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Women and international assignments: A systematic literature review exploring textual data by correspondence analysis

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Women and international assignments

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A systematic literature review exploring textual data by correspondence analysis

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Abstract

Purpose – Research on female expatriates has been substantially growing over the last decades and particularly in more recent years. Complementing previous thematic analyses of the literature, the purpose of this paper is to apply textual statistics and correspondence analysis to reveal the existing semantic structure of the field of research on female expatriates.

Design/methodology/approach – Using correspondence analysis, the authors explored textual data from the abstracts of 151 identified journal articles published in English since 1975. The authors obtained a graphical representation showing the various developmental stages of research on female expatriates.

Findings – The authors found that research follows a home-host country orientation and advances from an organizational focus toward individual-level studies. The authors identified various directions for future research and especially a strong need for more multilevel approaches to study men's and women's expatriate experiences and trajectories in various contexts.

Research limitations/implications – Only articles with abstracts entered the analysis, which in turn was dependent on the content and quality of these abstracts. This limitation has been addressed by thoroughly reading each article considered.

Originality/value – This review adopts an original method in research on (female) expatriates and more broadly management research. It enabled the authors to map out the development of key research themes over time. Based on this analysis, gaps in current research could be identified and clear directions for future research were formulated.

Keywords Literature review, International assignments, Gender, Women, Correspondence analysis, Female expatriates

Paper type Literature review

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Introduction

With the intensification of global competition, expatriate management has turned into a critical factor for the success of multinational companies (Harvey and Moeller, 2009). Among other essential functions fulfilled by expatriate management (Dowling *et al.*, 2008), the creation and development of a pool of global managers represent a strong competitive advantage in increasingly globalized markets and are a key human resource priority in many multinational organizations (Dickmann and Harris, 2005; Cartus Corporation, 2012). Whereas international assignments may not necessarily enhance assignees' careers (Stahl *et al.*, 2002; Brewster and Suutari, 2005), they may be crucial to reach higher management positions within many multinational organizations (Altman and Baruch, 2013; Cao *et al.*, 2012; Vance, 2005; Magnusson and Boggs, 2006).

In the light of demographic shifts, the demand for expatriates is growing and even accelerating in multinational companies (Cartus Corporation, 2012), which face increasing difficulties in finding suitable employees willing to relocate (Baruch *et al.*, 2013; Collings *et al.*, 2007). It is thus crucial for multinational companies to consider all available talents beyond their traditional male candidate pools (Cole and McNulty, 2011; Selmer and Leung, 2003a), especially since female talent pools have been shown to provide various potentials other than those of their male counterparts (Tung, 2004; Guthrie *et al.*, 2003). Some past studies for instance emphasized that female expatriates might adopt a more relational leadership style that is particularly well-suited for doing business and managing in an international context (Jelinek and Adler, 1988; Van der Boon, 2003). However, although the numbers of female expatriates significantly increased over time – from 3 percent of the worldwide expatriate population in the 1980s (Adler, 1984a), to 10-14 percent at the end of the 1990s (Mathur-Helm, 2002; Windham/NFTC, 1997), and reaching 16-20 percent in recent years (Brookfield, 2012) – they remain strongly underrepresented today in comparison to men. Women thus represent a valuable and relatively untapped source of human capital for multinational companies (Tharenou, 2010; Insch *et al.*, 2008). Yet these companies still often fail to consider and understand women's particular experiences and trajectories and to design the unique attraction and support measures these non-traditional expatriates require (Cole and McNulty, 2011; Linehan, 2002a; Selmer and Leung, 2003d; Cole, 2012).

We adopt a broad definition of an expatriate in order not to restrict our analysis to traditional corporate-assigned expatriates, but to integrate other developments and alternative forms of expatriation. Thus, our definition of expatriates includes employees who are sent abroad by their company, usually for a limited duration (e.g. Bonache and Noethen, 2014; Cerdin and Brewster, 2014), as well as individuals who initiate and undertake their international work experiences themselves, with little or no organizational support, for a limited or undefined duration (Andresen *et al.*, 2012; Al Ariss, 2010; Cao *et al.*, 2012; Suutari and Brewster, 2000).

Expatriate research has long relied almost exclusively on male expatriate samples (Linehan and Walsh, 1999a; Kollinger, 2005). In earlier research, the role of women in the expatriation context was limited, at best, to that of "trailing spouse" (McNulty, 2012; Altman and Shortland, 2001). While the very first studies on female expatriates were published in the 1970s (i.e. Taylor *et al.*, 1975; Thal and Cateora, 1979), research on women international assignees noticeably emerged as a significant field of study in the 1980s; the challenge for women who reached managerial positions – and thus passed the "glass ceiling" – was to cope with the "glass border", a new barrier restricting women's access to international careers (Mandelker, 1994; Linehan and Walsh, 1999c). Since then, research on female expatriates has grown, and our knowledge about

women's experiences in the different stages of the expatriation cycle has increased considerably over time (e.g. Taylor *et al.*, 2002; Hutchings *et al.*, 2012a).

Following on from the globalization and feminization of managerial positions (Collings, 2014; Billing, 2013), this paper addresses a key aspect of interest to organizational theory and practice: women's entry to, and experiences on, international assignments. Our study aims at complementing and extending previous noteworthy thematic analyses on the topic (e.g. Kollinger and Linehan, 2008; Altman and Shortland, 2008; Shortland and Altman, 2011; Menzies, 2012), which adopt, among others, King's (2004) template analysis method. No studies have yet explored quantitatively how research on this topic has evolved over time. We analyze 151 scientific journal abstracts published between 1975 and 2012 in the expatriate literature by applying correspondence analysis (Lebart *et al.*, 2010) and present a visualization of the semantic structure of the scientific production in this field. This approach allows us to display the semantic structure without prior interpretative analysis, providing maybe the most generic evidence of the structuring of the field. We also obtain the location of research on female expatriates' experiences in various contexts, thus expanding upon noteworthy literature reviews focusing on the corporate setting (see Shortland and Altman, 2011).

We contribute with our quantitative literature review to expatriate research by identifying key tendencies, such as the emergence and development of research on female expatriates over time along different stages of employee expatriation, a gradual shift toward host environment issues, a recent development of critical perspectives drawing on more micro-level research; and the inclusion of cross-disciplinary perspectives on societal change (e.g. labor migration and older women workers). Important gaps in the existing literature are identified and directions for future research are suggested.

In the following sections, we describe our method and present the results. We then offer our interpretation and finally outline potential future research directions.

Method

We examine how identified themes in research on female expatriates are systematically interrelated with different stages of development of the research field. We do this by using correspondence analysis (Greenacre, 1984; Benzécri, 1992) – a multivariate technique employed in the field of sociology (Bourdieu, 1979) and used for the exploration of textual data by Lebart *et al.* (1994, 2010). In contrast to the principal component analysis that is used for data representing continuous measurements, correspondence analysis accepts nominal-, ordinal-, and interval-level data. This makes correspondence analysis particularly suitable for textual analysis and, in particular, for the analysis of short texts of high content density. We thus depart from qualitative thematic analysis methods adopted in more classical literature reviews (which typically require scholars to draw on a limited number of illustrative examples and list, code and group inherent themes) and instead rely almost exclusively on a quantitative procedure. This analysis accounts for the simultaneous contribution of content (i.e. themes) and time to structure the research field. Hence, rather than matching themes to time as they emerge (as in, e.g. thematic analysis), “time” in our analysis plays an active role. Moreover, instead of requiring the creation of rather rigid boundaries (e.g. in tables), the visualization or topography that results from the analysis enables showing each element of interest positioned with respect to all the others and offers a nuanced understanding of the structure of this research field.

The data covers abstracts of articles focusing on women’s participation in international assignments published in English. More precisely, several categories of articles are included: first, studies with samples composed of women only (i.e. potential expatriates such as employees, expatriates[1], repatriates) and no men (e.g. Taylor and Napier, 1996a, b; Mäkelä *et al.*, 2011b; Tzeng, 2006); second, studies including men and women (potential expatriates such as employees or students, expatriates, repatriates) in their samples, typically discussing differences between men and women (e.g. Selmer and Leung, 2003a; Myers and Pringle, 2005; Connerley *et al.*, 2008), or examining gender as a moderator or interaction variable (e.g. Selmer and Laurant, 2011; Bozionelos, 2009). Our data thus include empirical studies examining both “within group” differences (samples of women only) and “between group” differences (samples of men and women)[2]. In addition, some contributions include exclusively other actors in their samples (e.g. HR managers, company representatives, host-country nationals), but focus on issues related to women’s participation in international assignments (e.g. stereotypical assumptions, support practices offered to male and female expatriates) and thus have been included in our data (e.g. Kollinger, 2005; Varma *et al.*, 2006; Domsch and Lichtenberger, 1992). Finally, some theoretical and conceptual articles focusing on issues related to women on international assignments have been included (e.g. Caligiuri and Lazarova, 2002; Harris, 2004; Tharenou, 2010). Overall, consistent with previous literature reviews (e.g. Shortland and Altman, 2011), we included studies that focused on the particular situation of women on international assignments, which thus had a clear contribution for research on female expatriates[3].

Articles from both academic, specialized, and practitioner journals were considered. We initially performed an intensive keyword search and extracted articles from the following databases: Google Scholar, Business Source Complete, EconLit, Emerald Fulltext, Wiley Online Library, Ingentaconnect, International Bibliography of the Social Sciences (IBSS), Francis (INIST-CNRS), Sage Journals Online, ScienceDirect, and JSTOR. Main search keys had been agreed upon by both authors, in consultation with experts in the expatriate field. The list of keywords applied in our article search is shown in Table I[4].

In order to reach the maximum coverage of relevant contributions, the search and extraction of articles went far beyond the mere keyword search. For example, each article was carefully read, and the references of each article screened to identify other potentially relevant papers to consider. Overall, this comprehensive search (up to October 2012) resulted in a list of 158 relevant articles, out of which approximately 60 percent were identified by keyword search and 40 percent by screening of references. Since our correspondence analysis explores textual data from the article

Table I.
Overview of
keywords applied in
article search

| Terms 1 | Terms 2 | Terms 3 |
|----------------------------|---|--|
| Women; female; sex; gender | – | Expatriate; international assignment; international mobility; relocation; international manager; global assignment; expatriate management; international career; flexpatriate assignment; commuter assignment; frequent flyers |
| Women; female; sex; gender | Self-initiated; self-directed; short-term | Expatriate; international assignment; international mobility |
| Male; gender | Spouse; partner | Expatriate; international assignment |
| Dual career | – | Expatriates; expatriate couples; international couples; international |

abstracts which gave us a larger diversity of salient terms compared to analyses of article titles only (see next paragraph), a few papers had to be eliminated because they did not include abstracts[5]. This led to a set of 151 articles[6] published in 63 journals in the research disciplines of management, business, human resources, organizational behavior, cross-cultural management, career, gender, and migration (see Table AI in the Appendix).

The data from the 151 article abstracts was then entered into our textual analysis, performed with the SPAD software (Morineau and Aluja-Banet, 1998), which generated a comprehensive vocabulary and repeated segments of words, on the basis of which the subsequent correspondence analysis was performed. Moreover, each article was coded by year categories (see Table II below). Indeed, this variable was chosen as the main criteria to plot against the original content from the abstracts because it appeared to be the most useful in identifying emerging trends and directions for further research (in contrast to some more “descriptive” variables such as journals).

The first year category (1975-1994) represents the earlier years and reflects a rather slow initial development of the field until the mid-90s (22 articles over 20 years). Given the increase of articles published since that period, five-year period categories appeared to be the best adapted to examine the evolution of the field, providing enough data per category to perform valid analyses and offering enough flexibility to capture the various developments over time. The last category, with the three remaining years (2010-2012), enables the identification of the most recent research trends. In the next section, we present, interpret and discuss the results of the correspondence analysis.

Results, interpretation and discussion

We explore key research themes and how these are associated with the different periods of time. The salient themes constitute the active row variables; the five different year categories presented in Table II above form the columns of a contingency table. This contingency table was input to our correspondence analysis. We opted for running the analysis with words rather than with word segments in order to capture the largest possible vocabulary. In total, 315 salient themes (i.e. words) entered our analysis. More specifically, our analysis examines the number of times each year category (column) coincides with particular themes (which corresponds to the value 1 for the nominal variable). It should be emphasized here that correspondence analysis, like similar methods such as principal component analysis and multidimensional scaling, neither generates nor requires any notion of causality between variables, instead allowing us to represent the extent to which different year categories “correspond” to different salient themes and the frequency of appearance of these themes in scientific abstracts. To allow for interpretation of the results, Figure 1 offers a graphical representation of the first two axes and the location of year

| Year category | <i>N</i> (articles) |
|---------------|---------------------|
| 1975-1994 | 22 |
| 1995-1999 | 25 |
| 2000-2004 | 49 |
| 2005-2009 | 31 |
| 2010-2012 | 24 |
| | <i>151</i> |

Table II.
Overview of year categories

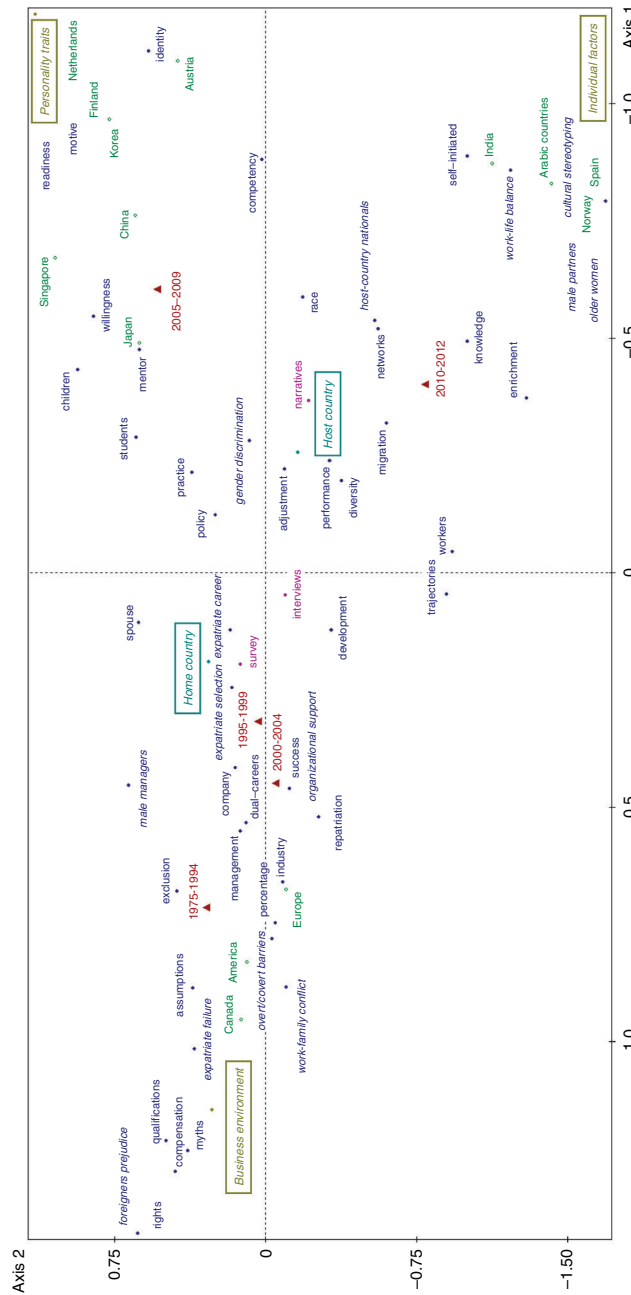
categories and selected research themes (words) in this two-dimensional space. Moreover, to help with the interpretation, selected word segments have been added as supplementary variables; these do not actively construct the axes but aid interpretation (see the boxed elements in Figure 1).

The literature on women on international assignments is closely linked with that of international management development, women in organizations, and career research (see Figure 1). Key issues in international development include expatriate selection, organizational support, and performance (e.g. Harris, 2002; Adler, 1994; Linehan and Scullion, 2001c). Literature regarding women in international management has focused on prejudice, gender discrimination, exclusion, diversity, and policy (including the work-family nexus; e.g. Smith and Still, 1996; Harris, 1993; Shortland, 2009). In career research, dual careers, career success, and career development have been key themes (Selmer and Leung, 2002; Traavik and Richardsen, 2010; Van den Bergh and Du Plessis, 2012) (see also Shortland and Altman, 2008).

The overall structure of the graphical representation suggests an interpretation of the field along two main dimensions (i.e. axes in Figure 1). We find that the development of research on female expatriates is well expressed on the first axis on a continuum from a more macro level to a micro perspective. This is exemplified first by a focus on business environment, industries, and companies – as expressed by salient terms such as “company” – when expatriate research started in the 1970s (the left end of our axis)[7]; and second by a strong focus on the individual level in recent years, with salient terms such as “identity” (at the right end of our continuum/axis). The second dimension spreads between home-country issues (on the upper end of the continuum), such as the “willingness” to undertake an international assignment, and host-country issues (at the lower-end), such as “adjustment” to the new environment. We describe and discuss these key developments of research on female expatriates over time below.

(I) 1975-1994: the early years: a focus on the business environment in the home country

In the early years of research on female expatriates, studies focused on certain home countries and industries where the expatriate program started, often based on the interest of the government and the economy (e.g. Taylor *et al.*, 1975; Taylor *et al.*, 1981). Authors predominantly addressed the issue of women’s numerical representation as expatriates (“percentage”) (e.g. Adler, 1984a; Thal and Cateora, 1979; Harris and Harris, 1988), consistent with Kollinger and Linehan’s (2008) observations. During that time, the existing literature focused on the business environment, especially in the home country, which has been previously identified as one of the major causes of women’s low representation in international assignments. Indeed, research comprehensively examined overt and covert barriers predominantly coming from the home-country business environments. Negative attitudes and a lack of experience of placing women in higher managerial positions were considered to be the key reasons for women’s exclusion from international assignments (e.g. Kirk and Maddox, 1988; Domsch and Lichtenberger, 1992; Dawson *et al.*, 1987). Adler (1984b, c, 1987) identified three common “myths” related to women’s participation in international assignments (1987, p. 176): first, that women do not want international careers; second, that companies are hesitant to send women overseas; and third, that foreigners’ prejudices against women would render them ineffective in the host country. Importantly, Adler could only find evidence to support the second myth in terms of biased assumptions of home country male managers and decision-makers about women’s abilities to succeed on



Notes: The boxed elements correspond to isolated terms representing the main dimensions of both axes. Year categories appear in red. Terms relating to key research themes appear in blue; terms relating to home and host locations appear in green; and terms relating to methods appear in purple

Figure 1. Two-dimensional display generated by correspondence analysis of year categories (active column variables) and themes (active row variables)

assignments (e.g. “expatriate failure”). Issues related to foreigners’ prejudice toward women, spouses, and dual careers were typically perceived by corporate headquarters to be insurmountable for women abroad and were often mentioned as main reasons not to offer them an international assignment (e.g. Jelinek and Adler, 1988; Harris, 1993; Berthoin Antal and Izraeli, 1993). The transformation of the economy from a manufacturing to a service economy further increased the proportion and hence the visibility of women at all levels of the organization (Windham/NFTC, 1997). Nevertheless, the wage gap remained, and as our findings show, motivated a vital discourse regarding the compensation gap between men and women in international management positions (Egan and Bendick, 1994). On the other hand, some encouraging factors are identified, such as the rise in the proportion of women with relevant qualifications for international management positions (e.g. business education, managerial level) in the labor market (e.g. Adler, 1994; Izraeli and Zeira, 1993), as well as increasing legal protection for women (and more broadly minorities also) in the workplace both in the domestic and international context (e.g. the Civil Rights Act of 1991 in the US, which aimed at extending equal employment opportunity protection to US expatriates working for US companies abroad, see Feltes *et al.*, 1993).

(II) 1995-2004: a decade of growth and transition

The period from 1995 to 2004 can be considered a decade of growth and transition in the literature on women and international assignments. It is characterized by a major expansion of organizational-level studies and, in some cases, more individual-level studies in the home and especially in the host country. This gradual shift is illustrated by the horizontal rightward shift of this year category in Figure 1 which contributes to validating previous literature reviews for this specific time period (e.g. Shortland and Altman, 2008).

(a) Organizational-level studies in the home country. The mid-1990s showed the first major consequences of the ongoing globalization for companies and international businesses. Cross-cultural competencies and the experiences gained from an international assignment became a key challenge in career development, requiring men and women to undertake expatriation (Gregersen *et al.*, 1998). It explains why (the term) careers is so closely associated to this time period in our graph.

Women’s participation in international assignments was often blocked by companies’ discriminatory policies and practices. Selection procedures were typically designed to support male international careers (e.g. Harris, 1995; Smith and Still, 1996; Ruhe and Allen, 1997; Linehan, 2002a; Paik and Vance, 2002). It is thus not surprising that a growing number of scientific papers address the issue of expatriate selection during this period. Authors highlighted an often informal and even “irrational” selection process for international assignments (Brewster and Scullion, 1997; Mendenhall and Macomber, 1997, quoted in Anderson, 2005, p. 569). The predominant use of informal selection processes was emphasized by studies on female expatriates as representing a gender bias in recruitment that restricted women’s access to expatriate positions (e.g. Harris, 2001, 2002; Stroh *et al.*, 2000; Varma *et al.*, 2001; Linehan, 2001a). It is interesting to note that the positions of “policy” and “practices” on the graph (at the crossroad of organizational and individual dimensions on the continuum) reflect that these elements have also been investigated in relation to men and women’s willingness to expatriate (Hill and Tillery, 1992).

(b) Expatriate experiences: toward organizational and more individual-level studies. As more individuals were pursuing expatriate careers, their experiences abroad

progressively became a strong focus of interest for expatriate research in general, which developed following the expatriate cycle: selection and pre-departure; adjustment, support, and performance during an assignment; and repatriation and career management post-assignment (see Bonache *et al.*, 2001; Brewster and Scullion, 1997; Reiche and Harzing, 2011). Our analysis highlights that research on female expatriates also followed this tendency, consistent with Taylor *et al.* (2002) who observed a trend toward more studies examining women's experiences in different host-country contexts during this period. Women entered international assignments in larger numbers (10-14 percent of the expatriate population at the end of the 1990s compared to 3 percent in earlier years), nevertheless their experience differed substantially from that of their male counterparts, notably with poorer organizational support abroad in comparison to their male counterparts (in the lower left quadrant of Figure 1). Organizations also tend to value male expatriate careers more than those of females (Selmer and Leung, 2002; Linehan and Scullion, 2001b; Selmer and Leung, 2003d). Moreover, a closely positioned term in Figure 1 is "success", which mostly relates in the articles we reviewed to expatriate success that is biased toward male expatriates (Linehan and Walsh, 1999c; Mathur-Helm, 2002; Tung, 2004; Taylor and Napier, 1996a). Our observations are in line here with Altman and Shortland (2008) who emphasized the "campaigning" phase of research during this period; that is, a rather "challenging" and "protesting" discourse of researchers showing that women are at least as suited for international assignments as men, and maybe even more than men, despite clearly identified discriminatory practices.

Progressively, a trend toward including more individual-level examinations emerged, particularly dealing, at that time, with issues of development, adjustment, and performance. The issue of "development" has been investigated at several levels, depending on the focus of analysis. It has first been examined as "career development practices" provided by companies to male and female expatriates (i.e. corporate support as mentioned above; Selmer and Leung, 2003d; Linehan and Scullion, 2001c). It has also been considered in relation to assignments as "developmental" experiences (Tung, 1998; Myers and Pringle, 2005), with findings suggesting that female expatriates, who may stay abroad longer and return to similar employment upon return, may accumulate more career capital than men during their assignments abroad (Myers and Pringle, 2005).

The rather central position of "adjustment" in Figure 1 (though logically positioned on the host-country side and at a more individual level) reflects that it is influenced by a broad range of factors such as home- and host-country cultures, organizational and work environments, and personal characteristics (Black, 1988; Black and Gregersen, 1991; Florkowski and Fogel, 1999; Caligiuri *et al.*, 1999; Aycan, 1997; Schaffer *et al.*, 1999). Studies investigating female expatriates' adjustment identified company as well as social support as crucial influencing factors (Caligiuri *et al.*, 1999; Caligiuri and Lazarova, 2002). Comparative studies, overall, found that women adjust better or at least as well as men (e.g. Selmer and Leung, 2003a; Haslberger, 2010), though some findings suggested a weaker adjustment in host countries with lower female workforce participation (Caligiuri and Tung, 1999). The issue of performance, strongly interrelated to that of adjustment and success (Lazarova and Thomas, 2012; Kraimer *et al.*, 2001; Caligiuri, 1997), is also increasingly investigated (e.g. Caligiuri and Cascio, 1998; Taylor and Napier, 1996b). Women are found to self-report lower performance than their male counterparts, even when men and women's job performance does not significantly differ when rated by a third person (e.g. host-country national colleague or

supervisor, see Sinangil and Ones, 2003; Connerley *et al.*, 2008). This reflects the existence of a self-induced barrier for women on international assignments wherein Fischlmayr (2002) found evidence of women's lack of confidence and underestimation as representing additional obstacles.

(III) 2005-2009: an important shift back to the home country – at the individual level

As the literature's documentation of women's inflow into the international arena continued, companies seemed to have more difficulty finding competent candidates for international assignments who were motivated to relocate (PwC, 2007). The lack of candidates could be explained by low perceived benefits of an assignment toward career progression or by demographic developments such as the rise of dual-career couples (Hofbauer and Fischlmayr, 2004; GMAC, 2006). Thus, during this period, individuals' willingness to relocate became a stronger focus of interest for companies and researchers (Wagner and Westaby, 2009; Hippler, 2009), including women as an untapped source of available talent (e.g. Tung, 2004; Inch *et al.*, 2008) and women's willingness to relocate (including related issues such as "readiness"). Research also found that gender stereotypes and linear "male" career models (see Linehan and Scullion, 2008) may have led to perceived blocked opportunities for women, thereby negatively affecting their willingness to relocate (Chusmir and Frontczak, 1990). Moreover, origin and destination factors (e.g. cultural distance, level of development in the host country) appeared to impact men's and women's willingness differently (Lowe *et al.*, 1999; Dupuis *et al.*, 2008). A key issue also associated women's willingness to relocate with their ability to cope with work and family demands, i.e., juggling work and family life (e.g. Ackers, 2004; Tharenou, 2008; Shortland and Cummins, 2007). Overall, while it remains unclear whether women are as willing as men to relocate (see, e.g. Wang and Bu (2004) and Van der Velde *et al.* (2005) for conflicting findings), women in dual-career couples seem to take family issues into account more strongly (e.g. children and spouse) (Dupuis *et al.*, 2008), leading them to refuse an assignment more often than men (Tharenou, 2008; Ackers, 2004).

(IV) 2010-2012: examining individual-level issues in the host country

In the aftermath of the financial crises of 2008, there is evidence of a continuous rise in women in international assignments reaching 16-20 percent by 2012 (Brookfield, 2012). Recent research (e.g. Van den Bergh and Du Plessis, 2012; Mayerhofer *et al.*, 2011), however, reflects the profound social and economic changes of post-industrial societies. During this period, research on female expatriates began to increasingly draw on cross-disciplinary perspectives to do justice to recent and major developments occurring beyond the corporate world, such as labor-market flexibilization, migration, population ageing, and changing families (Johnson-Hanks *et al.*, 2011; Hanappi, 2012). This research reflects the pressure toward increasing flexibility at various levels (contractual, geographical, temporal) that are required in the professional environment as a result of economic downturns and strengthening globalization (ILO, 2012; Dobbs *et al.*, 2012), as well as the constraints these changes bring to individuals' work and family lives (Kalleberg, 2009; Szydlik, 2008). The latter is expressed by the salience of the terms "self-initiated", "migration", and "work-life balance" with these studies focusing more on the individual level in the host country. Consistent with broader research on self-initiated expatriates (Doherty, 2013; Andresen *et al.*, 2012), research on female expatriates increasingly focused on women who were leading their own careers and undertaking their international career moves themselves

(e.g. Stalker and Mavin, 2011; Crowley-Henry and Weir, 2007; Selmer and Lauring, 2010). The full responsibility for success and failure therefore shifted to individual women acting as agents of their own lives rather than expecting their careers to be advanced by organizations (Spini *et al.*, 2013). This is consistent with Tharenou's (2010) contention that women may self-initiate their expatriation to circumvent organizational barriers. It should be noted however, that, as in the broader expatriate field (e.g. Al Ariss, 2010), a distinction between self-initiated expatriate and migrant women is not always clearly made (see Berry and Bell (2012) for a discussion).

In line with these developments, studies during this period began to consider the experiences of women evolving outside corporate boundaries, such as international "workers" (e.g. Bozionelos (2009) study of nurses, and Selmer and Lauring (2011) study on academics). Acknowledging a lack of studies addressing international experiences of older workers – especially older women – Myers (2011) emphasized the importance of taking life and career stages into account when examining key issues such as motivation to undertake an international assignment and international assignment outcomes. Findings suggest that older women tend to perceive their international experience as an opportunity to refocus and search for more purposeful lives. In the non-profit sector, mostly in North America, recent concerns about an aging workforce have stimulated initiatives and programs to promote late careers, including those of expatriate women (see e.g. Encore, 2014).

The growing number of female expatriates motivates studies to more precisely understand women's trajectories in the expatriation context (see the lower right quadrant of Figure 1). For instance, Ackers (2004) focused on women's international career trajectories in the scientific field. It should however be noted that longitudinal data and analyses remain almost non-existent, with the exception of Forster's (1999) and Tharenou's (2008) study. A last study examining trajectories of female expatriates is that of Hutchings *et al.* (2012a), who examined women's traditional and new trajectories in international careers. The authors examine whether alternative forms of global work (e.g. short-term assignments, frequent flyers or flexpatriate assignments and virtual assignments) enable women to pursue global development opportunities differently. This examination is paralleled by a growing literature in the broader field of research on expatriation on other forms of international work (e.g. Baruch *et al.*, 2013; Shaffer *et al.*, 2012; Bonache *et al.*, 2010; Dickmann and Baruch, 2011) and by a slow emergence of studies considering the potential impact on women's experiences (Mayerhofer *et al.*, 2004, 2011; Meyskens *et al.*, 2009).

Female expatriates' work-life balance issues are also increasingly addressed during this period (e.g. Fischlmayr and Kollinger, 2010), going beyond the traditional view that focuses exclusively on conflicts between private and professional lives (see in earlier years) and including enrichments for women between both life spheres (such as spouse and family support, and attractiveness of new location; see Mäkelä *et al.*, 2011b). Another recent development involves the challenges faced by the growing number of dual-career expatriate couples (Permits Foundation, 2009; Morley *et al.*, 2006), in a time where women appear to be less inclined to give their career prospects lower priority than those of their male partners (Altman and Shortland, 2008). Hence, the male partner issue has seen increased interest among researchers and companies (Cole, 2012; Selmer and Leung, 2003e), along with studies acknowledging the complexity of spousal role dimensions and the positive influence the spouse can have on expatriate's private and professional lives (Mäkelä *et al.*, 2011a; Lauring and Selmer, 2010).

Moreover, researchers seem to increasingly recognize the need to include other dimensions of analysis in addition to gender, such as race (e.g. Berry and Bell, 2012; Tung, 2008) or cultural stereotyping (Hutchings *et al.*, 2012b). This may reflect a trend toward a positioning of research within the broader diversity literature, obvious in Shortland's (2009) addressing of the "gender diversity" issue in expatriation.

Finally, illustrating the strong host-country focus of recent research, studies increasingly take host-country nationals into account, a trend also emphasized by Menzies (2012). This tendency to consider more strongly the role of host-country nationals has been highlighted in broader expatriate research as well (e.g. Varma *et al.*, 2011; Takeuchi, 2010). Arman and Aycan (2013, p. 2929) identify three lines of research concerning host-country nationals in the expatriation process: first, the differences between host-country nationals and expatriates; second, their role in the cross-cultural adjustment and performance of expatriates; and third, their attitudes toward expatriates. A study of female expatriates belongs to this first line of research, as it compared the career success of local women with that of female expatriates in Norway (Traavik and Richardsen, 2010), showing that host-country women achieved higher career success overall, although female expatriates' motivation, as well as their levels of education and language skills, potentially enabled them to overcome their liability. Although earlier research on female expatriates had widely debated the second and third lines of research (e.g. foreigners' prejudice against female expatriates, impact of host-country nationals' attitudes on women's performance and adjustment; Stroh *et al.*, 2000; Selmer and Leung, 2003a; Caligiuri and Lazarova, 2002), studies adopting host-country nationals' points of view to investigate these issues long remained non-existent (besides the noteworthy exception of Izraeli *et al.*, 1980). There have however been some studies recently that increasingly deal with the third line of research through examining actual host-country nationals' perceptions of female expatriates or their categorization of the latter as in-group or out-group members which guides their behaviors toward female expatriates (e.g. Tung and Haq, 2012; Varma *et al.*, 2006, 2009). Lastly, we could not identify any studies adopting the perspectives of host-country nationals and examining their influence on expatriate adjustment or performance. At best, they are involved only in the evaluation of female expatriates' performance (e.g. as supervisors, colleagues, see Shen and Jiang, 2011; Sinangil and Ones, 2003; also see previous sections).

(V) The development of the field over time: summary and complementary observations

Our review of the literature over time is consistent with previous noteworthy reviews addressing the historical development of the field (e.g. Altman and Shortland, 2008; Kollinger and Linehan, 2008). We build on these reviews first, by revealing and discussing more recent developments in the field up till 2012, and second, by identifying and emphasizing a structuration of the field along macro and micro levels with a differentiated focus on home and host countries. Specifically, we found that early research (from 1975 to 1994) had a strong North American focus (e.g. expatriates from the US), whereas more recent studies have focused on Europe (e.g. Linehan and Walsh, 2001; Kollinger, 2005; Selmer and Luring, 2011), Asia (e.g. Hutchings *et al.*, 2008; Peltokorpi, 2008; Cole, 2012), the Middle East (e.g. Harrison and Michailova, 2012; Hutchings *et al.*, 2012b; Bozionelos, 2009), and have started to include African countries such as South Africa (Mathur-Helm, 2002).

In addition, theories being used to investigate issues related to women's participation on international assignments did not explicitly emerge in our graphical

representations, because they were frequently omitted in the abstracts. We observed that most research on female expatriates appears to be practice-driven and lacks clear theoretical foundations (see Shortland and Altman, 2011; Kollinger and Linehan, 2008 for similar commentaries). Nevertheless, based on our review and consistent with Shortland (2009), several types of theories used to address women's experiences in the expatriation context appear to be "typical" including gender roles (e.g. dealing with influences of women's role stereotypes on their willingness and choices to relocate, influence on work-life balance issues, see Tharenou, 2008; Harris, 2004); cross-cultural adjustment (e.g. comparing adjustment of male and female expatriates, see Selmer and Leung, 2003a; Caligiuri *et al.*, 1999); social and societal norms (e.g. women perceived as secondary breadwinners, impact on selection practices, see Cole, 2012; Harris, 2002); human capital and career capital (e.g. impact of human capital on willingness to relocate, career capital development through international assignment, see Van der Velde *et al.*, 2005; Tharenou, 2010; Myers and Pringle, 2005); or identity theory (e.g. female expatriates characterized by several identities (e.g. woman, foreigner, manager) on which they draw to be successful; identity challenges during expatriation, see Janssens *et al.*, 2006; Van den Bergh and Du Plessis, 2012). In addition, the theory of self-categorization (Hogg and Terry, 2000) used in Varma *et al.*'s (2006) study to investigate host-country nationals' categorization of female expatriates could be especially relevant given the increasing host-country focus of research in the period from 2010 to the present day. In the next section, we present directions for further research.

Directions for further research

Based on our empirical analyses and an in-depth reading of each article considered in this review, we identify research gaps and formulate nine key directions for further research on female expatriates.

First, while several studies have taken a home and/or host-countries focus, very few have comprehensively investigated the impact of specific industry sectors or organizations (for rare exceptions see Mayrhofer and Scullion (2002) and Shortland (2011)). Moreover, the different levels of analysis (i.e. macro/meso/micro) remain largely disconnected from each other, thus ignoring interrelationships and the way they potentially interact. A noteworthy exception examining various levels of analysis is Hartl (2004), which looks at expatriate career transitions of women and conceptualizes expatriate career as being influenced by a complex set of sociocultural, economic, organizational, and individual factors. As this latter study illustrates, case studies may be particularly suitable to contextualize and connect different levels of analysis (Yin, 2009; Ghauri, 2004). This need to better connect different levels of analysis is consistent with others' recommendations in the field of research on (female) expatriates (Shortland and Altman, 2011; Al Ariss *et al.*, 2012). Furthermore, the framework proposed by Menzies (2012) on the different levels of influence on women's participation on international assignments appears to provide a relevant starting point to analyze and more strongly integrate these different levels of analysis:

Summary 1. Different levels of analysis often remain largely disconnected from each other, and there is a need to integrate them better in future research.

Second, women's repatriation has been investigated by only one (qualitative) field study (Linehan and Scullion, 2002a, b, c), hence more research is needed that examines women's repatriation experiences. Studies could, for example, investigate gender

differences in repatriation adjustment and related influence factors. Moreover, career patterns of male and female repatriates in the home country could be investigated and compared in order to identify potential gender specificities in a context where the challenges for returning employees have been widely emphasized (e.g. difficulties in finding a re-entry position, the new position often does not meet expectations: see Jassawalla and Sashittal, 2009). Examining the organizational perspective would further enable an examination of how organizations support male and female repatriates:

Summary 2. More research is needed on repatriate women, both from individual and organizational perspectives.

Third, several studies deal with the topic of dual-career couples and expatriate partners from a gender perspective. However, more is needed to examine differences between female-led and male-led expatriation in terms of satisfaction, adjustment, and the work-life interface of both partners and other family members such as children. An important step would be to more systematically include partners (and other family members) in study samples (e.g. Cole, 2012; Davoine *et al.*, 2013):

Summary 3. The rise in the proportion of female-led expatriate couples calls for more research to understand their specific assignment experiences.

Fourth, the experiences of single female expatriates has been largely overlooked (for notable exceptions, see Linehan and Walsh, 2000; Ben-Ari and Yong, 2000; Thang *et al.*, 2002), reflected by the fact that no terms related to single female expatriates emerged from our analysis. This is surprising given that, traditionally, a significant proportion of women sent abroad were, in fact, single (e.g. Adler, 1987; Westwood and Leung, 1994; Forster, 1999). In a time when more studies, especially in social sciences, are acknowledging various issues faced by single individuals in the domestic context (e.g. work-life balance, stigmatization, see Byrne, 2009; Engler, 2011), it may be relevant to address the considerable challenges single women face on international assignments (e.g. loneliness, stigmatization, safety concerns among them):

Summary 4. Single women relocating abroad have rarely been the focus of studies. Hence, further research is needed to examine their particular situations and experiences.

Fifth, only one empirical study (Selmer and Leung, 2003c) has examined and compared differences in personal characteristics between male and female expatriates (i.e. age, hierarchical position, marital status, previous expatriate assignments, time as an expatriate, tenure with parent corporation). Significantly, Selmer and Leung found that women were younger than men, occupied lower hierarchical positions, and were less often married. Future studies could perform similar analyses and include additional personal characteristics such as presence and/or number of children, language skills, educational level, or personality traits, which, in line with other research (e.g. Nicholson and Imaizumi, 1993; Takeuchi, 2010; Black *et al.*, 1991; Bhaskar-Shrinivas *et al.*, 2005; Selmer, 2006), could influence several facets of the expatriate experience as well as expatriation outcomes (Olsen and Martins, 2009). Cole and McNulty (2011), for example, analyzed the relationship between self-transcendence values of male and female expatriates and cross-cultural adjustment, whereas Selmer and Lauring (2013)

examined the link between several personal characteristics and various outcomes such as work adjustment, work performance, or work effectiveness:

Summary 5. More research is needed on male and female expatriates' personal characteristics. Their potential relationships with expatriation outcomes could also be examined.

Sixth, it appears timely to consider female individuals' life and career stages and trajectories in the analysis of their international assignment experiences, as initiated by Myers (2011) and Hutchings *et al.* (2012a). Indeed, many of the issues already highlighted (e.g. willingness, adjustment, work-life balance, repatriation), among others, could be more comprehensively understood by considering the importance that an international assignment has in an individual's broader life and career trajectories. This may be especially relevant since men's and women's life and career trajectories may strongly differ (Sullivan and Mainiero, 2007). Examining this topic would thus enable the contextualization of this "life phase" with respect to previous life events and next anticipated stages, and thus deepen understanding of the meaning of an international assignment for individuals and how it is perceived and experienced, for which longitudinal studies would be ideal:

Summary 6. Research could more strongly take individuals' life courses into account when examining various assignment issues and experiences (willingness, adjustment, etc.).

Seventh, alternative forms of international assignments are becoming increasingly frequent (Bonache *et al.*, 2010; Cartus Corporation, 2012; Baruch *et al.*, 2013), however, studies examining the uptake of these assignments by women are rare (i.e. Mayerhofer *et al.*, 2004, 2011; Meyskens *et al.*, 2009; Hutchings *et al.*, 2012a), despite that alternative forms of international work may provide women with the necessary flexibility to adapt to their careers and work-life circumstances and may enable them to pursue global careers differently (Hutchings *et al.*, 2012a). More exploratory work is needed to better understand the impact of these alternative forms of international assignments on women's international career success:

Summary 7. More studies addressing women's experiences in alternative forms of international assignments and international work examining their impact on women's international careers are needed.

Eighth, more research is needed on women's involvement in non-corporate expatriation, e.g., in academia, diplomatic corps, and non-profit institutions, among others. Additionally, studies on women being sent to more diverse regions of the world would be insightful (Brookfield, 2012). For example, the issue of female expatriate adjustment has been examined mainly in Asian host-country contexts (e.g. Taylor and Napier, 1996a, b; Selmer and Leung, 2003a, 2007; Volkmar and Westbrook, 2005), calling for studies in other (single) host-country contexts and/or emerging markets:

Summary 8. Research is needed that investigates various expatriation contexts in terms of organizational and home and host countries.

Lastly, a research axis that has gained increasing importance is the examination of host-country nationals, particularly in light of previous research suggesting that female expatriates' experiences may strongly vary depending on host-country nationals' attitudes toward them (Adler, 1987; Caligiuri and Tung, 1999). As emphasized in the discussion above, their perspectives have up until today never been included while examining female expatriate adjustment or performance, despite their influential roles (see e.g. Takeuchi, 2010). Moreover, the two other lines of research mentioned above (comparison of host-country nationals and female expatriates, and their attitudes toward female expatriates) have just started to be addressed, and much more research is needed on these topics:

Summary 9. More exploratory qualitative or mixed-methods studies should be performed in this early stage of research on that topic in order to gain a more in-depth understanding of these related issues.

Based on our empirical analyses and our knowledge of the field, these nine key directions formulated and summarized may serve to orient future research in the field and contribute to address identified gaps in previous research. In this respect, as already emphasized by previous authors (e.g. Shortland and Altman, 2011), future studies should pay particular attention to methodological issues (adequate sample sizes, sampling procedures, etc.) in order to enhance the validity of the findings in the field. Moreover, the research field would benefit from anchoring the examination of these issues more deeply and systematically in well-founded theoretical bases (Kollinger and Linehan, 2008).

Conclusion

Overall, the contribution of this review article is that, in order to take a step forward on studies of female expatriates, we first took a step back to review the field. We have presented probably the most generic and unconventional literature review on women and international assignments, offering a visualization of the evolution of the research field to scholars in expatriate research and beyond. Mapping out the semantic structure of research on female expatriates prior to any coding or assignment of meaning, we discovered many similarities to previous literature reviews (e.g. Altman and Shortland, 2008), but also revealed the key dimensions along which most development in this field takes place. Major defining dimensions are the micro and macro divide and the home/host country focus. While earlier research had a stronger focus on the business environment and organizational level in the home country (as exemplified by studies predominantly dealing with women's underrepresentation on international assignments at this period, e.g. Adler, 1984a; Harris and Harris, 1988), our visualization of the field made explicit a gradual shift toward the examination of host environment issues along with a development of critical perspectives drawing on more micro-level research (as illustrated, among others, by the examination of self-initiated female expatriates' learning experiences in a specific host country context or by the study of host country nationals' categorization of female expatriates; Stalker and Mavin, 2011; Varma *et al.*, 2006, 2009).

Several limitations of our review are acknowledged. First, our analysis is limited to articles published in English and may therefore exclude relevant contributions in other languages. Second, despite our efforts, the search for articles may not have been exhaustive which may have subsequently excluded other articles from our analysis.

To overcome this problem, we nonetheless performed a comprehensive search far beyond the initial key-word search. Third, correspondence analysis has been performed on the basis of textual data from abstracts, which has two implications: first, some articles without abstracts could not be considered; and second, the analyses and results are limited to and dependent on the content of the abstracts.

Finally, it is vital to see how women in international assignments are embedded in the larger societal context, such as the labor market system, family arrangements, and constantly transforming societies (e.g. aging, ideational changes). It indeed appears crucial for multinational companies to pay attention to these factors in order design support practices that are tailored to women's career and life paths. Scholars in expatriate research adopting multilevel, multi-method, or longitudinal approaches will thus gain from orienting their research toward the expatriate experience of men and women in various familial, organizational, and national settings.

Notes

1. Studies focussing on non-working women abroad (e.g. female "trailing spouses") were excluded, consistent with our definition of an expatriate presented above (i.e. involving individuals with employment).
2. In some cases, some other actors are included in these samples, such as HR managers, or supervisors, but this does not modify the meaning of this categorization.
3. For example, studies taking gender solely as a control variable (i.e. without focussing on and further discussing the impact of gender) were not considered in this paper.
4. For each row, a term from the first column was combined with terms from the second and/or third column(s) (depending on the rows) using the "AND" operator. Depending on the database used, terms were mainly searched in the "whole text", "abstract", and "keywords" fields.
5. We note that due to this restriction of eligible articles our interpretation of results is confined to those articles having English abstracts, which represent the majority of the relevant literature in the field. See also limitations.
6. These articles are marked with an asterisk * preceding their reference in the bibliography section.
7. Terms such as "company" or "identity" in bold refer to the terms represented in the two-dimensional display generated by correspondence analysis (see Figure 1).

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The sign (*) indicates which articles have been considered for the correspondence analysis (151 articles overall).

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Appendix

Women and
international
assignments

| Journal | N (articles) |
|---|--------------|
| <i>The International Journal of Human Resource Management</i> | 28 |
| <i>Women in Management Review</i> | 14 |
| <i>Career Development International</i> | 7 |
| <i>Journal of World Business</i> | 7 |
| <i>Journal of Management Development</i> | 5 |
| <i>Journal of Business Ethics</i> | 5 |
| <i>Human Resource Management</i> | 5 |
| <i>Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal</i> | 5 |
| <i>Thunderbird International Business Review</i> | 4 |
| <i>Journal of Managerial Psychology</i> | 3 |
| <i>Gender in Management: An International Journal</i> | 3 |
| <i>California Management Review</i> | 2 |
| <i>European Journal of International Management</i> | 2 |
| <i>The International Executive</i> | 2 |
| <i>Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources</i> | 2 |
| <i>Academy of Management Proceedings</i> | 2 |
| <i>Journal of European Industrial Training</i> | 2 |
| <i>British Journal of Management</i> | 2 |
| <i>Gender, Work & Organization</i> | 2 |
| <i>SAM Advanced Management Journal</i> | 2 |
| <i>Geoforum</i> | 2 |
| <i>International Journal of Cross Cultural Management</i> | 2 |
| <i>International Journal of Intercultural Relations</i> | 2 |
| <i>International Studies of Management and Organization</i> | 2 |
| <i>The Academy of Management Executive</i> | 1 |
| <i>MIT Sloan Management Review</i> | 1 |
| <i>Journal of Organizational Change Management</i> | 1 |
| <i>Human Resource Planning</i> | 1 |
| <i>Personnel</i> | 1 |
| <i>International Journal of Business and Management</i> | 1 |
| <i>Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology</i> | 1 |
| <i>Business Forum</i> | 1 |
| <i>Equal Opportunities International</i> | 1 |
| <i>Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes</i> | 1 |
| <i>International Journal of Business and Globalisation</i> | 1 |
| <i>Review of Public Personnel Administration</i> | 1 |
| <i>International Journal of Management Practice</i> | 1 |
| <i>Human Resource Management Review</i> | 1 |
| <i>European Business Review</i> | 1 |
| <i>Journal of Organizational Behavior</i> | 1 |
| <i>International Review of Women and Leadership</i> | 1 |
| <i>Journal of Vocational Behavior</i> | 1 |
| <i>Business Horizons</i> | 1 |
| <i>Human Resource Development International</i> | 1 |
| <i>Management International Review</i> | 1 |
| <i>European Management Review</i> | 1 |
| <i>Organization</i> | 1 |
| <i>Journal of Education for Business</i> | 1 |

Table AI.
List of journals and
(continued) related number of articles

| JGM 2,3 | Journal | N (articles) |
|------------------|--|--------------|
| | <i>Organizational Dynamics</i> | 1 |
| | <i>Columbia Journal of World Business</i> | 1 |
| | <i>Personnel Review</i> | 1 |
| | <i>Journal of International Business Studies</i> | 1 |
| | <i>Global Business and Organizational Excellence</i> | 1 |
| 374 | <i>Journal of International Management</i> | 1 |
| | <i>Applied Psychology</i> | 1 |
| | <i>American Business Review</i> | 1 |
| | <i>EBS Review</i> | 1 |
| | <i>Women's Studies International Forum</i> | 1 |
| | <i>Equality, Diversity and Inclusion: An International Journal</i> | 1 |
| | <i>International Journal of Management</i> | 1 |
| | <i>Women's Studies Journal</i> | 1 |
| | <i>International Journal of Manpower</i> | 1 |
| | <i>International Migration</i> | 1 |
| Table AI. | Grand total | 151 |

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