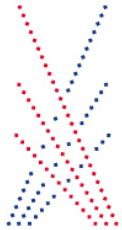

BRITISH ACADEMY
OF MANAGEMENT

# BAM
## CONFERENCE

## 3RD-5TH SEPTEMBER

**ASTON UNIVERSITY** BIRMINGHAM UNITED KINGDOM

This paper is from the BAM2019 Conference Proceedings

**About BAM**

The British Academy of Management (BAM) is the leading authority on the academic field of management in the UK, supporting and representing the community of scholars and engaging with international peers.

http://www.bam.ac.uk/

# "Hello, World!" - A Sentiment Analysis of the Trailing Spouses' Online Blogs

***Submission for the BAM 2019 Conference***

***Track: International Business and International Management***


## ABSTRACT

In this study, we contribute to the literature on adjustment of trailing spouses to new cultural environments by using an innovative research design where we employ sentiment analysis to examine trailing spouses' blog entries over time as our source of data. Based on our analysis of blogs maintained by 12 trailing spouses relocated from Western countries to China, we identify four distinct trajectories of emotions, interpreted as a proxy for psychological adjustment, during the expatriation process. We also illustrate the contingency of the adjustment on the spouses' individual and contextual factors and discuss differences and similarities between the four configurations of adjustment. We propose four profiles of trailing spouses: *the observers*, *the optimists*, *the carers*, and *the mourners*.



**Keywords:** trailing spouses, time, emotions, adjustment, sentiment analysis, blogs

## INTRODUCTION

The number of expatriates continues to grow globally (e.g., Brown, 2008; Kraimer et al., 2016) and the topic of expatriation with its various challenges continues to draw a lot of attention from scholars and practitioners alike (e.g. Brookfield GRS, 2016; Mahajan & Toh, 2014; Bader, Berg, & Holtbrugge, 2015; Lorenz, Ramsey, & Richey, 2017). A large bulk of this research explores the challenges and the process of cross-cultural adjustment, perceived as one of the key challenges for expatriates (e.g. Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005; Farh et al., 2010; Lazarova et al., 2010). It is defined as the degree of psychological comfort with various aspects of a host country (e.g. Black & Gregersen, 1991).

However, behind the focus on the expatriate and his/her adjustment, it often remains forgotten or unnoticed that most of the expatriates (about 75%-80%, Cartus 2007; GMAC 2008; Brookfield GRS 2011) are, in fact, accompanied by a spouse or partner (e.g., Ballesteros-Leiva et al., 2017; Cole, 2011; Davies et al., 2015; Kempen et al., 2015; Shaffer et al., 2001). These partners are often called "trailing spouses" and defined as the committed partners who *follow* the expatriates in their international move (see Harvey, 1998). Traditionally, research often accepted a dichotomous perspective on the expatriate – spouse phenomenon: the expatriate is usually a male sent by his corporation abroad to fulfill a particular task whereas the spouse is a female who follow and support the expatriate in his expatriation adventure. Despite of several noticeable attempts to examine more diverse groups of spouses (e.g. Davoine et al., 2013; McPhail et al., 2016), it seems that the "traditional" take on the spouse tends to persist in the literature still today.

What is of interest to us in this paper is the relative lack of research on spouses and their adjustment, especially if compared with what has been done in relation to the expatriate's adjustment. Research on spouses as the core subject of investigation remains marginal with a few exceptions (see Shaffer & Harrison, 2001; Bikos et al., 2007a, 2007b; Lauring & Selmer, 2010; Collins & Bretone, 2017). What these rare research tell us is that the adjustment of spouses is likely to be of a different kind and the challenges are likely to be different from those of the expatriate. At the same time, research on expatriates themselves shows that the spouse adjustment is an important factor in influencing and predicting expatriates' adjustment and ultimately expatriation success (e.g. Black & Stephens, 1989; Black & Gregersen, 1991; Brett and Stroh, 1995; Bader et al., 2015). However, understanding the process of the spouse adjustment is important not only for the expatriate's sake but also from the point of view of the spouse him/herself.

When examining the spouse adjustment, one needs to consider the fact that the nature of the spouse adjustment is likely to differ from that of the expatriate. Whereas the expatriate is sent by his/her corporation abroad from one corporate unit to another with very similar or even identical corporate culture and is often trained and supported by this corporation, the spouse receives no support and has to deal with the new environment all by him/herself straight on. Thus, it may not be appropriate and relevant to apply the existing theoretical models of adjustment, which have been originally developed for the case of expatriates (e.g. Black & Stephens, 1989; Hippler et al., 2015). More explorative and innovative approaches are needed to capture the process of the spouse adjustment and to incorporate its idiosyncratic nature.

Such an approach would need to fulfill two criteria. First, it would need to take into consideration the fact that the process of adjustment develops over time (Hippler et al., 2015). Yet, it is often difficult to implement in academic research (e.g., Church, 1982; Hippler *et al*., 2015). As a result, the plethora of studies on expatriates' adjustment is mostly cross-sectional measuring

expatriates' adjustment (Firth et al. 2014; Harrison et al., 2004) and its different aspects at specific and isolated points in time. Consequently, as of now, our general understanding of adjustment as a process and its time dynamics remains limited. Second, it is well established in the expatriation literature that expatriates do not form a homogenous group and differ in terms of their personal, professional, and family-related attributes (e.g., Hechanova et al., 2003; Shaffer et al., 1999). Different groups of expatriates are likely to experience adjustment differently, that is, their adjustment is likely to develop differently over time, in terms of time that it takes, phases through which it is likely to develop, and the steepness and the direction of the adjustment trajectory. The same is also to be true for the population of spouses – it is likely to be diverse and different spouses are to experience adjustment differently. Therefore, it is crucial to recognize the contingency of the adjustment's development over time on spouses' attributes and characteristics.

Against this background, in this paper, we aim at shedding light on the adjustment of spouses by analyzing the blogs of 12 trailing spouses relocated from their home countries to China. We use the so-called sentiment analysis to trace the trajectory of their emotions over time to answer the following research questions: *(1) How do the spouses' emotions develop over time during the expatriation process?* and *(2) How contingent are the trajectories of the spouses' emotions on their individual and contextual attributes?*

We focus on emotions because the psychological nature of adjustment presupposes a strong emotional component. The positivity / negativity of one's emotions is an indication of the degree of one's psychological comfort in a particular context or situation (see Ward et al., 1991). Thus, we believe that by examining the spouses' emotions during the expatriation processes, as they are reflected and expressed in their blogs, can be used as a relevant proxy for capturing their general degree of psychological comfort in the host country, i.e. their cross-cultural adjustment.

By doing so, we accomplish two things. First, we capture empirically and illustrate the previously little explored nature of the spouses' emotions and consequently psychological adjustment and its development over time. More specifically, we identify and discuss four trajectories of adjustment in our sample. Second, we investigate whether the identified trajectories of adjustment are different for trailing spouses with different profiles. By doing so, we aim at verifying whether adjustment and its development over time are not standard and invariable but indeed *contingent* on spouses' characteristics and attributes, such as age, the presence of children, previous relocation experience.

## THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### The process of expatriation over time

The process of adjustment to a new cultural environment has attracted a lot of attention from researchers over time (e.g. Tung, 1998; Caligiuri, 2000; Bhaskar-Srinivas et al., 2005). It represents one of the most challenging aspects of the overall expatriation process and often results in cultural shock, that is, the feeling of psychological discomfort upon entering a new culture or country (Dubois, 1951). Traditionally, the process has been conceptualized as developing in stages over time following a U-curve (e.g., Lysgaard, 1955; Black and Mendenhall, 1991), starting with a honeymoon phase followed by a crisis and a subsequent adjustment to the new culture. Only a handful of researchers have hitherto tested the adjustment process empirically over time (e.g., Firth et al., 2014; Nash, 1991; Ward et al., 1998; Ward & Searle, 1991) and even fewer have focused on

the trajectory of adjustment among a specific population of expatriates (e.g., Bikos et al., 2007a; De Cieri et al., 1991; Nicholson & Imaizumi, 1993; Selmer, 1999).

Measuring the process of adjustment is not an easy task and often involves methodological issues. Longitudinal designs advocated by Church (1982) received very limited attention from researchers (Firth et al., 2014; Bikos et al., 2007; De Cieri et al., 1991; Nash, 1991; Ward et al., 1998; Zheng & Berry, 1991) and somehow discouraged researchers from examining how the process of adjustment develops over time (see Hippler et al., 2015). For instance, Black and Mendenhall (1991) is an illustrative example of the general reluctance among researchers to engage with the temporal dimension of the expatriation process. The authors offered a theoretical piece dealing with the adjustment process over time and the U-curve hypothesis, yet the model received very little attention from other researchers after its publication. The U-curve hypothesis suggests that adjustment is a process, in which expatriates initially experience the "honeymoon" period of fascination with the host country, followed by the cultural shock, in which they struggle with the day-to-day realities and challenges of being in a new place, and culminating in the recovery and adjustment phase (e.g. Adler, 1975; Garza-Guerrero, 1974; Gullahorn & Gullahorn, 1963; Lysgaard, 1955; Oberg, 1960). Despite its intuitive appeal, the theoretical grounding of the U-curve hypothesis has rarely been critically questioned and seldom empirically tested. Although some proponents have developed theoretical frameworks (e.g., Black and Mendenhall, 1991) and others have documented some evidence of the time-varying levels of adjustment (e.g., Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al., 2005), scholars are still skeptical about its usefulness and theoretical strength (e.g., Ward et al., 2001), and the empirical evidence remains thin and largely anecdotal.

Otherwise, the studies dealing with adjustment as a process over time are rare (e.g., Bikos et al., 2007a). The most noticeable ones are Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005), Firth et al. (2014) and, more recently, Hippler et al. (2015). In the first one, the authors found support for the U-curve hypothesis by meta-analyzing 23 existing studies, only three of which employed longitudinal research designs. Timewise, the identified U-curve of adjustment consisted of the honeymoon period of around 12 months, the cultural disorientation period ending after around three years, and finally, the adjustment period stabilizing at around four years since relocation. Unfortunately, Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005) did not test for any moderating effects thus not exploring the trajectory's *contingency* on personal and/or professional attributes and characteristics.

In the second contribution, Firth et al. (2014) focused on expatriates' adaptation during the first four months abroad and suggested a generally negative trend for work adjustment during that period, starting from high initial levels boosted by expatriates' initial cross-cultural motivation but then decreasing over time. Although providing interesting findings, the study does not shed light on the shape of the adjustment trajectory in a longer perspective beyond the four months period, nor discusses other dimensions of adjustment than the work-related one. In addition, both Bhaskar-Shrinivas et al. (2005) and Firth et al. (2014) study exclusively assigned expatriates thus leaving the adjustment of other expatriates' groups, e.g. self-initiated expatriates or trailing spouses, unexplored.

The most recent contribution by Hippler et al. (2015) conceptually draws our attention to the importance of temporal dynamics in the investigation of adjustment. The authors argue that because the starting levels of adjustment are likely to vary among different expatriates and because different antecedents are likely to affect the adjustment processes of different expatriates differently, the adjustment trajectories are likely to develop differently over time. They also point

out that expatriates are likely to adjust differently in different domains. Thus, Hippler et al. (2015) conceptually underscore for researchers the importance of taking into account and investigating the presumed *temporality* and *contingency* of adjustment as a process over time.

In addition, in the last two-three decades, there were several attempts to verify the U-curve hypothesis empirically (e.g., De Cieri et al., 1991; Selmer, 1999; Ward & Searle, 1991; Ward et al., 1998). Among these publications, the findings are scattered and largely incomparable. Indeed, the research uses different samples—corporate expatriates (e.g., Nicholson & Imaizumi, 1993), spouses (e.g., Bikos et al., 2007a, 2007b), or students (e.g., Nash, 1991)—and different measurements—psychological impact (De Cieri et al., 1991), sociocultural adjustment (e.g., Selmer, 1999), well-being (Nash, 1991), or feelings over time (Nicholson & Imaizumi, 1993). These studies are also difficult to compare in terms of their research design (longitudinal vs. cross-sectional), the age or gender of the expatriate population studied, the home/host countries, and cultural distance.

Considering our review, it is clear that despite of its valuable contributions and theoretical advancements, the existing research has not been able to explain convincingly and exhaustively the development of the expatriation process over time. Moreover, with its predominant focus on the adjustment of corporate expatriates, it largely left out of its scope the adjustment of other large and important populations of individuals in one way or another involved in various expatriation activities, such as trailing spouses, for instance.

**Trailing spouses**

Compared to the burgeoning literature devoted to expatriates and the various aspects related to their expatriation experiences, the attention toward spouses has been rather modest up to now. In fact, we can even say that the literature has paid little attention to the challenges and the unique expatriation experiences of spouses. Besides cross-cultural adjustment, the literature has largely focused on the spouse's willingness to move abroad (e.g., Black & Stephens, 1989; Brett & Stroh, 1995; Harvey, 1995, 1997, 1998; Tharenou 2003) and the importance of the spouse training (Eschbach et al., 2001; Mendenhall and Stahl 2000; Okpara 2011; Shaffer et al. 2001) as a facilitator of the expatriate success or failure. More recently, research has started to examine how the spouse's identity may change during the expatriation process (e.g., Caligiuri et al., 2016; De Cieri et al., 1991; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001; Takeuchi et al., 2002; Takeuchi et al., 2005).

Overall, the expatriation literature has mostly examined the spouse in a very limited sense, as either a resource or a barrier for the expatriate (e.g., Fishlmayr & Kollinger, 2010). Moreover, very rarely the spouse has been the core of the research. A few notable exceptions are Bikos and colleagues (2007a, 2007b; 2013), Mohr and Klein (2004), Shaffer and Harrison (2001), Davoine et al. (2013), and Collins and Bertone (2017). Yet, even these studies primarily focused on the spouse adjustment as an antecedent of the expatriate adjustment or a contributing factor to the expatriate success (Bikos et al., 2013).

When the spouse is discussed, which is done very often in comparison to the expatriate himself, it is usually acknowledged that the expatriation process and experience is oftentimes more difficult for the spouse than for the expatriate. The literature suggests a number for reasons for that.

*High perceived responsibility for significant others*. The spouse is the one who carries the weight of her entire family adjustment to and wellbeing in the host country on her shoulders (Porter, 1999). She also typically takes on all household responsibilities and childcare concerns, dealing with which usually requires navigating and facing the new host environment with its new rules of conduct head on and often very early on, right after the relocation (see Ali, 2003; Collins & Bretone, 2017). Moreover, the spouse is also expected to provide psychological support to the actual expatriate to ensure that everything is in order back home and he can focus on his primary work-related tasks and responsibilities (Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). Obviously, all these factors put the spouse under a lot of pressure and stress.

*Identity loss / crisis.* Spouses may have to interrupt their own careers when relocating abroad and in this way experience a strong disruption in their personal lives (Ali, 2003; Cole, 2011). Oftentimes, they need to rethink their own roles that they are to take and reconstruct their identities away from the ones focusing on their own careers towards the ones centered on their partner's careers and their families (Bikos et al., 2007). In some cases, such a reconstruction of oneself from being financially independent and focused on one's own career into a dependent fulltime homemaker may cause the spouse to experience a loss of identity (Mohr & Klein, 2004; Van Erp et al., 2014).

*Psychological anxiety of becoming a burden*. Another pressure that spouses might face is the anxiety of causing the expatriate to fail the assignment or perform his duties not in the best way possible. For instance, Bikos et al. (2007a) pointed out that some of the interviewed spouses were concerned whether part of their expatriate husbands' job performance may be evaluated based on their behavior during the assignment. Oftentimes, the spouse knows that when selecting expatriates MNCs evaluate not only the suitability of the candidates themselves but also of their partners (Tungli and Peiperl, 2009). This knowledge puts extra pressure on the spouses who know that their adjustment is also being monitored and evaluated in relation to the expatriate's success.

*Lack of support*. Despite of all these pressures and in contrast to the expatriate, the spouse does not usually receive any organizational and psychological support when preparing to relocate or relocating abroad (e.g. Porter, 1999; Ali, 2003). On the contrary, there is an expectation that it is the responsibility of the spouses themselves to be proactive and self-motivating in ensuring that they are mentally prepared and self-trained to face and deal successfully with the new environment (e.g. Black & Gregersen, 1991).

Thus, the spouse-related challenges are there yet not much research has taken them up as core research themes. More importantly, we know nothing concerning how these challenges translate into positive / negative emotions that spouses experience over time during their expatriation, thus ultimately determining the degree of their psychological comfort in the host country and culture. In what follows, we use an innovative research design to explore in depth 12 blogs written by trailing spouses, where they share their experiences and feelings related to their move to the new culture of China. This empirical material allows us to make a sentiment analysis of the spouses' emotions and ultimately gain an insight into the process of adjustment experienced by this specific and so far understudied expatriate population.

## METHODOLOGY

### Research setting

Given the difficulty to collect data with a longitudinal design, we opted for a creative approach and turned to the examination of online diaries (or blogs) written by trailing spouses during their experience of expatriation. Blogs, as a sort of personal diaries (see Hookway, 2008), represent a rich source of daily life data (Corti, 1993; Toms & Duff, 2002), studying which allows researchers to capture the subjects' experiences and emotions as they happen or in a future not too distant from the experiences and emotions themselves (Toms & Duff, 2002).

More importantly for our research purposes, it allows researchers to capture the subjects' lives experiences longitudinally over time and at relatively regular time intervals. Thus, the method provides a way to examine the phenomenon under study without the risk of distortion due to impaired memory or retrospective reconstruction, which are likely to occur with other methods, such as interviews or life histories. Thus, blogs represent naturalistic data in textual and visual form, which reflects and provides access to spontaneous and unsolicited personal experiences and emotions and offers an excellent opportunity to analyze processes over time and on regular basis (Hookway, 2008).

### Data collection

To investigate trailing spouses' experience of expatriation over time, we collected data from blog entries of trailing spouses available from the popular expat forums such as www.expatblogs.com and www.blogexpat.com.

First, we identified blogs of trailing spouses, defined as persons who follow their life partners to another country because of a work assignment (Harvey, 1998). Thus, we did not restrict our selection to female spouses, we also considered male spouses. The choice was determined by the availability of blogs (most of the blogs were set up and updated by spouses), their content (oftentimes the spouses' blogs reflected the joint experiences and emotions of the relocating couple), and the fact that trailing spouses have been largely marginalized in expatriation research up to now (see McNulty, 2012).

We collected blog entries applying a certain number of restrictions. First, the blogs had to have a sufficient longevity that we defined as a minimum of six months. Second, the selected blogs had to be updated relatively regularly, at least once every month. Third, we restricted our data collection to blogs written in English. Fourth, we focused on the blogs of spouses relocated with their partners to China from anywhere in the world. The criterion of a common host country allows a relative comparability among the blogs (see e.g., Church, 1982). The choice of China as a host country is somehow arbitrary yet, because expatriates are historically more often from Western countries, China is assumed to be different enough to be a good example of potentially challenging process of adjustment. The final sample was composed of 12 blogs. Table 1 below provides an overview of the selected blogs.

*** Table 1 about here ***

### Data analysis

Table 1 shows that among the 12 blogs, two were hosted by male and the rest by female trailing spouses. All but two spouses were originally from the US, one from the UK, and one from

France. All were based in China (Shanghai and Chengdu). The estimated age of the spouses ranged between around 30 and 50. For most, it was the first relocation experience. Two spouses relocated for the second time and one for the fourth. Five spouses relocated with children, the rest had no children.

Sentiment analysis is a technique to measure "the polarity or tonality of texts by identifying and assessing expressions people use to evaluate or appraise persons, entities or events" (Haselmayer and Jenny, 2017, see also Mohammad, 2016). The sentiment analysis of textual data found numerous applications in the social sciences (Haselmayer and Jenny, 20217). Such analysis can be either manual or computed-based depending on the level of difficulty or specificity of the text. After a few tests to evaluate the quality of the computed-based analysis, we concluded that our data were too specific to get valid results with automatic dictionaries. For instance, the description of differences and similarities between two countries, some elements related to the Chinese culture, or simply the writing style of blogs lead to unexpected coding so that we decided not to continue in this direction.

Instead, following the advice of Grimmer and Stewart (2013), we created a customized dictionary that fitted well our topic. To do so, we scanned the exhaustive list of terms grouped by stems (e.g., the word 'friendship' contains the stem 'friend'). Among those, we identified a list of 103 positive terms (e.g., "grateful", "perfect", "gorgeous", "improve") and 98 negative terms ("fail", "annoying", "careless", "deprive"). We verified in context some of those terms, which could have had double meanings. Then, for each post, we identified and weighted each of these terms (i.e., it was calculated as the frequency of occurrence per post). As a robustness check, we calculated the coding coverage, in other words, how many sentiments were found as compared to the total number of words in each post. The coverage ranged from 0.5% to 18% with an average of 4%. After verification, those with low coverage (i.e., neutral) were mostly factual descriptions (e.g., history of China).

The sentiment scores were calculated as the relative difference between the sum of the positive and negative weights on a 100-base, so ranging from -100 (very negative) to 100 (very positive). The sentiment scores were averaged per week per blog. To ease the graphic representations (i.e., to smooth the trend), the moving average approach was used.

## FINDINGS

Table 1 displays description of sample and analysis related information. The sentiment scores were plotted over time (see Figures 1 to 4) and four distinct configurations were identified.

*** Figures 1 to 4 about here ***

First, **Configuration (A),** associated with one spouse (B6), seems to represent the traditional *U-curve of adjustment* (e.g., Lysgaard, 1955; Black and Mendenhall, 1991). The expatriation in this case starts with many positive emotions reflecting the euphoria, excitement, and positive expectations of the spouse from the relocation to China. The individual seems to be living through period of a sort of honeymoon when the new country looks exciting and everything new seems intriguing and attractive. The spouse perceives observed differences as exciting, fascinating, and exotic, and observed similarities as a validation of the home culture (e.g., Adler,

1975). The spouse functions in the so-called tourist or contact phase, which lasts for about 3-4 weeks. However, then the euphoria ceases and a two-step crisis kicks in.

During this phase, the differences become more and more noticeable until they start creating confusion, disorientation, and frustration because the acquired understanding of culture (based on the home environment) is no longer valid and/or appropriate. This is the step of disintegration (Adler, 1975), observed in this case between the weeks 5 and 26. During this phase, isolation and alienation are common. During the second step of the crisis, also known as reintegration (Adler, 1975), the crisis worsens (weeks 26 to 33). The observed differences and similarities are rejected, the confusion turns into hostility. However, as explained by Adler (1975), the experience of such negative feelings is an indication of the individual's identity reconstruction. At last, the individual starts a two-step phase of recovery with autonomy (weeks 33 to 39) and independence phases (week 39 and onward). The spouse first starts to feel more and more comfortable and positive about his/her status of insider-outsider and then slowly become more and more bicultural.

In this particular case, the spouse has been a female in her 30s with no children. Having no prior expatriation experience, she has gone through the U-curve of adjustment within roughly 40 weeks or 10 months. A closer look at the spouse's blog reveals that she preserved a strong identification and connections with her home country. The blog contains plentiful references and allusions to different events occurring in the US during the expatriation period and related to the US in general, e.g. thanksgiving, Christmas, baseball, elections, whereas the references to the host country can be mainly classified as a travelogue, e.g. tourist sight, food, different stereotypes. Therefore, we call this type of spouses "*the observers*".

Second, **Configuration (B),** associated with the blogs of spouses B2, B4, and B13, also represents a compressed U-curve of adjustment, which is squeezed into the first five months after arrival. However, unexpectedly, a major drop into negativity follows the presumed integration stage with subsequent fluctuations of a relatively large scale and a rapid pace (around 4 weeks). It can be argued that the drop indicates that it is unlikely that the spouses managed to go through the adjustment transitional experience (Adler, 1975) as described above for Configuration A, in less than half a year. Besides, when the individual presumably reaches the independence stage, s/he should not experience a major crisis right after.

A possible speculation to explain the trend toward negative emotions after the first five months would be a possibility that the spouse realizes that his/her psychological adjustment and the positive emotions related to it were slightly superficial because the process of adjustment has been rushed and compressed in the first five months or so. Then, an emotional hangover kicks in driven by the realization that the genuine adjustment takes time to develop, especially in such culturally distant country as China. Moreover, because we examined the spouses' emotions, this configuration may indicate that the spouses become much more neutral in their emotions about the host country after the initial stage when the new experiences generate more often positive emotions.

A closer look at these spouses' blogs reveals that all three are female and two of them have previous relocation experiences and children. One can speculate that having been abroad before and thus having experienced the process of adjustment, and on top of that being motivated by the need to take care of their children; these spouses may be too overoptimistic about their ability to adjust successfully to the new environment. Hence, the drop after the first five months when the

spouses come to realize that there are genuine differences between their previous relocation locations, the current one, and their home country. We call these spouses "*the optimists*".

Third, **Configuration (C),** associated with blogs of spouses B3, B5, B9, and B12, has similarity with Configuration (B). Yet, the beginning of the trend is less positive meaning that the individual may not experience a honeymoon. Similar to Configuration (B), there is an emotional pick and a drop (slightly later) around 5-6 months. Then, the fluctuations are smaller, take longer time and their level tends to be higher on average (more often above the neutral line) showing a better process of adjustment than in the case of Configuration (B) spouses.

Interestingly, all but one of the spouses are from the same state in the US, Michigan. One of the spouses is male, who has relocated to China with his expatriate wife and two children. The rest are females. A closer look at the blogs show that all spouses in this group expressed concerns prior to their relocation as for all but one it was the first experience of that kind. Hence, they were quite cautious from the start and reserved their emotions. Two of the spouses has two children each, which also took some time for the spouses to ensure that their children are comfortable and set in the new country. It can explain why for these spouses the first five months or so are emotionally neutral and pick up only after they have been roughly six months in the country. In general, from the start, all the spouses in this group took on identities, which focused more saliently on their families, i.e. supporting their expatriating wife / husband and children.

The subsequent drop is more or less the same as in the case of the spouses in the previous group – the inevitable cultural shock kicks in once the spouses realize the need to cope and live with the differences that they experience as compared to their home country. However, as already pointed out, the general tendency of adjustment appears to be more positive. Because these spouses seem to be more focused on their families, they find psychological comfort in their wives/husbands and kids. We call these spouses "*the family carers*".

Fourth, **Configuration (D),** associated with blogs of spouses B1, B10, B14, and B15, has the most negative trend of the four configurations. It starts from a low point with no honeymoon and keeps fluctuating around the neutral zone or with a slightly positive trajectory. These spouses are the younger ones on average and most of them relocated to China from large American cities such as Los Angeles, New York City or San Francisco with their particular lifestyles. Particularly, the spouse B10 relocating from New York City have had many negative emotions from the very beginning of her relocation. Although slightly better, others were also below the neutral line from the start.

Besides that, what really distinguishes these spouses from the rest is that their emotions continue to oscillate between being quite strongly negative and in some cases strongly positive for the entire expatriation period that we have examined. This indicates no real adjustment takes place among these spouses even after one year of being in China. A closer look at these blogs shows that in addition to their strong identification with their home cities, these spouses have also had quite strong professional identities prior to their relocation. The fact that they had to interrupt their professional careers appears to be mentioned here and there in their blogs. This may explain why in spite of their best attempts at adjustment they still cannot avoid negative emotions about their expatriation experiences in China. Thus, we call these spouses "*the mourners*".

## DISCUSSION

### Contributions

In this paper, we aimed at shedding light on the nature of the adjustment process over time among trailing spouses who have relocated with their expatriate partners to China. More specifically, we wanted to tackle the following questions: (1) *How do the spouses' emotions develop over time during the expatriation process?* and (2) *How contingent are the trajectories of the spouses' emotions on their individual and contextual attributes?* To address these questions, we used an innovative research design and applied sentiment analysis to examine the blogs of 12 trailing spouses. In this way, we identified four configurations of the spouses' emotions over time, which, we argue, represent four types of trailing spouses in terms of their psychological comfort and adjustment to the new environment over time. We call these groups of spouses as "*the observers*", "*the optimists*", "*the carers*", and "*the mourners*".

Our results indicate that the population of spouses is diverse and expatriation experiences differ quite substantially for different spouses. Whereas we find that only one spouse in our sample, "the observer", followed the U-curve of adjustment as manifested by the nature of her emotions during the expatriation period, the other adjustment processes in our sample were different. Some – the spouses with previous expatriation experiences and children, "*the optimists*" - tried to rush and compress their adjustment to the Chinese context in the fist five months, just to realize later that any subsequent relocation experience is unique and has to be dealt with over time. Others, the spouses with a stronger identification with their families, "the carers", have been too busy making sure that their family members are well adjusted to the new context thus delaying their own cultural shock and experiencing a sudden emotional drop only after six months in the new country. Finally, "the mourners" have not been able to truly adjust to the new context due to their constant regrest about the lifestyles and careers that they have left behind and sacrificed to be in China with their expatriate partners. Our analysis illustrates the contingency of psychological adjustment of spouses on a range of individual, e.g. career orientation, age, expatriation experience, and contextual, e.g. children, factors.

By doing so, our analysis contributes in two ways to the currently quite marginal research on spouses in general and on their adjustment in particular (see Shaffer & Harrison, 2001; Bikos et al., 2007a; Lauring & Selmer, 2010; Collins & Bretone, 2017). First, our study is among the first one to explore longitudinally the development of spouses' emotions and subsequently adjustment over time. Moreover, it is the first to identify the four groups of spouses based on the trajectories of their emotions during expatriation. It confirms that the adjustment of spouses is of a different kind and the challenges are different from those of the expatriates. For instance, such factors as mourning one's interrupted career or lifestyle as well as ensuring the adjustment of one's children to the new environment are likely to figure less prominently in the adjustment process of corporate expatriates. Yet, for many spouses, these may be central issues affecting their emotional state and psychological adjustment to the host environment. Second, our analysis illustrates the contingency of the spouse's adjustment and emotions. It finds that the trajectories of adjustment are different for trailing spouses with different profiles. By doing so, it shows that adjustment and its development over time are not standard and invariable but indeed *contingent* on spouses' characteristics and attributes, such as age, the presence of children, previous relocation experience.

## REFERENCES


Adler, P. S. (1975). The transitional experience: an alternative view of culture shock. *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 1*5*(4): 13–23.

Ali, A., Van der Zee, K., & Sanders, G. (2003). Determinants of intercultural adjustment among expatriate spouses. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations, 27*(5): 563-580.

Bader, B. & Berg, N. (2014). The influence of terrorism on expatriate performance: a conceptual approach. *International Journal of Human Resource Management, 25*(4): 539-557.

Bader, B., Berg, N., & Holtbrügge, D. (2015). Expatriate performance in terrorism-endangered countries: the role of family and organizational support. *International Business Review*, 24(5): 849-860.

Ballesteros-Leiva, F., Poilpot-Rocaboy, G., & St-Onge, S. (2017). The relationship between life-domain interactions and the well-being of internationally mobile employees. *Personnel Review, 46*(2): 237-254.

Bhaskar-Shrinivas, P., Harrison, D. A., Shaffer, M. A., & Luk, D. M. (2005). Input-based and time-based models of international adjustment: Meta-analytic evidence and theoretical extensions. *Academy of Management Journal*, 48(2): 257–281.

Bikos, L. H., Çiftçi, A., Güneri, O. Y., Demir, C. E., Sümer Z. H., Danielson, S., DeVries, S., & Bilgen, W. A. (2007a). A repeated measures investigation of the first-year adaptation experiences of the female expatriate spouse living in Turkey. *Journal of Career*, 34(1): 5-26.

Bikos, L. H., Ciftci, A., Guneri, O. Y., Demir, C. E., Sumer, Z. H., Danielson, S., DeVries, S., & Bilgen, W. A. (2007b). A longitudinal, naturalistic inquiry of the adaptation experiences of the female expatriate spouse living in Turkey. *Journal of Career Development, 34*(1): 28-58.

Bikos, L. H. & Kocheleva, J. (2013). Life role salience dimensions and mental health outcomes among female expatriate spouses in Turkey. *Journal of Career Development, 40*(2): 107-126.

Black, J. S. & Stephens, G. K. (1989). The influence of the spouse on American expatriate adjustment and intent to stay in Pacific Rim overseas assignments. *Journal of Management*, 15(4): 529–544.

Black, J.S. & Mendenhall, M. (1991). The U-curve adjustment hypothesis revisited: a review and theoretical framework. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 22(2): 225–247.

Black, J. S. & Gregersen, H. B. (1991). The other half of the picture: Antecedents of spouse cross-cultural adjustment. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 22(3): 461–477.

Brett, J. M. & Stroh, L. K. (1995). Willingness to relocate internationally. *Human Resource Management, 34*(3): 405-424.

Brown, R. J. (2008). Dominant stressors on expatriate couples during international assignments. *International Journal of Human Resource Management, 19*(6): 1018-1034.

Caligiuri, P.M. (2000). The five big personality characteristics as predictors of expatriates' desire to terminate the assignment and supervisor-rated performance. *Personnel Psychology*, 53(1): 67–88.

Caligiuri, P. & Bonache, J. (2016). Evolving and enduring challenges in global mobility. *Journal of World Business, 51*(1): 127-141.

Church, A.T. (1982). Sojourner adjustment. *Psychological Bulletin*, 91: 540–572.

Cole, N. D. (2011). Managing global talent: solving the spousal adjustment problem. *International Journal of Human Resource Management, 22*(7): 1504-1530.

Collins, H. E. & Bertone, S. (2017). Threatened identities: adjustment narratives of expatriate spouses. *Journal of Global Mobility-the Home of Expatriate Management Research, 5*(1): 78-92.

Corti, L. (1993) Using Diaries in Sociological Research, Social Research Update 2.

Davies, S., Kraeh, A., & Froese, F. (2015). Burden or support? The influence of partner nationality on expatriate cross-cultural adjustment. *Journal of Global Mobility-the Home of Expatriate Management Research, 3*(2): 169-182.

Davoine, E., Ravasi, C., Salamin, X., & Cudre-Mauroux, C. (2013). A "dramaturgical" analysis of spouse role enactment in expatriation: An exploratory gender comparative study in the diplomatic and consular field. *Journal of Global Mobility-the Home of Expatriate Management Research, 1*(1): 92-112.

De Cieri, H., Dowling, P. J., & Taylor, K. F. (1991). The psychological impact of expatriate relocation on partners. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 2(3): 377–414.

DuBois, C. (1951). *Culture shock*. In Midwest regional meeting of the Institute of International Education, Chicago (Vol. 28).

Elliott, H. (1997). The Use of Diaries in Sociological Research on Health Experience, Sociological *Research Online*, *2*(2).

Eschbach, D. M., Parker, G. E., & Stoeberl, P. A. (2001). American repatriate employees' retrospective assessments of the effects of cross-cultural training on their adaptation to international assignments. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 12*(2): 270-287

Harrison, D. A., Shaffer, M. A., & Bhaskar-Shrinivas, P. (2004). Going places: Roads more and less travelled in research on expatriate experiences. *Research in personnel and human resources management*, *23*: 199–248.

Haselmayer, M., & Jenny, M. (2017). Sentiment analysis of political communication: combining a dictionary approach with crowdcoding. *Quality & quantity, 51*(6): 2623-2646.

Hechanova, R., Beehr, T. A., & Christiansen, N. D. (2003). Antecedents and consequences of employees' adjustment to overseas assignment: a meta-analytic review. *Applied Psychology*, *52*(2): 213–236.

Hippler, T., Brewster, C., & Haslberger, A. (2015). The elephant in the room: the role of time in expatriate adjustment. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 26*(15): 1920-1935.

Fahr, C.I.C., Bartol, K.M., Shapiro, D.L., & Shin, J. (2010). Networking Abroad: A Process Model of How Expatriates Form Support Ties to Facilitate Adjustment. *Academy of Management Review, 35*: 434–454.

Firth, B. M., Chen, G., Kirkman, B. L., & Kim, K. (2014). Newcomers abroad: Expatriate adaptation during early phases of international assignments. *Academy of Management Journal, 57*(1): 280–300.

Fischlmayr, I. C. & Kollinger, I. (2010). Work-life balance - a neglected issue among Austrian female expatriates. *International Journal of Human Resource Management, 21*(4): 455-487.

Garza-Guerrero, A. C. (1974). Culture shock: its mourning and the vicissitudes of identity. *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 22: 408–429.

Grimmer, J. &Stewart, B.M. (2013). Text as data: The promise and pitfalls of automatic content analysis methods for political texts. *Political Analysis. 21*(3): 267–297.

Gullahorn, J. R. & Gullahorn, J. E. (1963). An extension of the U-curve hypothesis. *Journal of Social Issues*, 14: 33–47.

Harvey, M. G. (1995). The impact of dual-career families on international relocations. *Human Resource Management Review, 5*(3): 223-244.

Harvey, M. (1997). Dual-career expatriates: Expectations, adjustment and satisfaction with international relocation. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 627-658.

Harvey, M. (1998). Dual-career couples during international relocation: The trailing spouse. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management, 9*(2): 309-331.

Haselmayer, M., & Jenny, M. (2017). Sentiment analysis of political communication: combining a dictionary approach with crowdcoding. *Quality & quantity, 51*(6): 2623-2646.

Hookway, N. (2008) "Entering the blogosphere": Some strategies for using blogs in social research. *Qualitative Research*, 8(1): 91–113.

Kempen, R., Pangert, B., Hattrup, K., Mueller, K., & Joens, I. (2015). Beyond conflict: the role of life-domain enrichment for expatriates. *International Journal of Human Resource Management, 26*(1): 1-22.

Kraimer, M., Bolino, M., & Mead, B. (2016). Themes in expatriate and repatriate research over four decades: What do we know and what do we still need to learn?. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior*, 3: 83-109.

Lauring, J. & Selmer, J. (2010). The supportive expatriate spouse: An ethnographic study of spouse involvement in expatriate careers. *International Business Review, 19*(1): 59-69.

Lazarova, M.B., Shaffer, M.A., & Westman, M. (2010). Elucidating the positive side of the work-family interface on international assignments: A model of expatriate work and family performance. *Academy of Management Review*, 35(1): 93–117.

Lorenz, M. P., Ramsey, J. R., & Richey, R. G. (2017). Expatriates' international opportunity recognition and innovativeness: The role of metacognitive and cognitive cultural intelligence. *Journal of World Business,* in press.

Lysgaard, S. (1955). Adjustment in a foreign society: Norwegian Fullbright grantees visiting the United States. *International Social Science Bulletin,* 7.

Mahajan, A., & Toh, S. M. (2014). Facilitating expatriate adjustment: The role of advice-seeking from host country nationals. *Journal of World Business*, *49*(4): 476-487.

McNulty, Y. (2012). 'Being dumped in to sink or swim': an empirical study of organizational support for the trailing spouse. *Human Resource Development International*, 15(4): 417-434.

McPhail, R., McNulty, Y. and Hutchings, K. (2016). Lesbian and gay expatriation: opportunities, barriers and challenges for global mobility. *International Journal of Human Resource Management, 27*(3): 382-406.

Mohammad, S.M. (2016). Sentiment analysis: detecting valence, emotions, and other affectual states from text. In: Meiselman, H. (ed.) *Emotion Measurement*: 201–238. Elsevier, Amsterdam.

Mohr, A. T. & Klein, S. (2004). Exploring the adjustment of American expatriate spouses in Germany. *International Journal of Human Resource Management, 15*(7): 1189-1206.

Nash, D. (1991). The course of sojourner adaptation: A new test of the U-curve hypothesis. *Human Organization*, 50(3): 283-286.

Nicholson, N. & Imaizumi, A. (1993). The adjustment of Japanese expatriates to living and working in Britain. *British Journal of Management*, 4(2): 119.

Oberg, K. (1960). Cultural shock: Adjustment to new cultural environments. *Practical Anthropology*, 7: 177–182.

Pedersen, P. (1995). *The Five Stages of Culture Shock: Critical Incidents around the World*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press.

Porter, G. & Tansky, J. W. (1999). Expatriate success may depend on a "learning orientation": Considerations for selection and training. *Human Resource Management, 38*(1): 47-60.

Selmer, J. (1999). Culture shock in China? Adjustment pattern of Western expatriate business managers. *International Business Review*, 8(5/6): 515.

Shaffer, M. A. & Harrison, D. A. (2001). Forgotten partners of international assignments: Development and test of a model of spouse adjustment. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 86*(2): 238-254.

Shaffer, M. A., Harrison, D. A., & Gilley, K. M. (1999). Dimensions, determinants, and differences in the expatriate adjustment process. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 30(3): 557–581.

Shaffer, M. A., Harrison, D. A., Gilley, K. M., & Luk, D. M. (2001). Struggling for balance amid turbulence on international assignments: work-family conflict, support and commitment. *Journal of Management, 27*(1): 99-121.

Takeuchi, R. (2010). A critical review of expatriate adjustment research through a multiple stakeholder view: Progress, emerging trends, and prospects. *Journal of Management, 36*(4): 1040–1064.

Takeuchi, R., Yun, S., & Russell, J. E. A. (2002). Antecedents and consequences of the perceived adjustment of Japanese expatriates in the USA. *International Journal of Human Resource Management, 13*(8): 1224-1244.

Takeuchi, R., Wang, M., & Marinova, S. V. (2005). Antecedents and consequences of psychological workplace strain during expatriation: A cross-sectional and longitudinal investigation. *Personnel Psychology, 58*(4): 925-948.

Tharenou, P. (2003). The initial development of receptivity to working abroad: Self-initiated international work opportunities in young graduate employees. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology, 76*: 489-515.

Toms, E.G., & Duff, W. (2002). I spent 1½ hours sifting through one large box…: Diaries as information behavior of the archives user: Lessons learned. *Journal of the American Society for Information Science and Technology*, 53(4): 1232–1238.

Tung, R. L. (1998). American expatriates abroad: From neophytes to cosmopolitans. *Journal of World Business*, 33(2): 125-144.

Tungli, Z. & Peiperl, M. (2009). Expatriate practices in German, Japanese, UK, and US multinational companies: A Comparative survey of changes. *Human Resource Management, 48*(1): 153-171.

Van Bakel, M., Van Oudenhoven, J.P., & Gerritsen, M. (2014). Catalysts and Barriers: Improving Quality of Contact between Expatriates and their Local Host. *European Academy of Management*, Valencia, Spain.

van Erp, K., van der Zee, K. I., Giebels, E., & van Duijn, M. A. J. (2014). Lean on me: The importance of one's own and partner's intercultural personality for expatriate's and expatriate spouse's successful adjustment abroad. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 23*(5): 706-728.

Ward, C., Okura, Y., Kennedy, A., & Kojima, T. (1998). The U-curve on trial: A longitudinal study of psychological and sociocultural adjustment during cross-cultural transition. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 22(3): 277–291.

Ward, C. & Searle, W. (1991). The impact of values discrepancies and cultural identity on psychological and sociocultural adjustment of sojourners. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, 15: 209–225.

Zheng, X. & Berry, J.W. (1991). Psychological adaptation of Chinese sojourners in Canada. *International Journal of Psychology*, 26(4): 451.

## TABLE 1

## Description of sample and sentiment analysis descriptive statistics

| Blog | Gender | Age | Home country | Previous experience | No. of kids | # of posts | Start writing (day) | End collection (day) | Longevity (year) | Coded sentiments coverage (%) | Mean sentiments [-100,100] | Range sentiments [-100,100] |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| B1 | Male | ~30 | USA – LA | First relocation | 0 | 24 | 9 | 218 | 0.60 | 0.039 | 15.68 | 83.52 |
| B2 | Female | ~35 | USA – SF | First relocation | 0 | 157 | 0 | 360 | 1.03 | 0.043 | -0.47 | 200.00 |
| B3 | Female | ~30 | USA - East coast | First relocation | 0 | 114 | 0 | 683 | 1.95 | 0.049 | 22.56 | 166.67 |
| B4 | Female | ~50 | UK | Second relocation | 1 | 69 | 22 | 793 | 2.20 | 0.036 | 9.80 | 126.64 |
| B5 | Female | ~30 | USA - Michigan | Second relocation | 0 | 18 | 24 | 453 | 1.23 | 0.048 | 8.08 | 92.86 |
| B6 | Female | ~30 | USA – Boston | First relocation | 0 | 87 | 0 | 312 | 0.89 | 0.041 | -7.08 | 200.00 |
| B9 | Male | ~50 | USA – Detroit | First relocation | 2 | 35 | 32 | 796 | 2.18 | 0.037 | 6.04 | 83.41 |
| B10 | Female | ~40 | USA – NYC | First relocation | 2 | 149 | 1 | 363 | 1.03 | 0.041 | -8.65 | 200.00 |
| B12 | Female | ~50 | USA - Michigan | First relocation | 2 | 199 | 110 | 720 | 1.74 | 0.049 | 19.14 | 200.00 |
| B13 | Female | ~45 | France | Fourth relocation | 1 | 68 | 0 | 717 | 2.05 | 0.041 | 4.96 | 115.18 |
| B14 | Female | ~30 | USA - North East | First relocation | 0 | 64 | 2 | 699 | 1.99 | 0.037 | -7.64 | 161.90 |
| B15 | Female | ~40 | USA - Idaho | Second relocation | 0 | 154 | 0 | 722 | 2.06 | 0.038 | -2.48 | 175.00 |

**FIGURE 1**

**Configuration (A) – The observers**

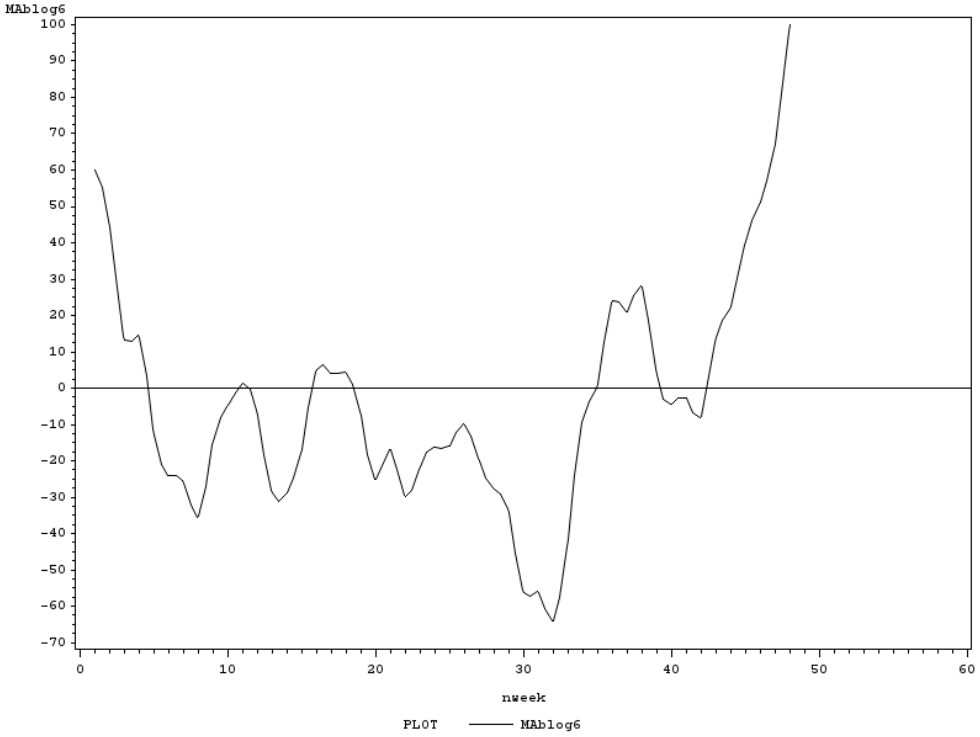


**FIGURE 2**

**Configuration (B) – The optimists**

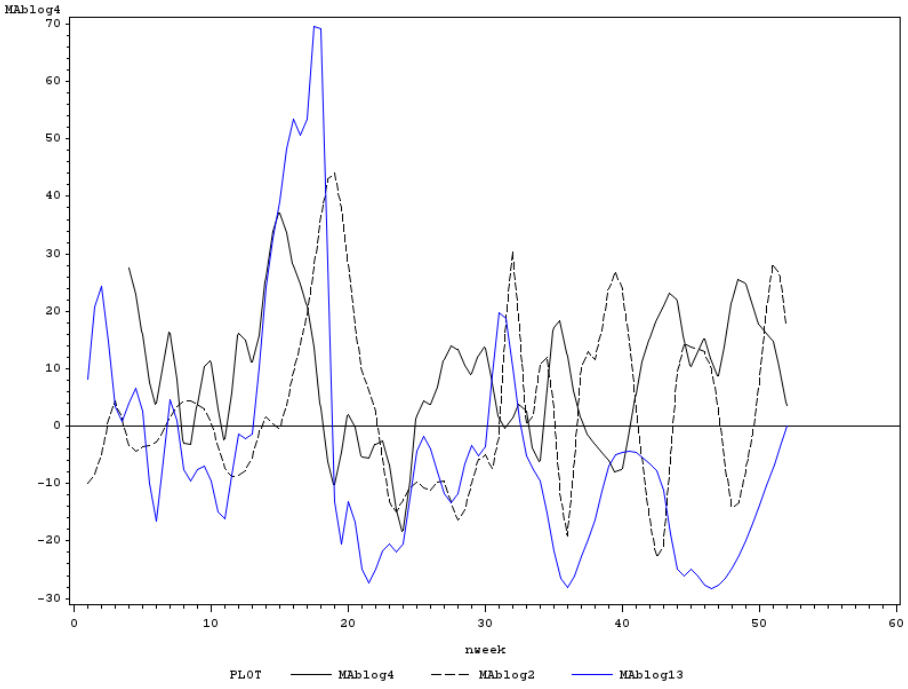

**FIGURE 3**

**Configuration (C) – The carers**

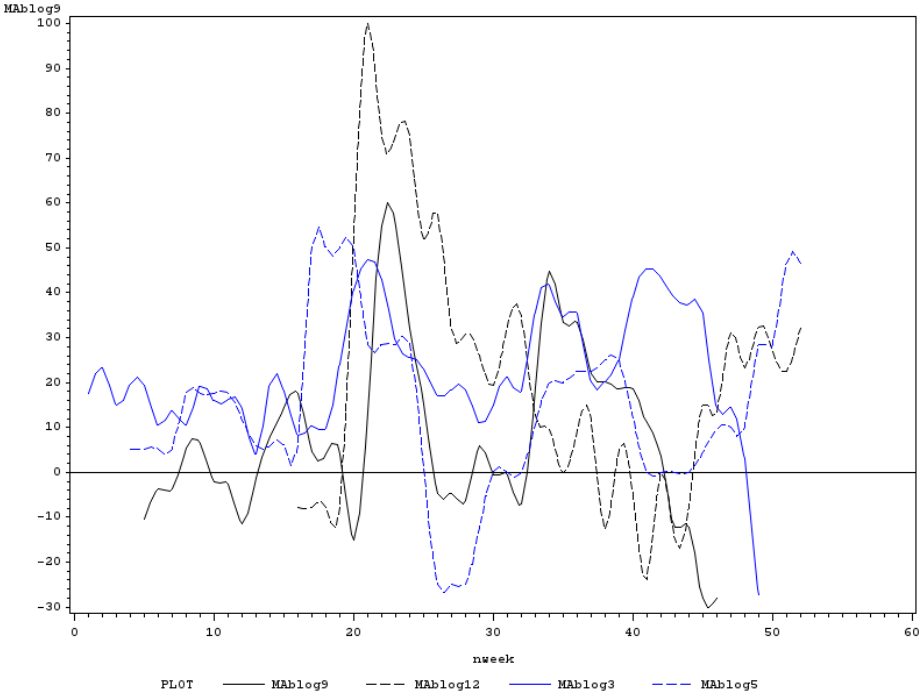


**FIGURE 4**

**Configuration (D) – The mourners**