

What Makes Them Move Abroad?
Reviewing and Exploring Differences
between Self-Initiated and Assigned Expatriation

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Abstract

Expatriates were most commonly presented in literature as a homogeneous population. Only in recent years are self-initiated expatriates (SIE) more distinguished from assigned expatriates (AE). But there is still a lack of empirically based comparative results. This study investigated factors that predict whether a person will consider an assigned or self-initiated foreign work experience. Comparative statistical analysis, performed on data from 193 expatriates ($N_{AE}=67$; $N_{SIE}=126$), indicates that a self-initiated foreign work experience is significantly more likely to be chosen by women and those having lower job levels. But which career path is chosen cannot be predicted by boundaryless and protean career orientation that did not differ significantly among SIEs and AEs. Implications of these findings for research in expatriation are discussed.

Keywords: self-initiated expatriation, assigned expatriation, gender, human capital, protean career, boundaryless career

Expatriates were commonly viewed in literature as a homogeneous population. Only in recent years are self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) more distinguished from assigned expatriates (AEs). A SIE refers to any person who is seeking employment abroad of their own initiative and is hired as a local in the host country (Crowley-Henry, 2007). In contrast, AEs are sent by their home companies to international posts (Edström & Galbraith, 1977). While assigned, expatriates often receive generous relocation packages. On the other hand, SIEs are likely to fund their own relocation (Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009).

Inkson, Arthur, Pringle and Barry (1997) pointed out that while the research literature on AEs is substantial, the SIE literature is virtually non-existent. Our recent search shows that more than 40 articles dealing with SIEs have been published in academic journals. Interestingly, only six of them are empirically contrast the two groups (Biemann & Andresen, 2010; Cerdin & Le Pargneux, 2010; Jokinen, Brewster, & Suutari, 2008; Peltokorpi, 2008; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). In order to better understand how and why both groups differ from one another, more comparative statistical analyses are necessary. SIEs, as a growing part of the global workforce (with a relative sample size ranging from 25 % in Biemann & Andresen [2010] to up to 72.7 % in Peltokorpi [2008]), provide a potential alternative for costly AEs. Hence, knowing more about the two groups will help to better select, employ and manage them.

The objective of this study is to analyze differences between self-initiated and assigned expatriates. In particular, the aim is to compare what factors predict whether a person will consider an assigned or self-initiated foreign work experience. For this purpose we analyzed group-specific differences in boundaryless and protean career orientation, the influence of gender, and the role of human capital. The article is organized as follows: review of the comparative research results with respect to differences between self-initiated and assigned expatriate experiences; discussion of the literature related to the research question; and

presentation of the hypotheses for each of the three areas. The sample, measures, and statistical procedures are then outlined, and the findings of the study and a test of the hypotheses are presented. Finally, the article presents conclusions beyond the initial findings and provides suggestions for further research.

A REVIEW OF DIFFERENCES BETWEEN

SELF-INITIATED AND ASSIGNED EXPATRIATE EXPERIENCES

For the handful of studies that compare SIEs and AEs the main differences and similarities among self-initiated expatriate experiences and assigned expatriation are summarized below. In these studies the two groups have been compared in the following terms: individual, task and employer-related variables, reasons for the international tasks, repatriation and future careers (Suutari & Brewster, 2000), the potential for the development of career capital (Jokinen, Brewster, & Suutari, 2008), cross-cultural adjustment (Peltokorpi, 2008; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009), career anchors (Cerdin & Le Pargneux, 2010), and motives and career-related factors (Biemann & Andresen, 2010). One study compares the models of international career experience on a theoretical basis (Inkson, Arthur, Pringle, & Barry, 1997) while another compares experiences of women professionals in different countries but does not include a statistical calculation of differences between SIEs and AEs (Napier & Taylor, 2002).

Concerning individual variables, survey research shows that SIEs on average tend to be slightly younger or to start their international careers at a younger age than AEs (Biemann & Andresen, 2010; Cerdin & Le Pargneux, 2010; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). As well, SIEs are more often single (Cerdin & Le Pargneux, 2010; Suutari & Brewster, 2000), have fewer children (Cerdin & Le Pargneux, 2010), and more commonly have spouses who work abroad (Suutari & Brewster, 2010). In four of the comparative studies, SIE samples had slightly more

women (Cerdin & Le Pargneux, 2010; Jokinen et al., 2008; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009; Suutari & Brewster, 2000) and this difference was significant in two of the studies (Cerdin & Le Pargneux, 2010; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). This suggests that traditional expatriate assignments are male dominated while self-initiated expatriation tends to be less gendered.

With respect to employer and task-related differences, SIEs are more likely to work for a foreign organization and these organizations have less international presence, whereas AEs operate mostly in organizations of their home-country or their foreign subsidiaries. SIEs more often work in the public sector and in European countries with a temporary contract (Jokinen et al., 2008; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). SIEs are significantly more likely than AEs to go abroad due to the poor employment situation in the home country and less often have some kind of promise about a job upon return (Suutari & Brewster, 2000).

The studies also contain some information about human capital related differences. The level of academic achievement does not differ significantly between SIEs and AEs in the sample analyzed by Cerdin and Le Pargneux (2010). Hence, the starting basis of their career appears to be comparable. With respect to their international experience, SIEs significantly differ from AEs in that they have worked in a higher number of different countries (Jokinen et al., 2008). In addition the expatriation tenure for SIEs, on average is longer than that of AEs (Cerdin & Le Pargneux, 2010; Jokinen et al., 2008). Additional results are less clear: differences regarding the number and total average length of previous foreign work experiences were significant in only one study (Jokinen et al., 2008) and non-significant in two studies (Cerdin & Le Pargneux, 2010; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). Looking at the status quo of their organizational positions, SIEs differ significantly from AEs in that SIEs tend to work in expert positions rather than in leading positions and comparably on a lower hierarchical level (Cerdin & Le Pargneux, 2010; Jokinen et al., 2008; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). During their stays abroad both groups show equal levels of development of knowing-

how and knowing-why career capital, but SIEs are disadvantaged regarding the development of knowing-whom career capital (Jokinen et al., 2008). SIEs are better adjusted to interactions with host-country nationals (Peltokorpi, 2008; Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009).

The studies contain references to the career orientation of expatriates. An analysis of Schein's career anchors revealed that for both SIEs and AEs internationalism and lifestyle are very important career anchors. SIEs rank comparably and significantly higher on the career anchors of security, lifestyle, and dedication to a cause and lower on internationalism and managerial competence than AEs (Cerdin & Le Pargneux, 2010). Contradictory to the internationalism career anchor result, Suutari and Brewster (2000) show that personal interest in developing international experience is more frequently ranked as important by SIEs than by AEs. Also, there are conflicting results regarding the expected benefits from international experiences for the SIEs and AEs careers (Biemann & Andresen, 2010; Suutari & Brewster, 2000) With respect to physical mobility, SIEs have a higher international mobility (Jokinen et al., 2008; Suutari & Brewster, 2000) as well as organizational mobility (Biemann & Andresen, 2010; Cerdin & Le Pargneux, 2010). Finally, career orientation remains relatively stable for SIEs with increasing age, whereas it declines for AEs (Biemann & Andresen, 2010).

This clearly shows the broad range of fields covered and inevitably leads to very diverse findings. The next section of this article focuses on career-related questions, since findings in this area appear to be contradicting. For example, Inkson, Thomas and Barry (1999) found evidence that self-initiated expatriation leads to career success, whereas others found support for a negative career influence (see Tharenou, 2009, for a review). More specifically, gender related career differences, human capital, and the boundaryless and protean career concept are analyzed. It is stressed in literature that there is still a need to further explore SIEs and AEs in the perspective of a boundaryless career and to include variables such as protean career

attitude (Cerdin & Le Pargneux, 2009, 2010; Crowley-Henry, 2007). The comparative empirical studies summarized above are important in this respect in that they, first, allow the evaluation of different constructs and variables for each group of expatriates and, secondly, indicate that SIEs and AEs are separate groups of expatriates that should be distinguished in conceptual and empirical accounts. Based on the review and under reference to further non-comparative empirical studies of SIEs and AEs, we work out the hypotheses for our own empirical study.

IMPORTANCE OF THE BOUNDARYLESS AND PROTEAN CAREER CONCEPTS

FOR SELF-INITIATED COMPARED TO ASSIGNED EXPATRIATES

The boundaryless career hypothesis holds that careers are no longer constrained by organizational or occupational boundaries (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; DeFillippi & Arthur, 1996); and, in an international setting, are unconstrained geographically (Banai & Harry, 2004; Stahl, Miller, & Tung, 2002). In boundaryless global careers, persons move freely between firms and countries, relying on competencies which are transferable between organizations. Rather than waiting for the organization to arrange for an appropriate career progression, these employees take charge over their own careers. Carr, Inkson and Thorn (2005) stress that apart from mobility, the boundaryless global career is predicated on proactive and internationally-oriented attitudes of expatriates. Important personal competencies that sustain global boundaryless careers include knowing-why (perception that specific needs are better met abroad), knowing-how (technical and professional skills and experience), and knowing-whom (networks and reputation) (DeFillippi & Arthur, 1994).

Whereas boundaryless careers focus on how *organizational* boundaries have become more permeable, the term “protean career” (Briscoe & Hall, 2006), by contrast, emphasizes the *individual’s* values-driven attitudes as well as adaptability and self direction in personal

career management (Sullivan, 1999; see also Hall & Harrington, 2004). Hall (1976) repurposed the term “protean” to describe careers which involve periodic personal repackaging of an individual’s knowledge, skills, and abilities to fit the changing work environment in order to remain marketable. Protean careerists are flexible, value freedom, believe in continuous learning, and seek intrinsic rewards (Hall, 2002; Hall & Moss, 1998; Mirvis & Hall, 1996). Crowley-Henry (2007) stresses the importance of the protean career for proponents of international careers.

Inkson, Pringle, Arthur and Barry (1997) and Inkson and Myers (2003) define the “career type” of expatriate assignments as an organizational career, whereas they refer to the boundaryless career for self-initiated expatriates (see also Crowley-Henry, 2007; Jokinen et al., 2008). Cerdin and Le Pargneux (2010) counter that an organizational career is compatible with a boundaryless career and interpret from their data that both assigned and self-initiated expatriates can be engaged in a boundaryless global career. We expect that the boundaryless career mindset is comparably more pronounced by SIEs than AEs. Since both groups cross cultural boundaries in their careers, internationalism is important for both groups (Cerdin & Le Pargneux, 2010; Näsholm, 2009; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). On one hand, the internationalism career anchor has been comparably lower for SIEs than AEs in the study by Cerdin and Le Pargneux (2010). On the other hand, SIEs who go abroad on their own initiative showed a higher personal interest in developing international experience (Suutari & Brewster, 2000). In addition, SIEs demonstrated a significantly lower organizational embeddedness than AEs (Biemann & Andresen, 2010), which is seen as a predictor for higher voluntary turnover (Mitchell, Holtom, Lee, Sablinski, & Erez, 2001) and an indicator of psychological mobility.

Apart from mindset, the boundaryless global career concept is determined by organizational and geographical mobility (Carr et al., 2005). SIEs tend to have a significantly

higher international and organizational mobility than AEs throughout their careers (Biemann & Andresen, 2010; Cerdin & Le Pargneux, 2010; Inkson et al., 1997; Jokinen et al., 2008; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). This mobility implies that SIEs are more strongly characterized by a career identity that is independent of the employer (Banai & Harry, 2004; Crowley-Henry, 2007; Inkson et al., 1997) and interpret their foreign experience as a valuable competitive asset on the external labor market. This leads to:

Hypothesis 1.1: The boundaryless career concept is likely to be prevalent among both assigned expatriates and self-initiated expatriates. However, it is likely to be more represented among SIEs than AEs.

Crowley-Henry (2007) argues that the protean career concept is reflected in Schein's (1978; 1990) life-style career anchor. Cerdin and Le Pargneux (2010) show that the lifestyle career anchor is high for both groups, indicating that expatriation could be seen as a way of achieving work-life-balance (see also Suutari & Taka, 2004). Interestingly, it is significantly more prevalent among SIEs than AEs which might be due to the fact that SIEs create the conditions of their foreign work experience themselves. Thorn points out that "the concept of work/life balance arises only in the context of 'new' careers or self-initiated mobility. The expatriate literature, including that on gender and expatriation, does not consider this factor." ((2009: 16). Several studies on SIEs stress the importance of lifestyle as one of the primary motives of SIEs (e.g. Crowley-Henry, 2007; Jackson, Carr, Edwards, Thorn, Allfree, Hooks et al., 2005; Richardson & McKenna, 2003).

Cappellen and Janssens (2005) point out that apart from individual factors, global career paths are determined by organizational and global environmental factors. For example, self-initiated foreign work predominantly occurs in project organizations, whereas foreign

assignments more frequently take place in matrix organizations (Suutari & Brewster, 2000). In addition, SIEs work significantly more often in smaller (Biemann & Andresen, 2010) and less international organizations (Suutari & Brewster, 2000) and comparatively more often in the public sector than AEs (Jokinen et al. 2008; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). This limits the chances for further assigned expatriate experiences compared to assignees working in multinational private companies. Hence, they are forced to take control and change employers when striving for additional (international) work experiences (Inkson et al. 1997). In summary, it is to be expected that the protean career concept is more important for SIEs.

Hypothesis 1.2: The protean career concept is likely to be prevalent among both assigned expatriates and self-initiated expatriates. However, it is likely to be more represented among SIEs than AEs.

GENDER DIFFERENCES IN CAREER CHOICES

Female expatriation is a topic that has received significant attention (Adler, 2002). While investigations looking into self-initiated women are rapidly increasing, there is still much knowledge to be gained. One area of research that has not been thoroughly investigated is whether there are gender differences on self-initiated and assigned deployments. We propose that women are more likely to become SIEs. While this hypothesis has not been tested directly, looking at descriptives of other studies as a whole, it appears from our literature review above that traditional expatriate assignments are male-dominated while self-initiated expatriation is less gendered.

We believe that women are more likely to become SIEs than men for two reasons. First, there may be glass ceilings in home countries and better career opportunities overseas (Fitzgerald & Howe-Walsh, 2008; Insch, McIntyre, & Napier, 2008). For professional

women, glass ceilings may exist before, during and after traditional assignments (Insch et al., 2008). Women may perceive these restrictions while simultaneously perceiving the benefits of international experience, including completing a self-initiated expatriate assignment (Fitzgerald & Howe-Walsh, 2008; Napier & Taylor, 2002). International experience is vital for individuals with high career goals.

Those with international experience perform at higher levels, have higher incomes, and are more likely to be promoted (Bretz, Boudreau, & Judge 1994; Carpenter, Sanders & Gregersen, 2001; Daily, Certo & Dalton 1996; Egan & Bendick 1994; Magnusson & Boggs 2006; Roth 1995). Some recent studies suggests that SIE women accrue benefits from their international experience in terms of accelerated career development, more interesting job opportunities, and an increase in capital accumulation (Fitzgerald & Howe-Walsh, 2008; Myers & Pringle, 2005; Thang, MacLachlan, & Goda, 2002). Additionally, female SIEs reported more favorable work attitudes, especially job satisfaction, than their male counterparts. These positive perspectives occurred even when in a country where cultural values apparently do not favor females (Bozionelos, 2009). Women may be aware of the advantages of international experience and when blocked in the home country they may be more likely to become SIEs when compared to men. Therefore, females may decide to leave the country because of restricted opportunities in their current organization and seek opportunities abroad (Thang et al., 2002).

Second, women may be more likely to be SIEs because of family considerations. SIEs interpret their decision to relocate in direct relation to their family, particularly partners (Richardson 2006). One family factor is that female SIEs are likely to relocate to support their partner's career, but less often than to expatriate for their own career (Tharenou, 2008). These trailing spouses are unlikely to have their employers sponsor an assigned expatriation and therefore, are more likely to be SIEs. Willingness to go abroad is also more impacted by

family and intricately interconnected with relationships for female than male SIEs (Myers & Pringle, 2005; Tharenou, 2008). For example, while not statistically tested, female SIEs could be more likely to be younger, single and have fewer children than female AEs (Cerdin & Le Pargneux, 2010; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). Women may make decisions that are best for the family which should increase the likelihood that they participate on SIEs than AEs.

Hypothesis 2: Women are more likely to choose a self-initiated expatriate experience than men.

HUMAN CAPITAL DIFFERENCES BETWEEN SELF-INITIATED AND ASSIGNED EXPATRIATES

When comparing self-initiated and assigned expatriate experiences one critical factor to consider is the level of human capital of the expatriates. Human capital is knowledge, skills and abilities (KSA) that are obtained through experiences such as working overseas, education, and training (Becker, 1964). These KSAs can be roughly grouped into two categories: general and specific. Specific KSAs are employee skills that are only useful for the current organization such as a proprietary computer software program not used elsewhere. General KSAs such as degree obtainment, by contrast, are considered to be highly marketable on the internal and external job market (Becker, 1964). In general, higher levels of human capital are indicative of more career success. The understanding of differences between SIEs and AEs is still growing and the picture of the levels of human capital each group possess is incomplete.

We predict that assigned expatriates will have higher human capital while self-initiated expatriates will possess less human capital. However, previous research on this topic is sometimes contradictory to this position. Much of the SIE research suggests that these expatriates gain significant human capital. Specifically, SIEs are said to gain increased

networks, mobility, self-confidence, skills (cross industry, life, technical, social and flexibility) and knowledge (Inkson et al., 1997; Inkson et al., 1999; Inkson & Myers, 2003; Jokinen et al., 2008; Myers & Pringle 2005; Richardson & Mallon, 2005; Richardson & McKenna, 2001). In the study by Jokinen et al. (2008) about Finnish engineers, SIEs and AEs did not differ with respect to the development of knowing-how and knowing-why career capital, but were disadvantaged regarding the development of knowledge of the organization (knowing-how) and of knowing-whom career capital (Jokinen et al., 2008). While these articles explain that SIEs acquire human capital we do not have precise knowledge about their absolute level of human capital and its difference compared to the AE group. The SIE group tends to be younger or to start their international careers at a younger age than the AE group (Biemann & Andresen, 2010; Cerdin & Le Pargneux, 2010; Suutari & Brewster, 2000), which may imply lower knowing-how and knowing-why career capital.

To integrate these conflicting findings we suggest that self-initiated foreign work experiences, like all expatriations, are tremendous growth opportunities. However, before the assignment, SIEs may start with less human capital than AEs. The lack of human capital could be a source of motivation for leaving to acquire a job in a foreign country. If this is the case then SIEs would always be trailing AEs in human capital. When employees have more human capital they have an easier time finding employment and once employed, getting choice positions including overseas assignments (Becker, 1964). Employees with little human capital have a more difficult time finding employment.

While an assigned deployment is challenging, having organizations assist in the process is easier than doing everything by one's self. Organizations pay for logistics, provide at least some support and place employees in jobs. Initiating one's own expatriation is more risky and challenging. Many SIEs expatriate to other countries before they have a job. Since there is no guarantee of employment there could be significant economic hardship for these

expatriates. Expatriates with less human capital may be escaping economic difficulties at home and therefore, feel compelled to take a risk as an SIE. There are two types of human capital that should be different between AEs and SIEs: job level and education.

Previous research suggests that SIEs are more likely to be at lower levels of the organizational hierarchy compared to AEs (Cerdin & Le Pargneux, 2010; Jokinen et al., 2008; Suutari & Brewster, 2000). SIEs work in relatively unskilled positions below their capabilities and when repatriating, skills are often not used (Al Ariss, 2010; Al Ariss & Özbilgin, 2009; Inkson et al., 1999; Myers & Pringle, 2005). SIE repatriates accept jobs with lower responsibility and compensation and therefore, their international experiences are not valued (Begley, Collings, & Scullion, 2008). One reason why employers may be unlikely to deploy low level expatriates is that expatriation is expensive and risky for organizations (Selmer, 2001). It is impractical for organizations to send low level employees who are easily replaceable to perform jobs that can be filled by host country nationals. With fewer opportunities to partake in an AE, employees at lower levels are much likely to become SIEs. On the other hand, employees at higher levels in organizations are more likely to receive an assigned expatriate deployment because of their managerial experience (Suutari & Brewster, 2000).

Only one study looked at differences in education between SIEs and AEs. In a large French speaking sample, SIEs had equal levels of academic achievement as AEs (Cerdin & Le Pargneux, 2010). However, we feel that in broader, more diverse samples that this relationship would not hold. Human capital research shows that employees with higher levels of education have greater general skills and therefore, have greater career potential (Becker, 1964; Mincer, 1988). For example, employees who acquire higher levels of education while employed are more likely to leave the organization for a better position unless they are promoted (Benson, Finegold, & Mohrman, 2004). Academic credentials signal employee

ability to potential employers (Arkes, 1999; Spence, 1973). Obtaining higher education allows individuals to acquire better jobs, higher salaries and choice assignments overseas. Because of this AEs are more likely to have a higher education.

Hypothesis 3: Persons with lower human capital are more likely to seek a self-initiated foreign work experience.

METHODS

Sample Characteristics

One hundred and ninety-three individuals (125 men and 68 women) from 39 different nationalities and working in 46 different countries were recruited via various expatriate organizations, which provided expatriate groups they had access to with a link to the survey. Participants filled out an online survey in English with an average of about 22 minutes to complete the survey. For 72 individuals, it was the first working experience abroad and the average number of foreign positions was 2.30. We chose an online survey as they are better suited to be sent to expatriates in various countries (Dillman 2000). Furthermore, we chose a distribution strategy that does not necessarily involve the employing organization, as it allowed us to get a balanced sample of EAs and SIEs. That is, when contacting employing organizations, there might be a bias in that the group of EAs is overrepresented. SIEs might simply be overlooked, because they might be less apparent for contact persons in organization that select individuals that are working abroad for the survey.

Instruments and measures

Self-initiated expatriation (SIEs) vs. assigned expatriates (AEs). Participants indicated in the questionnaire whether they were seeking employment internationally on their own (SIE) or if they were sent abroad by their employing company (AE) (dichotomous variable).

Boundaryless career. The boundaryless career concept was assessed using shortened versions of the two subscales of boundaryless careers from Briscoe, Hall, and DeMuth (2006). The first scale, labeled Boundaryless mindset, consisted of three items measured on a 5-Point Likert scale (e.g., “I like tasks at work that require me to work beyond my own department; $\alpha = 0.76$). Second, we assessed organizational mobility preferences with five items (e.g., “In my ideal career I would work for only one organization.”). Cronbach’s alpha for this subscale was $\alpha = 0.85$.

Protean career. To measure the protean career concept, we used seven items on a 5-Point Likert scale (1 = to little or no extent, 5 = to a great extent), originally developed by Baruch, Bell, and Gray (2005), and Baruch and Quick (2007). A sample item reads “I navigate my own career, according to my plans.” Cronbach’s alpha for this scale yields $\alpha = 0.64$.

Gender. Gender was assessed with a single item in the questionnaire, asking whether the respondent was male (0) or female (1).

Human capital. We measured human capital with the individuals’ level of education and authority. Participants indicated their highest level of academic education on a 7-point scale, ranging from 1 = no school degree to 7 = higher tertiary education (PhD). We further assessed the current level of authority with a 6-Point item ranging from 1 = unskilled blue collar worker to 6 = management or director.

Control variables. Organizational size and subsidiary size were assessed in the questionnaire by the number of employees and logarithmized due to the skewness of their distributions (e.g., Dalton & Kesner, 1983). There were three missing values for organizational size and

two missings for subsidiary size that were imputed using an expectation maximization algorithm (Dempster, Laird, & Rubin, 1977; Graham, 2009). Employment type was assessed with three dichotomous variables that indicated whether the current job was (1) full-time or part-time, (2) temporary, and (3) a trainee position. Since only one case in our data was temporary or a trainee position, we only used the dummy variable for full-time employment for further analyses. Lastly, we used age as a control variable that was also assessed in the questionnaire.

RESULTS

Table 1 presents descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations. Since the dependent variable in this study is dichotomous (AE vs. SIE), we used binary logistic regressions for hypothesis testing (see Table 2). Model 1 contains only control variables and in Model 2, predictors from Hypotheses 1 to 3 were entered in the regression. First, note that among the control variables in Model 1, only organizational size is a significant predictor for AE vs. SIE such that the probability of being a self-initiated expatriate decreases with organizational size ($B = -.182, p < .01$). Overall, the amount of variance explained approximated by Nagelkerke's R^2 is relatively low in this model ($R^2 = 0.07$). Hypothesis 1.1 suggested that there is a positive relationship between a boundaryless career concept and the probability of being an SIE. This is partly supported, as we do not find a significant effect for a boundaryless mindset ($B = -0.061, p > .05$), but SIEs are significantly more frequent when organizational mobility preferences are higher ($B = 0.094, p < .05$).

*** Insert Table 1 about here ***

*** Insert Table 2 about here ***

In Hypothesis 1.2, we argued that a protean career concept is positively related to the probability of being an SIE. This is only marginally supported in our data, as the Beta coefficient of this variable is significant at the 10%-level only ($B = 0.094, p < .10$). Overall, we find partial support for Hypothesis 1.

In Hypothesis 2, we derived a link between gender and AE vs. SIE. This is supported, since there is a significant effect in the hypothesized direction ($B = 1.335, p < .01$). Hypothesis 3 suggests a negative relationship between human capital and AE vs. SIE. We do not find a significant effect for the level of education ($B = -0.075, p > .05$). However, the level of authority is a significant predictor in Model 2 ($B = -0.980, p < .001$). Hence, Hypothesis 3 is partially supported. The total amount of variance explained (i.e. Nagelkerke's R^2) amounts 0.27 in Model 2. That is, the sum of all hypothesized predictors that are added in Model 2 explains 20 percent more of the variance in the dependent variable than Model 1.

Post hoc analyses. To better understand differences in the motives of AEs compared to SIEs, we asked participants in the questionnaire to assess the importance of 17 reasons to work abroad that we derived from previous classifications (see, for example, Stahl, Miller, & Tung 2002; Suutari & Brewster 2000). Answering options captured the importance of each reason for working abroad, ranging from 1 = to little or no extent to 5 = to a great extent. Results from this explorative analysis are shown in Table 3. Overall, both groups show a very similar pattern of reasons to work abroad. However, two significant differences are noteworthy. First, expatriation as a part of a career advancement pattern is higher for EAs ($t = 2.61, p < .01$) and working abroad because of a risk of unemployment in the home country is higher for SIEs ($t = -2.95, p < .01$).

*** Insert Table 3 about here ***

We did not find support for our assumption in Hypothesis 3 that there is a negative relationship between the level of education and the probability of being an SIE. Note that we used an item exhibiting an ordinal level of measurement for the level of education. To test whether this non-finding might be due to measurement issues, we estimated an additional model in which we used the years of education as a predictor for the amount of education a person experienced. Similar to our findings in Model 1, we also do not find a significant effect for this alternative measure to capture the level of education when predicting the probability of being an SIE.

DISCUSSION

The differences between SIEs and AEs is an area in the expatriate literature that needs further investigation. Most of the expatriate research focuses on AEs although more recent studies look at SIEs. Only a handful of researchers compare the two groups. While more work still needs to be done between SIEs and AEs career paths, this study has shed light on some new areas of knowledge. The findings of this research may assist in the understanding of some fundamental differences between SIEs and AEs.

It was predicted that the boundaryless career and protean career concepts would be more represented among SIEs than AEs. It was expected that AEs would feel more constrained because they would hold more attachment to staying with their current organization. Additionally, because SIEs have significantly higher international and organizational mobility than AEs throughout their careers it was expected they would identify with the boundaryless and protean careers concepts to a greater extent. However, there were only small differences when comparing SIEs and AEs on boundaryless and protean careers. More specifically, we find that SIEs have significantly higher organizational mobility

preferences, but do not find differences for a boundaryless mindset and a protean career attitude.

This is an important finding because it might suggest that in contrast to Inkson et al. (1997), AEs are not limited to an organizational career but in addition, may pursue boundaryless careers. This finding also supports that both AEs and SIEs only slightly differ in their engagement in a boundaryless and protean career. Hence, SIEs and AEs may be closer in their psychological mindset than previously thought. *Post hoc* analysis looking into the reasons why these two sets of expatriates go overseas finds only a few significant differences. For the most part, both SIEs and AEs are similar in their career reasons for seeking a deployment.

Future research should investigate this by finding other psychological mindsets in which these two populations differ (see also Rodrigues & Guest [2010] who criticize that the notion of psychological boundarylessness is fuzzy and difficult to operationalize.). Doing so will give better predictions of how expatriates select methods for going overseas. This result might corroborate the critique by Pringle and Mallon (2003) and Rodrigues and Guest (2010) that the current explanatory power of the boundaryless career concept is still relatively weak. They believe that the concept has merit but that it is still theoretically and empirically undeveloped. The results from our study suggest that boundaryless careers are not oppositional to the traditional organizational career as posited by Arthur and Rousseau (1996) and Peiperl and Arthur (2000).

The results also demonstrate that women are more likely to be SIEs than AEs. This is the first time this research question has been directly tested. The findings imply that women may be seeking SIEs to acquire better career options (e.g. Fitzgerald & Howe-Walsh 2008; Napier & Taylor, 2002; Thang et al., 2002) or that they may be trailing spouses (Tharenou, 2008). To help further elucidate this, *post hoc* analysis was done on the reasons why this

sample population went overseas. Women more often indicate “trailing a spouse” as a reason for going overseas than AEs ($t = -3.44, p < .001$). Future research needs to investigate this finding deeper. Are female trailing spouses a distinct group from the rest of the SIE population? It may be that they are socioeconomically better off, but more likely to be underutilized because they were forced to find a job in a foreign country that may not appreciate their skills and knowledge.

The last finding was that AEs possessed no significant difference in levels of education than SIEs, but were more likely to be in greater positions of authority. These findings add to the conflicting results in this field of research (e.g. Cerdin & Le Pargneux, 2010; Jokinen et al., 2008). One unique property of this study was that the samples of SIEs and AEs were close in age. This means the analysis controls for maturation. Interpreting the human capital results suggests that even with the same levels of education and at the same point in life, SIEs are more likely to be in a lower position in the organization. It may be that a key difference between SIEs and AEs is not human capital but the underutilization of human capital in the home country. That is, the lack of opportunity in the home country drives SIEs to look for employment in other countries. Using *post hoc* analysis, SIEs were significantly more likely to cite as a reason for leaving on the SIE because of “risk of unemployment in home country.” Further investigation should focus on human capital utilization as well as looking for other more subtle differences.

One reason why the results differ from other comparative studies may be the generalizability of the samples selected in other studies that include mostly Finnish (Jokinen et al., 2008; Suutari & Brewster, 2000) and “French speaking” expatriates (Cerdin & Le Pargneux, 2010). These are very heterogeneous samples that may inject significant bias into their results. Other studies that use more diverse samples, such as the one in this study, tend to find results that are closer (e.g. Peltokorpi & Froese, 2009).

Limitations. We hope these findings are the beginning of deeper debate in the expatriate field; however, our study does have some limitations. A first limitation in our study and one that we hope future researchers will stop is grouping SIEs into a single category. From these results there appears to be multiple groups within the SIE population that may be vastly different. One pertinent example from this study is that trailing spouses may be significantly different from those fleeing their home country for fear of unemployment. It is possible that women who are trailing spouses are more educated and underemployed than those who are seeking better economic conditions. Future research needs to distill SIEs into subgroups so that we can isolate what may be very different motivations, attitudes and behaviors.

While this paper provides some interesting insights about the relationship between SIEs and AEs, there are limitations that should be considered when interpreting the results. The results are limited from the typical problems associated with a one-time cross-sectional research design. Future research should look at these expatriates across time to be able to determine causation. While the sample was more diverse than others in this area of research, having expatriates from every continent, it still has limited generalizability because most of the expatriates were from Europe. SIEs from Africa or South America may have vastly different reasons for finding work internationally than Europeans. Researchers should investigate a much larger pool of expatriates than those from mostly Europe.

Further, Cronbach's alpha for the scale of the protean career concept was 0.64, which is below the often-cited threshold of 0.70 (Lance, Butts, & Michels 2006). This is slightly lower than reliabilities for different versions of this scale in other studies (e.g., $\alpha = 0.71$ in Baruch et al., 2005 [5 items] and $\alpha = 0.75$ in Baruch & Campbell, 2007 [8 items]). Ultimately, the relatively low internal consistency of the scale might be a reason for the weak relationship between the protean career and the probability of being an SIE that we find in our data.

Conclusion. In conclusion, in this study we identified several differences between self-initiated and assigned expatriate experiences. More specifically, our results indicate that women are more likely to self-initiate their foreign work experience than to be assigned abroad. Moreover, we showed that SIEs possess significantly lower levels of human capital than AEs as reflected by their lower levels of academic achievement and that only allows them to work at comparably lower levels of the organizational hierarchy while perceiving a higher risk of unemployment in the home country. However, SIEs and AEs did only slightly differ regarding boundaryless and protean career concepts. Future research should explore these two kinds of expatriates in the perspective of a boundaryless and protean career while critically reflecting their explanatory potential and identifying SIE subgroups and their characteristics.

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TABLE 1

Means, standard deviations, and zero-order correlations

	M	S.D.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.	10.
1. AE (0) vs. SIE (1)	0.653	0.477	-									
2. Boundaryless mindset	12.59	1.880	-0.05	-								
3. Org. mobility preferences	19.06	3.806	0.11	0.13	-							
4. Protean career	26.77	3.446	0.08	0.35***	0.19**	-						
5. Gender (female = 1)	0.352	0.479	0.24***	0.03	0.08	-0.03	-					
6. Level of education	5.627	0.845	0.05	0.02	0.02	0.02	0.17*	-				
7. Level of authority	5.187	0.939	-0.24***	0.20**	0.22**	0.20**	0.07	-0.11	-			
8. Organizational size ^a	7.278	3.054	-0.19**	-0.07	-0.01	-0.05	-0.22**	-0.02	-0.08	-		
9. Subsidiary size ^a	4.935	2.407	-0.04	-0.04	0.03	0.06	-0.08	0.11	-0.13	0.58***	-	
10. Full time employment	0.969	0.174	-0.01	-0.09	0.07	0.08	-0.18*	-0.04	0.13	0.02	0.07	-
11. Age	39.95	9.002	-0.07	0.03	0.07	0.02	-0.07	-0.25***	0.29***	-0.06	-0.11	0.15*

Notes. N = 193; M = mean; S.D. = standard deviation.
^a correlations based on logarithmized values
* p < 0,05; ** p < 0,01; *** p < 0,001 (two-tailed)

TABLE 2

Results of binary logistic regressions comparing AEs and SIEs

	Model 1		Model 2	
	B	S.E.	B	S.E.
Organizational size ^a	-.182**	.064	-.145*	.072
Subsidiary size ^a	.087	.079	.020	.089
Full time employment	.030	.921	1.050	1.025
Age	-.018	.017	.002	.020
Boundaryless mindset			-.061	.101
Org. mobility preferences			.094*	.047
Protean career			.094	.056
Gender			1.335**	.413
Level of education			-.075	.208
Level of authority			-.980***	.247
Constant			.837	2.608

Notes. N = 193; DV = AE (0) vs. SIE (1); B = unstandardized logistic coefficient; S.E. = standard error; -2-log likelihood: Model 1 = 239.46, Model 2 = 206.72, Chi-square (Model 1/ Model2) = 32.75 (p < .001); Nagelkerke R-square: Model 1 = 0.07, Model 2 = 0.27.
*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01; ***p < 0.001

TABLE 3

Comparing reasons to work abroad between AEs and SIEs

Reason/motive	AE	SIE	t-value
Normal career advancement pattern in my profession/job	3.28 (1.19)	2.82 (1.18)	2.610**
Risk of unemployment in home country	1.43 (0.94)	1.91 (1.29)	-2.952** (W)
Higher salary abroad	2.33 (1.20)	2.60 (1.33)	-1.415
Professional development	4.15 (1.10)	3.97 (1.10)	1.085
Opportunities to realize own values and ideas	3.99 (1.02)	3.90 (1.09)	0.497
Thirst for adventure	3.76 (1.03)	3.98 (1.17)	-1.315
Importance of the job itself	3.76 (1.03)	3.44 (1.15)	1.887
Personal challenge	4.22 (0.92)	4.15 (1.14)	0.453
Geographic location of the assignment	3.18 (1.36)	3.29 (1.30)	-0.575
Family considerations	2.70 (1.58)	2.79 (1.62)	-0.347
Encouragement from spouse or partner	2.48 (1.49)	2.68 (1.61)	-0.862
Higher quality of living	2.54 (1.31)	2.95 (1.44)	-1.966
Trailing my spouse	1.64 (1.10)	1.93 (1.45)	-1.418 (W)
Pressure articulated by supervisor	1.54 (0.94)	1.29 (0.69)	1.864 (W)
Tax advantages	1.48 (0.94)	1.62 (1.03)	-0.937
<i>Notes.</i> AE = Assigned expatriate; SIE = self-initiated expatriate; N _{AE} = 67; N _{SIE} = 126; t-value = result from t-test/Welch-test comparing both groups; (W) Welch-test because of heterogeneity of variances; ** p < .01			