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Zhang, L.E., Lauring, J. and Liu, T. (2021), A sense of belonging helps! The alleviating effect of national identification on burnout among diplomats, *Journal of Global Mobility*, <https://doi.org/10.1108/JGM-06-2021-0063>

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A sense of belonging helps! The alleviating effect of national identification on burnout among diplomats

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Abstract

Purpose – This paper aims to explore the interplay between burnout, national identity, and career satisfaction among diplomats. In particular, we focus on the roles of home and host country identification as an emotional resource for overcoming the negative effects of job-related burnout.

Design/methodology/approach – We use survey responses from 123 diplomats to assess the moderating role of home and host country identification on the relationship between burnout and career satisfaction.

Findings – We tested various combinations of high or low home or host country identification, and our findings suggest that the negative effect of burnout on career satisfaction is reduced for those individuals that have high identification with both the home and the host country, while this is not the case for other combinations. This points to the beneficial effects of dual national identifications even for diplomats – a group that would normally be expected to identify strongly with the home country alone.

Originality/value – No existing study that we know of has explored the relationship between burnout, national identity, and career satisfaction among diplomats or other types of expatriates. This is unfortunate because a better understanding of national identity could guide practitioners in finding ways to reduce the negative consequences of burnout in international organizations.

Keywords: diplomat, expatriate, burnout, career satisfaction, home country identification, host country identification

Introduction

Levels of burnout are currently found to be alarmingly high among many groups of white-collar workers (Dylag *et al.*, 2013; Willard-Grace *et al.*, 2019). In addition to the detrimental personal consequences for individuals, burnout can contribute to reduced performance (Bakker *et al.*, 2004) and increased turnover due to low satisfaction with career development (Rahim and Cosby, 2016). In this regard, studies reveal that high levels of burnout are particularly prominent among expatriates who spend much of their career outside their home countries (Bhanugopan and Fish, 2006; Silbiger and Pines, 2014; Selmer and Fenner, 2009). Burnout is considered a consequence of strain caused by the need to adjust to novel work conditions and represents a challenging job demand (Silbiger *et al.*, 2017). Interestingly, although burnout is frequently reported by expatriates, not all individuals experience the same negative consequences for work performance and career satisfaction. Influencing factors are, for example, the perceived importance of work (Silbiger and Pines, 2014), the supervisor-subordinate relationship (Yuan *et al.*, 2019), as well as role conflict, role ambiguity, and role overload (Bhanugopan and Fish, 2006).

Our study follows this stream of work, which explores specific contextual factors that can affect the consequences of expatriate burnout and alleviate negative effects on the performance and career outcomes of expatriates (e.g., Silbiger and Pines, 2014). We focus specifically on the role of expatriates' home and host country identification. There is increasing consciousness of national identity as a consequence of globalization and the dynamics of international relations (Horak *et al.*, 2019; Reade, 2001). At the same time, national identity has become more complex due to increased migration flows and global work mobility (Fleischmann and Phalet, 2018). While the literature on expatriation has traditionally emphasized the importance of recognizing home and host country identification of expatriates (Leonardelli and Toh, 2011; Varma *et al.*, 2011), little empirical work has been conducted to examine its actual consequences. To obtain knowledge of this research gap, we investigated the issues of national identity and burnout among an extreme type of expatriates in terms of host country identification – namely diplomatic expatriates.

Diplomatic expatriates¹ take on one international assignment after another and experience health-related challenges such as stress and burnout that are rarely addressed in empirical studies (Brandt and Buck, 2005; Fliege *et al.*, 2016). There is a lack of knowledge on the effect of national

¹ In this paper, we use the term “diplomats” and “diplomatic expatriates” interchangeably, treating diplomats as one type of expatriates in keeping with previous studies (e.g. Fliege *et al.*, 2016).

identity, which is of particular relevance to diplomats during their repeated expatriations to various host countries. Scholars in diplomacy traditionally refer to diplomats as “diplomats of states” or “national diplomats” with diplomats being the key referent object for any inquiry into diplomacy (Murray *et al.*, 2011). Thus strong home country identification is often assumed among diplomats when they work on securing agreements ranging from sovereignty to trade, arms control, and security crises on behalf of the national states they represent (Wong, 2016; Jervis, 1970). It has even been argued that what diplomats “do” and what they “say” in their everyday diplomatic practices cannot be separated from their home country (Neumann, 2002; Sending *et al.*, 2015). Still, diplomats have long been known for their skill in constructing and maintaining ambiguous identities in various social contexts, depending on the requirements of the specific negotiation goal (Murray *et al.*, 2011). As a significant component in the work of diplomatic expatriates is to engage in negotiations with local counterparts with the aim of reaching cross-nation agreements, it is important that diplomatic expatriates are able and willing to cooperate with representatives from the host country. Therefore, developing a certain level of host country identification may help them gain the trust of their local counterparts. National identity is thus a particularly relevant issue and warrants research on this extreme type of expatriate.

In this paper, we focus specifically on the effect of home country and host country identification in remedying the adverse impact of expatriate burnout on career satisfaction. We explore career satisfaction because it has been considered of high relevance to the increasingly changing workforce and complex workplace structures – not least to mobile workers such as expatriates (Colakoglu, 2011). In this regard, it should be mentioned that career satisfaction and subjective career success are often regarded as synonyms and measured with the same scale (cf. Heslin, 2005). However, we argue that there are differences between career success and career satisfaction, especially among expatriates who have different job descriptions across countries (Dimitrova *et al.*, 2020; Guttormsen and Francesco, 2019). While career satisfaction may not provide a sufficient indication of career success, it is a more concrete measure and associated with various organizational benefits such as lower job search intentions (Dawley *et al.*, 2008) and higher organizational commitment (Joo and Park, 2010) that are highly relevant for organizations. We therefore focus on the concept of career satisfaction among diplomatic expatriates in this paper. Specifically, we seek to answer the question of whether a specific national identification (home or host country) has the potential to reduce the negative effects of expatriate burnout on career

satisfaction. We do this by drawing on the Job-Demands Resources (JD-R) model (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001; Bakker and Demerouti, 2017) as a framework for describing the effects of draining and replenishing factors for expatriates at work. By so doing we seek to answer whether a firmly grounded national identity, whether home or host country, can function as a resource that buffers the effects of burnout on career satisfaction for expatriates. By applying the JD-R model in the context of expatriation management, we make a conceptual and empirical contribution to the advancement of our knowledge on the relationship between burnout and career satisfaction and the moderating effects of national identity. This is especially important because to date very few studies have tested the JD-R model from an intercultural perspective (Rattrie and Kittler, 2014; Rattrie *et al.*, 2020). We also contribute to expatriate home and host country identification literature by emphasizing the moderating effects of such identifications on work-related outcomes such as career satisfaction. In so doing, we provide much-needed knowledge on how working employees reshape and extend their sense of self (Arnett, 2002; Hermans and Dimaggio, 2007) in responding to exposure to diverse cultures during expatriation. Further, we relate this to the consequences of changing degrees of identifications with regard to home and host cultures (Lee *et al.*, 2018; Luring *et al.*, 2018).

In the following sections, we present a review of the relevant literature as the theoretical background to this paper, followed by the hypotheses we developed and tested for this investigation.

Theoretical background

The JD-R model has often been applied as a theoretical framework for understanding employee well-being, particularly in connection to burnout (Demerouti *et al.*, 2001; Bakker *et al.*, 2014). The general argument is that job demands are related to health impairment and burnout, whereas job resources are related to positive work outcomes (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017; Bakker *et al.*, 2004). According to the JD-R model, job demands are elements of work activities related to physical, emotional, or cognitive effort. Job resources, on the other hand, are aspects of work that help an individual achieve goals, alleviate job demands, or stimulate personal growth (Bakker *et al.*, 2014; Bakker and Demerouti, 2007; Akhtar and Lee, 2010). According to the JD-R model, burnout develops when job demands are high and job resources are limited. This is because such negative

working conditions cause energy depletion and undermine employee motivation and satisfaction (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017).

More specifically, it has been argued that burnout results from chronic stress associated with emotionally intense work demands and inadequate resources for dealing with these demands (Pines and Keinan, 2005). A central aspect of occupational burnout is the notion of lack of meaningfulness and dissatisfaction with one's life. In this way, burnout can be seen as a failure in the existential quest for meaning (Pines, 1993). One factor that generates such a feeling of failure leading to burnout has been described as self-concept uncertainty (Higgins, 1987). This term relates to confusion and lack of clarity regarding how individuals view themselves. Consequently, a clear self-concept can help individuals become better at handling emotional exhaustion and dealing with it before it becomes too intrusive in their lives (Pines and Maslach, 1978).

National identity has been described as a sense of belonging to a specific society (Igarashi, 2019), offering favorable defining characteristics of the group that can be used in positive self-categorization (cf. Turner *et al.*, 1987; Luring, 2008). Hence, individuals can incorporate the positive attributes, success, and status of their group into their own self-concepts and thus achieve a clear and favorable self-image (Dutton *et al.* 1994; Oakes and Turner, 1980). In line with this, identification with a larger group can enhance self-worth and self-confidence (Cialdini and Richardson, 1980; Correll and Park, 2005; Johnson *et al.*, 2006). National identity can thus be considered a form of essential emotional resource that allows fulfillment of fundamental needs such as belonging and developing a positive self-image (cf. Baumeister and Leary, 1995). This is particularly important for diplomats in foreign postings whose main duty is to represent a single country (Shaw, 2006). Hence, we argue that having a strong national identity can provide emotional sturdiness, which can assist diplomats in alleviating the consequences of burnout and thus maintain a higher level of career satisfaction (cf. Richter and Hacker, 1998; Neumann, 2012).

Hypotheses

Burnout and career satisfaction

Burnout arises as a consequence of unmet job demands, for example, when important work-related goals are blocked by external circumstances. This can lead to a feeling of failure (Pines, 1993), lack of personal accomplishment (Snyder, 1994; Densten, 2001), and low satisfaction (Andrews and Dziegielewski, 2005; Bilge, 2006; Larrabee *et al.*, 2003). In line with this, scholars on burnout

have argued that burnout lowers the career satisfaction of employees (Barthauer *et al.*, 2020; Bianchi *et al.*, 2015; Harry and Coetzee, 2013; Schaufeli and Enzmann, 1998). Hobfoll (1989), for example, found that burnout reduced employees' generic satisfaction with their careers and lowered the chances for achieving self-set criteria for developmental success. Similarly, Choi and colleagues (2012) found that high levels of burnout were related to lower job and career satisfaction among call center employees. Similarly, burnout for expatriates could be reflected in their perceived status in the organization and career satisfaction. This effect has been substantiated in a qualitative study of black expatriates living in South Korea (Dos Santos, 2020), where burnout negatively affected career decisions and led to turnover. Accordingly, we present our baseline hypothesis on diplomats as one type of expatriate.

Hypothesis 1: Burnout experienced by a diplomatic expatriate will be negatively associated with career satisfaction.

National identification and career satisfaction

National identification is important for many employees, not least in global workplaces where they move across national boundaries regularly in the course of their careers (Du Bois, 2007; Mao and Shen, 2015). This is because the identity of this type can be conceived as a primary basis of the need to belong and as an emotional resource (Moreland and Levine, 1989; Stangor *et al.*, 1992). A strong feeling of national identity can be a job resource for furthering satisfaction with the job situation and career progression, especially for diplomats who have strong attachments to the national state because of their jobs.

While attachment to a specific national identity can yield feelings of confidence and belongingness, empirical studies have shown that people exhibit varying degrees of national identification (Das *et al.*, 2008). For example, this has been demonstrated in studies of various racial groups in the USA (Devos and Banaji, 2005). Such findings are central because national identification has been found to have strong career-long positive consequences for satisfaction and organizational commitment (Das *et al.*, 2008).

The relationship between national identity and career satisfaction is particularly salient for expatriates. This group of employees works in various locations during what is career-wise the most crucial period of their working life and may often experience uncertainties in national

affiliation (Adams and Van de Vijver, 2015; Grinstein and Wathieu, 2012). With regard to home country identification, past research has shown that it is related to career satisfaction. For example, in their study of Latino immigrants in the US, Valdivia and Flores (2012) found that strong home country identification had a positive effect on job satisfaction. In a similar vein, empirical studies with a Latina population showed that high degrees of home country identification were associated with high levels of career self-efficacy (Gushue, 2006; Gushue and Whitson, 2006). Home country identification is also often related to one's sense of worth, which is an important positive work motivator (Shinnar, 2007). In another study, Timotijevic and Breakwell (2000) showed that migrants from former Yugoslavia to Britain maintained continuity in their home country identity. This was because their home country identification was of significance to them for retaining their sense of self-efficacy and self-esteem, which in turn were associated with career satisfaction and development. Finally, in a study of Nordic expatriates in China and Japan, Peltokorpi and Zhang (2020) found that expatriates tried to hold on to values and business practices from their home country. Moreover, those who were successful in shaping the local environment to resemble that of their home country tended to have a greater sense of career-related achievement. Diplomatic expatriates are an example of a group of expatriates where home country identification is traditionally expected to be strong. In this regard, diplomats are often criticized if they live too luxuriously abroad and become alien to their home countries; they are viewed as having lost touch with their own people (Sofer, 1997). As such, home country national identity becomes part of the personal identity of diplomats (Faizullaev, 2006). In line with this, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2a: Diplomatic expatriates with high identification with their home country will have a higher level of career satisfaction.

While we argue that strong *home* country identification should have positive implications for career satisfaction, strong *host* country identification may be beneficial as well. Migration and expatriation studies provide ample empirical evidence on the positive effect of strong host country identification. In an empirical study of expatriates working in Malaysia, Tan (2010) found that expatriates who identified more strongly with the host country were more willing to contribute to the Malaysian economy and in turn were more satisfied with their careers. Similar results were also found among Asian American workers – a strong US identity reduced occupational stress and

strain and helped increase job satisfaction and career development (Au *et al.*, 1998; Leong, 2001; Leong and Chou, 1994). Mace and Carr (2005) further showed that immigrant workers in New Zealand with a strong host country identity were more likely to achieve full employment and had higher levels of job satisfaction and a more satisfying career trajectory. Research on self-initiated expatriates also showed that the development of a strong host country identity resulted in positive work outcomes related to career advancement (Hajro *et al.*, 2017).

For expatriates, a strong host country identity is associated with their need to be accepted, valued, and respected in the host country, as well as the need to belong (Ellemers *et al.*, 2002; Smith and Tyler, 1997). The more expatriates start to define themselves by employing host country culture, the more their local colleagues accept them (Zhang *et al.*, 2018). Hence developing a strong host country identity helps expatriates adjust and develop their career in the new context (Berry, 1997; Phinney *et al.*, 2001). When they identify strongly with their host country, expatriates are motivated to fully utilize their skills and work on their own professional development and achieve career related self-actualization in the host country (Adler, 1977; Aycan and Berry, 1996).

While diplomatic expatriates are expected to have a strong identification with the home country, they also need simultaneously to manage multiple complex roles in the host country (Cornut, 2015). The daily work of a diplomatic expatriate is far more sophisticated than the representation of one's home country. Diplomats are often expected to speak the language and have a deep understanding of the host country (Smith, 2011). While diplomatic expatriates work on behalf of their nation states, we argue they also have personal needs to achieve self-actualization in the host country. This becomes especially explicit when the tension between the "homebound good husband" and the "hero script of the nomadic diplomat" leads to many diplomats working without accompanying families (Neumann, 2005: 84). Diplomats are essentially public sector employees on repeated international assignments with the same need to feel motivated in their work as other types of expatriates. Thus, we expect that a strong feeling of attachment to the host country during the posting could also be a job resource that improves the job situation of diplomatic expatriates and contributes to career progression. In line with this, we hypothesize the following:

Hypothesis 2b: Diplomatic expatriates with high identification with their host country will have a higher level of career satisfaction.

As we have argued that both high home and high host country identification increase career satisfaction separately, we also argue that a combination of high home and high host country identity will have positive implications in this regard. This is due to the usefulness of having identifications with both home and host country when working abroad (Tadmor *et al.*, 2012). Expatriates with dual identifications have been found to have greater cultural competence and are more likely to have better careers (Gillespie *et al.*, 2010; Hong and Doz, 2013). Such expatriates have also been found to have more social capital, which could also be the case for diplomats (Fitzsimmons *et al.*, 2017). In this regard, scholars in diplomacy have noted that diplomats are often called upon to negotiate their ‘selves’ and may experience identity confusion in their efforts to interpret both their home countries and the posted host countries as a “wanderer among diverse cultures” (Sofer, 1997: 182). In attempting to create a “third culture” between their home country and host countries, diplomatic expatriates juggle between acquiring a deep knowledge of the host country and refraining from developing feelings for it. Based on this, we present our fourth hypothesis:

Hypothesis 2c: Diplomatic expatriates with high identification with both their home and host country will have a higher level of career satisfaction.

Interaction between burnout, career satisfaction, and national identity

We have argued that burnout caused by high job demands has a negative effect on career satisfaction. On the other hand, we have presented national identity, in the form of home and host country identification, as an emotional resource that could increase expatriates’ satisfaction with their work situation and career (cf. Richter and Hacker, 1998; Pines and Maslach, 1978; Wilk and Moynihan, 2005; Liu *et al.*, 2020). As a third step in our argumentation, we will discuss the interaction between burnout, national identity, and career satisfaction. Here, in line with the JD-R model, we predict that the emotional resources encompassed in strong feelings of national identity may buffer the negative emotions that burnout creates in relation to one’s current career situation. While only a few studies have dealt with the buffering role of national identity, there are some indications that a specific national identification could have an impact on the relationship between emotional strain on the job and positive work outcomes. For example, Das, Dharwadkar, and

Brandes (2008) demonstrated that the relation between burnout and organizational identification in the Indian call center sector was moderated by the centrality of national identity to individuals. This could be related to the feelings of dissonance in one's identity enhancing the perceived level of stress and burnout among employees (Philips *et al.*, 2006; Raskin, 2006). On the other hand, national identity has also been considered a personal emotional resource with a buffering effect on career satisfaction. For example, Wassermann and colleagues (2017) found that a strong host country identity moderated the relationship between immigrants' overqualification and work-related well-being, including career satisfaction.

Accordingly, based on the above findings and the JD-R model outlined earlier, we predict that a strong national identity in the form of either home or host country identification will reduce the negative effect that burnout would normally have on career satisfaction for diplomatic expatriate personnel. This is because national identity can work as an important form of emotional resource for expatriate diplomats (cf. Richter and Hacker, 1998). A strong national identification provides them with a sense of belonging to the home and/or host country, an enhanced self-image (Oakes and Turner, 1980), as well as self-worth and self-confidence (Correll and Park, 2005). This leads us to our final set of hypotheses:

Hypothesis 3: The negative effect of diplomatic expatriates' burnout on career satisfaction will be weaker for individuals with a high identification with a) home, b) host, or c) both home and host country identifications.

Methods

Data collection and sample

To test our hypotheses, data were collected through an online survey among diplomatic expatriates. The questionnaire was in English. To make sure that the questions were clear and easy to answer, we conducted pilot tests with three men and two women. The survey was then posted on the research project website and social media for diplomats and diplomatic spouses, such as the Facebook and Twitter accounts of various platforms related to diplomats and diplomatic spouses. We also managed to reach family officers in Foreign Services, who helped us distribute our survey link to further diplomats. In total, we received responses from 208 diplomats who indicated in response to filter questions that they currently worked outside their home country. Excluding those

with missing information on the variables used in this study left 123 respondents. As shown in Table 1, 77 percent of the respondents were female. Most (67 percent) lived with their spouse or partner and 48 percent lived with children under the age of 18. The average age was 43.94 years (range: 24 to 66 years). On average, respondents had lived in 4.5 countries for at least one year (range: 0 to 10 countries). As shown in Table 2, the expatriates were located in 53 different countries on six continents; the largest number were located in Belgium (11 respondents), followed by the Japan and the United States of America (8 respondents each). Most of the respondents (43.1 percent) were located in Europe, followed by Africa and the Middle East (20.3%) and Asia (19.5 percent).

Insert Table 1 and Table 2 about here

Measures

Unless stated otherwise, items were measured on seven-point scales, with answer categories ranging from 1 = “strongly disagree” to 7 = “strongly agree.” Scales were formed by taking the mean of each respondent’s responses.

Career satisfaction was measured with three items from Greenhaus *et al.* (1990). Sample items are “I am satisfied with the success I have achieved in my career” and “I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals in regard to income.” Cronbach’s alpha was 0.78.

Burnout was measured with six items adapted from Hollet-Haudebert *et al.* (2011), a short version of the General Burnout Questionnaire (Schaufeli and Van Dierendonck, 2000). Sample items are “I feel exhausted from my activities” and “Being involved in all these activities is really a strain for me.” Answer categories were 1 = “never”, 2 = “almost never”, 3 = “sometimes”, 4 = “fairly often” and 5 = “very often”. Cronbach’s alpha was 0.80.

Home and host country identification were each measured using three items from Roccas *et al.*’s (2008) “identification with groups” scale that measured the importance of the group as part of self-definition, i.e. how much the person viewed the group as a part of who he or she is. The items were “Being ... is an important part of my identity,” “It is important to me that I view myself

as ... ,” and “It is important to me that others see me as ...”^[2]. To measure identification with different countries (i.e. home country and host country), we used the referent “a national of my home country” to measure identification with the home country and “belonging to the current host country” to measure identification with the current host country. Cronbach’s alpha was 0.89 (home country) and 0.95 (host country). For home country identification, the scale’s mean was 5.88 (SD = 1.12) and for host country identification 3.31 (SD = 1.58). Using the mean as a cutoff value^[3], we dichotomized home country identification and host country identification, respectively, and used the dichotomized variables to create dummy variables for four categories reflecting different levels of identification with home country and host country: low home country and low host country identification (n = 23), low home country and high host country identification (n = 21), high home country and low host country identification (n = 42) and high home country and high host country identification (n = 37).

In addition, we collected demographic information on respondents’ gender (0 = ‘man’, 1 = ‘woman’), age (in years), whether they lived with a spouse or partner (1 = yes), and whether they lived with any children under the age of 18 (1 = yes).

Analyses

Confirmatory factor analysis using R software showed an acceptable fit of our measurement model ($\Delta\chi^2 = 119.59$, $df = 79$, $p < 0.001$; TLI=0.98; CFI=0.98; RMSEA = 0.07); this fit the data significantly better than a one-factor solution ($\Delta\chi^2 = 975.52$, $df = 90$, $p < 0.001$; TLI=0.76; CFI=0.80; RMSEA = 0.28) or an alternative three-factor solution where home and host country identification were combined into one factor ($\Delta\chi^2 = 604.03$, $df = 87$, $p < 0.001$; TLI=0.86; CFI=0.88; RMSEA = 0.22).

The hypotheses were tested using OLS regression with PROCESS version 3.5 (Hayes 2017) in SPSS version 26 (IBM 2019), with career satisfaction as a dependent variable. To facilitate interpretation of the moderating effect, the variable burnout was centered before

² A fourth item (“When I talk about ..., I usually say ‘we’ rather than ‘they’”), had been included in the survey as well, both for home country identification and host country identification, but was removed from both scales after confirmatory factor analysis showed low standardized loadings on the respective latent variable (0.51 and 0.43, respectively) (Hair *et al.*, 2019, p. 674). Removing the items led to a significant improvement in the model’s chi-square ($\Delta\chi^2 = 57.74$, $df = 29$, $p < .01$).

³ We explored alternative cutoff points, notably the midpoint of the scale and the median. With regard to the former, the number of cases with home country identification below or at the scale’s midpoint (4) was 14, i.e., too few for meaningful analyses. When using the median as a cutoff, the results were similar to those based on the mean as a cutoff, and led to the same conclusions concerning our hypotheses.

creating the interaction terms. Model 7 in Table 3 includes the control variables (gender, age, living with spouse or partner, living with children, and number of countries) together with our focal independent variable (burnout) and the dummy variables for various combinations of high vs. low home and host country identification (reference category: low home country and low host country identification). Next, we added the interaction terms between burnout and each of the three dummy variables for home country and host country identification (Models 8 to 11).

Insert Table 3 about here

Results

Our findings showed no association between career satisfaction and respondents' gender, age, family situation, and the number of countries they had lived in (Table 1). Turning to our hypotheses, Hypothesis 1 concerned the association between diplomatic expatriates' burnout and career satisfaction. As shown in Table 3, we found a significant negative association between burnout and career satisfaction (Model 2: $b = -0.56, p < 0.001$), suggesting that expatriates who felt burnt out were less satisfied with their careers. This provided support for Hypothesis 1.

Hypothesis 2a, 2b, and 2c concerned the effect of home and host country identification on career satisfaction. We found support for the hypothesis that individuals with high-home country identification but low-host country identity had a more positive perception of their careers (Model 6: $b = 0.68, p < 0.05$). Also as expected, there was a significant positive effect of having both high home and high host country identifications (Model 6: $b = 1.01, p < 0.01$), suggesting that those individuals were more satisfied with their careers. However, there was no significant effect of having high host country identity and low home country identity. This provided support for Hypothesis 2a and 2c but not for 2b.

Hypothesis 3a, 3b, and 3c predicted that the negative effect of expatriate burnout on career satisfaction would be buffered when either home country or host country identification or both were high. As shown in Model 11, the interaction was significant only when both home and host country identification were high ($b = 0.87, p < 0.05$). We then conducted a simple slope analysis to assess the results in more detail (Aiken and West, 1991). When diplomatic expatriates have low

home and low-host identification, the relationship between burnout and satisfaction is negatively significant ($b = -0.82, p < 0.01$). From this, it was clear that when diplomatic expatriates have both high home and high host identification, the relationship between burnout and satisfaction is not significant ($b = -0.21, ns$). Figure 1 presents the interaction plot. Thus, Hypothesis 3c was supported and Hypothesis 3a and 3b were not supported. In summary, Hypothesis 1, 2a, 2c, and 3c were supported.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Discussion

Apart from the strong direct effect of burnout on career satisfaction, our study yielded other interesting results. First, we found that not all combinations of high and low home or host country identifications had similar effects on career satisfaction. It is noticeable that having a high host country identity is not sufficient if the home country identity is low. This may be because for diplomatic expatriates, host country identity does not provide as strong an emotional resource as home country identity. The strongest effect on career satisfaction was achieved when both home and host country identification were high. Similar results were found when we examined the interaction between burnout, career satisfaction, and home/host country identity. Here we also found that the negative effect of burnout was reduced only when there were strong identifications with both home and host countries.

As described briefly above, our findings contribute to the use of the JD-R model in international business and management research by emphasizing high home combined with high host country identification as a job resource that can buffer the effect of burnout on career satisfaction. Our results are in line with the JD-R model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017) and predict that high job demands resulting in burnout will also have negative consequences with regard to job and career satisfaction in general. Thus, our findings are consistent with previous studies showing that negative work outcomes can result from burnout among both expatriates (Dos Santos, 2020) and domestic employees (Andrews and Dziegielewski, 2005; Bilge, 2006; Larrabee *et al.*, 2003).

The finding that a high level of home country identification had a positive direct association with career satisfaction is in line with research demonstrating the positive effects of strong identification with their home country on the part of immigrants (Valdivia and Flores, 2012; Timotijevic and Breakwell, 2000) and expatriates (Peltokorpi and Zhang, 2020). However, contrary to many previous studies (e.g., Hajro *et al.*, 2017; Mace and Carr, 2005; Zhang *et al.*, 2017; Ellemers *et al.*, 2002) we did not find an effect on career satisfaction when there was high host country identification. Instead, strong home country identification had a positive effect on the career satisfaction of diplomatic expatriates. While this may sound intuitive for diplomats who are often seen as the representatives of their home countries, we find it interesting because developing a deep understanding of the host country is primarily a diplomat's job (Cornut, 2015). This confirms previous research findings that the diplomatic expatriate needs to strike a fine balance in disaggregating the state and oneself (Hoffman, 2003). While developing a strong identification with the host country yields positive work outcomes for business expatriates (e.g., Peltokorpi and Zhang, 2020), this is not the case for diplomatic expatriates, to whom the home country becomes an individual self-schema (Faizullaev, 2006).

It is interesting, however, that despite the insignificant result of the effect of strong host country identification on the career satisfaction of diplomatic expatriates, our results show that home country identification and host country identification collectively increased career satisfaction as well as moderated the relation between diplomatic expatriate burnout and career satisfaction. In other words, identifying with the home country alone does not help relieve the negative effect of expatriate burnout when it comes to career satisfaction. By identifying with more than one group, the social identity complexity of expatriates (Roccas and Brewer, 2002) increases, which in turn helps reduce the anxiety and uncertainty encountered by expatriates during assignments abroad. Therefore, despite the differences between business expatriates and the specific type of diplomatic expatriates, our counter-intuitive findings point out that dual home and host country identification is actually important for diplomats who are not supposed to develop attachment to local cultures because of the technicalities and minutiae of their day-to-day representation work for their home countries (Muldoon, 2005).

By empirically illustrating the role of the national identity in remedying the adverse effect of expatriate burnout on career satisfaction among expatriates who engage in diplomatic assignments, this study responds to the call for contextualizing expatriate research (Selmer, 2013;

Pinto and Caldas, 2015). In this regard, Pinto, Bader and Schuster (2017) emphasize the importance of gaining insights from expatriate communities other than the dominant business community. In addition, McNulty *et al.* (2017) called for more research on overlooked occupational groups such as diplomats for a better understanding of the differences between business and governmental expatriation (e.g., Waibel *et al.*, 2018). Our study, thus, contributes to the severely under-researched form of expatriation, namely diplomatic assignments, which are among the oldest types of expatriate profession (Fliege *et al.*, 2016; Groeneveld, 2008; Davoine *et al.*, 2013).

The findings of this paper also contribute to the identification literature in international human resource management research in general. We found that national identification becomes more important when burnout increases. Here it becomes clear that employees with different levels of home and host country identification have different levels of resilience when it comes to burnout. At the average point of burnout, those that have high levels of both home and host country identity are most satisfied, while those with low levels of both are least so. This is in line with research advocating the importance of developing dual identifications with both home and host country when expatriates work abroad (Tadmor *et al.*, 2012). In this situation, employees with dual identifications have been found to have more cultural competence and cultural switching capability and are more likely to have more successful careers in top management positions (Gillespie *et al.*, 2010; Hong and Doz, 2013). Expatriates with multiple national identities are also found to have more social capital and higher levels of intercultural skills than those with fewer skills of this kind (Fitzsimmons *et al.*, 2017). What we can see from our results is that as work starts to become tough, identifying with the host country only becomes useful if identification with the home country remains strong.

In conclusion, it can be argued that some groups defined on the basis of identification deal with high burnout significantly better than others and that the differences between the groups are most pronounced when they are at the highest levels of burnout. As such, our research supports findings from recent studies on multicultural employees in international business showing that individuals' cultural identities have become increasingly complex with different implications for work outcomes (e.g., Fitzsimmons *et al.*, 2017; Vora *et al.*, 2019). Moving away from the monocultural assumption of expatriates (Collings *et al.*, 2007; Takeuchi, 2010), our findings emphasize that expatriates can identify with both home and host countries and that such dual identifications may create favorable work outcomes such as reduced effects of burnout (Brannen and Lee, 2014).

Practical implications

The findings of this study provide important insights on diplomats as an extreme case of expatriates in relation to the requirement for host country identity. Diplomats are ‘permanent expatriates’; they are constantly on the move and experience repeated international relocation. Unlike most business expatriates, who return home at the end of an assignment, diplomats continue taking on new postings. Such frequent relocation often involves comprehensive procedures in a highly institutionalized setting (Brandt and Buck, 2005; Holland, 1984). Moreover, diplomatic expatriates also engage in not-for-profit assignments all around the world, including difficult locations with danger and risk and without accompanying families. This constitutes a major source of strain and stress (Wilkinson and Singh, 2010). Finally, the work intensity of diplomats is also extremely high with the constant need to deal with crises, which can lead to burnout and career dissatisfaction. For diplomats who take on assignments without accompanying families and are expected to have a high degree of home country identification, it is recommended that the human resource personnel of foreign ministries help diplomats evaluate the risk of an identity crisis and burnout caused by the constant need to represent their home country and the inability to switch off from work.

Diplomatic expatriates would also benefit from formal human resource training that is found to be helpful for business expatriates. In this regard, studies have repeatedly demonstrated that burnout prevention can improve employee well-being and performance (Huo and Boxall, 2017; Schaufeli, 2017). Such training can make employees with the intention of working abroad aware of the high risk of burnout. As opposed to short one-time training, long-term, repeated training directed toward alleviating the perceived cultural novelty and foreignness could potentially reduce burnout. It can further enhance the diplomatic expatriate’s perception of career continuation within the same organization. It is also recommended that employees organize burnout workshops to help diplomatic expatriates acknowledge the importance of their work, set reasonable goals, and manage their own expectations as well as those of home and host country colleagues (Silbiger and Pines, 2014). As a preventive strategy for expatriation stress (e.g., Lei *et al.*, 2004), cross-cultural training covering a wide range of general topics including languages, experiences in the host country and intercultural sensitivity would also be helpful to diplomats (Morris and Robie, 2001; Tung, 1981). Good cross-cultural skills would make diplomats less anxious when they are expected to be knowledgeable about the host country upon arrival at the new posting (Smith, 2011).

In addition to the formal organizational support from the foreign ministries, we also recommend that diplomatic expatriates take a reflexive approach in relating themselves to their home and host country (Mateu, 2006; Archer, 2007). As a powerful group with access to unique social and economic resources in the host country, expatriates in general have considerable freedom to explore their cultural identities (Adams and Van de Vijver, 2015; Li *et al.*, 2019). Although admittedly diplomats cannot separate their work from their home countries, they need to be more conscious of the tension between themselves as employees of the public sector and the stereotypical heroic script of the nomadic diplomats (Neumann, 2005). By becoming aware and reflexive about their identifications in relation to the home and host country, diplomats can proactively prevent identity crises, reduce identity-related stress, be less vulnerable to burnout, and enjoy higher career satisfaction.

Limitations and directions for future research

Several limitations should be noted. First, a potential problem of this study could be common method bias (CMB) since the data were collected by cross-sectional self-reports (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). To explore the potential for CMB, Harman (1976)'s single factor test was applied (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2003). As noted above, the model fit of the one-factor solution was significantly worse than our measurement model and the average variance extracted was low (25 percent), suggesting that CMB did not significantly influence our findings. Moreover, as our main interest was in the interaction between burnout and national identification, CMB is less likely to be of concern because significant moderation effects cannot be caused by CMB (Siemsen *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, results concerning the varying effects of home and host country identity cannot be caused by CMB. Further, due to the cross-sectional nature of our study, the direction of causality cannot be determined with certainty and hence we refrain from speculation concerning the direction of the measured effect. Although future studies using longitudinal designs would potentially be able to establish the direction of causality with more certainty, the relationship is likely to be dual as burnout and career satisfaction can impact each other.

Using a sample of diplomats could lead to certain limitations in terms of generalizability. Compared with diplomats, business expatriates working for multinational corporations may be perceived less as representatives of their home countries as their main working context is business-driven. Hence, the results of our study need to be generalized with caution outside the diplomatic

context. That said, past studies have repeatedly highlighted the importance of national identities as an explanatory variable in career development for all types of expatriates, migrants, and immigrants including non-traditional types of expatriates such as diplomats (See Miller and Kerlow-Myers 2009 for a review). We thus believe that our study provides important insights on national identity, career, and burnout issues despite the limitations of our sample. Still, we find that future studies contrasting the findings among diplomats with other types of expatriates are needed in order to assess the uniqueness of the diplomat group.

Another issue worth further consideration is the role of diplomatic spouses. The benefits of spousal support in expatriate careers have already been well established (Lauring and Selmer, 2010; Stoermer et al., forthcoming). In this regard, Davoine et al. (2013) described how spouses of diplomatic and consular expatriates, depending on their gender, took on different supporting roles. Based on a survey with European diplomatic spouses, Gudmundsdottir et al. (2019) further emphasized the important role of diplomatic spouses in the improvement of expatriate programs and policies for Foreign Ministries. In line with this research effort, we believe that more research on diplomatic spouses could be a useful way of contextualizing the understanding of diplomats in expatriate research. A particular avenue to explore the role of diplomatic spouses further would be to compare spouses that are of the same nationality as the diplomat with those who are of a different nationality. This could, for example, be diplomatic spouses with a host country nationality that may provide specific insight into the local context but may also introduce a split loyalty situation in the relationship. This issue would be particularly relevant to study in varying contexts such as developed vs. developing countries and in host countries having a crisis situation (McNulty et al., 2019). In this regard, Fliege et al. (2016) found that the health of diplomats was affected by the exposure to international relocation mobility and various personal risks and protective factors. Here a diplomatic spouse with host country nationality could be perceived as a potential protective factor or as a resource to counter the health problems and burnout that diplomats may experience.

Moreover, future studies using larger samples would be desirable in order to provide a clearer understanding of the types of benefits provided by national identification and potential differences in resources provided by home and host country identification, respectively. In addition, while our findings suggested that the effects of national identification differed at low and high

levels of burnout, more research will be needed to provide a more detailed understanding of when and how the resources provided by home and host country identification matter.

Finally, quantitative research has limitations in relation to assessing the processual dynamics of the interplay between factors in expatriate work life. Accordingly, a qualitative and more dynamic research design could be applied to provide insight into the details and contextuality of how national identity influences the effect of burnout on career satisfaction. The results of the current study could be applied as a point of departure for developing a process model of the interaction between identity and experienced hardship in expatriate assignments.

Conclusion

This paper contributes to contextualized expatriate research on burnout and dual identifications by extending the JD-R model to international human resource management research. By identifying both home and host country identification as an important job resource for expatriates engaging in diplomatic assignments, our findings suggest that national cultural identification moderates the relationship between burnout and career satisfaction. Viewing national identification as a resource in the context of the inner well-being of diplomatic expatriates may shed more light on the mechanism involved in alleviating adjustment stress and expatriation failure. Our study thus contributes to the large body of expatriation literature and opens a new avenue of research on the role of national identification among employees in the international work setting.

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Table 1 Means, standard deviations, and correlations

Variable	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
1. Age	43.94	9.64												
2. Gender	0.77	0.42	0.03											
3. Living with spouse or partner	0.67	0.47	0.01	-0.30**										
4. Living with children	0.48	0.50	-0.13	-0.22*	0.44**									
5. Number of countries	4.45	2.09	0.56**	0.11	0.04	-0.12								
6. Burnout	2.90	0.83	-0.19*	0.08	-0.05	0.01	-0.14							
7. Home country identification	5.88	1.12	0.11	-0.13	0.05	-0.01	0.05	-0.06						
8. Host country identification	3.31	1.58	0.09	0.10	-0.08	-0.14	-0.04	-0.11	-0.03					
9. Low home and host country identification	0.19	0.39	-0.17	0.06	0.07	0.21*	-0.01	0.12	-0.40**	-0.38**				
10. High home country identification, low host country identification	0.34	0.48	0.03	-0.10	0.00	-0.01	0.04	0.13	0.40**	-0.57**	-0.35**			
11. High host country identification, low home country identification,	0.17	0.38	-0.10	0.09	0.05	-0.00	-0.17	-0.05	-0.56**	0.37**	-0.22*	-0.33**		
12. High home and host country identification	0.30	0.46	0.20*	-0.02	-0.10	-0.17	0.11	-0.19*	0.38**	0.61**	-0.31**	-0.47**	-0.30**	
13. Satisfaction with own career	5.38	1.12	-0.00	-0.01	-0.00	0.07	-0.01	-0.40**	0.29**	0.18*	-0.22*	0.04	-0.06	0.20*

Notes: *n* = 123. ^a 0 = male, 1 = female. **p* < 0.05. ***p* < 0.01.

Table 2 *Diplomats host country information*

	Host country	Frequency	Percent					
Valid	1	Angola	1	0.8	29	Latvia	2	1.6
	2	Argentina	1	0.8	30	Lebanon	1	0.8
	3	Australia	3	2.4	31	Lithuania	1	0.8
	4	Austria	5	4.1	32	Luxembourg	1	0.8
	5	Belgium	11	8.9	33	Malaysia	1	0.8
	6	Bosnia and Herzegovina	1	0.8	34	Mexico	2	1.6
	7	China	5	4.1	35	Morocco	1	0.8
	8	Costa Rica	1	0.8	36	Nepal	1	0.8
	9	Croatia	1	0.8	37	Netherlands	2	1.6
	10	Democratic Republic of the Congo	1	0.8	38	New Zealand	1	0.8
	11	Denmark	1	0.8	39	Poland	2	1.6
	12	Egypt	2	1.6	40	Republic of Korea	1	0.8
	13	Estonia	1	0.8	41	Romania	1	0.8
	14	Ethiopia	3	2.4	42	Russian Federation	5	4.1
	15	Finland	1	0.8	43	Saudi Arabia	1	0.8
	16	France	2	1.6	44	Singapore	1	0.8
	17	Germany	2	1.6	45	South Africa	3	2.4
	18	Greece	2	1.6	46	Spain	1	0.8
	19	Guatemala	1	0.8	47	Sweden	2	1.6
	20	Honduras	1	0.8	48	Switzerland	2	1.6
	21	Hong Kong (S.A.R.)	1	0.8	49	Ukraine	4	3.3
	22	India	4	3.3	50	United Arab Emirates	3	2.4
	23	Iran, Islamic Republic of...	2	1.6	51	United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland	2	1.6
	24	Israel	3	2.4	52	United States of America	8	6.5
	25	Italy	1	0.8	53	Viet Nam	1	0.8
	26	Japan	8	6.5	Missing	Other	3	2.4
	27	Kazakhstan	1	0.8	Total		123	100
	28	Kenya	4	3.3				

Table 3 Regression Results

	Dependent variable: Career satisfaction										
	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9	Model 10	Model 11
	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>b</i> (SE)	<i>b</i> (SE)
Age	0.00(0.01)	-0.01(0.01)	0.00(0.01)	0.00(0.01)	-0.00(0.01)	-0.01(0.01)	-0.01(0.01)	-0.01(0.01)	-0.01(0.01)	-0.01(0.01)	-0.01(0.01)
Gender ^a	-0.02(0.26)	0.08(0.24)	-0.01(0.26)	0.00(0.26)	0.03(0.26)	0.10(0.26)	0.20(0.24)	0.24(0.24)	0.20(0.24)	0.18(0.23)	0.17(0.24)
Living with spouse or partner	-0.11(0.25)	-0.13(0.23)	-0.11(0.25)	-0.09(0.25)	-0.08(0.25)	-0.06(0.24)	-0.08(0.23)	-0.10(0.22)	-0.08(0.23)	-0.06(0.22)	-0.06(0.22)
Living with children under 18	0.21(0.23)	0.22(0.21)	0.21(0.23)	0.21(0.23)	0.28(0.23)	0.36(0.23)	0.34(0.21)	0.34(0.21)	0.33(0.21)	0.30(0.21)	0.32(0.21)
Number of countries	-0.00(0.06)	-0.02(0.06)	-0.00(0.06)	-0.01(0.06)	-0.00(0.06)	0.01(0.06)	-0.01(0.06)	-0.02(0.05)	-0.01(0.05)	-0.03(0.05)	-0.03(0.05)
Burnout		-0.56*** (0.12)					-0.54*** (0.12)	-0.53*** (0.12)	-0.54*** (0.12)	-0.52*** (0.11)	-0.93** (0.28)
High home country identification, low-host country identification ^b			0.09(0.22)			0.68* (0.30)	0.68* (0.27)	0.72** (0.27)	0.68* (0.27)	0.64* (0.26)	-0.11 (1.08)
High host country identification, low-home country identification				-0.19(0.28)		0.44(0.34)	0.27(0.32)	0.29(0.32)	0.26(0.32)	0.18(0.31)	-0.88 (1.18)
High home and hostcountry identification					0.54* (0.23)	1.01** (0.31)	0.81** (0.29)	0.85** (0.29)	0.81** (0.29)	0.85** (0.28)	-1.72 (1.07)
Burnout * High home country identification, low host country identification								-0.27(0.24)			0.25 (0.34)
Burnout * High host country identification, low home country identification									-0.02(0.31)		0.36 (0.39)
Burnout * High home and host country identification										0.66** (0.25)	0.87* (0.35)
R ²	0.01	0.17	0.01	0.01	0.05	0.10	0.24	0.25	0.24	0.29	0.29
F	0.17	4.03	0.17	0.22	1.08	1.50	3.98	3.72	3.55	4.48	3.77

Notes: n = 123. ^a 0 = man, 1 = woman. ^b Reference category: low home and host country identification. **p* < 0.05. ***p* < 0.01. ****p* < 0.001.

Figure 1 *Effect of the interaction between burnout and home country/host country identification on career satisfaction*

