the record function on Zoom while using my phone to record a backup audio recording in case the Zoom format failed (it never did so I deleted those recordings). At the conclusion of the interview, I emailed a $20 gift cards to each participant through Amazon. Digital recordings of Zoom interviews were stored on a password protected hard drive that was not connected to the Internet.

In the next two months I concluded my doctoral courses and further refined my interview guide, after which time I conducted an outreach for the remainder of my data collection. The remaining interviews were scheduled and conducted in a three-week period over Zoom, except for one interview that was conducted over Google Meet at a time when the Zoom service seemed to be down. I conducted interviews until I determined the study had likely reached data saturation. Fusch and Ness (2015) wrote that data saturation is the concept that continued data collection will not result in any additional themes in the final study. Saturation can be determined based on study design. Based on the data I saw in a preliminary review of my transcripts, I determined I reached saturation after my tenth interview.
Data Analysis

I transcribed the Zoom (and one Google Meet) recordings as quickly as possible after the conclusion of each interview. I used AI-driven digital transcription software to take a first pass at the transcription, then took those draft transcripts in Microsoft Word format and read through them while listening to audio of the Zoom recordings to clean them up and verify their accuracy. This cleaning also served as my first pass of data analysis, and an opportunity for me to jot down notes and memos in separate document. After cleaning the transcripts, I deleted the Zoom recordings from my hard drive.

I assigned pseudonyms (new first names) for each participant at this time. I also harvested the answers of the demographic and descriptive questions I asked at the beginning of each interview and dropped that data in a spreadsheet. Some data was missing because I either forgot to ask the question or received incomplete responses during the interview, so I sent follow-up emails to some of my participants to fill out some data missing in my spreadsheet, eventually receiving all the responses I was looking for.

I went back to the cleaned transcripts and thought about how to best process the data. After consulting with my committee, I decided to use a concept-driven thematic analysis process that was both deductive (theory-driven) and inductive (data-driven). Advantages of thematic analysis are that it is flexible, quick, produces findings that are accessible to any educated reader offers a “thick description” of the data, highlights similarities and differences across the data; and often produces unanticipated insights (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 97).

Considering the process of thematic analysis, my interview guide provided a logical starting point for generating initial codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p. 87). This process would help to frame the data within the aims, theoretical frameworks, and methodology of the study.
However, I did recognize that my analysis would not be adequately nuanced if I did not follow up my deductive work with an inductive process to identify additional codes that could give me insight into my research questions. I began my analysis by using a line-by-line open coding process with each of the first three interviews, which is a slower process. I looked at the codes I came up with, combining and refining codes that felt redundant and omitting codes that seemed to fall outside the scope of my research questions. This process is called focused coding (Skjott Linneberg & Korsgaard, 2019) and allowed me to code the remaining seven interviews more quickly through the use of fewer, more focused codes.

Eventually through this process I developed a code book. I used that book to go back through the interviews a second time to harvest blocks of text from each transcript, which I dropped into separate buckets (text documents) that became loose themes. I sifted through the data in those buckets to better ensure the data matched up with what I was looking for in each bucket, and then moved data in-between buckets as needed. I stepped back from this process to look how the buckets of data could become themes, each with subcategories, which became the basis for my Findings chapter. During the coding process I also engaged in memo writing, which helped me to not only compare the data but to explore larger themes and ideas that would help me formulate the Findings and Discussion sections.

In writing the Findings, I flagged and eventually changed details in the data that could potentially reveal the true identity of a participant (each under their respective pseudonym) to a reader. I used the initials "JG" when necessary to refer to myself as the researcher when I chose to include my interview questions in order to clarify the data to the reader.

After submitting the final draft of my dissertation to my committee, I deleted the transcripts of all my interviews.
Reflexivity Statement

Starting in the first semester of my DSW program at Penn, I honed an idea to conduct research with male spouses of expatriates who are employed by the U.S. Government and the psychological effects of role and identity change of accompanying their spouses on work assignments abroad. I came to this idea because of two reasons: one, I am (at the time of this writing) connected with my targeted research population because I also am a male spouse of an expatriate who is employed by the U.S. Government; and two, I have worked clinically with expatriates and their spouses and families in the past and plan to do so in the future. In research, someone who researches phenomena while existing outside that community is called ‘etic’, while someone who is inside that community they are researching is considered to be ‘emic’ (Markee, 2012). From the ‘emic’ perspective, I can provide insight of potential impacts and challenges of researching a population that is familiar to me. A researcher of a population s/he tangentially belongs to feels an added incentive to serve their research participants and the population at large. Crozier (2003) wrote that because his research participants showed their vulnerability to him, he had a responsibility “not just to take care of the data but to do something useful with them” (p. 85). I will feel this responsibility because my participants share similar individual and global characteristics with me, and by not fully processing this data into a meaningful product, I will feel I am both letting down my community and letting down myself, as someone in a role to present the perspective of this community and to represent possibilities in imagining the male spouse role.

Villenas (1996) described the role of the native ethnographic researcher, which can apply to someone who is researching a population that s/he shares identity with. It will be essential for me as a researcher to understand the role of language in creating any barrier between me and my
research participant, to position myself above the researched community. In order for me to do authentic work, I will need to fully commit to recognizing both the power and liabilities granted by my status as student and a researcher. If I am seen as the “Other”, I might have struggled to be trusted or accepted by participants and thus unable to gather meaningful data. Fine et al. (1994) described the need to capture the true story of our research participants, to not sensationalize or sanitize the stories they give us and to be comfortable with the mundane and the exceptional. In order to fully understand the dynamics of the data I collected, I needed to fully understand the individual baseline experiences and vantage points of each participant.

Overall I will continually account for how I bring self into the relationship with my research participants, and to exert extreme care to not lead my research participants (knowledge co-creators) due to my identifications with and judgments of their own experiences as male spouses of expatriates, in relation to my own. Thankfully I believe I am now working on an elevated plane of professionalism and will learn how to conduct rigorous qualitative research that will resonate with the empirical research community. Through this new sense of purpose; through careful introspection and consideration of the qualitative research process; and through the formulation of a clear research question that I believe needs to be answered, I feel confident that I did justice to my research participants, our shared community, and to myself as a budding researcher – and as a male spouse who soon may no longer have the emic perspective of the population I am studying.
Chapter 4: Findings

The sample for this study on the experiences of male spouses of expats consisted of ten males who were living in nine different countries around the world and ranged in age from their 30s to their 60s. Seven of the ten participants were in their 40s. Eight of the males identified as White/Caucasian, while one identified as Latino and the other as Black. Eight of the ten males identified solely as American while two identified as dual-citizens (both were born outside of the United States). All ten of these men claim a different state in America as their home state. As all ten of these men are in heterosexual marriages with women, I will refer to their spouses – the expatriate whose work assignment has brought them overseas – as their wives.

Since choosing this lifestyle, these men had spent between 2.5 and 11 years accompanying their wives on one or more overseas work assignments. One of the men was in his fifth country as an expat spouse to his current wife; two men were in their fourth countries; four men in their third; two men in their second; and one man was in his first. However, nine of the ten men already had at least six months experience living in at least one country outside of America before becoming the spouse of an expat. Including their time before and after becoming spouses of expats, three of the participants said they had been living overseas for more than 18 years - other than short trips back to the United States. All three of those men were in their 40s.

At the time of interview five of the participants had two children living with them, while another three participants had one child, and two participants had no children. Six of the ten participants had at least one school-aged child. Four men were currently working outside their field of choice, three full-time and one part-time; three men were working in their field of choice, one self-employed with his own business and two who had just completed work contracts; two men
were full-time stay-at-home parents; and one man was fully retired. Additional descriptive data on these participants can be found in Table 1.

Table 1 – Sample Data

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 Daniel</th>
<th>2 Troy</th>
<th>3 Roger</th>
<th>4 Cory</th>
<th>5 Mitch</th>
<th>6 Mark</th>
<th>7 Terry</th>
<th>8 Bart</th>
<th>9 Martin</th>
<th>10 Frank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>racial identity</td>
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<td>White/ Caucasian</td>
<td>White/ Caucasian</td>
<td>White/ Caucasian</td>
<td>White/ Caucasian</td>
<td>White/ Caucasian</td>
<td>White/ Caucasian</td>
<td>White/ Caucasian</td>
<td>Latino Black</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td># of children</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>time spent in current country (in months)</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>current country (noted by region)²</td>
<td>Southern Asia</td>
<td>Western Asia</td>
<td>Southern Asia</td>
<td>Eastern Europe</td>
<td>Western Asia</td>
<td>South-eastern Asia</td>
<td>South-eastern Asia</td>
<td>South-eastern Asia</td>
<td>Caribbean</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total countries lived in as expat spouse</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>other regions lived in as expat spouse³</td>
<td>Central Asia</td>
<td>Northern Africa</td>
<td>Western Asia, Eastern Africa</td>
<td>Southern Europe, Western Asia</td>
<td>Central Asia, Caribbean</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>Central Africa, Eastern Africa, Southern Asia, Western Asia</td>
<td>Southern Asia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>total # of years living abroad as expat spouse²</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2.5</td>
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<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>current work status</td>
<td>retired</td>
<td>part-time</td>
<td>full-time</td>
<td>stay-at-home parent</td>
<td>stay-at-home parent</td>
<td>contract worker (between contracts)</td>
<td>self-employed</td>
<td>contract worker (between contracts)</td>
<td>full-time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>if working: in your chosen field?</td>
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<td>no</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>yes (to date)</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes (to date)</td>
<td>no</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>U.S. state of upbringing (noted by region)²</td>
<td>West North Central</td>
<td>East North Central</td>
<td>Pacific</td>
<td>New England</td>
<td>Mountain</td>
<td>South Atlantic</td>
<td>East North Central</td>
<td>Mountain</td>
<td>Middle Atlantic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lived abroad for at least 6 mo. before becoming expat spouse</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
<td>yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

² According to https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49/#geo-regions
³ According to https://unstats.un.org/unsd/methodology/m49/#geo-regions
⁴ Rounded up partial years of at least six months. Includes time that may have been spent back in the United States for training between posts. Postings for these participants typically ranged between 2 and 4 years but may have been interrupted by an event (e.g. evacuation from a country due to conflict or instability, curtailing due to family/personal reasons).
⁵ According to https://www2.census.gov/geo/pdfs/maps-data/maps/reference/us_regdiv.pdf
I am presenting these sections as themes I discovered during the data analysis process. I believe the themes are an appropriate reflection of the theoretical framework on which this study is based. I provided ample data (participant responses) to illustrate the themes. However, due to the complex nature of the ideas expressed by my participants, some of the data overlaps between themes. I attempted to note when I thought this overlap occurred. If I said I found similarity in the subject data for most of the participants, I mean at least seven of the ten participants, while some of the participants means at least three of the ten participants.

The primary themes and their associated subcategories:

1. Perceiving oneself as a male expatriate spouse (being a spouse who follows; being a man who follows; being a man in a culture of females);
2. Evaluating gender-based identity and roles (ingrained perception of gender-based identity and roles; recent experience confronting gender stereotypes; desire to embrace current identity and role; identity regarding work);
3. Negotiating culture (resolving home country culture; interacting with host country culture; navigating spouse’s organizational culture; connecting with expat culture);
4. Adjusting to a process (sources of stress; traits that help and hinder adjustment; coping strategies; support mechanisms); and
5. Cultivating a lifestyle (sharing a vision; making trade-offs; personal goals and gains).

Theme One: Perceiving oneself as a male expatriate spouse

This theme positions a man in his role and identity as a spouse. This male spouse, who I will also refer to as my participant, is traveling abroad because of his wife’s career. This theme is based on three direct questions I asked my participants at the beginning of each interview. These open-ended scene-setter questions would mentally prepare the participant for the line of inquiry
to come (Appendix B). I wanted to frame the participant as an independent person who chose to live outside of his home country, and to compel him to compare his overseas self to his life at home in America and his identity as an American.

**Feelings about following your spouse's career**

This first subcategory is based on how a participant felt about moving to new countries so that his spouse could pursue her career. Six of the ten participants started out their response by expressing positive feelings about how they personally felt about moving for their wife's job. Troy, who has moved with his wife to four different countries over an eight-year period, focused on how the lifestyle was aligned with what he and his wife were wanting. He alluded to him and his wife sharing an international identity and culture fostered during their upbringing. He stated:

> I feel good about it. It works really well for us. I mean, both of us come from multicultural families. So my mother is [European], my dad is American, and my wife [has parents who were born in two different countries]. So I think I’ve kind of gravitated to international life and culture. I like the excitement of moving to new places, we've tended to move every two years. And that's been a pretty good rhythm.

Three of the participants focused on how proud they were of their wives for ascending in their careers, and each of these men expressed their role as either supporting their wives or in sharing in the decision for their wives to pursue their careers internationally. Martin, who just moved to a second country with his wife, said:

> I know for sure that she means well, in that she’s doing her best to help her, her country. So she, I - when we move I know that I’m supporting her career, and she also does her best to support mine. And I know that is not perfect, that is always that, what is the
called, itching for going back to where I feel very, very comfortable. But I think that it is worth it for me at least to be with my wife, go and help her and support her in her career.

As part of their experience of moving to new countries for their wives’ careers, two participants pinpointed difficulties in adjusting to new circumstances. Back to Troy:

*It's been a little bit of an adaptation for me to try and figure out what to do in each place that we move to. So at first, for the first couple tours that we were in, I was in a Ph. D. program, that worked really well. My program was very flexible. But then that [in our second country], I finished my PhD. And then it's okay, what do we do now?*

That concept "to try and figure out what to do", particularly in relation to the challenge of creating new community, was echoed by Mark, who is currently living in Southeast Asia in his first post abroad with his wife. While my question centered on moving to new countries for his spouse’s career, Mark seemed to suggest that his career would partially influence their next move:

*It's been challenging in that respect. For our next move we're looking to move to West Africa, where I do have kind of more existing networks. So I think that this this move to [this country] was, was a little bit hard. But you know, our decisions aren't strictly based on [my wife] ... they're not strictly dictated by my wife's work.*

Mark was one of five participants who seemed to tie their identities within specific careers to their identities as an expat spouse, even if they were not currently working in that career. Several of these participants also introduced the importance of place in order to realize what they want to accomplish professionally, which would be a recurring narrative throughout the interview for each of those participants. One of them, Terry, is a filmmaker who worked in
southeast Asia before meeting his wife and subsequently moved to two countries in the same region for his wife’s job. Regarding his recent experience moving for his wife’s career:

*I feel good about it. The places we’ve gone have been places that I’ve wanted to go, though. So I, you know, it's not like I was going someplace that I didn't want to go. [Our current country] was a little off my map. But, but not entirely, because I've been there. We've done holidays there. So let me think. I think that if, for example, our next post was a place where maybe I can't do my work right there where we are, you know, a country, maybe there's no [religious] culture, and I would have to find, [then] I could find other things that I’m interested in. And, you know, I'm not - I'm fortunate as an artist, you know, that, you know, I do make [religious] films about [religion], you know, [religious] films, but, but as an artist, you know, that's, that I can, I can adapt to different things and still feel fulfilled, right?*

Another of those five participants, Mitch, who was well into his own career as a teacher when he moved abroad as an expat spouse, continued to work as a teacher overseas. In responding to my question about continually moving for his spouse’s career, Mitch detailed his own process of currently re-examining his life goals, from professional to personal, through the help of others. This illuminated a related concept of goal setting and attainment for a male spouse who is in his 40s, the middle stages of life. Mitch, who currently has chosen to be a full-time stay-at-home parent rather than take on a teaching position, on answering questions about what he wanted out life:

*It's been a lot of, it's been a lot of introspection. And in fact, it's, it's led me to, um - my therapist, very recently, we've been going through a pattern where he's like, you know, last summer, my wife and her mother were like, "What do you want?" And, and I was*
irritated at the question because, like, probably deep down, I'm like, "I want space. I want people to just leave me alone. Let me be, ba ba ba ba." But more recently, it's like, oh, I accomplished these goals, getting our family overseas. And I like, like, I looked at, I looked at there was like, a bunch of goals. ... I wanted to be a teacher. I wanted to get married, and wanted to move overseas, and I wanted to start a family and suddenly I'm ... in my late 30s, early 40s, I'm realizing that like I did it. I did the things that I wanted to do, and now I don't have to do anything. Like, nothing is pressing. And I hadn't set any other goals for myself. Like, there's stuff that I've liked, but I hadn't set any other goals for myself. And so now I'm going through a process now of being like, Okay, well, what do I want next?

Not unlike Mitch, the goal of staying overseas seemed to be front and center for at least two other participants. One of those two, Roger, an engineer by trade who gave up his career field to volunteer and eventually live overseas since the early 2000s, still feels like he is achieving his goal after years of trying. On his identity as an expat spouse:

Oh, I'm perfectly fine taking a backseat. I mean, we, we worked for 10 years to get into the Foreign Service. And at this point, I am along for the ride and ... I am perfectly content, being in that position. Because I feel - the reason why is because I feel like I can always find work that, doing something, hence this position that I'm in now it's more of a hobby than a kind of a long-term career, job. And I love it. So it keeps me happy. So yeah, I'm fine.

While the majority of the responses to this question focused on employment in one shape or form, all of the responses seemed to start in one place and end up in another, which was a signal to me that I was entering territory that was not exactly clear to these participants.
**Feelings about being a man who follows**

This next subcategory was based on how a participant felt about being man – not just a person – who travels abroad with his spouse as she pursues her career. Some participants seemed to clearly respond to my prompt on the implications of gender on their reality as an expatriate spouse. Martin felt that his new lifestyle has changed the dynamics of his marital relationship and had implications on his identity now and in the future, both as a man and as a worker in a family. He responded:

*Ah, it feels a little bit weird. And it isn't because I am so used to be the – not the head of household or anything like that, but more like an equal. Like when we both used to be teachers, like we both had a career. We both, were like in the education field, and it was just like, kind of like 50-50 representation. This time, it is even funny when I see us, to do, what's it called – the IDs that we get from the foreign government where we are where it says like, "so and so is the husband of", and I felt like, I don't know? ... I even joke with my wife. I'm like, "Look, I am your property now because it says so on that ID." And I'm just joking but I, I guess somewhat joking, I guess. There is no resentment, it is just like, I don't know, it is weird. I guess like getting used to that of being like the spouse who gets a job, whatever, whatever it falls into my field. But I guess that is something that I'll get used to the more we do it.*

Two other participants reacted to this question by expressing how they can work through their current role to espouse a modern, egalitarian view of gender roles that mirrored how they were raised. Terry, the participant who has lived in southeast Asia for most of his adult life but who grew up in a small town in East North Central USA, is proud to actively promote a gender equitable family with a female breadwinner:
The gender thing just isn't – It's not, just not a thing, I just don't feel like that's really a thing. And I can't, I can't – I've never had this time where like, I felt that gender that element like, oh, like I should, like, I'm the man in the relationship and I should XYZ, you know. I've always been really fluid with that. I think. It doesn't bother me at all. Growing up my mother was, had her own career. She had a small business that she ran and both my parents worked and, and I don't know, I just – I went to a liberal college where we're at, you know, where my, my where, you know, my views broadened even more than that. And then I wound up living in countries where culture can be quite conservative in those regards. And I find that people – it's, it's hard for people to understand that kind of situation. But, but I certainly don't have any problem. Well, probably proud of it more than I'd have a problem. I mean, I'm proud of her and proud of how we live together and equitable, gender equitable, you know, family.

The other participant, Daniel, grew up on a farm in the Midwest before traveling abroad with the Navy and Peace Corps. He then moved back to America, married, and started a successful career in agriculture in America. Over 20 years ago Daniel’s wife found a job overseas and he became an expat spouse, but he then found a job and led his family to Northern Africa for several years before retiring. As of the point of his interview he was again moving with his spouse, who was still working age, for her career in another country. He answered the question affirmatively:

I'm going to give you a really short two-part answer to this. One is it's a non-issue. I mean, I'm my manhood is not the least bit threatened or I never thought, you know, I should be the one working and you know, bringing home the bacon. That's, that's never been my issue and or [my wife] and my's issue in our relationship. And number two, and
again, it might go back to I grew up on a farm or whatever, but you know, my mom was, I mean, she was a fully enfranchised partner with my dad. That was their relationship. And that’s what I come from.

However, other participants seemed to immediately downplay gender as an important characteristic in their lifestyle and in their experience as an expat spouse. Bart had already lived in four countries before becoming an expat spouse and has now moved with his wife to five more countries over an 11-year period. He presented his identity as an expat spouse as separate from his identity as an international worker, as if his identities are hierarchical:

Yeah, I mean, it hasn’t been an issue for me. I’m trying to figure out why? I guess probably because before we moved overseas, [my wife] was working in DC and I was working on my dissertation. And I did a lot of the, the, picked up a lot of taking care of the kids when they were little. So I think I was kind of already primed to be a male trailing spouse by the time we moved to [Northern Africa]. And I don’t know if this is, if this completely like, compensates for the potential issues of how you might be perceived as a male training spouse, but I was a I’ve been able to find work pretty quickly, wherever we’ve moved, luckily. So that in a way I don’t have to – I don’t always identify as or my identity isn’t as a male trailing spouse. I kinda have my own work identity.

One participant did immediately divulge some negative feelings, rooted in his culture of upbringing, about being a man in his role. Mitch, who is currently a stay at home parent, introduced the concept of a “cultural echo” to describe the clash between the traditional masculinity he encountered in his youth and what he sees in the countries he has lived in abroad:

By and large, like, I’m conscious of like this little nagging, essentially, misogyny, like in me, it's like, it's there. It's like this little thing on my show that it's like you should be the
breadwinner. And it comes up every once in a while, but it's pretty, it's pretty weak. It just feels like you know, it feels kind of like a cultural echo. Like I hear there, but it doesn't really make me feel one way or another. I think that's because by and large, the people that I interact with are also expats and so like they – I, I think I remember when we lived in the States, there being a little me feeling a little bit more of a tug of like macho-ness. ... I sense that locals in a lot of places that we lived think I'm effeminate, or uh – but it's not an overwhelming sense. Like, it's this weird kind of nagging every once in a while, like - and, and I think that it was, and I think maybe it's just been something that I've lived with my entire life, like you get around, get around good old boys. And there's just this kind of like, this kind of like tendency to want to throw your masculinity around a little bit.

In this theme, culture, identity, and role emerged as important in how of male expatriate spouse perceive their experiences. I attempted to tease that out through my next question.

**Thoughts on identity as a male spouse in a culture of females**

The final subcategory of this theme appeared in my final eight interviews. It is based on the me as a researcher presenting the participants with data showing that the majority of expatriate spouses are female, meaning male expatriate spouses are in the minority. Five of the eight respondents either said their status as a man in a role that was majority female was either not bothersome to them or was not something they spent much time thinking about. Bart, in fact, said the idea of value attached to “breadwinner” status was not something he had observed amongst the families that he and his wife befriended while overseas:

*For our friend groups we've had in different posts, I haven’t seen it. I guess we must gravitate away from families where that might be perceived as a negative because, well, it's kind of like – let’s say if the male is the breadwinner, the female has always found
productive employment opportunities. I feel like that has really made it to me, kind of a non-issue. But no, I don't have any strong feelings about that.

Roger went farther, describing an organizational culture that his wife works in that employs a significant number of females:

I would say when I first got here, I noticed that a majority of the Foreign Service officers in [my wife’s agency] were female and I thought that was notable and good. Other than that, I haven't really put much thought into it and it's not it's not a concern.

One participant answered my question by pointing out structural issues in the organizational culture he and his wife work in. Frank, who had never lived abroad before becoming an expat spouse eight years ago, considers his gender as a negative characteristic within the context of his wife’s organization. He believes a culture of sexism exists in the American expatriate community that he has navigated across several posts:

It's not – that's not so much bothersome. It's the fact that that it's, it's the, the discriminatory issues that surround that are what's bothersome, more than the fact that I'm one of five males in a 40-spouse community. ... My first experience as a male spouse, in another post, I applied to a job and was told men and people with children cannot have this job. And so that sort of set a bad tone that I keep hearing as we as we go from post to post. But that's the stuff that bothers me, not the fact that I'm a male here, because I mean, it's not like – that's not the problem. It's the perception. That's the problem, I guess.

The two male spouses who primarily identified as stay-at-home parents turned the question back on themselves and the pressures of being productive in their role. Mitch, the stay-
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at-home parent who had worked as a teacher in several countries while pursuing his wife’s career abroad, expressed his mixed feelings on the subject:

*It's more that it's, it's something that I think about often than something that I think about, I ruminate on. Like, and so that tells me that it doesn't bother me that much in the, in the grand scheme of things. You know, I think about it, and sometimes I can get worked up about it, but it's actually fairly seldom. No, I think it's one of the things that I think about like - like, I'm gonna think about shit, and then I'm gonna think about the stuff of my life. But does it like, does it bother me? No, no. I, I'm just as like, I'm just as ecstatic about it as I am .... like sometimes, sometimes I'll get like, “Uh, I should, I should do more.” But just as often I'm like, ”Oh right, we're really - it's awesome that we, that this is the arrangement.”*

Cory, the full-time stay at home parent, focused on how his role would change as soon as his children, who were studying at home due to COVID restrictions and related school closures in his country, were allowed back in school. He also contrasted the enjoyment he has of his stay-at-home parenting role with his anxiety toward taking employment at the local Embassy, which is commonly offered to spouses of diplomat expats:

*I can't say I really have given up too much. Recently, you know, maybe a little more now that both kids will be in school full time, hopefully, you know, next semesters. So now the question becomes, “Okay, you know, what am I going to do?” But no, other than that I, yeah, it doesn't, doesn't bother me. ... I guess, a question of, you know, do I find a position within the Embassy? You know, which always gives me pause just based on the politics of the post, and, you know, who are you going to be working with? And, you know, that sort of thing. So it's kind of like, do I really want to be doing that again? Do I
really want to be just like, sitting in a cubicle doing something? You know, that's not particularly fun in any way.

This first theme consisted of responses to my questions about how expat spouses perceived their identities. Because the questions were general, responses ranged from thoughts about non-American culture, to American influence, to safety, to degrees of happiness about their decision. Every participant mentioned some degree of comfort with their decision to live overseas. Nine of the ten participants said they noticed differences in themselves from their experience abroad. Six of the participants specifically used the word "aware" or "awareness", usually in the context of culture, to describe that self-growth. In my next four themes, I moved away from a focus on how my participants responded to specific questions. Instead I analyzed their responses to items across my interview guide, as identified by specific inductive codes.

**Theme Two: Evaluating Gender-Based Identity and Roles**

In my second theme, I wanted to look deeper at how my participants perceived their identities as men in contrast with their perceptions on gender roles, and specifically on their current roles. I broke this theme down into ingrained perceptions of gender identity and roles; current experiences with gender roles; desire to embrace current roles; and male identity regarding work.

**Ingrained perception of gender-based identity and roles**

This subcategory is centered on the code *congruence with male cultural upbringing*, under which I identified data that on how my participants perceived gender roles and identities through their childhoods. Most of the participants in this study exhibited what I would call a pro-feminist orientation. Every man who participated expressed neutral or positive feelings about
their current roles and masculine identities. Daniel stated that this relationship with his wife maps to his upbringing and how he saw his parents share the breadwinner responsibility:

*My mom and dad had a few knockdown drag-out disagreements over the course of my life, but it was never an issue of you know, who was the – I mean, sometimes my dad took the lead, sometimes my mom took the lead, and that's the case with [my wife], for the most part. I mean, we're, we're equal partners, as opposed to me being the head of the house and wearing the pants or something like that.*

Most participants mentioned growing up in families that supported strong women roles, if not equality, in terms of women leading and working for the family. Terry said his ideas of what a woman is supposed to be were engrained from youth and how it juxtaposes to his current reality:

*Growing up my mother had her own career. She had a small business that she ran and both my parents worked and, and I don't know, I just – I went to a liberal college where we're at, you know, where my, you know, my views broadened even more than that. And then I wound up living in countries where culture can be quite conservative in those regards. And I find that people – it's, it's hard for people to understand that kind of situation.*

Not every participant grew up in such an egalitarian household, but that wasn’t because the mother was not involved, and it wasn’t that they weren’t learning an egalitarian family mindset from their friends and their community. Cory:

*My parents were divorced when I was seven. My father was gay. So you know, my father and I never had that sort of, I don't think, a stereotypical father-son relationship. He wasn't into sports or anything. So it wasn't like, you know, we would go outside and play*
catch or anything. That just wasn’t it. So that was more of my mother doing that. So yeah. I think, yeah, truthfully, I don’t know that I was really exposed to that sort of stereotypical macho kind of thing. Like most of my friends’ fathers were, you know – my best friend in high school, his father was a stay-at-home father. But was also like a high-end carpenter. And another one ran a deli, you know, so, very blue collar, you know, not what you would necessarily think about, you know, big tough guys or something like that, you know? Yeah. So the macho thing was just not something that I think I saw.

Like Cory, Roger did not have a stereotypical father-son relationship. In Roger’s case he was turned off by his father’s expression of masculinity and fatherhood, and that influences how Roger behaves as a father today:

So [I] probably pretty much grew up my whole life thinking I don’t want to be my dad. And when my parents got divorced, you know, I lived with my mom and, and so I probably picked up a lot of her traits. So the influence was always there, but I like, I like, actively rejected it and wanted to be something different. And not I didn’t want to be that guy. I didn’t want to be I didn’t want to be my dad, who, who kind of like did all these things to me, wasn’t there for me as a kid, you know, all these, all these [things] I kind of perceived as slights when I was younger. And so [I am] trying to, actively trying to be the antithesis of what I perceived my dad to be.

Most of my participants mentioned not seeing themselves as “traditionally” masculine men. Mitch detailed how his upbringing allowed him the freedom to express himself how he wants, and how he notices the difference in that freedom in the countries he has traveled to:

I was being called a faggot when I was, you know, 13, and again, it’s not because I seem very feminine. I think I just culturally, like, leaned in with the freaks that way. And so like
I was, you know, a drama kid and, and, you know, wearing outlandish clothes. So I think that has made me feel pretty, like, I feel pretty comfortable. ... I feel like if anything, America has, and my family upbringing has taught me that women and men have equal value. ... It's taught me like, I think that the American attitude is wildly flexible compared to the places where I've lived. Like, everywhere that I've lived has been more restrictive, by a large degree, in terms of how it views the lanes that men and women are supposed to stay in. And, and, it seems to me that that America has lanes, but there's a lot of mobility in between those lanes.

Some spouses grew up in households that informed them on what roles and tasks should be fulfilled within that house. Martin was part of an immigrant family that moved to the USA where children and parents learned to adjust customary roles in their new culture in order to survive. Martin:

Growing up in my [non-American] family, some of the things that I used to be like very – what's it called – some of the things that I learned as a child was that as a, as a man, I was supposed to, to be the head of household, like I wasn't supposed to do anything at home that will involve manual labor or things like that. And that changed, when I moved to America, when we moved to America, it became like, Oh, we all have to do things at home, because otherwise, nothing is going to be accomplished. And then it became like, a shared experience within the whole family. Because everyone started like doing things like, okay, I'll cook, I'll clean I'll do this, I'll do that. Like it became a more of, learning to survive, and also learning to share responsibilities. And I think that that idea came up, like in my head, that even when I moved out of my house, and I started, like, being
independent, I still kept that same mentality. When I met my wife, it wasn't like any
different, she had the same kind of idea.

Frank, in the same way, is still working to rectify what he learned as a child about what a
man does in the household and how it differs from how his spouse was socialized:

It's sort of unpacking the stuff that I learned that all boys should do when they're growing
up, all boys should push a lawn mower and paint the house and stuff like that. ... But my
dad was in the military. So a clean house is always what you do, and no matter what, I
find myself doing a lot of cleaning. And my wife grew up in a lot more lenient sort of
environment. So I find myself like, doing a lot more of the cleaning. But I mean, that's, it's
not because it's, it's my role. It's because I sort of feel like I would do that if I was even
visiting someone else's house.

Most of my participants seemed to relate learned role behaviors from their childhoods to
what roles they were actually performing as adults, and as male expat spouses. That leads to the
next subcategory in this theme that examines how these participants confront gender role
stereotypes.

**Recent experience confronting gender role stereotypes**

In this subcategory the male spouse considers his perception of traditional gender roles
through his position in a traditionally female role (a spouse who trails). He also considers this
perception through external feedback from individuals in the host country culture in reaction to
him performing tasks that are likely seen as traditionally female in that culture. The codes I
identified for this subcategory are *perception of being a man in a female role; perception of
gender roles; and perception on identity as a trailing spouse.*
Roger, who is the parent of two young children, now notices how Americans do not outwardly express judgment towards men who parent in public:

*I think like being in America ... there's these stereotypes of what a what a man is supposed to do. But I don't think like in America, you would ever be, like, just people staring at you with mouth open at, you know, if you went to the grocery store to pick up water or something, or if you, you know, if you had kids with you [and you are] going out and doing something. But I feel like since we've been overseas, yeah, there's been situations that we've been in where, just like, people look at me, with such disbelief that I'm getting something. And women have actually come up to me and said, “No, no, no, no, you can’t do that. You're a man. You need to like, go sit under the tree.” Yeah, I think like one time I flew, I flew with the kids alone. And I was like, I got so much sympathy. I was just like, thought that was so weird. And then [my wife] is like, “No one offered to help me!” But I feel like in America being you know, if you're, if you're not living up to your stereotypes, it might be a little bit of silent, like, judging, but overseas it's a lot more apparent and directed and people let you know about it. But I, it's never really been anything that's made me feel uncomfortable or that I would be insulted by.

Cory expressed a similar viewpoint:

*I think it was probably in [southern Europe], it was a little weirder, because I would walk our youngest to school every day. So I'd have her in the stroller and have the dog, you know, and walking up the street, and there was always traffic backed up. And it just - everybody would kind of be like, what's this? Why is this man doing the job that should probably be in a women's or, you know, type job. So, or, you know, you walk to the Embassy and somebody would be like, “Oh, you know, I saw you walking yesterday,”*
because clearly, there's not too many other bearded men, you know, pushing a stroller with a dog, you know?

Similarly, Mitch brought up the concept of men in his role actively working against traditional gender roles from his home country culture, but perhaps to his detriment in his current lifestyle:

I know that this is my, this is a personality thing, and it's probably a personality thing for a lot of expats – but I've actively pushed away from traditional roles. I'm like, I'm not going to live in my hometown. I'm not going to, I'm not going to go to the church that you want me to go to. I'm not going to vote for the people that that you vote for. I'm not going to you know, like – and, and i just find myself further and further kind of out on that branch. And the one thing that I noticed about being further out on that branch is as far as like, my, my, my gender role is concerned is that like, you just don't, like – it feels like I forced myself, I painted myself into a corner where I constantly have to reinvent the wheel. And for a long time, I did that on purpose.

Frank expanded on this idea by mentioning how his wife has begun to express guilt for him being a man in the expat spouse role, and alluded to the stress it is having on their relationship:

This is a conversation we've been having a bit lately, but there's guilt. There's the realization of how bad it is for spouses, specifically male spouses overseas, or how bad it could be. And so we – some of our recent conversations, there's been a lot of guilt as far as roles. And she, she's been trying to pick up more, and it's like, it's really hard for her to pick up more when she's spending so much time out. Her job now that COVID is over, her job is just cranked up to 11. So she is, she's out give or take six days a week. She's,
she's got meetings and stuff. So it's been, it's been weird, because she's really trying. It's –

I don’t, I don’t need it, I don't demand it. But I think there's some there's a lot of guilt there that we’ll probably need to talk to psychologists about, something, I don't know.

Frank further detailed how he and his spouse communicate often about the unique role of the male spouse. This type of data will be presented in findings on support mechanisms in Theme Four.

**Desire to embrace current identity and role**

This subcategory relates to participants expressing satisfaction in their identity as expat spouses and in roles that might be seen as traditionally female, including supporting children and spouse and taking care of household. This section came from a number of codes. I coded *enjoyment of role* when a participant expressed a degree of enjoying his current role in his family. *Embracing flexibility in role* is a participant’s desire to be psychologically flexible in that role. *Desire to support expat* relates to a participant’s aspiration to support his spouse through his role.

I did not mention the term trailing spouse in my interview guide, nor prompt the term in my interview. Yet six of the ten participants referred to themselves as such, which signaled to me that men in this position are familiar with this term and identify with this term to some degree. The degree of identification with the term varied among these six participants: some had an antagonist relationship with it, others seemed resigned to it. Not one participant mentioned liking the terminology.

Bart, who in Theme 1 said he identified more as a worker than as a trailing spouse, mentioned being a trailing spouse nine times in his interview, without my prompting. He had this to say about his comfort in the role:
I haven't felt any negative pressure about me being the trailing spouse or the primary
caregiver. ... I feel like it's pretty accepted at this point to be a trailing spouse. But maybe
I'm naive on that, but I feel like it's, it's much more accepted now than it would have been
20 years ago.

Martin told me he was personally working to overcome the traditional thinking that men
should be the breadwinners, and that he perceives a stigma in not being the breadwinner. He
dismissed any judgment from others as to why he chooses to be in this role:

I guess that when I think of trailing spouses and it has always been this idea that it's
always women doing it and men actually, like, as you said earlier, like, they are the
breadwinners, the direct hires. And I think even though the numbers might show that they
are correct about that, I feel that there is a good bunch of us male [spouses] who are like
doing this for our families. And I'm not - there is a stigma to it. Like if people think, like, I
don't know, like, think less of men like doing this kind of life, I don't really care
personally. Like it is, like it is what it is. Like, I don't care. I get to see cool places, where
people stay in America in the same town, so I don't care about that.

Several participants had spent time thinking about how they ended up in this role. Terry
wondered aloud if men like him choose to find career-oriented partners who not only share their
values but also a desire to live abroad, or is if it is a random occurrence:

It's kind of hard to say which comes first – is it that men, men who are finding themselves
in this kind of situation are obviously already have a certain kind of, a certain, a certain
personality and a certain character, that they would find themselves in that situation in
the first place? I don't think I've ever met an expat man that was like, was desperate to
get back to his job in America, or something, you know, because he just can't stand not
being the breadwinner, and then the, and the head of the family and all these kinds of things, you know, traditional things. I don't think I've ever met an expat in my circle like that.

While none of my participants expressed a desire to be the “head of the family,” four participants – each of whom also expressed a desire to work against non-traditional gender roles in their households and in their lives – did embrace more traditional gender-based parental behaviors in their household. Roger, for example, spelled out that he is still the “authority figure” in his household while his wife provides the “comfort”:

I am the authority. I'm the, I'm the one that says no. I'm the authority figure with my, with – the enforcer with my children. I'm the one that deals out the punishments. [My wife] is the one that they go to, to get comfort.

Other participants recognized that certain gender roles among parents were unavoidable. As the stay-at-home parent, Cory wants to reduce his wife’s workload outside of the office, but recognizes a limit in what he can do due to his children wanting attention and care from their mother:

All the grocery shopping, I do, you know, that sort of thing. So, you know, I hope that, you know, [my wife] doesn't feel like she has to do too much beyond, you know, her job. But, you know, also the kids can make that tricky as well, you know, when they're “Mommy, mommy, mommy” – you know, your father's right there. But they don't, they don't care.

Three participants (Terry, Bart, Cory) identified themselves as the primary caregiver of their children. Only one of these participants (Cory) was a stay-at-home parent, while the other two maintained self-employed and contract employment, respectively. Each of the nine male
spouses with children readily acknowledged their role in their household is to be the parent with
the more adaptable schedule, if not primary caregiver, in order to facilitate care for the kids;
handle the unscheduled events in their lives; and provide a stable presence in the household.

Not all participants were comfortable with being that stable household presence. Mark, for example, exhibited “minor frustration” toward his wife’s expectations for him in the household:

_I do think she expects me to be home for things more than she used to, which has been a
little bit of a frustration, I think sometimes because there has been a bit of a pattern of
like, “Oh, you know, XYZ is being delivered today.” And the assumption just being that
I'll be you know, I'll kind of be there, which has been a bit of a, you know, a little bit of a
minor frustration._

Other participants hinted that the distribution and acceptance of roles within the household was by design, due to inherent strengths of each parent in the balance of their relationship. For example, both Terry and Mitch mentioned that their spouses are much more organized while they are more flexible, if not more creative (flexibility/adaptability will be discussed further in Theme Four). As such, each couple agrees that specific household roles or tasks will fall to one partner or another based on strengths that had more to do with personality type than with gender.

_Identity regarding work_

Considering that expatriation assignments are based on work agreements, the concept of work came up often across the data set. The findings in Theme One showed that several participants were not only aware of but were comfortable that their (female) spouses were perceived to be the breadwinner in their family. The findings in this theme presents data on the
relationship between the male spouse and his employment. This subcategory is based on the codes *work as identity*, which is connected to data on a participant’s connection to himself as someone who wants or need to have a career, and *feel expectations from others to work*, which describes any instances where people have specifically told or insinuated that my participant should have a specific job or career.

My findings show that for some expat couples, both parents share an expectation to maintain paid employment. For others that does not seem to be the case. In the last few countries he has lived in, Roger has alternated between taking full-time jobs at the Embassy, working short-term contracts and creating small businesses away from the Embassy, and being a full-time stay-at-home parent. He often encounters other people who express the expectation that he should always be employed:

*It's weird. Like you – I don't think from what, from my experience, I don't think people get that [my wife] can support us on a single income and how we do it. And people just expect that I should be working.*

Similarly, Terry related his identity as an artist to his other identity as an expat spouse, saying in both scenarios he receives comments from others that imply he is not concerned with finding paying work:

*Sometimes occasionally people will ask me questions that sort of insinuate – I can think of one conversation, they sort of insinuated, like, like, they were kind of trying to figure out like, well, what's your financial situation? Like, are you just kind of hanging? I think sometimes people think I'm just kind of hanging out. But I get the exact same thing, when I'm here. If you're – that's something every artist deals with. "You don't have a real job do you?" You know, like, you don't, you know, this or that. So that's no surprise to me.*
Several participants, who had paid employment at the time of these interviews, detailed how they experienced judgment for the type of work they chose. Troy recounted how he encountered people abroad who insinuated that spouses of expats who work at Embassies should also work for those Embassies:

*I’m sure at times there have been people who were surprised when I said, you know, my wife is a diplomat at the Embassy. … Especially when I was doing freelance work, there can be many [people] who would be like, Oh, you should get a job at the Embassy. And I say, Well, I’m not really interested in that right now. And so that I mean, their first instinct was there are all these great jobs [at the Embassy], which is great. And there are great jobs. But there were times in my life where I didn’t want that. And so I think that surprised people sometimes.*

Another of those participants, Mitch, was also aware of this judgment about his chosen work, but he remained deliberate in how he chose a career that reflects his value to espouse non-traditional gender roles. In conjunction with the previous subcategory (*Desire to embrace current identity and role*), Mitch connected his experience as a male spouse as an example of how he embraces non-traditional roles in his work as a teacher:

*Teaching is a job that – like at least, you know, school teaching, not post-secondary – but school teaching is often considered a woman’s, I mean, still is considered a woman’s occupation. So I don’t know. These, although these things make me feel – these things don’t make me feel effeminate. They make me feel connection with women.*

Mitch left teaching in the previous year to become a full-time parent for his two children, who were engaged in online school at home during lockdowns related to the COVID-19 pandemic. For men like Mitch, employment is a choice, not a necessity, due to the financial
stability (employment, housing, health care) offered by his wife’s employment. Likewise, several men said they can take their time and wait for the right job to come along. Mark expressed his patience with waiting for the right job, and the downsides that come with it:

I’m pretty patient person overall. So I think that like, being – I mean, the lack of sort of movement on the job front has led, you know, I have – it’s been hard. It’s been emotionally difficult for me. But I think that I am the type of person that is like okay with, you know, not, you know, having gone through a period where it feels like, my career isn’t really progressing. I think I do have that patience. And I think also that I’m not particularly ambitious, when it comes to, you know, needing to be like, at the director level, by the time I’m, you know, 40, or you know things like this. I’m not, I don’t have that kind of ambition. … I’m much more motivated by finding projects, organizations that sort of, have a bit of a match to sort of my, you know, my ideological kind of grounding.

This motivation for a specific type of work - and the identification with that employment - was evident in half of my ten participants. For those who identify heavily with what type of work they do, their work was something they needed to express. As mentioned in Theme One, Terry was one of those men who preferred a particular type of work: to make films. One other spouse needed to find new work situations (identities) with each move and admitted to struggling with making his employment work with his family transitions. Bart:

It is a bit challenging to time work such that it lines up with the moves. You know, there's always that little lag of getting on the ground and finding a productive rewarding work opportunity after we arrive. ... If you are driven professionally, then obviously, it's hard to kind of reconcile that with, with having to, you know, change jobs every two to three years.
While none of the participants I spoke with expressed any financial difficulties, some did seek employment for different reasons: as a stress reducer. Martin, on his relationship with employment and money:

Most of the stress that I have ever had, has been like, Oh, we need to pay a bill. And this needs to be done at the end of the month, so I’ll work a couple of extra hours. And that I guess that even though it will add more stress to my life, at the same time, I will know that at the end of the day, like I will fulfill those financial responsibilities. So yeah, like work has been like a stressor and also a way to take some of that stress away from me, if that makes any sense. And again, I’m saying this because of how I grew up, like the challenges that I had.

Similarly, we go back to Roger, who in his tours to previous countries has alternated between working full-time and doing part-time and contract work. He has found employment out of things he likes to do, his hobbies:

I’m good at keeping myself entertained, or occupied, I should say. So, um, like photography, right, so this has always been kind of a hobby of mine. But in, in [Western Asia], I was able to kind of spin it into a business, like doing a contract work, doing events and stuff. Being able to kind of write and pairing that with, with photography, has helped. And being able to kind of like, go out and do stuff, so like bike riding, hiking, outdoorsy stuff, it builds up a lot of relationships, contacts, so people get to know me in the mission, and they’re more comfortable, even the side work or position. So it’s all a matter of, I think, being able to kind of like, make those contacts and those friendships and building trust amongst an embassy community and, and kind of shaking the tree a little bit to find your own work.
Roger shows he has a kind of psychological flexibility built into his work identity. While half of the participants associated themselves with a singular career, the other half were more flexible. Troy, who was a graduate student when he joined his wife overseas for her first work assignment, said they designed their lives around the need for him to maintain a more flexible career role:

*I think we both understand the value of having someone or really appreciate the value of having someone who has a flexible schedule. So for our first two tours, when I was in graduate work, and then doing freelance writing, my schedule is very flexible. And that was a huge asset. Again, if there were maintenance issues, or things that needed to happen, or if a kid is sick, like what do you do? And so that was huge.*

Daniel, who is already retired from his profession and is no longer considering his career needs, said that he and his wife have their lives planned around his flexibility as she approaches retirement age herself:

*I always reassure [my wife], especially now [because] the nice part about my situation is that ... I can do [what I want to do] anywhere. ... And that's, that's by design, because then that gives her the flexibility to do what she wants to do, and career-wise to finish up her career and get her to retirement, and to take advantage of whatever opportunities there.*

For all of these spouses, work was a part of their identity in differing degrees. This subcategory reflected how identities for these participants were complex and intertwined, and how past and present influences reflected in how these participants expressed their wants and desires in their current roles. It also showed that a subset of male expatriate spouses chooses to
be flexible in how they view their work and career. Flexibility was also a key feature in the next theme.

**Theme Three: Negotiating Culture**

This theme encompasses the cultural elements that affect a male spouse during expatriation. This includes adjustment within and to culture that a male spouse understands and is comfortable with to varying degrees. Seeing that the adjustment process involved a constant negotiation with culture, feelings about culture can change rapidly depending on circumstances that crop up in an individual’s life. Masculinity is a large piece of this cultural framework, in how these male spouses begin to view their lives as men from another culture, with distinct cultural values and ways of being. I broke this cultural framework down into these subcategories: home country culture, host country culture, organizational culture, and expatriate culture.

**Resolving home country culture**

This subcategory collects findings on how these male spouses perceive American culture while living outside of America, noted by the code *connection with home country culture*. Similar findings were introduced under the Theme Two subcategory *Ingrained perception of gender-based identity and roles*, but this subcategory is more specifically about culture and how the expatriate spouse regards the impact of culture in his life.

Most of my participants expressed some distance with the culture they grew up in, if not with American culture in general. Troy says his international experience has given him a perspective on what it means not only for him to be an American, but on his interconnection with it all:

*Being abroad, and living abroad, being kind of multicultural, has made me think a little bit more about what it means to be American. I love my country. But I haven’t lived there*
a ton in the last 10 years. And what does that mean? And how am I American? And why
do I love my country yet also choose to live abroad so often? So that's been something
that I've thought about. And then also just made me more aware. I think about the
international mess of the world as a whole.

That interconnection with international culture that an expat spouse feels might come at
the expense of connection to his home country culture. Daniel, who grew up on a farm but spent
almost half of his adult life overseas, finds it hard to connect with the culture and the people he
grew up with long ago:

I called my closest friends in high school just recently, never left the farm. Never left the
farm, live a mile down the road from my folks, never left the farm. And you know, of
course, he's had a full wonderful life as [a Midwest] farmer. But you know, when you
compare the two of us, there's no comparison.

Like Daniel, some of my participants reflected on the life choices they made, while not
denigrating those different choices made by old friends who continued to live in the area where
they grew up. Terry, on his choice to search for a different life:

I didn't want to go to school and then come out and get a job and then find a girl, settle
down. Well, that's a line from a song anyway, popped in my head – but you know, meet
somebody, settle down, have kids, that, you know, that whole thing seemed kinda like, I
kind of don't want to live like that, you know? A lot of my friends that I went to high
school with live like that, and they're very happy, and I'm happy for them, you know. I
enjoy, I enjoy sort of coming in and out of that world when I visit, you know, it's
interesting to me. But it's a definitely come away from that thinking, this isn't, this isn't
the life that I want, or that I was meant to have, I guess.
In order to live a different lifestyle, a male expat spouse has to also live with the fact that those in his home country may not fully understand his lifestyle and why he wants to live in that way. Martin, on the perceived slights that come from his family, which is rooted in his home country culture:

_The one thing that I will say is like little remarks from family members or friends who when they asked like, "so now that you move with your wife, what is it that you do there?" And I'm like, "Well, I'm at home and I am going back to school" but they are like "so you are the ..." – then comes a joke like the what's it called like "the stay at home mom" or something like that. And I mean, those are people that I have I known for a long time. And so for me it is just more like a joke. And I take it as that._

Across my findings, my participants wrestled with the idea of resolving perceptions between the country they were born in and the countries they now live in. That ingrained culture gives them a lens in which to view the countries around them, and to react to and interact with them as any living being would when entering new ecosystems.

_**Interacting with host country culture**_

This next subcategory considers how these male spouses move from country to country and interact with those cultures to varying degrees. I collected this data under the code _connection with local culture_. Those cultural interactions are rooted in their own perceptions of culture, as defined by where, when, and how they grew up, particularly as men. Because cultural interactions are often interpersonal experiences and comparisons to what is already known and understood, I wanted to know how my participants perceived the masculine elements of the cultures they lived in through the men in their host countries. I included the code _comparison with local men_.

Two participants explicitly stated that the host country culture has a large effect on adjustment. One of them, Martin, is an American who was born outside the United States and first moved abroad with his wife to the other side of the world. In their next transition abroad they moved back to a country in the Caribbean, and he described how the similarities in his birth country culture and his current country were comforting:

*It was my first time being away from the U.S., so I was missing my family, my friends, my food, like, I was missing so much from the U.S. And it was difficult. As a person, I, I guess that I had a hard time trying to understand how, what it all meant for me. And that was hard. And then moving to [the Caribbean], I feel like home here, like I go out, I just feel at home. See the people, the food, the language, like, everything just feels fine. So I guess that I have learned how to navigate these different environments as we jump from one place to the next.*

Martin was one of several participants grew up in multicultural families, where one or both parents were born in a country outside America. Troy, who in Theme One mentioned having a European mother, talked about how his family upbringing and experience as a Peace Corps volunteer informed his perspective on cultural difference, which has helped him integrate into new cultures:

*The fact that I enjoy traveling, and I kind of got that from my parents from a young age, both visiting family in [a country in Europe]. We spent a year in [a different European country] when I was in elementary school. Because I've gotten that travel bug, and I think the travel bug has helped me to be successful. And then all those different experiences travel living abroad, Peace Corps, have given me kind of an openness to other cultures, I mean, both an openness to languages, I enjoy languages, I speak several*
languages. But I think that being open has allowed me to be successful as we move from place to place.

Troy was one of four of my participants who were former Peace Corps volunteers, an experience that compelled them to integrate with local culture. (In fact, all four of those participants were volunteers in the same country as their current wives.) However, Roger stated a specific reason he and his wife continue to prefer living in foreign countries for the past the eighteen years:

Living abroad allows us to kind of beat our own path, right, like to ignore societal rules, society's kind of pressure to conform, because we don't need to conform because we're already kind of not part of that culture. So we, we have the excuse to do what we want, so to say. So if anything it's kind of been abroad, I feel like is, let me kind of express my own way of doing things more easily. ... We know that we're always being watched by the local population, but we're okay with that.

Like Roger, other participants also felt feeling watched and judged by people in their host country. Male spouses who said they explored more and connected more with the local culture tended to think more deeply about cultural similarity and difference. When asked about culture in the context of gender role and identity, Terry, who also said he put a high value on working in and connecting with his local community, explained:

I feel like my role as a man is defined by my, the fact that I'm, that I'm a modern Western man. You know, because, because it is, it is clear that when I'm in these traditional cultures, I can see there's a difference in the way that people see. But at the same time – so in terms of gender roles, I think I feel more aligned with that, that progressive, modern Western kind of viewpoint. And I tend to find those people in, in the culture where I live.
Most participants did not seem to compare themselves to the men in the countries they lived in, particularly in terms of what is culturally normative behavior. And most of my participants said they did not know much about how local men behaved, other than those they know through work at the Embassy. Frank, on how he reacts to the macho attitudes he confronts in the countries he has lived in:

_The countries that I've spent most of my time in, men are men and they bang their chest and they scream a lot. And this is just from TV and stuff, but like, there you're, you're respected if you're loud, and, and dominant, big rock and roll air quotes dominant. And I sort of think that's funny because most of these folks, like the dominant characters, the, the faux-dominant characters are usually the ones who are scared of the dark and need a nightlight. So it's just a sense of humor and, and yeah, just to laugh at it, to laugh at it all._

Several participants mentioned that they did not tend to recognize starkly traditional male behavior until becoming immersed in different cultures. Mitch reflected on this fact and how it juxtaposes with his own culture and thoughts about masculine expression:

_The cosmopolitan nature of living overseas makes me more aware of how, like, American males are more woke than we think we are. Most of the time we're more, we're more sensitive to our women than we think we are. Like we're more, we're more coddled than we think we are. We're less like, you know, like, like you want to see men? Like, oh, like you have to go outside of America to kind of see like the kind of like men that I feel like AM talk radio talks about._

While that masculinity is the norm in some foreign cultures, Cory said although he noticed the macho attitudes and perceptions of local men in some of the countries he lived in, he also noticed a softness not seen in his own culture:
It feels like in most places we’ve lived, you know, that's more of a macho kind of idea of themselves, you know, it's sort of, you know, women are there to cook and clean and keep the house. So, you know, that's always kind of a little can be sometimes a little strange.

You know, but at the same time, and it was sort of more when the girls were younger, you know, we'd go out to restaurants and stuff, and, you know, the waiter would come over and pick them up, and then, you know, take them into the back, show them off, you know, where that would never happen in states.

Several participants noticed how men in stereotypically masculine cultures also exhibited traits that were traditionally feminine in America, including a fascination with babies that Cory referred to, or other warm behavior such as holding hands with other men in public. Terry wonders why men can't be close in America like they are in certain cultures. For example, in Southeast Asia where he had lived, men express themselves to other men much more intimately than they do in the United States:

Men are much more physically intimate with, you know, like, holding hands, for example, walking, like walking hand in hand, two men walking hand in hand. Or just kind of when, when men are being chummy, you know, like, on a train or something, and everybody's piled into, you know, seats of a train and kind of, you know, arms around each other and, and that kind of thing. I remember being really surprised by that, but, but feeling like, it was like feeling good about it, like, it reflected back to me. Why not? Why can't, why can't men be close like that? You know, why? And it made me realize, like, how much my, my culture growing up was really, you know; didn’t, didn’t really engender that.

This subcategory showed how my participants connected with, interacted with, and reflected on the culture in their host countries. But that is just one level of culture my participants
need to navigate while living overseas. The next subcategory shows how my participants interact with the culture of their spouse’s organization, which exists as a subculture within the foreign countries they live in.

Navigating spouse’s organizational culture

The organization an expatriate works in has its own unique culture. Those expats and their families are connected by similar ideals, behaviors, communication styles, and working and living conditions. In the case of multi-national organizations – in the case of this study, Americans through the U.S. Embassy – that culture extends across borders. Data identified in this theme fell under the codes connection with organizational culture and stress from organizational culture, with the latter code detailing common frustrations experienced by my participants.

Roger mentioned how individuals within his wife’s organizational culture can make all the difference in whether or not living in a host country is “tolerable”:

It doesn't matter if it's if it's like the Chief of Mission or the Ambassador, or like, a supervisor, or, you know, someone, someone in the Mission that I hear about through [my wife]. If, if the conditions are good, and the people are good, if the people are good, if those people are good at what they do, they make the jobs, the living, the work, good, the home life, good. And it makes the overall situation of living in that country tolerable because you feel like you're with people that understand. And when those people aren't like that, when they're, like, just following the rules without disregard for the kind of like, you know, the human side of your working staff, I tend to get a little bit, I lose, like faith in them. And I'll lose faith in the Mission.
Other participants did notice some issues with the “human side” of their spouse’s organization. Frank, who in Theme One mentioned feeling a bit of underlying racism within his wife’s organization, reflected further on the traditional gender roles he sees day to day at work:

*I think it's the nexus of “old school” versus “new school” thinking as far as gender roles.*

... *I feel like the men are very 1950s sort of – I'm blanking on the name of the show, but they sort of wish they could smoke cigarettes and pop their legs up on their desk, while the women secretaries come in and, and type up letters. I feel like that's like a very dominant, there's very, there's like a handful of individuals that I can see when I, when I make a statement like that.*

Cory expressed a similar sentiment on the gender discrimination his wife has faced in her career abroad:

*We just arrived here, and one of her counterparts was like, “Yeah, I think I'm going to move to [this city] next year. So I'm going to just, like, take your job.” And it was like, so she, you know, complained, and you know he, to his credit, you know, apologized but, you know, just sort of like, you know – here's this guy that's been in this position for 20 years, and has just done that for the last 20 years, and has gotten away with it. So I think her pushing back, hopefully, you know, he now understands it next time, just keep your mouth shut or understand [he] can't just push [his] way around. ... I've certainly become aware of how other people think and what they, I guess, sort of expect a woman how she should act or behave.*

On the flip side, five other participants all alluded to their wives being part of organizations that pushed for gender equality. Mitch was one of them, describing his perception of his wife’s professional experiences:
Her superiors have all been women. And so it strikes me that her organizational culture is particularly forward leaning as far as, as far as, as far as gender roles are concerned. It's like, they're hiring women, they're continuing to hire women, they're hiring women at all levels. And so therefore, yeah, I don't think that she – she's had, she's had lots of colleagues that are men, obviously equal, you know. ... There are men that are higher than her at other places in the organizational structure at her office. But her direct bosses have always been women. And I think that that just speaks to the, to the, to the high, to the high level of women that they're hiring.

Frank was one of four participants who also works in a job in his wife’s organization at the U.S. Embassy, through a work program made specifically for spouses of expats. While the other participants did not express any concerns about how they were treated by superiors or co-workers while working in those organizations, Frank mentioned a certain encounter with one expat man that made him question the culture of that organization:

There's an officer that I've known now, this is our second post we've come across, we've come together, and we have very similar backgrounds. And the first time I met him, he shook my hand and said, “What section are you in,” and I told him, “My wife is in this section. I'm just [her spouse]. I don't have a job yet.” And he literally walked away, like didn't even, I didn't even finish the sentence, he just walked away. Fast forward, 6-7 years later, we see each other as he gets off the plane, and he sees me and he gives me this big hug, and, and he's – we've sort of cut through that facade. But like, like he, he was such an idiot for the, when I first met him, and now we're friends.
Another of those participants in that job program, Martin, works at a store in an Embassy. He understands the temptation to compare himself and his achievements to other men in his wife’s organization, but he insists it is not an issue for him:

If I think of, in terms of like achievements and education, the same guy who is selling this direct hire, or whatever man, beer – the same, like, in this case, in my case, it’s a guy who has a master’s degree, double major in college, so that’s something I have done. And for me when I think – I never think or compare myself to them and think that I am less than them. I always think that I’m as smart and as driven as they are, and it has never been an issue for me. Like it has never been a situation where I feel like "Oh, I am in the middle of this many people who are more accomplished than I am."

For those male spouses who work outside of the Embassy, their wives’ organizations play a large part on how accepted they feel as people. Terry, on how his wife’s organization has been receptive to him as a person:

I’ve always felt really, really accepted and really supported. I feel like if we go out to dinner with [my wife’s] colleagues, for example, and people ask me about my work, they’re genuinely interested. And I, I find those experiences are positive. ... Another thing, you know, again, about being an artist, you do sort of struggle, not so much in the sense of gender, but just in general, like, do people value what I do? Is it important? And, and, and it can, it can be, you know, a recurring theme of sort of, what do you call it? Well, I don't know, it can just be a challenging thing to always feel confident, to always maintain that confidence in what you're doing. And I always feel like in our community, I always feel like I get a lot of energy from the people in my, in [my wife’s] circles, whether it’s because they are interested in filmmaking, or they’re interested in [this religion], or
maybe it's because I've learned some language and I can I talk with some of her colleagues and they're in their own language.

For Terry and most of my participants, I sensed a clear distinction in how they perceived their relationship to the culture of their wife’s organization, which is dominated by expatriate culture, and the broader expatriate culture of the city and area they live in. I made that distinction in my next subcategory.

**Connecting with expat culture**

Some expats and their families spend significant time interacting with other expats who also live in the area they live in, regardless of who those expats work with and for. To represent this concept, I used the code *connection with expat culture*. Some expatriates prefer other expats from the same country of origin and branch out to spend time with expats from other countries of origin. Other expats spend most of their time with expats who work in the same organization, often born in or at least citizens of the same home country. I was interested in how my participants viewed these interactions in terms of their gender, through the codes *connection to other male expat spouses* (those with similar identities as trailing spouses) and *comparison to other expat men* (those who were the primary breadwinners).

My findings here show that expat culture can be so strong and well-defined as to compel the expat spouse and their family to only interact with the local host country culture on a cursory level. Several of my participants mentioned the term “bubble” several times to describe how little they interact with the local culture and how little they feel local culture impacts their lives.

Bart:

*We’ve always been quite removed from the host country population with the exception of you know, like, government counterparts or, or professional counterparts. ... I just feel*
like we've managed to associate with similar people while we have been overseas. So, and like I said earlier, the cultures haven't really, because of the bubble we live in, haven't really impacted [us] and played a significant role.

That connection that expats feel with their own culture can lead to a sense of relatedness, which can also lead people to compare themselves and their experiences to others. Three of my participants mentioned the feeling of needing to compare themselves to other expats of the same gender. Because the majority of expats who bring their families abroad on work assignments are males, this has particular connotations for male spouses who are thinking about the viability of their own careers. Mark elaborated:

I do find myself comparing myself to them. And I think it's really more again, in this sort of, like, career. I don't know, I keep saying sort of like career advancement, that that sort of makes me sound as if I'm like – I really am not the person who like necessarily cares about getting to a certain level or everything like that. But in terms of just – career fulfillment is maybe is a better word. Yeah. I do compare myself to them in terms of career fulfillment.

Regarding gender and the expatriation experience, this group of male expat spouses found less in common with men who are in different roles than them. Terry:

I have met other expats that are men who are abroad for their own career and for their own work. And yeah, I probably don't relate to them quite as well. But again, I don't know if that's because my situation is different, or if it's because we land in these situations because of who we are, and what we want and what our values are.

Besides for those two participants, the majority of my participants mentioned feeling a strong connection to other male spouses of expats. Mitch was one of half of my participants to
use the term follow to describe his situation – and none of those participants seemed to have any positive or negative reactions to that term. Mitch, on his “tribe”:

*I feel like if there’s, if I have any tribe anymore, it’s, it’s the expat spouses who follow, or expat men who follow their spouses abroad. Like, it feels that that feels more normal to me than anybody.*

Roger, another of those participants who used the term follow more than once, mentioned how he feels quite welcome in the expat community. He also said his role as a male spouse who is not the breadwinner seems to be more accepted within the expat community than it would be back in America:

*Our lifestyle fits more with people here [in the expat community] than in the U.S., with like, you know, being a male, non-working spouse. Follow it, follow it, follow your spouse around. Absolutely, yeah, it’s more way more way more relatable to people here overseas.*

Most of my participants commented on how they felt being a male spouse of an expat seemed like a common occurrence. Surprisingly, three of participants were surprised to learn that males were in the minority in the expat spouse community compared to females. One of them, Troy, agreed that he feels strongly connected to other male expat spouses, but he has also noticed how female expat spouses tend to adapt and adjust to each other more quickly:

*Depending on the posting you’re at, and how many foreigners there are, a lot of the foreigners that aren’t working are women. And I’ve hung out and done things with women’s groups before and that’s been great, and they’ve been very warm and welcoming. But yeah, sometimes female spouses have a little bit more of an instant connection group that can help them adapt to new places.*
Two other participants mentioned not knowing that many other male spouses of expats, and are more familiar with female expats who married foreign nationals in some country they lived in. Mark:

*I don't really know very many husbands who are, you know, who are following their spouses. And the ones that I do know, sort of more broadly, if you kind of go outside of my circle [in this country], a lot of them are actually men that, that, that, that their spouses met while they were living abroad. So they are foreign, or foreign nationals, I think that are actually probably more common in my life than American men who, who are following their spouses.*

Interestingly, Mark also mentioned having few friends within the expat community, and how he was seeking that in his life to support him through his experience. As we explored in this subcategory, participants each have a different connection with culture, from home to host country, from organizational to expat. Depending on the person and what he wants, a male spouse may choose to find interpersonal connection on any of the cultural levels, but perhaps is selective about where he chooses to look for those relationships. The concept of social connection and support will be explored in a later theme.

**Theme Four: Adjusting to a Process**

This theme is related to how male expatriate spouses adjust to their lives over the course of their transitions from country to country. As mentioned in the first two chapters, this process of coping with and managing stress is a primary factor in one’s adjustment to a new culture. My participants noted some significant sources of stress in their lives. They also told me that certain traits have helped them to better adjust to new cultures, and my participants referenced different coping strategies to help them combat stress. My participants also voiced what support
mechanisms they lean on to get through times of psychological transition. These concepts together comprise a framework for adjustment. The subcategories in this framework are sources of stress; traits that help and hinder adjustment; coping strategies; and support mechanisms.

Sources of stress

The findings show that sometimes stress can be situational, and other times the stress has compounded from the expatriate lifestyle of moving from country to country. While my participants recounted many small sources of stress, including some specifically related to new cultures (from learning the local language to learning how to drive like a local), I chose to highlight the most commonly occurring subthemes here for this subcategory. The primary codes identified in this subcategory are stress from role and stress from lifestyle.

The majority of my respondents said that moving to a new country was the most challenging aspect of the expat spouse experience. Mitch explained how feelings about each transition was compounded by the overall stress of the expat spouse lifestyle:

First getting to [a new country] I have to actively and constantly remind myself that I'm overwhelmed, that my brain is on overload. Because I forget, like, you just kind of tune it out, especially because the lifestyle is so transient to begin with. Like, I have to remind myself, kind of like very regularly, like you are totally tapped out emotionally right now. Because you're taking in so much new information and your, and your brain is doing so much mapping, right?

The period needed for someone to weather that initial cultural adjustment to a new country varies. Troy put a number on it:
I do notice that kind of the first three to six months in a new place are challenging. You know, especially, you know, trying to fit into a community and trying to find new friends and acquaintances.

Other than finding new friends, some participants were looking for work. Mark, on the stress of creating new professional networks for the spouse who follows:

It's difficult, because, you know, as the one who's kind of following, who's following, you know, I'm sort of in the position of having to enter a new environment and kind of create, you know, try to try to create new networks and everything like this, which is challenging, and something that I, like a lot of people, don't particularly, you know, enjoy this kind of, like process of networking and everything.

In Theme Two, Roger had considered his ability to be resourceful in finding work after each transition to a new country, but in his current country he chose to be a stay-at-home parent for one year before taking a full-time job. He recounted his newfound appreciation for a parent who chooses to stay home, based on the stressful particulars of his current location:

[This country] is a really hard place, like with the pollution and the dengue in the rainy season. And just like, not being able to get around this, this city. Like, you can't just go out and walk anywhere, because it's like, it's, it's like, traffic is horrible, and there's pollution and it just, I felt trapped. And I felt like I didn't have I didn't have a purpose, but I feel like, you know, being able to kind of, like, deal with that and cope with it. And it taught me like, like sympathy for people who just stay at home and like do this all the time. I mean, I did it for about a year, I was ready to like go nuts.

Relatedly, most participants mentioned experiencing stress from what they perceived as expectations for what role they should be fulfilling in their household. While every participant
considered their spouse to be their primary source of support, this particular stress came from interpersonal interactions with spouses. Daniel recounted an interaction at dinner:

*It was a challenge for [my wife]. ... She’d walk in while I had planned dinner in and you could just tell on the look of her face, like, I wouldn’t have planned this dinner. You know, I wouldn’t have had, you know, chicken nuggets and french fries again, you know. But she had no choice. I was Mr. Mom, and run, you know, the house and then take care of the kids. And she was, you know, working. There have been challenges. And difficult times.*

Daniel later specified that his reaction to such interactions with his wife were just a sign of the overall stress he felt in his role:

*It’s not the day to day stuff – that’s whatever. And it’s not [my wife] and my's relationship and having to manage that. It's just having to manage the uncertainty, that's been the biggest challenge.*

These daily stressors trigger overwhelming feelings of the long road ahead for expat families. Cory was recounting a stressful interaction with the local culture when he brought up that future uncertainty:

*At least with [my wife’s] job now, there's no real time limit on it. You know, it's just, she could do [her job] now the rest of her career. ... Those kinds of stressors, also, we have. Where are we going to go next? You know, is there going to be an extension coming? Is there not an extension? ... Yeah, that – those periods were certainly stressful trying to, you know, what's next?*

The “what’s next” is often another transition to another country. Often the transitions are planned, based on the wife receiving a job posting in a new location, but other life changes can
come into play. For those expats working for the U.S. Embassy, sometimes these life changes can force some of all of their family members to make a short move back to the United States. These situations can include a major life event for a family, such as the birth of a child; instability in a host country, such as a war; or a globally disruptive event, such as first year of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020. Regardless of the reason for the transition, every participant I spoke with mentioned at least one time their family was challenged by temporarily moving back to America while their belongings and life remained overseas. Mark revealed how the intersection of a global disruption and a family life event led to a stressful temporary transition:

We got stuck in the U.S. for six months, and we were living in our basement apartment with our, you know, very young baby daughter for a long time. And so, in a sense, the, the, you know, COVID coincided with this, you know, sort of being stuck in the U.S. for six months, plus, plus the addition of a new member of the family. And so it's kind of almost hard to, it's almost hard to, like, do justice to the, to the sort of the changes in both of our roles and in our family.

For families with young children, the drastic change in lifestyle from a foreign country back to the U.S. was shocking. Terry, when considering how the effects of the global COVID-19 pandemic had on his life:

We had this lovely community of people around us and, and people, like our nanny there, it wasn't that pronounced really of a difference. The difference didn't really happen till we came back to the states, where, we're, where, you know, when we were in DC, and people said that they literally sign up for care when they're pregnant. Because the waiting list to get into a good daycare is, like, years long.
As my participants have shown, the stress from the expat spouse role can be unique for men. Some choose to ignore that stress, as Bart described, which he brings back to his culture:

*I think this is very cultural, it's, it's family, but it's also just the broader culture I grew up in. The negative thing would probably be a kind of, like, a disregard of stress or like a somehow like a like trying to pretend it's not there. It's not happening, you know, because, because, you know, good, smart people don't, don't suffer.*

As shown, my participants expressed how stress can be perceived from multiple sources and can compound over time. This next subcategory shows how men are uniquely situated – or uniquely unsuited – to handle such stressors.

**Traits that help and hinder adjustment**

My findings show that male expatriate spouses may share some attributes that allow them to effectively manage their lives in this role. Naturally, individuals have unique characteristics that can either encourage or inhibit their adjustment to new cultures and their ability to be content in their transient lifestyle. This subcategory collects some gender-specific characteristics that my participants revealed as well as some characteristics that may be inherent to any expatriate spouse. Codes identified in this subcategory include *traits that help with adjustment* and *traits that hinder adjustment*. I also asked a question that compelled my participants to reflect on their traits through their gender, which I labelled here as *traits as a man*.

The majority of my participants used the word adaptable to describe themselves, and several of those participants paired that with the word flexible or flexibility. Mitch, for example, struggled to maximize his productivity during the day but realized having the bandwidth to be adaptable and flexible were a benefit to him:
I'm pretty good if I, if I can throw the football down the field a ways and like, go and run and get it. But like this day to day stuff of like trying to figure out, like, how to organize my day, I suck at that. Like, I'm good at being adaptable and flexible. So I've had to - circling back, I've had to let myself feel more secure in the fact that actually adaptability and flexibility is really, really is, is a very good and, and, and helpful trait to have.

Bart does not just see the trait of adaptability as helpful for a male spouse, but as necessary to surviving in this lifestyle:

The couples who make it are generally couples where the male is more flexible in how he sees his role. So I would say that, more or less the people who I know who are in my situation are similar to me, I have, I've seen some who have started out and then just not really made it. Then, so that those would be males who would be a little bit more identified, identify more with their, their work situations to define their identities. And so yeah, but most of the male trailing spouses had been more, more similar to me than then dissimilar to me, I would say.

In some of that flexibility in adapting to new people in a host country, two participants expressed a preference for maintaining an outsider perspective when relating to a new culture. Roger expounded on a comment he made in a previous theme about connecting to local culture, which is a perspective he and his wife share:

We're always going to be the outsider. And so no matter how much we try to conform it, we will never be part of that culture. So we don't really try so much to, but we keep, you know, we do our own things. So that's how I think it's probably influenced me but like, never changed me just, just, I'm aware of it, but we don't really try to try to mimic it. We don't we don't try to fit in so much. We try to be good citizens, but we don't try to fit in.
Terry takes the opposite approach. He embraces that adaptability and works himself inside a culture, which he says is a skill that came from his experiences traveling abroad before he became the spouse of an expat:

*I adapt pretty well, you know, to new places. And, and I think I adapt to new places as well because I like to, I like to think I'm a curious person. I mean, a person with curiosity. ... I get a lot from the experience of being in a new place and having to learn things in a new place, learning how to do things in a new place. I like that, and I enjoy it. And I think I'm pretty good at it. Because, because I feel like I'm – over the years living abroad, one thing – I just think I've become a much more flexible person generally, in terms of my patience, and in my, and my kind of in-the-moment, like, Oh, what that person said, is really offensive, but I, that's not, but they're not trying to offend me. Do you know what I mean? Like cultural things.*

Terry touted his patience, a trait that was echoed by three other participants. Mark, however, noted that patience can be a benefit and a hindrance for him, particularly in his desire for a certain career:

*I do have a bit of a history of with, like, anxiety and depression that I think sometimes gets the better of me, especially when things aren't going well in my life. So it's kind of like, yeah, it's easy for me to, like, lose a little bit of, of hope. I think I am a patient person. But I think that I do have that tendency, especially again, on the career side, to, to feel a little defeated in ways that that aren't helpful.*

Adaptability can also be a struggle. Mitch tried to put words to the feelings he has about being adaptable in his role:
I still feel guilty. Like I have this, like this shame neuroses around my like, like –

adaptability has left me feeling like kind of wildly unmoored. So I feel, I just feel kind of weirdly adrift. Um, so I think that the trait behind that though is like kind of my, my –

think it's my anxiety. Like, it's not necessarily being – being anxious is not necessarily good for, good for this. I think, my undisciplined-ness, like I, I resist routine and I resist structure. Like, I want structure to be imposed upon [me] ... whereas like, me trying to structure my own day, it oftentimes feels very fraught.

Although I did not ask specifically, Mitch was one of four men who told me they have introverted personalities. Each of these men described how their personality type helps them to slowly integrate into a new culture. Troy described how being an introvert helps keep him motivated while he warms up to finding new social outlets:

I think I'm an introvert. And I, I enjoy sometimes I get energy from doing things by myself. And so I enjoy wandering around the city by myself or, you know, going to a coffee shop by myself or when I was doing more writing. When we first got here, that would be kind of my go to, I would take the kids to school. And then if there were errands to run, I would do that. But if there weren't, I would end up at a coffee shop somewhere. And I would be doing writing or doing photo book projects or – so the willingness to be by myself, I don't, I don't need to be with others. I understand that at times I, it is really good for me to be social. But so [being an] introvert helps.

The concept of being social is linked directly to communication. While a majority of my participants touted their communication skills as a trait they felt helped them be successful in their roles and lifestyles, all of my participants mentioned the importance of needing to communicate more, including in their marriage with their partner; with friends; in advocating to
their spouse's organization; and in their communities. (That concept will be explored further in the next two subcategories.)

Traits such as the ability to communicate feelings can be seen as traditionally female. Interestingly, several of my participants ascribed traditionally masculine characteristics to their wives – direct, rigid – and more traditionally feminine characteristics to themselves – feeling, communicative. Terry, on how his communication style differs with his wife’s, rooted in his childhood and personality, in terms of how difficult it is to express what he needs:

*It's more difficult for me to sort of say, Hey, wait a minute, I don't I, I, you know, I don't like that, I want something to be like this. It's harder for me to do that, just because of the way I was raised than it is for her. I think she's much more practical about these things. I'm much more sort of, I don't know if you know, we're, you know, the Myers-Briggs or something, I think it's called – it's like this way of defining personal, yeah. And I guess I'm, I'm a feeling person, I guess, is what it is. I sort of feel my way through things. So um, so that's like, you know, it's an interesting way to look at it, too. ... I don't feel like there's a gender issue with that. I think it's just really our personalities.*

Another traditionally male characteristic is that of a leader. Daniel made the observation that male spouses can still see themselves as leading the family, even when they are not considered to be the breadwinners:

*[My wife] is really, really capable and talented as a, as the leader of an organization. ... She tends to lead from the front and the top. That's her strength, she's good at that. Me, I'm also an incredibly capable leader, and have had excellent training and experiences and whatever and lots of responsible positions in my working career. But I'm more of a lead from the side and the back, and the middle. And so that's perfect for this situation,
because now I can lead from the side and the back and the middle. I don't necessarily have to be the one calling the shots IE, where [my wife] wants to go take a job. And I'm just fine saying, okay, you know, what do I got to do to make that work for us, for me.

Daniel’s response brings us back to the idea of adaptability as a key component of the male spouse experience. That adaptability can also be seen as a coping strategy. This is the subject of my next subcategory.

**Coping strategies**

This subcategory comprised data on methods of coping with stressful situations. To create this subcategory, I looked at responses to questions about coping strategies, but I also pulled data from responses across the interview guide. Codes included positive coping mechanisms and negative coping mechanisms. I also asked a question about problem vs. emotion focused coping mechanisms, based on my theoretical construct outlined in Chapter Two, labeled here under the code problem or emotion focused.

All of my participants were willing to share with me the coping mechanisms that were positive influences on their lives while living abroad as expat spouses. The results are in Table 2. Only a few of participants reported coping mechanisms that they considered to be harmful. One participant said he smoked cigarettes when he was under stress; another said he watched television; and a third mentioned he struggled with problem eating. Three spouses mentioned a history of problem drinking behavior, but all three said that behavior was in the past.

**Table 2 – Positive coping mechanisms**

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<th>1 Daniel</th>
<th>2 Troy</th>
<th>3 Roger</th>
<th>4 Cory</th>
<th>5 Mitch</th>
<th>6 Mark</th>
<th>7 Terry</th>
<th>8 Bart</th>
<th>9 Martin</th>
<th>10 Frank</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical exercise</td>
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Two things stood out to me from the data on positive coping mechanisms. The first is what expat spouses do when they first encounter a new culture. Terry describes the plan he has in place:

*Three things, I think, are the most important things that I, I always do. I do a checklist when I land a new place. ... I need to run, I need to talk to somebody and I need to meet people that live around me. You know, it's like a checklist, it's, and it works for me pretty well. And meditation has been a huge part of it. It's because it contextualizes your stress so much. It gives you such a broader sense of where stress sits in your life, in who, your DNA, in who you are, instead of just kind of taking you over.*

The second is how people communicate during times of stress. The majority of my participants reported communicating or reaching out to someone during times of stress, which is discussed further in the next subcategory. However, some of my participants stated that they talk a certain way in order to get what they want. Frank talked about how he has learned to speak differently while living overseas:

*I am pretty straightforward and direct, and if – I don't mind people not liking me. ... I mean, it's a bit harsh when you say it out loud, but it's sort of my coping mechanism as*
well. I don’t, I don’t waste my time sitting in circles on purpose. So that’s, that’s something that’s helped me sort of navigate these waters.

I also gathered data on the particular strategies my participants use to process stressful situations. In interview three I introduced a question based on Lazarus’ and Folkman’s intercultural adjustment framework, which I discussed in Chapter Two: To manage stress in your life, do you think you take a problem-focused approach or emotion-focused approach?

A problem-focused approach to managing stress means we actively try to do things to address the problem. An emotion-focused approach, in contrast, consists of efforts to change or reduce the negative emotions associated with stress.

Interestingly, two participants said they regularly utilize a problem-based approach; two use an emotion-based; and three use a mix. Bart says he uses a mix of strategies to cope with stress but had specific examples for the benefits of a problem-focused approach:

For work, I guess a problem focused approach would be just to, but I tried to be really strict about my working hours. And that’s, it’s been, it’s helped that I’ve been the primary caregiver for the kids, because I can’t work evenings, you know, I have to focus my attention on them.

Cory reported gravitating more toward emotion-based coping (the use of therapy as a support mechanism with be discussed further in the next subcategory):

I talk with my therapist about that quite frequently. I think it is more emotion based, because sometimes there’s just nothing that is going to change the situation. So the situation is what it is. And so you either change how you’re going to react to it, or, you know, you’re just gonna pull your hair out.

Martin described the benefit of using both strategies simultaneously:
I like to always address a problem that is like killing me or making me feel stressed. So say that is something at work, I try to find a solution to it – and at the same time, kind of like learning to, to deal with it. And as a co-worker used to say, it is what it is. In some situations, you just have to let it go, like whatever is happening, and kind of accept that as much as I try to fix that situation, it might not get fixed. And so I think that it has been both of them, because I know that sometimes something needs to be done in order to get things accomplished. And that way, I will not feel stressed, even if that means that I have to work harder or do more than I’m supposed to. But if this means that the problem will be solved, then that means that I am not going to feel stress about it. And that helps.

The last subcategory in this theme is support mechanisms. I separated the idea of coping strategies (actions to reduce stress) from support (resources to reduce stress) while considering the potential overlap. I tried to place the data in the most logical subcategory, knowing that individuals sometimes cope through the process of reaching out for support.

**Support mechanisms**

This subcategory compiles what my participants deemed to be sources of support during times of psychological distress. These sources are anything that the expatriate spouse leans on, which I separated out into separate codes but then collected in this section, including *support from spouse; support from extended family; counseling resources; medication; support from other male expat spouses;* and *lack of support.*

Since a family expatriates together and is the only constant from country to country, it was unsurprising to see family as a key source of support. Roger says his family unit is the most solid thing in his life of transition:
We’ve been our own unit for so long. Um, I mean, it’s, it’s who we rely on like our, the family is our core, right? So we’ve always it's not the house or where we live or our friends, because all that seems all that in our life is transitory. So it’s always been the family unit.

Bart went further, signaling that his family has become more supportive due to their lifestyle:

I kind of feel like our family unit might be a little bit closer just because we are each other’s support network, more so than maybe if we’re living in an established community.

As far as direct support, each one of my ten participants mentioned their partners (the expat) are their emotional foundation. Troy talked about the importance of communication with his wife since they began their overseas life:

Since going abroad as a family, I mean, I think touching base with my spouse has been really important. And then checking in and using, you know, her as a sounding board has been really amazing.

Several of my participants mentioned that their wife initiates that communication, perhaps sensing what the husband needs for emotional stability. Mitch described how his wife talks with him before times of transition in their lives, when his anxiety noticeably rises:

I think that [my wife] has put up with a fair amount of ornery-ness and touchiness on my part. Um, I think she, she's learned to ask me before a big change. She's like, Hey, do you have, like a plan in mind for, for, for how we're going to, how you're going to emotionally deal with the, what's going on right now and what's gonna come next? Just, it's, you know – she’s sensitive to the fact that I get worked up around transitions, specifically.
As life partners, participants reported that their wives seem to intuit what the participants need to get through rough times. Frank recounts what his spouse did for him after a particularly stressful year:

Specifically this year, she's, she's stepped up, and she's offered a lot of support. And she knows I need space. She, she allows me to have space. She knows I need, I need to go sit and sit in the room by myself and just like zone out and, or just sit on the couch and sort of map out my life. And she knows and then she's, so she's allowing me that space to do what I need to do, which is, which is huge.

The desire for space as a form of interconnectedness during difficult times could be considered to be “traditionally” male aspiration. Another traditionally male characteristic is not asking for help when he needs it or needing permission to emote. Several of my participants who led child-caring roles in their household, such as Cory, talked about learning to ask for help after long hours of parenting:

I think I've recognized that, that sometimes you just need a break, and need to be okay asking for that, you know. Yeah, because eight or nine hours a day with, you know, a four-year-old can probably put the most sane person, you know, into a mood.

Cory illustrates the point of his nuclear family being a source of support but also a source of stress. In receiving support, then some participants recognized the process of receiving support is intertwined with providing support for their wives. Terry and his wife actually discovered a way to support each other more effectively:

[My wife] and I actually learned this thing called imago dialogue, if you ever heard of this. [My wife] learned about it from – [she] actually studied psychology, school psychology, before she switched to public administration, and one of her professors told
her about it. And we did a retreat, it's like a couples retreat, and you learn this really neat way of communicating with each other and kind of de-personalizes it, and it makes it easier for someone to listen to you without responding. And just kind of, you know, and it's a really, it's like a method, you know. And we use that. So that's a way that we support each other, during difficult times, we, we try to just check in, and just communicate a lot. I think that's our strongest thing.

Two participants mentioned their spouse is their only legitimate outlet for emotional support, and how their lack of male friends who can provide them with emotional support is a sign of American ways of maintaining friendships. Mark, on who he relies upon for support when abroad:

This doesn't make me happy to say but I don't really, I don't know that I really have very, very much else aside from, from [my wife], which is probably something to work on. ... I definitely fall into that totally sort of like masculine stereotype, for the U.S. at least, of really just not having male friends that, that, that I have that kind of a relationship with, that sort of emotionally supportive relationship.

Outside of the family, male spouses of expats often lean on each other, as was mentioned in Theme Three. Other expats living in the same area can also be a source of friendship and social support, but at least for one of my participants, Roger, that relationship does not run all that deep:

I have my close friends. But I think those are, those are my friends that I've had since like, elementary school, and college, and all of them live in the States. And I think those would be people that I would more kind of like, sit down and talk with on an emotional level. But I feel like [the expats here are] just not – I mean, we’re friends, we will go out
and have a good time, but nothing, no one I would really I – no one yet, I should say – no one yet that I feel like I've gotten to know well enough that I can just like dump on them.

Other than old friends, the majority of my participants say they regularly reach out to parents, siblings, and other extended family in America for support. Martin explained just how important such support is to him:

*I think is usually my brother and my sister in law, those are the two people that I always call and I was like, besides my wife, they are the ones that I will always turn to, for any support. And by that I mean ANY support, like it can be anything, not just like how I'm feeling. It might be, whatever is it that I'm feeling, they are there for me and they are there, what is it called, they are like those pillars that support me all the time.*

Family support and social support is crucial for my participants, particularly during times of transition. But sometimes deeper or more official support is needed. As mentioned in the first chapter, organizations often provide emotional and social support for expats and their family members. All ten of my participants have access to such services. Three of my participants recognized the existence of those services, though one of those participants said he rarely utilized them and another said he had never used them. The third went to a few Embassy-sponsored events for spouses to support each other, but found those services to be unfulfilling from the male perspective:

*I go to these spousal coffees sometimes, and they're brutal, man. I, like, just seeing all and, it's not, it's not all – well, it is mostly women, because there's not a lot of guys that go to these. And I should say, so of all the ones I've been to in [central Asia], I am the only straight man there. So, but a lot of it is just a lot of it is just these women that like*
hang out and, and, and complain. And so they don't really seem to have much going on for themselves.

In terms of deeper psychological support, I did not specifically ask my participants about their personal history with mental health support or about any potential diagnoses they had been previously given. Several of my participants, however, mentioned struggling with mental health symptoms either currently or in the past. Four participants revealed having feelings of anxiety, and two of those participants also cited personal histories with depression. Half of my participants said they currently saw a therapist regularly or had a therapist at one point and were considering finding one again. One of those participants, Daniel, considers therapy to be a part of a holistic routine to maintain overall health when he is overseas:

*I came to the realization that, you know, if you need some counseling, go get some counseling. It's no big deal. You know, mental health is just the same as physical health, and you know, I have gone to PT now and my shoulder's much better, and I, I'm a big believer in counseling. Go get help.*

Two of those participants reported taking psychotropic medications for their conditions. Mitch was diagnosed with generalized anxiety in 2002, several years before he moved abroad with his wife, and has maintained his medication and psychotherapy routine since then. The other participant, Cory, began taking medication after a stressful series of events in his previous country:

*It got to a point in [Eastern Europe]. I started taking antidepressants because it was just not, it was not sustainable, you know, just how things were. And we had major issues with the oldest school, and yeah, it just wasn't, it wasn't good for anyone.*
When his family moved to their current country, Cory said his wife also sought a therapist to support her during the move, and she encouraged Cory to see the therapist together with her:

“My wife certainly made an effort, I think, trying to reach out more. We had contacted a, another therapist that we both saw after a few weeks just to try to get all of us off on a positive first step. Which, you know, part of me is like, why do we have to do that, but, you know, it’s, it was good.

I identified two areas of what I would call non-traditional support for my participants. Two participants talked about the importance of spirituality, particularly Buddhism and ancient philosophy, as keys to focusing on what is important in life. Interestingly, both of these participants reported practicing meditation as a key coping mechanism in their lives. Another non-traditional source of support for expatriates is household staff, such as nannies or housecleaners, which in most countries is much more affordable than in the United States. All participants mentioned having household help, and the majority of them said having staff was necessary in making their lifestyle possible (the spouse often manages the household staff as part of their role). This idea dovetails into the next theme of life goals.

**Theme Five: Cultivating a Lifestyle**

This theme encompasses the steps that my participants said they have gone to in achieving and maintaining their international lifestyle. Part of that work has gone into aligning their goals and vision with that of their spouses. The data shows that along the way these spouses have worked to reconcile the lives they left behind in America while have adapted and grown through their experiences, sometimes in unexpected ways. The cultivation of their lifestyle is a
constantly evolving process. This theme consists of the following subcategories: sharing a vision; making trade-offs; and personal goals and gains.

**Sharing a vision**

The findings show that the majority of my participants shared the goal of wanting to live overseas with their spouses - regardless of which spouse would direct the movement of the family from country to country - and of doing whatever it takes to maintain that lifestyle. As seen in previous subcategories my participants expressed numerous benefits from expatriate life that were appealing to them, which I will display here. The primary codes used here are shared goals, desire to live overseas, and benefits from lifestyle.

Several of my participants said that they and their spouses both had the goal of living the expatriate lifestyle from the beginning of their relationships. Roger said that lifestyle was not just a goal, but an expectation:

*We've pretty much spent our whole relationship overseas. We, we've never lived together, except for like nine months in DC, in the States. Yeah. So our whole relationship was based on us living overseas.*

When thinking about how his life might be different had he not expatriated, Mitch elaborated further:

*This was such a specific goal for [my wife] and I. It's tricky to say how we would be different. Because like, I know that for other families, that for a lot of families, like, it's an opportunity that comes up for one spouse, and then you know, it snowballs into this other thing. Or one spouse really wants it and the other spouse kind of, like, acquiesces dot dot dot. But for us, like from day one, it was it was like one of our number one priorities as people.*
For others, like Frank, the goal of living overseas was not shared, but something he decided to do because he fell in love. He was one of the few participants who mentioned not being able to co-create the expatriate experience with his wife before they moved abroad, as his wife was already in her expatriate career when they met while she was back in Washington D.C. for training:

“She met me mid-career, so she met me, I think we met about 10 or 11 years ago. And she told me she was [a diplomat], but I really didn't know what that meant. Next thing I knew, like, I got an offer to go do something and she got an offer to move overseas. And we, that's when we had our hard conversation of what's, what's important. I went ahead and finished off my project and then joined her overseas. And that's where life really changed.

For Cory, who met his wife before they moved overseas together, the expatriate life might not have been a goal for him even though he was an open-minded person. Now that he has been abroad, however, he longs for his life when he is away from it:

“I guess I was, you know, perhaps maybe more open to new experiences and things. You know, it's also just sort of living overseas is nice. When you don't have to sometimes deal with the drama of stuff happening in America, you can just kind of tune it out, in a way.

You know, the 10 months in DC, it was sort of like, Okay, that's, I'm done here. You know, for any number of reasons, but it's like – It's time to get out of here.

For some participants the desire to live abroad might have started with their wife’s career goal, which the male spouse has come to appreciate as a shared goal. Over half of my participants reported being happy to make supporting their wife’s career first. Martin says this is an expression of their shared value system.:
I feel happy for my wife. Like, I feel like she has worked like really hard to get where she is. And her happiness is my happiness. I, it might sound a little cheesy to say, but it actually means a lot to me. And we both – we met through Teach for America, I used to be a high school teacher in [the West South Central United States]. So we met in the same program and we have quite similar ideals and that has helped.

As mentioned in previous themes, other couples have the expectation for both of them to work in each new country. In fact, several of my participants expatriated for a work assignment for one member of a couple but experienced a shift in roles when the other received a work assignment that moved them to their next country. In that case, the expatriate who was leading the family in transitions abroad became the expatriate who trails. This switch happened in order to allow for both spouses to have the experience of leading the family, and to pursue career goals that can more easily be achieved by a spouse with the freedom to choose where to move next.

Mark elaborated on the process he and his wife agreed upon, and how it helps ease his anxiety about future moves:

It's always our choice to kind of wait for a country to become available, for one to apply for, and we have a little bit more choice in that sense. So what that means is that our choice of postings I get – and this is going to be the case for the next posting – is going to be a little bit you know, I'll have a little bit have more control and say over it. And we're choosing them so that there's a little bit more of an overlap between, between my professional interests and hers. ... But after that, in theory, it would really be my job prospects that kind of, then are sort of the main determinant of where we would go after that. So that helps to kind of keep it a little bit more in perspective.
Several participants stated that both they and their wives share a value of each having meaningful work. Terry said his wife views his work in making [religious] films to be important, which reinforces the couple's shared value system and guides them to countries where they can both do what the work they want:

[My wife] and I share many of the same values, and we value the same kinds of things, the same lifestyle, so we're gonna always end up going into places that we both are, you know, like, or have some interest in.

Two participants brought up the concept of third culture kids, and how they as parents wanted to raise children with an international mindset. As their kids have grown up overseas, Daniel describes how he and his wife are no longer the ones who get to choose where to go – it’s a family affair:

I married an internationalist. And I have three third culture kids who can't wait to get on an airplane and travel internationally and live internationally and whatever. ... It’s been their choice more than, well, it’s been a collective.

Several participants mentioned the comfort of raising children overseas because of the benefits of the lifestyle: affordable household help; one parent maybe not having to work or being more present; and reduced stress with life in general. Mark, talking about the recent choice he and his wife made to adopt a child:

I mean, I do think that, that our lives would be very, very different if we hadn’t lived overseas. And honestly, I think for the, for the worst, for the most part. I don’t know that we would have chosen to, to adopt. I think that it would have been a lot more difficult. And we would have been confronted with real questions about whether, whether we were, you know, the best place for, for the best sort of family for a child to, to grow up. And just
because we were living in DC, and I mean, just running and, and – you know, lots and lots of people around us were having children, and it's not like it's impossible, but it's really just, you know, you're forced to confront, you know, sort of the, the questions about how much time you're going to be able to devote emotionally and sort of emotional energy to, to a child.

For Mark and his wife, their shared vision now encompasses a new family member. In his response Mark noted the trade-offs that are inherent in any adult relationship, based on whatever life circumstances are salient. For the next subcategory I will show data on the trade-offs that spouses make to maintain the lifestyle they envisioned.

**Making trade-offs**

The data shows that my participants had personal visions for their lives before they moved abroad, and since they have been overseas have learned (or have been learning) how to let go of those preconceptions. This subcategory focuses on what my participants have left behind, knowing that they might have made different decisions and experienced different outcomes if they had stayed back in America. The primary code in this subcategory is *making trade-offs for lifestyle*.

At least professionally, Roger does not believe he has made any significant trade-offs as he moves abroad while his wife pursues her career, but rather is helping her realize their shared goal of getting that job overseas. This data shows how the line between sacrificing something important and focusing on a goal can be somewhat blurry:

*We've made sacrifices for work. But it wasn't me for her career. It was both of us for, in pursuit of the career that we wanted, which she now has. So it just so happened that she got through first. But we both volunteered for ten years and worked in developing*
countries doing, doing grassroots work. And we both kind of worked with the, with the knowledge that the sacrifices would, you know, one day yield us this job. So, I mean, looking back now, we were making those sacrifices of giving up a salary and not and, you know, living in developing countries and doing all that. So she has the job, absolutely was worth it.

The “job” is top priority for some expatriate spouses and allows them to make trade-offs in other areas of their lives. A common thread among all participants was how pursuing a career abroad – which is tied to a transient expat culture that is somewhat static in nature but still changes from country to country – has a significant impact on developing and maintaining personal relationships. Because his wife’s work requires him to regularly move to new countries, Frank has learned he does not have the time to develop relationships with the type of people who inspire him to work toward personal projects:

Just going back over into the personal side, I mean, there's a lot of other personal projects [I want to do]. I miss being in a hugely creative audience or being surrounded with hugely creative people. And that's just not possible when you move every two years. Like you get to know people, they start trusting you, and then they go, and then you go away, and it's like, Oh, you're back at ground zero. So it, there's a, there's a lot of challenges involved in that.

Mitch expanded upon that concept while focusing on the concept of distance, and how his ambivalence towards relationship goals with friends and family is personally affecting him:

I think that goals as far as friendship, it's complicated. Um, moving around every two years, is a different kind of friendship that I'm, that I'm used to. It's had – and I would say that, that's tricky, because it's not necessarily something that I think of is like, having
good friendships is like an explicit goal that I have. Or like, having a really close relationship with my parents is an explicit goal that I have. But that I feel distant from my parents and my, and my siblings. And a lot of times I take that out on me, I think, Oh, I should be more, I should reach out more. But then I think how this lifestyle has impacted it, and I can't deny that.

As Frank also mentioned, one of the trade-offs of this transient lifestyle is accepting its uncertain nature. Daniel has been looking for more stability in his retirement years, and knows that until his wife is ready to finish out her career in America, he has and will continue to struggle with that uncertainty overseas:

I like more certainty than we have right now. I don't deal with uncertainty all that well. And again, I'm, I'm a reluctant traveler, I think, you know, I'm, I'm not going to be completely comfortable. And this is overstating it, way overstating it, because I'm totally comfortable here. But I'm not going to be completely comfortable till we move back to the states and found a retirement place and are settled in for the, for the duration.

Terry, on the other hand, is completely comfortable living and working overseas, as he had for years before he met his partner. One large change for him has been the transition from being single and able to work on his films however he wanted, to having to consider his partnership as he navigates his career:

A lot of it's about just about just learning how to live with a partner. Right? Like a lot of it's just sort of – When I lived in [Eastern Asia] by myself, I could go to the monastery and hang out for a month and, you know, nobody cares. You know, I could go up there and stay as long as I wanted. But then once, you know, then I had to, I had to learn how to sort of be in a partnership. Right? So yeah, there were times where like, I wanted to
stay at that monastery for a couple more weeks. But, but I need to get back because I, you know, because um, because I'm part of a family now. And so there's, there's been that kind of thing.

Bart, who has worked to stay in his career field overseas since receiving his PhD, continues to receive opportunities to grow his professional skills. Because of his wife’s trajectory to new countries, however, he has let some opportunities go:

When we left [Eastern Africa], I had to leave, I had to turn down a potential Research Fellow position for the International Food Policy Research Institute. So that was, that was difficult because that I was finding that line of work to be quite rewarding and interesting. And that would have been somewhere like kind of a natural growth trajectory for my academic background and interests. When we left [Western Asia], I was able to transition but when, for [Southern Asia], I had to leave a pretty interesting and dynamic work situation as well, because of the – they just couldn't extend my contract anymore. So yeah, there have been a couple places where I've had to turn down work that was rewarding at the time.

Several participants who wanted to progress their careers have said they have given up that idea altogether as an expatriate spouse and consider that to be an acceptable trade-off.

Martin still is reconciling how he froze his expectations for a career he started in America:

Going back to my professional side of things, like, I think that I have given up already like, promotions and like advancing in the education field, something that I was really aiming at. And I think that I had to give that up. And that's one thing that I kind of think about a few times when I don't have anything to do. And no, I think I mean, I'm okay with it. But do I think about it? Yes.
The data has shown me that a male spouse goes into the expatriation lifestyle with certain goals and needs, and those things change through the course of their unique experience. While this subcategory explored might have been left behind, the next subcategory focuses on what has been gained.

**Personal goals and gains**

In another previous subcategory, *Traits that help or hinder adjustment*, I described data on certain characterological traits that help an expatriate spouse adjust and then adapt. In this final subcategory I want to present data on what my participants have gained from the expatriation experience. Some of those gains are new traits that have developed through the adjustment process to the lifestyle, and others are goals that have adapted as my participants have learned and grown in their role. The codes I used to represent those ideas are *gains* and *adapting personal goals*, respectively.

A majority of my participants spoke about the mental shift they have experience while overseas that has allowed them to feel more psychologically flexible. Cory described how his mindset on coping and acceptance has changed for the better because of this lifestyle:

*It's maybe just being able to, accept things, perhaps, as they come, knowing that, you know, there's not much you're going to be able to do about it. You know, you're not going to move to a new country and be like, Oh, I don't like how they do that, and I'm going to fit doesn't work that way. Right? It's so it's just accept it move on, or, you know, you're gonna drive yourself crazy for, you know, three years, five years, whatever it is. Yeah, yeah, I think it's, yeah, frequently, it's just kind of accepting what things are, and picking the battles, maybe that you might be able to influence or change, as opposed to something you know, you're not going to be able to do.*
Terry echoed what Cory said, and added how his [religious] practice gave him a foundation to consistently evolve with the cultures he encounters:

*Between my [religious] practice, and my just having to just expand my horizons over and over again, because every day you're, you're having to do like, Oh, okay, that's how they're gonna do that, like, that's how that gets done. That's how that is. In this culture in this place, you can't, you know - you're constantly letting go, letting go, and letting go of all your, your boundaries. So I feel like it's just been like an evolution and a growth.*

Because these expatriates have families, the families must learn to evolve as well. Troy, on how he and his wife have passed down a flexible, adventurous spirit to their kids:

*I think to date, our kids have been really flexible and adaptable. That's been an impressive kind of to see how they've adapted from place to place. And this will be the first time I think, where they really will remember the country that they've been in. So that could be more of a challenge for them as we leave here. I mean, I think we're a tight family unit. And so that's been really helpful and supportive. And we've tried to instill kind of a sense of adventure in the kids. And so their, their willingness to do that has been really helpful.*

Naturally, seeing their expatriate wives lead the family adventure while striving for and thriving in their careers overseas has an added impact on their husbands, according to Martin:

*I will say that I have learned to become a better man because of my wife's work ethic and, and how she basically functions. I think, if it were up to me, I would be more, I guess, lazier or I don't know, like, messier. It is just that she always inspires me with her work, like how she accomplishes things. And that helps me to be driven to do the things I*
do. So if anything, all I can say is that her work ethic has been like, a way to teach me to become better.

Mark also has been inspired to be driven professionally, but he now has experienced a silver lining in having a flexible mindset in a marriage – a growing family:

*It has been difficult professionally, making it work in, you know, in here. But that said, you know, we had, we adopted our daughter, so that's, you know, sort of been a big sort of, you know, a good reason to stay take a step back from, you know, from being career focused.*

Frank also has had to come to grips with the limitations for his career in this lifestyle, which has opened him up to considering goals that are closer to his heart:

*Options are limited. I lived in a country where a male spouse can only be a bricklayer or a teacher in a male school. And none of that aligns with what I want to do professionally. I think at the, at the end of all of this, I won’t have that professional career that I set out for, when I originally like, got into the professional, into a professional arena. But I think it’s also, like I said earlier, the adaptability has come in where I’m starting to create new, newer goals and goals that are truer to I guess, this version of me.*

In previous data you saw that two of my participants, Troy and Bart, were already enrolled in doctoral programs when they began their experiences as spouses of expatriates. Bart talked about how adapting his career abroad has given him skills and experiences he never knew he could attain:

*I've definitely developed like, development, economics, credentials and bonafides that, it would have been hard to have developed, to have developed had we stayed in the U.S. And what, I mean, I guess I probably have done more diverse things with my degree than*
I probably would have done had we stayed in the U.S., we probably I probably would have gone on a very, like directed research track. But having lived overseas, I've done a lot more actual, like real development work compared to just research work. So which has been both rewarding, but that's one thing that I probably, you know, obviously, you can't do real - well you can in some parts, but normally, you can't do like actual hands on development work if based, if you're based in the U.S..

Latching on to the word diverse, Mitch depicted how his exposure to racial diversity has given him a window into the lives of minority populations in America. He alluded to the concept of privilege, which is a word that three other participants used to describe their lives as American expatriates, which seems to be a perspective they have gained in their years abroad:

I am more comfortable in diverse situations. So like, there were, I remember before I started living overseas being like, Oh, I don't belong here. And I feel less that way now like, if I'm in any just about any situation, I'm like, Well, they'll tell me what they want from me, if they like. But the other side of that is that I feel like a, like a perpetual outsider, like, like, I don't feel like and I don't think I thought about that much before I moved overseas. Like I, I don't feel like I'm the norm. I used to notice that in terms of kind of the, the negative attention. Like it, it helped me empathize with minority populations a while ago, being like, Oh, this is what it feels like to be stared at. This is what it feels like to be like, mistrusted in a in a situation. More, more as we get older, I notice how my, like, my rich whiteness is like a key that opens every door everywhere.

Being willing to accept the challenge of becoming an expatriate spouse is a hurdle to be overcome. Daniel, who is already retired and potentially just months away from moving back the America and closing this chapter of his life, said his experience as the spouse of an expat was an
unexpected highlight of his life. He suggests that every man should get the opportunity to live his experience:

The only thing I wanted to say was how fortunate I feel I am, having had the opportunity to be a following spouse a couple of different times. ... When we [first moved abroad], I mean, that was just, it was challenging. I was a rookie. But I quickly came up the learning curve, I think [my wife] came up the learning curve very quickly. And it expanded my view of myself and my capabilities and was a whole new dimension to me as a male by being, being the following spouse. ... I think every male should have to be a following spouse at some point, let me put it that way.
Chapter 5: Discussion

This qualitative study was intended to explore the needs of a group of men with a unique perspective on masculinity and show how a range of gender roles was expressed. I found a gap in the literature with limited understanding on the perspectives of men who not only are married to female breadwinners, but who choose to uproot their lives and move around the world in pursuit of the professional dreams of their spouses. I interviewed a subset of American men who simultaneously looked at gender roles, cultural integration, life goals, and ways of living in a drastically different manner than the majority of their male counterparts in the United States. My findings showed that these men cherish the connection with their wives and children and would literally go to the ends of the Earth to give them an international experience. The findings also show that these men may suffer silently, sometimes in traditionally masculine ways. They may turn a blind eye to their own needs in order to realize meaningful outcomes for themselves and their families.

In this final chapter, I will discuss how my findings matched up with the theoretical framework outlined in the first two chapters, but more importantly what I found to be compelling and surprising from my data. I will elaborate on key findings and summaries that I believe make this study important. I will detail how I feel my methodology worked to help or to hinder the desired result of my study. I will touch upon limitations in this study that hopefully will lead to future studies in this area, ideally with a stronger theoretical base, tighter methods, more profound findings, and a larger sample size. Finally, I will address how this study can be relevant to the social work profession.

Addressing my Theoretical Framework
I based my theoretical framework for this study on a number of constructs: on culture, coping, and masculinity. My research questions and my interview guide were my attempt to encapsulate these broader themes that my research and theory suggested would dominate a man’s perceptions as he moves from country to country for his wife’s employment. The phenomenological approach would provide enough room to capture the breadth and nuance of that man’s experience. I then used a gender-focused lens, which I felt was appropriate considering my theoretical base, as I processed each participant interview.

Regarding the roles my participants have assumed, I proposed theories of traditional masculinity – gender role strain and gender role conflict – that might influence how a man struggles with the idea of not being the breadwinner in his family, in assuming roles and tasks that are often seen as tradition ally female, and in not being in charge of moving their families to new geographies in order to work and live. I did observe an adult who often shares control of his situation, at least from the standpoint of assuming sole responsibility for the direction of the family. I did not, however, find that my participants were conflicted about their roles. I ultimately found that the majority of my participants had embraced their roles. I believe there are several reasons for this.

I feel that my participant group largely consisted of men who chose with their partners to be expatriate spouses and had spent considerable time thinking about it before they agreed to expatriate. In that way, they processed the pros and cons of the situation, and what they ended up experiencing in their lives abroad was not overly surprising to them. I believe I did not encounter men who were openly conflicted about their roles because men with this mindset may refuse to follow their wives for their work. In this way my group was self-selected to fit a particular masculine and personality profile that showed up in responses across my data set.
I found that the majority of these ten men had made conscious decisions about their desire to expatriate long before they actually left America. Some had alluded to making these decisions prior to meeting their current wives, and a majority of them – all except for one – had acted on their desires by living abroad for at least six months before they were married. Two of my participants grew up outside of America, and at least one other male spouse had a parent born outside of America. Considering these factors, I found that the choice to live internationally was not only an unthreatening concept for these men but was a goal for many of them. This further clarified the findings of Groeneveld’s 2008 survey of dual career couples in the Dutch foreign service, which indicated that a spouse who had previously lived overseas was a predictor that a couple would accept an international assignment. A majority of these men then found wives who shared their goal of moving overseas. The stated benefits of living overseas were numerous: financial gain; relative ease of lifestyle compared to home; and avoidance of less desirable parts of American culture. For some of those couples, the goal was to find any way to live abroad that was financially feasible for their family, meaning that either one of them could find a job that would provide the finances and benefits for them to live comfortably overseas. Either spouse could have that stabilizing job – and for some of my participants, the spouses alternated in that role from country to country. If that overall goal of living abroad was realized, any personal sacrifices my participants made were tolerated in order to continue in that style of living indefinitely.

Just because most of these men were living abroad like they envisioned does not mean they were without conflict. As seen in my first theme, I found it challenging to compare how my participants felt about being perceived as an expatriate spouse; they chose to focus on different aspects of their experience. This is where my findings became more nuanced. I found that how
my participants perceived their sense of self was contextual, and dependent on the specifics of their current role; the cultural environment of their host country; any challenging factors they or their family were dealing with at the time; and any prior experiences in their role that were deemed to be negative.

In my second chapter I detailed the typical help-seeking and coping behaviors of American men. I then found evidence of these theories in my data. While my participants were largely supportive of their wives and families and made whatever sacrifices necessary to maintain their lifestyles overseas, some of them did seem to struggle quietly, minimizing their personal needs for the needs of their families. This data echoed the findings of Davoine et al. (2013) in a survey of diplomatic culture that juxtaposed the outgoing social performances of male spouses to contrast with a more subverted role within the family. I also found evidence that mirrored what Ridge et al. (2011) discovered for how male spouses cope with stressful situations, where men struggle to find words to describe their emotions before releasing them all at once in outbursts. I found similarities with findings presented by Tung (2004) and Cole (2012), who postulated that male spouses cope with stress by spending time with their spouses and families, with the family systems evolving to become a key support mechanism for those fathers. I also asked my participants if they had utilized problem-focused vs. emotion-focused approaches toward challenges they have encountered, which were identified by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) as a framework for intercultural adjustment. (The authors posited that the use of problem-focused coping strategies was positively correlated with increased cultural adjustment). I did not find this to produce profound data, as most participants either reported using a mix of both strategies or used one strategy but would consider using the other. Regarding individualized methods for coping with stress, my data (seen in Table 2 of chapter four) reflected some coping
mechanisms previously highlighted by Tung and Cole, namely engaging in exercise or athletic activities.

Regarding support, all of my participants reported that their spouses were their greatest source of support and their only constant when moving from country to country. I found that most of my participants either minimized the need for other social interaction or expressed difficulty in maintaining social networks for support, which paralleled previous data on male spouses (Anderson, 2001; Cole, 2012; Harvey & Wiese, 1998). When my participants did seek out social interaction, they found kinship among those in strikingly similar situations: other male expat spouses. I will touch more on support and coping in the forthcoming sections, as well as my chosen constructs relating to masculinity and culture.

Constructing A Modern Masculinity

I did not observe that my participants were experiencing some kind of latent crisis of masculinity. Instead, I found an accelerated version of Harvey and Wiese coined in 1998 as the “modern man” who comfortably tackles any role in the home while remaining indifferent to cultural rules and historical benchmarks. I found men who disregarded the traditional male-driven model of expatriation in favor of a new egalitarian family structure led by the female spouse. This agreed-upon arrangement within their marriages frees up my participants to take on and excel in roles that may be conventionally feminine.

Through my interviews I found men who lacked awareness of their situations. Several of my participants said they were unaware that men were in the statistical minority of expatriate spouses. However, my participants seemed eager to respond to my questions about their experiences to the best of their ability, often in a roundabout way. Over half of my participants said at least once in their interviews that they had never before entertained the questions I was
asking them. This could be a traditional sign of masculinity, what Brody (1999) and Levant (2011) described as men being avoidant of emotional expression in order to maintain a sense of control and to avoid feelings of weakness. As several of my participants expressed, however, it is more likely that these men have fully processed and understand their situations and have become comfortable in their expressions of masculinity. These men have constructed their own brand of masculinity that proudly promotes their wives as breadwinners.

My participants still exerted influence on their spouses and their personal outcomes. They did so by subverting their egos in the face of masculine norms. They allowed their identities to be fluid depending on the needs of their family and life situations, as Gee (2000) postulated. In doing so they allowed themselves to experience the lifestyles they wanted without experiencing the psychological distress that have typically been experienced by men with rigid parameters for masculine roles and identities. They have learned that by making sacrifices, including by playing secondary roles in their outward representations in professional and social contexts and by minimizing their needs in family contexts, they can satisfy their desires and achieve their goals (Davoine et al., 2013). They may be acting in discord with masculine norms from their home country culture, and possibly in discord with their host country culture and the culture of the organization their spouse works in. This scenario epitomizes their strength. To consciously behave in this fashion in order to co-create a life with their partners and families could be seen as the ultimate expression of masculinity: one that is not rooted in the traditional expression of power and abject confidence, but in the desire to fulfill personal needs and shared desires.

The participants of this study had created a hybrid masculinity based on the myriad of cultures they had personally experienced. Eight of my participants had lived abroad for at least six years in their adult lives, and the other two participants grew up outside of the United States.
That means all ten of my participants have spent significant time in cultures outside of America, with different cultural norms for masculine behavior. That separation from the American brand of masculinity has allowed them to craft a cross-cultural vision of what it means to be a man.

**Uprooting from Culture**

This study was intended to focus on participants who are living in and adjusting to cultures that are more traditional than those in their home countries. I hypothesized that host country culture, including traditional gender roles, would have a strong effect on how male spouses have been adjusting to their host country environment, including intensified feelings of gender role strain or conflict. I thought that host country culture, and isolation from home country culture, could encourage a male spouse to adopt coping mechanisms that are ego-dystonic and atypical to that individual.

For these men, however, I found that cultural adjustment is life. It permeates everything that they do: it is rooted in the multi-layered cultural waters they navigate; it is evident in how they process interpersonal interactions; and it reflects the silent pressures they feel from their environments. Considering Bronfenbrenner’s ecological systems theory (Vélez-Agosto et al., 2017), I saw how my participants worked to be flexible in their interactions with all layers of the societies they entered. In considering the multi-level cultural structure that I proposed for this study – home, host, and organizational – I perceived moments where my participants were responding to my questions about their lives through the lens of one of these cultural levels. I found this fascinating to consider how deft my population was at navigating the omnipresent cultures in their lives without ever noticeably perceiving those cultures. As I said previously, these men have become cultural experts.
My data showed that a majority of my participants were wanting to intellectualize their experiences, almost as if they were viewing their lives from an anthropological distance. My theory suggests this is a conventionally male behavior when processing emotions, but it could be more. Because these men were deracinated, uprooted from their home country cultures and dropped into another, they entered some sort of liminal space that allowed them the intellectual breathing room to process their surroundings. Naturally the interview process gave them an opportunity to expound on their thoughts on culture without connecting to their emotions, even though I continually attempted to go back to how they would “feel” about their experiences.

Regarding those emotional connections, I observed several unexpected instances where my participants expressed a disconnection that could have affected their degree of adjustment from their current or prior host countries. The first disconnection was some frustration with a perceived lack of support that my participants felt from their spouse’s organization. Half of my participants expressed frustration with a lack of support their spouse’s organizations provided while moving their families between countries or home for unexpected family emergencies. While several of the same participants mentioned emotional support mechanisms their spouse’s organization offered to them during their times abroad, not one of my participants admitted to taking advantage of those services at any point. McNulty (2012) ultimately found that professional, social, and practical support, regardless of whether or not that was actually provided, were deemed to be the most important factors for spousal adjustment. Therefore, it should be noted that just because my participants did not take advantage of those services during times of distress does not mean those services were not useful or adequate, but perhaps something stopped my participants from utilizing those services. Another participant expressed frustration with how he was treated as an employee in his spouse’s organization; again, this
participant did not mention he reached out for support from the organization itself. These examples of disconnection from their spouse’s organizational support mechanisms could be something to explore further in future studies on male spouses.

The second disconnection – while also a positive supporting factor – was the connective element of the family. Expatriate spouses ranked a strong family life with less stress as one of the top issues in a successful adjustment (McNulty, 2012). However, several of my participants mentioned how their strong connection to their family members made them less interested in connecting with local culture. A third but related disconnection was what one of my participants, Bart, referred to as an “expat bubble” that he and his family were living in. Fechter (2007) found that some expatriate spouses not only create boundaries between themselves and the host country population but are not particularly open to different cultures and only feel comfortable when in their own expatriate ‘bubble’” (p. 167). Two participants also mentioned how spending significant time in the company of other expatriate families dissuaded them from engaging more with their host countries. I feel the need to juxtapose this idea with the concept of third culture kids, which was introduced by Useem in the 1950s to describe children who spend much of their developmental years outside their parents’ cultures and “develop an identity that’s rooted in people rather than places” (Mayberry, 2016). Two of my participants said they were proud to have raised third country children in their international experiences who can move easily between cultures, with home being “everywhere and nowhere” (Mayberry, 2016). I wonder though if these children are instead born into a rootless international expatriate culture, one that Fechter (2007) found contains individuals who “try hard to channel “fluidity” rather than immersing themselves in” local culture (p. 81). While I know this is not a fair connection to make in the case of my participants, I know some of them have felt the downside of this fluidity.
Understanding Work and Purpose

Even though in conceptualizing this study I efforted to remove the concept of “work” from my line of questioning, it was omnipresent throughout my data set. I chose to allow my participants to bring up employment if it was important to them. I found that my participants were keen on countering feelings of rootlessness and disconnection with their host country cultures by finding purpose and meaning through action. Often this action was either through temporary employment or maintenance of a career that could tolerate their transitions to new countries. With 9 of my 10 participants in their mid-30s to late 40s, the desire to work to help financially support a family is an understandable goal. However, the majority of my participants did not express the need to work for financial gain. This could largely be attributed to the safety these men feel, particularly economically, in their lives overseas. My findings showed that these men felt comfortable in how the core needs of their families were being met, including housing, medical care, schooling for their children, and security. With those key items taken care of, what my participants seemed to long for was a sense of meaning and purpose. Logically for some of them that meaning is attained through gainful employment. Based on the data my participants felt employment achieved various goals, and often more than one goal at once: getting out of the house; earning money; engaging in work that is personally meaningful; staying busy; and feeling that what you do gives you confidence.

Regarding work, there seemed to be two sets of spouses – roughly half and half – in my data. The first set clings harder to work as an identifier, and as such wants to find work that is meaningful. These men might even consider trading off with their partners in a future post to lead the family in pursuit of a career and/or to become the primary breadwinner. For these men meaningful work was a value, and the pursuit of that meaning seemed to affect their personal
psychology. For the most part I found this group to be more focused on their own work and life outside their identity as an expat spouse. They did not measure themselves against the achievements and accomplishments other male expats as clearly as those in the other group, but yet they seemed more sensitive to the fact that the country they were in would provide them an opportunity to find their purpose. This group did not seem to know or to focus on the fact that most expat spouses are female, which was a sign to me that they were minimally concerned with how they were perceived and instead were focused on who they were and how they could progress as productive individuals.

The second group mainly consisted of those who were either working as stay-at-home fathers or working in jobs outside of their careers (Table 1). These men seemed more flexible to find work if it suited them or their family, regardless of what the nature of that work was, or they would stay home and manage the household. Career status, at least in the immediate term, seemed to be less of a concern. That said, those who worked random jobs may have expressed a more negative perspective about certain responsibilities they were expected to fulfill within their families and seemed to be more sensitive to their identities as men in traditionally female roles.

Regardless of which group these men were in, they shared a similar need: the majority of my participants expressed a desire either for steadier employment or a more focused career. One of the only participants who did not express this desire was already retired. For those men who desired more from their career, they found a source of support: their spouses, who shared that value of pursuing meaningful work wherever in the world it could be found.

In my final theme I explored personal goals for my participants and goals they shared with their spouses. I found it quite compelling that the majority of my participants and their partners co-created visions for a life abroad before embarking on those journeys, and that they
continued to do whatever it takes to maintain that co-created vision to this day. My most compelling finding in this regard was from Roger, who continually respond to questions about his personal perspectives and goals by starting with the word “We” instead of “I”. This solidified in my mind how lifestyle can be an end goal, with one partner’s employment as the backbone that facilitates the dream.

**Reflecting on My Interview Process**

The interview process was the meat of this dissertation, as can clearly be seen by the sheer length of chapter four. My interview guide was part of me. The findings emanated from my participants but was filtered through my experience as a male trailing spouse. I did not originally intend it this way, but my findings came out of questions I would have wanted someone to ask me about the choices I made in my life and the visions I had for my future. I would have wanted someone to ask me these questions because I know I would have struggled to answer them succinctly, or clearly, and through answering them I would have become aware of this part of myself that was not clear to me. As a researcher I used my perspective to channel my findings and to identify the nuances. As someone who shares a lifestyle with my participants, this was also a potential source of bias that I needed to regularly account for. This was the etic versus the emic in my experience. Considering my close association with the subject matter, I wanted to give some space for my reflections on what the interview process meant to my study.

I understand the structure and characteristics of my interview guide impacted the responses I received, specifically what questions I asked; what terms I used within those questions; and what order I asked the questions in. I recognize the fatigue factor in participating in a long-form interview, and that participants may find it difficult to craft lucid answers to questions toward the end of a long interview as they could at the beginning. This was especially
true when interviews skewed toward the longer side, such as for Terry's interview. I also recognize that I interviewed participants at different points in their days; different days in their weeks; and altogether different times in their lives. One participant, Mitch, was caring for his child during the interview process. While I cannot account for these scenarios in my data, I recognize that life factors can and possibly did contribute to how participants offered and framed their responses. Also, I often utilized a disarming style in some of my interviews that might have colored some of the responses I received. I sometimes did not read my questions verbatim or used different wordings in different situations. For example, I avoided using the pejorative term trailing spouse, preferring to let the participant bring up this widely used term. However, half of my participants used the term follow to describe their behavior as a male expatriate spouse, and none of those participants expressed any negative (or positive) feelings with that term. To me this signaled that the word follow – which coincidentally was a word used by Anderson (2001) in the title of her article on male expatriate spouses, among the first literature on the subject – was more of an empowered action verb for my participants. It was as if the term demonstrated a choice the participant and his spouse made together to allow their spouses’ careers lead them to new countries. Therefore, if a participant had a strong reaction to the term trailing spouse in a previous response, I might ask a follow-on question that instead refers to them as a "man who follows". I cannot account for the effect of my subtle usage of language and how each participant chose to respond to me.

Many men, by nature, remain guarded. This can be said to be rooted in cultural and possibly biological factors. I believe the male ego response is couched in gender, in masculine norms rooted in social experiences and culture. This factor makes it difficult for me to say with certainty that the men in my study – even those who said they were trying to answer my
questions as openly and honestly as possible – were always willing to be open and vulnerable in their responses. Even a man/person who is totally honest is subject to blind spots, simply through exploring parts of themselves that they haven't explored before. Perhaps their egos might serve to sugar-coat their situations to make them appear to me to be in the upmost control of their life situations. I suspect this could mirror their realities as male expatriate spouses: some men put up their guards and only reach out for support when they become aware that these defenses are not enough to keep their anxieties at bay. Others put up their guard and use their work and their children and their busyness to shield themselves from any uncomfortable feelings related to their lives. These approaches are not necessarily positive or negative; they are protective factors, as methods that have worked for them in the past. As a researcher who was looking to account for these factors, I asked similar types of questions using different types of language in hopes of working around the edges and reaching an ultimate honesty. This ultimate honesty may not be apparent in a single answer to a question; some participants may have answered some of my questions, or parts of my questions, with full honesty, and others with less. I was able to present moments that I believe were honest in my findings, but without reviewing a full transcript of each interview – and furthermore, without knowing each man wholly and understanding the totality of his situation – you the reader can only surmise what is the full, honest perspective of each man, filled with hopes, doubts, strengths, weaknesses, and everything in between.

I intended to use a strengths-based lens in my line of questioning. From an alternate viewpoint, this entire study on its surface could be judged for not respecting a strengths-based approach, in that individuals – here, male spouses – are reduced to their status as those who I seem to purport in my theory and literature are in a lesser position: they are not breadwinners, not leaders in their families that are co-creating decisions in their families to move abroad for a
life. This alternate perspective, however, does not respect the dignity and worth of a male spouse who was creating a new modern sense of masculinity, and has chosen to influence their personal family situation through a new kind of leadership: one that is comfortable with a personal identity in which they are not in the position of power in all aspects of their lives.

Hesitations (um, yeah) as well as pauses were common within the data, across the range of questions among all respondents. Each of the ten participants, at one point in the interview, said he had never thought of or had not been asked at least one question in the interview guide before. To clarify, I did not provide the interviewees with my interview guide before conducting the interview. I provided the participants with the consent form, which stated I would be asking personal questions about their experiences as spouses of expats. The participants were hearing the questions as I was asking them and answering, I assume, as quickly as they were able. Because questions seemed novel to these men, I didn't focus intensely on dramatic pauses as some sort of psychodynamic block, an ego protective maneuver. As the researcher I believe I am using my best judgment when I assume each participant was independently searching for honest and meaningful answers, and not carefully crafting words to present the most evasive response that deflects from what they are truly thinking and feeling. Perhaps in later studies these pauses and hesitations in such answers from male spouses can be analyzed with greater scrutiny. If a participant answered a question very quickly and affirmatively, I have to wonder if they had a rote response for this type of question, and/or are shutting down the question in order to prevent themselves having to process an uncomfortable response.

I feel like many of the answers that participants gave me are rooted in self-worth and self-concept, and that by opening the door to such questions, perhaps they will ruminate on what these questions mean. A majority of my participants mentioned not having thought of these/my
questions before, and while some of my participants were struggling to come up with answers to my questions, all of my participants felt sufficiently talkative. Several of my participants, including Martin and Terry, directly stated that they were happy to talk to someone (me) who understood their perspective. Almost half of my participants also mentioned wanting a copy of my dissertation upon its completion, and in being interested in reading the findings I have collected.

Limitations of My Study

With an N of ten, this study was based on a small sample. This fact should not denigrate the validity of the responses of the men who participated. However, any future studies of this nature would ideally feature a larger sample in order to expand upon the depth and breadth of what was found here.

I collected data from each participant in a single interview, a moment in time, instead of over the course of multiple interviews. Collecting data over a period of time could mitigate what might have been a good or a bad hour or day for the participant during a single interview. My participants are basing their responses on perceptions and even identities that are dynamic. The same concept applies to adjustment and coping. These are concepts that are best studied over the course of time, mapped to specific data that comprises the totality of their situations: the length of time they have been living overseas; the peculiarities of each country they live in; present and past issues with their marriages and relationships; and more.

Following a participant through his experience over time could also give me a more accurate idea on how a man’s personal identity was affected by circumstances and context. As a researcher I was not able to control for how a man’s personal goals were aligning with his current situation and how he currently identified himself. For example, a man who wants to be a full-
time dad and is currently a full-time dad at time of his interview will likely give positive responses regarding his present and perhaps future, but also might be challenged by the fact that his child’s school has been closed intermittently due to COVID-19 restrictions. Likewise, a man who wants to be employed in his field but who is either underemployed or not working in his desired field might have a negative regard for his personal situation, but otherwise enjoy the cultural experience of and appreciate his family’s situation in his host country. It was problematic for me to account for these individual life factors and to consider them in accordance with the tone and content of the responses that I received.

While I did not predict to know the demographics of male spouses to be sampled, male spouses of all ages and races had equal access to participate in the study. As mentioned in Chapter Three, the diplomatic community is estimated to be over 80% white (Kralev, 2016). Interestingly, 8 of the 10 participants, or 80%, of my final sample identified as white.

As this study was intended to focus on the views of males, I attempted to create a Venn diagram in my mind of how women and men might uniquely perceive their role as an expatriate spouse, and to sideline data that would mirror the struggle of female spouses. While I felt I captured and highlighted the male perspective, a reader would undoubtedly detect some overlap in my data with the female experience. I hope the male perspective was evident through the sheer amount of data that I presented, and through the thematic framework I used to present that data.

The foreign service culture also seemed to have an impact at least some of the participants this study. Regardless of the status of females as the expatriate and primary breadwinner, the foreign service culture, which exists and operates independently from the cultures of the countries they work in, may either encourage more traditional norms in terms of gender role or may attract individuals who espouse more traditional gender roles than other
multinational companies (Davoine et al., 2013). The impact of culture should therefore be considered in the results of this study, for better or worse. The call for advancing a new research agenda in diplomacy, particularly through the lens of existing gender research (Aggestam & Towns, 2019), should justify the need to move past such limitations in future studies.

Several of the men in this study agreed to participate because we had social connections from prior overseas posts. There are benefits and drawbacks for me as a researcher who has social relationships with some of the men in this study. Those men could have been more willing to open up to me as a researcher and answer my questions honestly. Conversely, some of these men could have been more hesitant to answer me open and honestly for fear of judgment from someone they have an ongoing relationship with. Either of these scenarios could be true, or not true, or exist somewhere in the middle.

This study and my interview guide focused on masculine identity and role in the context of culture. Some researchers may consider this to be a broad subject of inquiry, particularly after reviewing the findings. A deeper look at the interview guide reveals many layers that could be peeled back and explored individually. My chosen process for data analysis could have either helped to mitigate or to further exacerbate the broad nature of my study. Braun and Clarke (2006) admit that thematic analysis can be limited because “it makes developing specific guidelines for higher-phase analysis difficult and can be potentially paralyzing to the researcher trying to decide what aspects of their data to focus on” (p. 97). I coded blocks of data that contained complex thoughts rather than coding shorter phrases. This can be an advantage in that displaying a surplus of data could allow a reader to pick up on more nuance in participant responses, but a disadvantage in that the data could have been coded and themed in a more granular fashion for deeper analysis. Regardless, as one of the first studies of its kind, this look at
the perspective of male spouses of expatriates from a social work lens should provide plenty of fodder for future research and lines of inquiry.

The data collection for this study was carried out in the summer of 2021, over a year after COVID-19 changed the landscape of the world. Travel and movement restrictions imposed by governing bodies forced us to physically distance ourselves from one another, and to find new methods for social connection and for collective support (Camargo-Borges & McNamee, 2020). The impact of these dynamics was present throughout my data. Some of my participants and their spouses stayed home more than usual, while others experienced work environments with heightened stress levels. Some marriages flourished while others floundered and were marred by divorce and abuse. This study could be carried out with exactly the same parameters in a different time period and see different results due to the all-encompassing nature of the virus on the perspectives of us all.

**Thoughts for Future Studies**

Considering the limitations previously stated, a researcher in this field could develop a narrower study from specific areas from my theoretical conceptualization or from certain questions and prompts within my interview guide. For example, a male trailing spouse may be foregrounding different identities or elements of their identity rather than their professional career, and thus may experience in difficulties in adjustment due to feeling ostracized by his spouse’s organization and/or by the local population (Harvey & Weise, 1998). Therefore, identity could be expanded as a line of inquiry beyond its narrower definition within gender role strain, as identity construction is a topic that has been researched in expatriation. In terms of what could be added to a study like this one, I started a line of questioning in my first two interviews on values, by asking “What values would you say are important to you at this time in
your life?” – but I discarded this and two related follow-up questions because I did not feel I fully understood what I was asking.

A future study could move deeper into the concept of psychological adjustment. I originally conceptualized this study with a quantitative piece that would measure adjustment using Shaffer's and Harrison's spousal adjustment tool (2001) and compare that to responses in my qualitative data, but it seemed too cumbersome for this already broad study. When considering how my participants expressed their abilities to adjust and their preferred coping strategies, I thought it would be interesting to map coping to the ability to adjust; the speed of adjustment; the degree of host country community integration; the desire to utilize other support mechanisms; and the desire to reach out for help. I also wondered more specifically how adjustment to a country is affected by particular disruptions in life such as personal or family health issues, or from becoming parents through natural birth or adoption.

I might have dived deeper into the concept of masculinity. I asked my participants to provide words and phrases to describe themselves as men. I felt that asking my participants to do this might help them connect to what either helped or hindered them in their roles. While future research could be conducted on a more direct correlation between masculinity and roles, my findings gave me an inkling as to what such research could look for. When probing my participants about masculine ideals learned in their childhoods, I could have gone further into parental/familial influence on traditional masculine thoughts and behaviors. I could have looked this concept with a sample of males with divorced parents, or who grew up in single mother households. I could have looked at the impact of race on masculinity, such as on how non-white American men construct masculinity in their home culture, and how they are uniquely treated in
their host countries based on their skin color (for example, an African American being told that he is not from America, but is from Africa).

I could have gone deeper into cultural specificities. I could have explored the juxtaposition of an American culture rooted in rugged individualism versus non-Western communal cultures. I could also have focused on how expatriates who periodically travel home to the United States to reconnect with culture experience a culture shock in their home country cultures (my participants Roger and Cory alluded to this feeling). The demographic characteristics of male spouses could also affect this relationship to culture. I could have focused on men born outside America who became legal Americans and then expatriated as Americans, and their experiences of third-country adjustment in new host country cultures. I also could have explored the expression of sexuality in new cultures, such as how LGBT expats are more accepted in certain host countries than others.

One larger category I believe is worthy of additional study is how the age of a participant might play a role in how he tells his life story. From a conceptually subjective feminist standpoint, Erik Erikson's development stage theories are still useful for situating identity within a socio-cultural and historical framework (Sorell & Montgomery, 2001). For example, a male spouse in the generativity vs. stagnation stage (ages 40-65), who is examining his overall contribution to their world, may respond differently to the experience of expatriation than a spouse in the intimacy vs. isolation stage (19-40), who might be focused on fostering a loving relationship with his spouse. The male-specific developmental theory of Daniel Levinson (Levinson, 1978) could be combined with Erikson’s theory to offer more specificity to the male spouse experience. For example, what impact with the expatriation experience have on a 30-year-old male spouse who does not yet see the significance of life structure of their future foreign
life vs. the structure they created for themselves in their 20s? On the other side of the spectrum, my only retired participant implored me to explore the transition from working age to retirement age, which he said adds a completely different perspective to male identity and role.

**Implications for Social Work**

This study uncovered a range of perspectives felt by men who are undergoing a transformation in identity. That transformation is nuanced and unique for each participant. It is reflective of reverberations from his upbringing and his prior concepts of masculinity; his interaction with a modern, relaxed culture that encourages fluidity of gender norms; his overall time spent abroad; the host country cultures he interacts with; the Ameri-centric organizational culture that he works and lives in that fluidly exists in host country he lives in; and general circumstances of life during the passage of time. The composite of this complex reality helps to shape a new masculinity, a new internal culture for this man: a new way of being in the world and in sitting with oneself. There is a need to understand this new expression of masculinity in order to support an individual who espouses such a perspective. There is a greater need then to understand how this man reaches out for help, whether for a support system or individual or mental health professional.

How is this study framed within social work? These men, largely, expressed the need to reach out for support. Some had acted on these impulses, others had not. In social work we are trying to reach more men. To do so we need to understand how men want to be supported and how they reach out for support. We also want to know how they process stress, and what coping mechanisms they utilize and what positive mechanisms we can reinforce. We want to learn how to model appropriate behavior that considers the full range of masculine identity, from a feminist perspective on one side to a patriarchal perspective on the other, and everything in the middle
and potentially beyond. If a man is guarded in providing his personal perspectives, particularly when opening up about himself, why is that? We need to help him understand what may be influencing him to keep his guard up. This includes helping him to understand the influence of culture on their help-seeking behavior.

Mental health professionals need to recognize the strengths a man has attained and built as the spouse of an expat: the ability to be flexible, adaptable, and resilient. We can couch these abilities within a modern understanding of what it means to expatriate and what it means for the families of expatriates. These men contend with schema for role and identity that was socially constructed in their youth, based on masculine norms and ideals in their home culture. This schema is filtered through a cross-cultural context. I believe male expatriate spouses can be an important resource in helping social workers to understand cultural adjustment overseas.
References


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Appendix A

Consent Form

For this study this form was digitally transmitted to the participant. As the researcher I began each interview session by asking the participant if he fully understood the consent form and had any hesitations about participating in the interview. I did not require this form to be completed and returned to me; it was for the participant’s records only.

[school letterhead]

YOU MUST BE 18 YEARS OF AGE OR OVER TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS SURVEY
By checking this box, I am agreeing that I am over 18 years of age. (See additional participation requirements below.)

☐ I am over 18 years of age and meet the participation requirements outlined below.

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this study. It should take no more than two hours in total. All responses will remain anonymous. Your participation in this survey study is entirely voluntary. You may choose not to participate or exit this study at any time.

This study is being utilized to help better understand factors of cultural adjustment for male spouses of expatriates. Under the supervision of Ram Cnaan, principal investigator, this survey is being conducted by Justin Grotelueschen for his dissertation as part of graduation requirements for the Doctorate in Clinical Social Work program at the University of Pennsylvania. If you still have questions or concern about your rights as a participant in this study, you may contact the Office of Regulatory Affairs at the University of Pennsylvania by calling (215) 898-2614.

Participation requirements to enter this study:

- Male
- Adult (18 and older)
- Legally married in country of origin to an expatriate who is either female or male
- Spouse of expatriate who is working full-time in another country, and who is on that expatriate’s travel orders or otherwise supported and funded to travel with an expatriate on a foreign assignment
- Consider current country as semi-permanent home, e.g. intends to live with expatriate spouse at post for a minimum of eight (8) months out of the year
- Willing to agree to an informed consent form for participation in the study
- Able to access an Internet-connected device (computer, laptop, phone) that would allow access the Zoom format for video interviews

You may not participate in this study if:
• You and your spouse are in a dual-career situation (e.g. you both work in the same organization and your job relocation was considered equally when determining your foreign assignment)

**Terms of Informed Consent and Study Requirements:**

**Purpose/Procedure:** You are being asked voluntarily to participate in this study because you are the male spouse of an expatriate currently posted overseas, and this study is interested in adjustment factors of expatriate male spouses. The purpose of the study is to learn more about the extent to which certain factors explain how male spouses adjust to new placements. This study is being conducted for a dissertation in social work. Participation in this study requires participant to answer demographic questions (approximately 5 minutes) and to respond to a series of questions during a single video interview with investigator over Zoom (approximately 60-90 minutes). This study is being conducted through the University of Pennsylvania.

**Risks:** There are no known risks involved. However, should you find the questions upsetting for any reason, you may discontinue the study at any time. You also consent to this Zoom call to be recorded. The recording of this call will not be made available to the public and will be digitally stored on a hard drive that is not connected to the Internet.

**Benefits:** Other than the subject payments (see below), your participation could help us understand the phenomenon of male spouses of expatriate workers, which may benefit you indirectly. In the future, this may help professionals, including social workers, to better assist male spouses of expatriates to adjust to life overseas.

**Confidentiality:** Every effort will be made to keep information obtained during this study confidential. We will keep any records that we produce private to the extent we are required to do so by law. Your data will be anonymized while electronically stored. Any data collected during partial interviews (e.g. a participant chooses to exit the study mid-interview) will be immediately deleted. Your data will only be used for research purposes in this dissertation and will be destroyed following defense of my dissertation. Data collected during the study will not be stored or distributed for future research studies.

However, we cannot guarantee total privacy. Records can be opened by court order or produced in response to a subpoena or a request for production of documents. If information from this study is published or presented at scientific meetings, your name and other personal information will not be used.

**Voluntary Participation and Withdrawal:** You must be 18 years of age or over to participate in this study. Participation in this study is voluntary; refusal to participate will involve no penalty. Each participant is free to withdraw consent and discontinue participation in the survey at any time.

**Subject Payments:** One $20 Amazon gift card will be provided to each interview participant who provides data for all relevant questions in Zoom interview with investigator.
Contact Persons: If you have questions, concerns or complaints regarding your participation in this research study or if you have any questions about your rights as a research subject, you should speak with the Student Investigator, Justin Grotelueschen at jugrote@upenn.edu. If a member of the research team cannot be reached or you want to talk to someone other than those working on the study, you may contact the Office of Regulatory Affairs with any question, concerns or complaints at the University of Pennsylvania by calling (215) 898-2614.

By checking this box, I verify that I am 18 years of age or over and am agreeing to the terms of the informed consent and study requirements.

☐ I verify that I am 18 years of age or over and am agreeing to the terms of the informed consent and study requirements.
Appendix B

Interview Guide and Script

The following script was the final version utilized during the data collection process. While the introduction, note of appreciation, and conclusion were paraphrased and not read verbatim, the questions in the interview guide were intended to be static from participant to participant to ensure accuracy in collecting qualitative data. Throughout the data collection process, however, the wording of several of the questions here were altered slightly for increased clarity. Some questions were asked verbatim and others were either expounded upon or truncated. After the first two interviews, several questions were discarded and several were added with the goal of collecting data that better addressed the research question. The total number of questions asked in each interview was either exactly or just below 30. The following interview guide was the guide used during the tenth and final interview, though it does mirror the guide that was used for the final eight interviews overall, again with slight alterations in wording along the way for the purposes of clarity.

Introduction. “This qualitative study will explore identity and role in male spouses of expatriate workers who are currently working overseas. This is a semi-formal interview format, which means you are allowed to ask questions of me at any time during or after the interview. The interview may take up to 90 minutes but could go longer if both the participant and researcher are willing.

You and your information will remain confidential and anonymous. If you would like to know how your interview responses will be stored and shared, please ask me. What you provide in this interview will be compiled into a research study and dissertation; if you would like see the findings of this study or the finished dissertation, I would be happy to provide either of those to you upon completion.

You are free to end this interview at any point before I have exhausted all of my interview questions – if something makes you uncomfortable or you for whatever – will delete if I you don’t complete interview. If you need to take a break, let me know and I will pause the recording. If we for some reason get disconnected, we will attempt to re-establish connection and complete the interview as soon as possible.

This interview will be recorded and transcribed, and both the recording and transcription will be destroyed following the completion of my dissertation. You acknowledge that you agreed through a consent form to voluntarily participate in this interview. We hope you will fully participate in this interview and upon completion will receive an Amazon gift card.”

Interview Guide. “Before I start this interview, I would like to ask some basic demographic and descriptive questions about yourself. This data will be used in comparative data analysis section and in the discussion section of my dissertation. You can choose to not answer any of these items. If you will, please tell me your:

• Age
- Racial identity
- number of children
  a. number of children currently living with you
- time spent in current location / country, in months and years
- total number of years living abroad (as a family)
- countries lived in as the spouse of an expat
- what’s your home state / where did you grow up?
- work status:
  a. full time, half time, volunteering, retired, parent at home, other
  b. if working: are you working in or out of your chosen field?

Thank you. We will not proceed to the qualitative interview. I am going to ask you about 30 open-end questions. This is a semi-formal interview format, which means you are allowed to ask questions of me at any time during or after the interview. Lastly, if at any point during the interview you need to take a break, let me know and I will pause the recording.”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Content Questions</th>
<th>Prompts</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Feelings about living internationally:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>How do you feel being an American living abroad?</td>
<td>As a person, what differences do you notice in yourself since you have been living abroad?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Feelings about being an expatriate spouse:</strong></td>
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<td>How do you feel about moving to new countries so that your spouse can pursue her/his/their career?</td>
<td>How does it feel, how does it strike you, to be a man who travels abroad with your spouse as she pursues her career?</td>
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<td></td>
<td>The majority of breadwinners in the expat community are male and the majority of their spouses are female. Male spouses like us are in the minority. How much time do you spend thinking about this fact, and is this bothersome to you?</td>
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<td><strong>Goals:</strong></td>
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<td>Do you feel your lifestyle as a man who has travelled with your wife overseas has kept you from fulfilling some of your goals, professional and personal, and if so how?</td>
<td>What if any sacrifices have you made for your spouse to pursue his/her/their career abroad?</td>
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<td><strong>Role:</strong></td>
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<td>How would you describe your role currently in your household? For example, what sort of projects and tasks are important to you, and/or</td>
<td>The passage of time notwithstanding – since you have been living overseas vs. when you were living permanently in the States, have you experienced any changes to your role in your household? If so, how?</td>
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<td><strong>you gravitate towards, and enjoy, in your household?</strong></td>
<td>Since you have been living overseas, how do you feel your spouse has perceived your role within your family?</td>
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<td>Do you feel that the consequences of COVID 19 has changed your role within your relationship/family in the past year?</td>
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<td>How do you feel it might be different for your wife if your roles were switched, and she had to cope with your life situation if she was in your shoes (moving from country to country for your job)? How would you feel about her and what she should want and feel and need?</td>
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| **Traits:** | What are some personal traits that make you successful in your current role as a spouse who accompanies his partner abroad for work? |
| What would you say are some personal traits that make you successful in your current role? |
| What strengths do you think you have gained through your experience in this role? |

| **Gender identity, self-description:** | Have those descriptive words changed since you have been living overseas with your family/wife, and if so how? |
| What are some words that would you use to describe yourself as a man? |

| **Role comparison re: home and host culture** | When overseas, when in the company of other American men, regardless of if they are in your situation or are the direct hire, the primary breadwinner, do you find that you compare yourself to them: such as your accomplishments, your work status, salary, how busy you are? |
| How much do you feel you have in common with other men like you: American men and husbands who accompany their spouses abroad for work? |
| Slightly different question: do you ever think about or compare your role as a man in your own household to the role of men in the country you now live in or have lived in? If so, how? Or, can you give me an example where this was apparent to you? |

<p>| <strong>Masculinity and culture:</strong> | In contrast, how has the culture in [the country you live in now] and the previous... |</p>
<table>
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<tr>
<th>How do you think you have been personally influenced by cultural ideas from America about manhood and what it means to be a man? This can be situated in your personal upbringing, in your family, as well as general culture?</th>
<th>countries you have lived in – affected you or given you a different perspective on what you think it means to be a man? How about your spouse’s work culture – how has her/his/their organizational culture has had an effect on what you think it means to be a man?</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Identity:</strong></td>
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<td>Has your identity in terms of your masculinity been challenged during your time overseas? For example, have you felt challenged in your own self-concept of what it is to be a man? If you have been challenged, how so?</td>
<td>How have your coping mechanisms changed since you have been living overseas vs. when you lived in America, if they have? Since you have been living abroad, what makes you feel vulnerable or overwhelmed? Like situations or triggers?</td>
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<td><strong>Coping with stress – and coping strategies:</strong></td>
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<td>Throughout your life, what techniques have you typically used to cope with stressful life experiences? They can be either positive or negative coping strategies.</td>
<td>To manage stress in your life, do you think you take a problem-focused approach or emotion-focused approach? A problem-focused approach to managing stress means we actively try to do things to address the problem. Emotion-focused coping, in contrast, consists of efforts to change or reduce the negative emotions associated with stress.</td>
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<td><strong>Support:</strong></td>
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<td>How do you feel your spouse and family have supported you emotionally – specifically you – while you have lived overseas?</td>
<td>When you have felt overwhelmed, who else outside your overseas family – person, persons, organization, etc. – who have you turned to in order to help you alleviate that stress and give you emotional support?</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Miracle question:</strong></td>
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<td>Thinking about your role as a spouse who travels abroad for your spouse’s career, how do you think your identity as a man and perception of manhood might be different if you and your family never lived</td>
<td>Along the same lines, in terms of gender, how do you think your identity as a man and perception of manhood might be different if you and your family never lived</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
you think your life might be different if you and your family never lived overseas? Particularly in terms of your role and identity within your family?

outside of America? If there is a difference, is it due to the lifestyle, difference with local culture, etc.?

**In conclusion:**

Is there anything you would like to add about your experience living abroad, particularly as a man who travels abroad with your spouse and family for her work?

Anything you felt I should have asked? Or that you expected me to ask?

Anything you thought was strange, or off, or didn’t land well with you?

**Conclusion of interview.** “Thank you for taking part in this research study. The answers you have given me along with your identifying information will only be available to me and will be stored on a local computer without Internet access. Your responses will be associated with a pseudonym for your name and will be available to my dissertation chair and committee, and some or all of this data may be published in my final dissertation. Your data will be combined with others who are participating in this same study. My final dissertation will be made available to you upon its completion. Your data will be destroyed following defense of my dissertation, and it will not be used or distributed for future research studies. As promised, I will send you an Amazon gift card within the next few days.”
Appendix C

Cover Letter

I sent the following text in a targeted email to participants who I thought might be interested in my study:

“Hello [name], I am a doctoral candidate at the University of Pennsylvania, and for my dissertation I am studying how male spouses of diplomats are adjusting to foreign service life. I am looking for male spouses to participate via an online video interview with me. I am contacting you because I believe you fit the criteria to participate in this study. Please email me to learn more, I will partially compensate each participant for their time with an Amazon gift card. Thanks!”