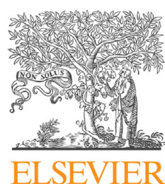
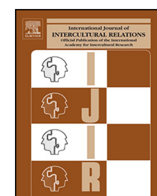
International Journal of Intercultural Relations 49 (2015) 278–293



Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

International Journal of Intercultural Relations

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/ijintrel



Acculturating non-traditional expatriates: A case study of single parent, overseas adoption, split family, and lesbian assignees

Yvonne McNulty

Singapore Institute of Management University, Singapore, Singapore

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Available online 12 June 2015

Keywords:
Expatriates
Non-traditional
Lesbian
Acculturation
Assignees
Single parents
Adoption
Split families

ABSTRACT

While much has been written and studied about traditional expatriates – typically senior, Western males in their late 40s or early 50s, with an accompanying female spouse and children – very little is known about non-traditional expatriates and the extent to which their hyper-diversity shapes and impacts on their international assignment experience. In this article, I examine the acculturation experiences of non-traditional expatriates in relation to: (a) the stressors they face when relocating abroad, including the barriers and challenges that arise in deciding whether or not to relocate; (b) how these stressors can be mitigated both by the companies employing them and expatriates themselves; and (c) how their hyper-diversity translates into reality, that is, meaningful outcomes that impact on their international assignment experience. Using case studies of four non-traditional expatriates, including single parent, lesbian, split family, and overseas adoption assignees, I engage in a debate as to whether current theories about acculturation hold true in the case of non-traditional expatriates and where future research on this important topic needs to be directed.

© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Over the past decade, the traditional view that business expatriates are typically senior, Western males in their late 40s or early 50s with an accompanying female spouse and children has been challenged (e.g., Hutchings, French, & Hatcher, 2008; Janssens, Cappellen, & Zanoni, 2006). Today, we see more non-traditional expatriates emerging including female breadwinners, single parents, semi-retirees, lesbians and gays, split families, single expatriates, Asian expatriates, blended families, and those with special needs children, among others (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2014; Carlton & Perelstein, 2013; Goby, Ahmed, Annavarjula, Ibrahim, & Osman-Gani, 2002; McNulty, 2014; McPhail, McNulty, & Hutchings, 2014). Non-traditional expatriates engaged in corporate global mobility (business expatriation) are defined by McNulty (2014) as those that have 'special' circumstances that standard global mobility policies typically do not address. They differ from traditional expatriates due to: (a) family composition (e.g., step, single-parent, split, overseas adoption, and multi-generational families); (b) family challenges (e.g., special needs children); (c) family status (e.g., single expatriates, semi-retired empty-nesters); (d) sexual orientation (e.g., lesbian, gay, transgender); and, (e) gender (e.g., female breadwinners with male trailing

E-mail address: ymcnulty@expatresearch.com

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.ijintrel.2015.05.006
0147-1767/© 2015 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

spouses, single female expatriates). A key feature of non-traditional expatriates is their hyper-diversity; 'diverse' in the sense that, before even relocating abroad, non-traditional employees often represent a unique point of difference compared to their colleagues, and 'hyper' because expatriation adds another layer of complexity to their already unique status (see Doucerain, Dere, & Ryder, 2013 in relation to hyper-diversity and acculturation).

The rise in number of non-traditional expatriates is likely a direct response to multinational corporations' (MNCs) demand for top talent in light of a 'thinning' talent pool (Beechler & Woodward, 2009; Findlay, 2006), coupled with a growing realization that organizational diversity is a key performance enhancer at the firm level (Süssmuth-Dyckerhoff, Wang, & Chen, 2012). Yet, in comparison to the hundreds, if not thousands, of published articles about traditional expatriates (see Takeuchi, 2010 for a review), very little is known about non-traditional expatriates and the extent to which their 'hyper-diversity' shapes and impacts on their international assignment experience. Recent exceptions include studies of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) expatriates (Gedro, 2010a; McPhail et al., 2014), female assignees (Hutchings et al., 2008), and single-parent and split families (McNulty, 2014). Even less is known about the challenges that global mobility managers face in compensating and supporting non-traditional assignees from a policy perspective, particularly when benefits assigned to employees in the home country are not transferable abroad on an international assignment (see Malecki, Day, Franklin, & D'Argenio, 2013).

In this article, I draw on interviews with four non-traditional expatriates engaged in business expatriation to explore: (a) the stressors they face when relocating abroad, including the barriers and challenges that arise in deciding whether or not to relocate; (b) how these stressors can be mitigated both by the companies employing them and expatriates themselves; and (c) how their hyper-diversity translates into reality, i.e., meaningful outcomes that impact on their international assignment experience. The objective is not to reinvent theories of acculturation about non-traditional expatriates given that recent studies suggest acculturation for expatriates, whether traditional or non-traditional, is in some (but not all) respects the same or similar (e.g., Haslberger, 2010; Shaffer, Kraimer, Chen, & Bolino, 2012). This is likely due to the fact that non-traditional expatriates remain part of the overall taxonomy of 'expatriates' with differences apparent only in their individual or family characteristics as opposed to fundamental differences at their core, i.e., expatriation is the common experience irrespective as to whether one is traditional or non-traditional in status. Rather, the intention is to use an empirical approach that explores the actual experience of non-traditional expatriates' acculturation during global mobility, from which to then help acculturation researchers discover the theoretical possibilities inherent in this topic and to potentially expand theorizing about expatriate acculturation.

Using a case study approach, the interviewees represent a cross-section of Western non-traditional expatriates. Furthermore, while each case study represents an expatriate that originates from a Western home-country, all but one are based in Asia, with a fourth in the UK. All, in one form or another, are pursuing international careers with the intention of acquiring skills and competencies for career advancement and/or fulfillment. In line with other research, all of them express ongoing challenges related to their non-traditional expatriate status. The contribution of this article is to: (i) address the gap in research that has largely ignored this segment of the assignee candidate pool; (ii) examine whether current theories about acculturation hold true in the case of non-traditional expatriates; and, (iii) propose a future research agenda to guide more scholarly work on this topic.

2. The nature of non-traditional expatriation

Non-traditional expatriates represent a potentially diverse and growing segment of the global talent pool constituting up to 10 different types of assignees (see Table 1 for an overview, with supporting literature). Recent studies (e.g., Janssens et al., 2006; McPhail et al., 2014) and industry reports (e.g., Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2014; ORC Worldwide, 2008) suggest a growing trend across a range of non-traditional expatriate types. Multigenerational families, for example, entail that elderly family members are relocated to the assignment location as a dependent or provided with other special arrangements. Yet, KPMG (2011) reports that only 15% of companies have policy provisions to assist in care for elderly family members; of those that do, bringing extended family members on assignment (64%) and supporting visits to the elderly family members in the home country (i.e., providing additional home leave; 55%) are the most popular solutions. Female expatriates similarly remain a strong contingent of the talent pool (20%), as do single men (20%) and single women (9%), while 49% of companies engage in split family assignments (married but on assignment without a spouse/partner) for assignments of one-year or longer, representing an 8% increase since 2013 (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2014).

Non-traditional expatriates also engage in different types of assignments beyond only company-assigned expatriate (CAE) engagements. This includes alternative forms of global work such as short-term and self-initiated assignments and business commuting some of which are evident in the case studies presented in this article (e.g., Case 2). Status-reversal marriages (married female expatriates) are among the most common type of non-traditional expatriate studied (e.g., Cole & McNulty, 2011; Hutchings et al., 2008). These assignees are characterized by the expatriate family's primary income being generated by a wife or female partner, whose career necessitates a move abroad. Approximately 18% of international assignees represent female breadwinner families with accompanying male spouses (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2014).

Table 1
Types of non-traditional expatriates.

Type	Definition	Relevant expatriate literature
1. Step-family*	Or blended family; where one or both parents has children from a previous relationship that are not genetically or biologically related to the other parent	No studies or literature
2. Single-parent family	A parent, who is the primary caregiver for one or more children, that does not live with a spouse or partner. Status does not apply to single-parent expatriates with children attending university in another location or the home-country	Cartus (2012a) McNulty (2014) Parkinson et al. (2010) Worldwide ERC (2008)
3. Split family	An assignee who relocates abroad unaccompanied by a partner and/or children. Split families can entail: (1) family stays in the home location and assignee relocates with more frequent trips home; (2) family and assignee relocate to the host country, and family lives in a tier 1 location while assignee commutes to a 2nd or 3rd tier location and returns on the weekend (an arrangement common in non-governmental organizations such as the United Nations when families are sent to hardship or dangerous locations); or (3) family and assignee relocate to a 'livable' host country and assignee commutes from there to a different country. Split family also includes parents that relocate abroad unaccompanied by one or more of their children, for example: (1) children at boarding school geographically separated from their parents having either never expatriated with the family, or having repatriated at some point during an assignment in order to attend school; and, (2) children of divorce that leave the custodial parent to temporarily live with the non-custodial parent in another location. Children only qualify for split family status when they are tax dependents of the assignee	Brookfield Global Relocation Services (2014) Cartus (2012b) KPMG (2011) McNulty (2014) ORC Worldwide (2008) Worldwide ERC (2011)
4. Overseas adoption family*	[A citizen] who lives abroad that adopts a child from the country in which he or she is resident. Also includes third country adoption where [a citizen] living abroad in country B, adopts a child from country C. In both instances, the adoption must comply with the domestic adoption laws of the child's overseas country of usual residence and must be finalised in that country	Australian Government (2014) KPMG (2011) ORC Worldwide (2008)
5. Multigenerational family*	A dependent relative who would normally reside with the employee in the home country and who relies on the assignee for the majority of their financial support. Typically includes parents, but may also include other relatives.	Brookfield Global Relocation Services (2014) KPMG (2011)
6. LGBT	Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender assignees whose accompanying partner is typically of the same sex to the assignee and included in the definition of family for the purposes of international assignment benefits as determined by the assignee's home country organization's policies	Colgan and McKearney (2012) Gedro (2010a) Gedro et al. (2013) Kaplan (2014) KPMG (2011) McNulty (2014) McPhail et al. (2014) ORC Worldwide (2008)
7. Family with special needs child/ren*	Expatriate children that require special attention and specific necessities that other children do not. Includes a broad range of special needs ranging from mild learning disabilities to profound cognitive impairment; food allergies or terminal illness; developmental delays; intermittent panic attacks or serious psychiatric problems. Common examples include children with autism, downs syndrome, and dyslexia	Carlton and Perelstein (2013) Cartus (2012b)
8. Female breadwinner (w/male trailing spouse)	Primary income is generated by the wife and whose career takes priority over that of her husband	Brookfield Global Relocation Services (2014) Cole & McNulty (2011) Harvey and Wiese (1998) Haslberger (2010) Janssens et al. (2006) McNulty (2014) Selmer and Leung (2003) Tung (2004) Westwood and Leung (1994)
9. Single male and female	Male and female assignees with no dependents. Typically does not include married assignees that relocate unaccompanied by their partner/children	Sidani and Al Hakim (2012)
10. Semi-retired empty-nester*	A person, typically a parent, typically between the age of 55 and 60 whose children have grown up and moved away from home and who is in the early stages of retirement. Relocating abroad is not seen as something essential for financial or career reasons but rather as an adventure	No studies or literature

* These categories have not yet been explored in the academic expatriate literature and are defined here based on industry sources as opposed to non-expatriate academic literature. This is because the latter does not represent foundational work in this area, whereas the former report new trends on this topic worthy of further study.

2.1. Non-traditional expatriate families

A distinguishing feature of many non-traditional expatriates with dependents is that the family composition itself may be a point of difference in comparison to more traditional family types. For example, step, single-parent, split, overseas adoption, and multi-generational families all represent different forms of family type which contrast significantly with published research on two-parent expatriate families (see Harvey & Moeller, 2009 review). The latter has tended to draw on a restricted definition of family as a "monogamous patriarchal family headed by a man permanently married to his [one] wife and living with her and their children" (Rothausen, 1999, p. 818). This is despite deviations from the traditional household composition for some time (see Sorrentino, 1990). How, then, is an expatriate family defined? I borrow from the literature in non-expatriate family studies to define a family as "comprising of persons who have a shared history and a shared future" (McGoldrick & Carter, 2003, p. 221) where,

> The nuclear family is no longer the predominant family structure in contemporary life. Divorce, remarriage, and the rise of same-sex marriages have led to single-parent families, blended families, and families with two parents of the same gender. (Wilson, 2011, p. 119)

This definition, while likely intended to apply to non-relocating families, equally applies to expatriates. For example, in its 2008 survey, ORC reports that the most prevalent definition of 'spouse' used by the majority of MNCs worldwide to define 'family' includes a married, long-term or live-in partner of the opposite or *same* sex (38%). While most Japanese companies (80%) continue to use the traditional definition of married husband or wife, European companies were the most liberal with 63% including the opposite or same-sex live-in partner in their definition. KPMG (2011) reports that over half of participants in their survey of 554 MNCs include opposite-gender unmarried partners and nearly half include same-gender unmarried partners for the purposes of determining international assignment-related benefits. In this article, I borrow from McNulty (2014, p. 338) in defining an expatriate family as,

> married, defacto, live-in, or long-term partners of the opposite or same-sex, with or without children, with family members that reside in one or many locations; and legally separated or divorced (single) adults with children, with family members that reside in one or many locations.

The definition is useful because it accounts for a range of traditional and non-traditional family types including: (i) cohabitation outside of legal marriage; (ii) children born outside of wedlock; (iii) blended families with step-children from prior relationships, particularly those that do not share the same family name; (iv) children at boarding school geographically separated from their parents; (v) LGBT partnerships, (vi) adoptions that take place during an assignment; (vii) split families residing in two or more locations; and (viii) single parents with international custody arrangements.

3. Theoretical positioning of non-traditional expatriates

3.1. Hyper-diversity and non-traditional expatriates

'Hyper-diversity' is an appropriate descriptor of the characteristics of non-traditional expatriates: while there may be many types, there is no sharp or clear distinction between the boundaries that define one type or another, with some representing two or more. As a result, the tendency to simplify expatriates as fitting neatly into one particular category or as having one particular label becomes a flawed approach when the researcher is faced with the reality of the lived experience. In this study, the lived reality of non-traditional expatriates suggests that 'hybridization' of the construct occurs more often than it has been reported. Hybridization in the context of this study is a term adapted from the acculturation literature (Arends-Toíth & van de Vijver, 2004; Doucerain et al., 2013) and is used to refer to the re-combination of idiosyncratic characteristics of non-traditional expatriates that mix and combine aspects of the underlying construct (in this case, expatriation), resulting in potentially new categories and potentially more unique needs that need to be understood and addressed. This may mean, for example, that a non-traditional expatriate family engaging in an overseas adoption may also be a blended family.

The hybridization of non-traditional expatriates is especially important from a policy perspective, where the unique needs of particular assignees may require customized approaches beyond what a policy can currently deliver or is capable of addressing (see arguments by Malecki et al., 2013). Understanding the implications of hyper-diversity and hybridization among non-traditional expatriates has nonetheless been largely absent from expatriate studies, in part because the broader topic of non-traditional expatriates has been inadequately researched. The choice of case study method for this study has, within this context, been deliberate in order to allow the lived experience to provide a more holistic perspective of their journey through the acculturation process. Importantly, each of the cases has been approached from the micro-context, seeking to explore "the immediate, concrete, local conditions of daily life" that typifies their lived experience as assignees and which situates their experience in "highly local contexts" (Doucerain et al., 2013, p. 688). In doing so, the findings are intended to move beyond only the prescriptive (i.e., defining a set of ideal or preferred characteristics, traits, and behaviors at the personal level that leads to acculturation success), to instead explore the actual behaviors that non-traditional expatriates acquire or adopt in reality in order to achieve a satisfactory degree of acculturation. In other words, how

does the hyper-diversity of non-traditional expatriates translate into reality, i.e., meaningful outcomes that impact on their international assignment experience? This fundamental question is not fully addressed by existing expatriation research largely because few studies engage in the case study method thereby allowing researchers to take into account the environment that non-traditional expatriates navigate in their daily lives, both before and during an assignment. Such an environment is like to include various forms of stigmatization and discrimination, and varying degrees of marginalization and inclusiveness (Colgan & McKearney, 2012), which heretofore has not been adequately examined in existing literature beyond the study of female expatriates (e.g., Adler, 2002; Selmer & Leung, 2003).

3.2. Acculturation, adjustment, and assimilation

Chuang and Morena (2013, p. 319) broadly define acculturation as involving,

> change at both individual and societal levels. Attitudes, values, beliefs, and behaviors developed in one cultural milieu must, to some extent, accommodate to a new context.

The adjustment process for expatriates, whether traditional or non-traditional, is conceptualized as one where individuals are continuously engaged in the balancing of demands against capabilities (Haslberger & Brewster, 2008, 2009; Patterson, 1988). Demands may include *stressors*, i.e., one-off events such as the move abroad. It also includes *strains*, i.e., ongoing unresolved tensions resulting from stressors that manifest over time, such as the accompanying spouse giving up a job/career to move abroad (Harvey, 1998; Harvey & Wiese, 1998), changed family routines (Caligiuri, Hyland, & Joshi, 1998), children starting new schools (Takeuchi, Lepak, Marinova, & Yun, 2007), and changes in financial status (Punnett, 1997). Third, it involves *daily hassles*, i.e., dealing with locals in a foreign language (Patterson, 2002). Capabilities may include coping behaviors as well as resources such as *emotional support*, e.g., from friendships, clubs, and associations, as well as the internet (Copeland & Norell, 2002); *informational support*, e.g., company assistance with finding a job for the accompanying spouse (Harvey, 1997); and *instrumental support*, e.g., company funded relocation allowances, residency permits (ORC Worldwide, 2008). Other resources may be found in 'socio cultural brokerage' (Glanz, Williams, & Hoeksema, 2001, p. 104), for example, where children may facilitate access to social networks and friendships for their expatriate parents. While much of the adjustment process is typically handled and addressed by expatriate individuals, good organizational support has been found to facilitate better coping mechanisms for those moving into unfamiliar cultural environments (McNulty, 2012). For the non-traditional expatriate, it is suggested that dealing with individual demands and building appropriate capabilities (to enhance positive crossover effects) are likely to be influenced by the types of organizational support provided to them and their families. Furthermore, Chuang and Moreno (2013, p. 320) argue that,

> A complete understanding of the adaptation process (and the family's role in the process) requires an account of the challenges and resources afforded by the cultural institutions (work, schools, communities, etc.) and the surrounding sociopolitical features, prior to, and after relocation. Only then will we be able to have any understanding how families enter into, and deal with the process of acculturation following their settlement in our societies.

The belief that full assimilation is the key to successful adaptation is a widely held view (see Chuang & Moreno, 2013 for a review). Those that fail to assimilate are therefore considered at fault (at the individual level) rather than examining the processes of their supporting organizations to uncover where inadequate support has been provided. Prior research (e.g., Buriel & Ment, 1997) highlights that acculturation has focused on the individual, where replacing on old culture (home country) with a new culture (host country) facilitates better assimilation and adjustment. But recent research (e.g., Berry, 2008) has not taken such a simplistic view, instead arguing for a multidimensional process in terms of the context that influences adaptation, and the nature of the acculturation process itself. For non-traditional expatriates, context includes what each individual brings to their international assignment experience (e.g., life history, prior assignments abroad, extent of their hyper-diversity) as well as how the acculturation process unfolds in terms of the support they receive from their organization, networks, community, and family.

While assimilation has its place, I argue that the overall acculturation of non-traditional expatriates lies in a multidimensional perspective of adjustment and assimilation as a combination of an assignee's ability to effectively balance demands against capabilities (i.e., reduce stressors and develop effective coping behaviors) which is further facilitated by the extent to which they receive adequate organizational support. Thus, non-traditional expatriates' adaptation is reflected in their ability to successfully navigate aspects that make up the new 'context' of their lives once abroad, including sociocultural adaptation (work, home, leisure, school for kids, and the broader community) and psychological adaptation (overall life satisfaction and well being; Ward, 1996). A number of existing theoretical models capture this adaptation process (e.g., family systems theory, ecological theories, acculturation typologies; Chuang & Moreno, 2013), however, many still fall short in adapting to the expatriate context because of significant variability in: (a) host-country diversity; (b) types of expatriates; and, (c) prior assignment experience.

In this article, I delve deeper into the dynamics and intricacies of global mobility for non-traditional expatriates in terms of their background culture, family development, and work progress to more fully understand the factors that contribute to their acculturation. I do so by engaging in case studies of this unique cohort's lived experience to enable a deeper exploration of their issues beyond the superficiality of self-reports and surveys. In this way, I hope to account for the multidimensionality

of non-traditional expatriates' mobility experience in terms of both ongoing transitions (i.e., how moves unfold across one assignment versus many assignments) and the meaning that is attached to them.

4. Case study approach

This study utilized a qualitative, inductive approach to draw on non-traditional expatriates' lived experience as international assignees. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with four participants who identified as single parent, lesbian, split family, and overseas adoption expatriates. This approach allowed for core themes to be explored with enough flexibility to allow participants to identify issues that they considered important and to elaborate on critical incidents (Creswell, 2003). Marshall and Rossman (2006) assert that when a topic is under-researched (such as the current one), qualitative research is often a better choice when new theoretical perspectives are required but the researcher is not fully aware of the details of the phenomenon under investigation. Qualitative research may therefore uncover as yet unspecified or undiscovered variables.

4.1. Rationale

A case-study approach to the study of non-traditional expatriates is justifiable on several grounds. First, it addresses the need for more acculturation research such as that of McPhail et al. (2014), whose model of social capital theory as an enabler to LGBT expatriates' expatriation is a clear example of conceptualizing adjustment as an integrated process. A second benefit is that it recognizes a range of internal and external factors that may influence non-traditional expatriates' adjustment (see Gedro, Mizzi, Rocco, & van Loo, 2013), thereby establishing a clear conceptual link between a variety of support elements and perceived adjustment. Third, the dynamic nature of acculturation is important on the basis that non-traditional expatriates' adjustment is in a constant state of flux according to the degree of hyper-diversity being dealt with at any point in time. This is evident, for example, in Case 3, where a split family is also dealing with a special needs child, Case 1 where a single parent is also an overseas adoption family, and Case 2 which describes the experiences of a divorced lesbian expatriate[1]. This study shows that hyper-diversity results in a type of hybridity that for some is an embodied reality best explored through the case study method.

4.2. Sample characteristics

Expatriates are defined as those who are currently company-assigned as well as self-initiated (for key differences, see Tharenou, 2013). For example, one of the expatriates in this study did not expatriate with the assistance of an MNC, electing instead to take a local position (in Singapore) and to find a better job once there (see Case 2). This, and other cases, shows that expatriates are engaging in alternative forms of global work experience. The participants reported in this study are four women who identify as non-traditional expatriates. While men were not intentionally excluded as respondents, women were included as participants because they volunteered to do so. All the participants had a current partner while working internationally or repatriating, with two having found new partners in the host-location after their divorce. The participants work in a range of industries including consulting, training, and government. All but one has children. As only one spouse in each non-traditional family was interviewed for the study, single response bias was mitigated by a combination of my experience as an expatriate and a qualitative researcher to challenge participants' responses at key points during each interview (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). In the case of Amber (split family) and Bianca (overseas adoption family), while it would have been advantageous to interview their spouses, it was not possible given the demands of their partners' work.

Three of the case interviews were conducted face-to-face in Singapore, with a fourth interview (to the UK) conducted via Skype. All the interviews took place over a one-year period from April 2013 to March 2014. Participants were invited to participate via personal invitation, being identified as a non-traditional expatriate through my personal network[2]. As a result, 10 non-traditional expatriates were interviewed in total. Adopting a theoretical sampling approach (Creswell, 2003), four of the 10 case studies are reported here as best representing the issues and challenges that non-traditional expatriates face. It is not possible to assess a non-response rate given that many non-traditional expatriates do not wish to make their status known and are therefore not easily identified.

4.3. Case study framework

Questions asked during the interviews were developed from a limited number of prior studies on non-traditional expatriates as well as an in-depth literature review across both academic and industry literatures. An interview guide was

[1] It is important to note that, in seeking participants for the study, I did not intentionally seek out those engaged in hyper-diverse lifestyles; rather, as the interviews progressed, the nature of each assignee's hyper-diversity became apparent.

[2] As an insider to the expatriate community, having lived and worked abroad as an expatriate for the past 15 years in USA, Singapore and China, I was able to draw on a network of contacts to find suitable participants.

subsequently developed. I chose to adopt Yin's (2003) comparative case study approach in studying four very different cases to enable me to yield commonalities and differences among dissimilar cases. Multiple case studies can strengthen a study's findings by providing informative comparisons and contrasts that highlight what is common to respondents but also what is unique under certain contexts (e.g., by studying unusual or extreme cases; Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007). Case studies are also sufficiently flexible to allow for iterative inquiry to occur (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Each participant was advised that the research was conducted in accordance with the participating university's ethical protocols, that their participation was voluntary, and that all responses would be treated in confidence, with anonymity assured by pseudonyms to be utilized in any published research. All participants were provided with an assurance that any published research arising from their interview would be made available to them for 'member checking' prior to submission to a conference or journal. Following Smith and Berg's (1988) advice, this procedure was used as a way to limit researcher bias stemming from my insider status within the expatriate community, and to ensure that if, and when, the insider "*showed up*" that participants had the opportunity to correct factual or conceptual misinterpretations that misrepresented their lived experience (Mirvis & Louis, 1988, p. 231). To facilitate member checking, I adopted a storytelling approach by transcribing the interview in full and then writing up the case as a narrative account (see Gertsen & Søderberg, 2010; Peltonen, 1998 for similar approaches). The usefulness of member checking is important when neutrality is required in order to improve response quality and reduce response effects.

Interviews ranged from 1½ to 4 h in length and most were conducted in public places where participants felt comfortable and relaxed, for example, a work canteen or a café near to their office (note: the Skype interview took place in my office.) All were recorded and transcribed, and then manually coded using computer-aided qualitative analysis software (NVIVO version 8). Hierarchical categories were used to reduce, sort and cluster the data and derive key themes (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000), as well as content analysis to determine how strongly the themes are manifested (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Although participant's provided a single-rater response, they can be viewed as expert informants.

5. Four case studies

5.1. Single parents

There is little to no research or exploration of the issues faced by single parent expatriates, nor is there much guidance offered by scholarly research or consulting reports as to how best to manage, support and attract this segment of the workforce to engage in international mobility. What, then, are the multiple considerations these families face when a single parent seeks upward career mobility via an international assignment? And what can be done to support these assignees that might otherwise be overlooked or dismissed? Although single parent expatriate numbers appear low in comparison to two-parent families, increases are being reported (see McNulty, 2014 for a recent study). The Australian and New Zealand Association in Singapore, for instance, recently launched a single-parent networking forum to provide support, advice, and friendship for adults and their families on topics such as legal rights, financial planning, immigration visas and emotional wellness (ANZA, 2014).

One important issue is how to define a single-parent expatriate, i.e., the upper age limit for children that qualifies a family for single-parent status in terms of assignment policy. Additionally, the presence of the other parent in a cohabiting arrangement might preclude single-parent status. Data from the US Bureau of Labor Statistics stipulates that most organizations use the under-18 age limit for single-parent status (Sorrentino, 1990), however, anecdotal evidence suggests that there is a general tendency for MNCs to extend the age limit to 21 for those expatriates with children attending university in the same location where the parent is currently residing. Single-parent status generally does not apply to expatriates with children attending university in another location or the home-country. To understand the complexity surrounding single-parent expatriation, consider Jacqueline Carter's story (note: pseudonyms have been used throughout).

Jacqueline's story is one that is common to many single parent families, although exacerbated by the stresses and uncertainty typically associated with expatriation: finding support networks to replace support that is lost from extended family and friends, deciding whether or not to move away from a significant other parent, childcare and schooling arrangements during business travel, loneliness, and exploring opportunities for career progression. For some, there is also the issue of finding a new life partner. Clearly, the decision to relocate abroad is one that is dependent not only on the needs of a non-custodial parent, but must also factor in a child's well being in relation to the proximity they may or may not have to the other parent (Parkinson, Cashmore, & Single, 2010). A further issue is the extent to which relocation and employment policies can adequately address the practical needs of single parent expatriate families (e.g., daycare and school schedules, unexpected sick days, and reduced business travel), particularly when a policy exception request is made in response to an economic or social issue that could be unique to a single parent situation. In Jacqueline's case, it was crucial that the company agreed to allow her to travel for business only 30% of the time. For other single parents, it may require working from home or relocating to countries where live-in domestic help is accessible. Like many non-traditional expatriates, Jacqueline's success is both complicated - and facilitated - by her personal life: complicated by the separation from her husband, but also facilitated by the support from her company, ex-husband, and a core group of personal friends.

Case 1: "I've never played by the rules"

Jacqueline Carter is a 50-something single parent raising two teenage daughters alone. A calm, level-headed career woman originally from the UK, nothing prepared her, in 1999, for the breakdown of her marriage when the family was posted to Singapore. Having expatriated only three years earlier from the UK to Hong Kong, where both she and her husband, Adam, worked for General Electric in Asia Pacific regional roles that required lots of travel and late night calls, the subsequent move to Singapore a year and a half later was a blessing in disguise that enabled the Carter's to start a family. With one daughter born shortly after they arrived in Singapore, Jacqueline gave up her full-time job to be a stay-at-home mother shortly after the family adopted a second daughter a year later. Then, 9 months after the adoption, the marriage began to unravel. "He had an affair with another woman but couldn't decide whether to leave us or to stay. Adam went back and forth for about 18 months in some kind of personal implosion, until I finally told him to go. He clearly did the wrong thing, but I ended up having to make the decision as to how it would all end."

By now an unemployed, stay-at-home mother with two young children under two, and living abroad as a foreigner, Jacqueline was in a crisis situation. Exacerbating the separation were unanticipated financial problems that added to the already intense situation. "Shortly after he left, he put all our money into margins and lost the lot," says Jacqueline. "So in addition to him leaving, we also lost all our money." The financial pressure meant that Jacqueline was unable to properly grieve the end of her marriage because she needed to immediately go back to work. "The financial toll was probably worse than the separation," she says. "I was not only upset and frightened, but incredibly frustrated because he had encouraged me to give up my well-paying job at GE and stay at home with the girls, which meant I gave up my employment pass (EP) and became a dependent pass (DP) holder, with him all the while planning to leave me. I was very upset that I could have kept a good job, which would have helped when he did leave and then subsequently lost all our money."

"Now I had no job, I had no income to support my children, and no EP. I had to find a job so that the girls and I could legally remain in Singapore until I could figure out a better plan." As a precaution, Jacqueline negotiated with her husband to delay formalizing their separation and divorce until she was gainfully employed so that the girl's residency was not in jeopardy, which he agreed to. The upside for Adam was that, as a DP holder, Jacqueline could not relocate out of Singapore with the children without his permission.

"Interestingly, we are still not formally separated, and we are not divorced, even though it is 14 years ago that all this happened," explains Jacqueline. "I've never played by the rules, and the separation was no different. I am now a permanent resident, so the work permit is no longer an issue. But with all this time that has passed, getting divorced is no longer a priority." However, with no formal separation or divorce in place, Jacqueline still has no recourse to seek help from Adam should he withdraw financial support; instead, she relies almost entirely on a verbal agreement which, thankfully, Adam has always upheld.

In the intervening years, Jacqueline has managed to create a relatively stable life for herself and her children in Singapore, a place she now calls home. She re-trained as a cross-cultural expert and landed a job with a large consulting firm shortly after Adam left, and is still with the company today. But with no time to grieve or to psychologically adapt to her new life situation, Jacqueline parked her emotions and got on with what needed to be done. Eventually, it took a toll. "About a year after the separation, I started to get health issues and they are still with me all these years later. There were massive periods of stress in the early stages that were never properly dealt with." The biggest stressor today is raising children alone. Jacqueline has also suffered financially having to dip into her savings every year and is acutely aware of the need to remain 100% employable.

Key to her success as a single-parent has been the ability to display a high level of emotional intelligence about her situation. "I had to put my ego and my pain aside. I had a responsibility to do what was best for all of us, even if he didn't reciprocate. I had to keep making all the decisions because he was close to a nervous breakdown over what he'd done. Ironically, although it was happening to me, he made out like it was happening to him." The biggest success factor, however, has been Jacqueline's ability to re-build a support network in Singapore to replace the support of family and friends in the UK. "There were four or five families here that I met through a working mums group shortly after my children were born and they became my lifeline when the separation occurred. They became like my sisters. If I had a meltdown, they would come and get the kids and give me space and time to pull it together. As a single parent, you absolutely need that. You can't live without it."

Obviously, Jacqueline has made many sacrifices. Still, she is philosophical about the future. "I am frustrated because I know that I will probably never be able to retire. I just can't afford to financially. Failure on the expat scene can also be hard," she explains. "You're surrounded by what appears to be successful expatriate families, and you just don't feel like you fit in. But I was determined that the situation would not beat me. It might crush me temporarily, but I'm a solutions-oriented person. I knew when to say 'please, somebody take over' and then my girlfriends would sweep in and help." Jacqueline admits that the feeling of paralysis during a crisis can be frightening, of not being able to get out of bed, of not being able to breathe some days. "But I needed to be a role model to my girls; that no matter what happens in life, you can get by, you can empower yourself, and build strength and resilience."

5.2. Lesbian and gay expatriates

It is thought that many LGBT people pursue less-rewarding careers because they are "safer" and often "more welcoming", suggesting there may be a corporate ceiling or glass border that does not allow gays to advance and prosper either at home or abroad (Gedro, 2010a, p. 392). Gedro (2010b, p. 352) asserts that LGBT people "remain a marginalized, stigmatized, and unequally protected segment of the population in the United States and around the world," noting that when an employee

remains in the 'global closet' they are unlikely to volunteer for global career opportunities and just as likely to turn them down if the host-country is known to be unwelcoming to LGBT, without ever revealing to their employer the true nature of their sexuality (Gedro, 2010a). Thus, many LGBT people suffer a form of self-discrimination resulting from self-imposed exclusion to international career opportunities. LGBT employee protections as well as the opportunities, issues and considerations with respect to their international assignment experience are important, but under-researched, areas. A few recent studies have emerged (e.g., Gedro, 2010a; Gedro et al., 2013; McNulty, 2014; McPhail et al., 2014) highlighting that more LGBT workers are venturing abroad, often because this predominantly 'covert' segment of the assignee workforce appears more willing to make their sexual orientation known to their employer (Colgan & McKearney, 2012). From this perspective, consider Talia Zimmerman's situation in Singapore.

Case 2: "I'm defined by my gender, not my sexuality"

Talia Zimmerman is a Dutch expatriate in her late 40s, holds a Masters degree in industrial and organizational psychology, and is living in a same-sex relationship in Singapore—a country that has strict laws against gay relationships, but is remarkably 'vague' about its stance regarding lesbians. Talia came to Asia more than 7 years ago with her then-spouse, Maria, an Irish national, having met in Luxembourg and then legally married in the UK some years before, living there for over a decade in their 'adopted home' before moving abroad to Asia. But in Singapore the relationship unraveled, and they divorced soon after the move. "We changed roles," said Talia, "I went from breadwinner to trailing wife and while the change in dynamics didn't end the marriage, it was a contributing factor".

Being in a same-sex marriage has its limitations no matter where lesbians live, but on the international scene the challenges can be even greater. "Neither our same-sex status nor marriage were legally recognized in Singapore for immigration purposes," explains Talia, "so we each had to secure our own employment pass before we could move there, as neither of us could assume dependent status on the basis of each other's employment". As it turned out, Maria got a job first and immediately departed the UK for Singapore. Talia followed four months later having secured her own job. But that first year was tough.

"We spent a significant amount of time apart in the beginning," says Talia, "and because I wanted to get myself to Singapore quickly, I took a 'job' as opposed to a career move. It helped that I had been seeking more work-life balance for some time anyway, so although I loved the slower pace in Singapore, it was a turning point for our relationship."

"Neither of us coped well with switching roles. I don't think moving to Singapore caused the divorce, but there were contributing factors."

Now in another committed relationship with a local Singaporean, Talia is back on her feet and enjoying what Singapore has to offer. But living in a country where many gays feel compelled to hide their true sexuality has drawbacks. "Even when I arrived at Changi airport seven years ago," recalls Talia, "I remember going to great lengths to hide from immigration officials any hint that I might be in the LGBT category. I knew that I was welcome as a woman, but felt deeply unsure how they would view me as a lesbian."

In hindsight, Talia is adamant that while the need for her to ascertain a Singapore work permit in her own right brought hardship via the initial separation from Maria, having it gave her many choices during the divorce that traditional expatriate wives often do not have. "I had the choice to stay in Singapore or leave, because I was gainfully employed in my own right. So I chose to stay because I was legally entitled to. That work permit enabled me to support myself and be independent. It gave me freedom."

Talia is philosophical about what it takes to be successful as an expatriate lesbian. The devastating break up of her marriage aside, there are safety issues foremost in her decision-making. "I would never live and work in the Middle East or Africa where open violence against gays is common," she says, "and even here in Singapore, I remain connected to a tight knit community of gay and straight friends who respect me for being a woman first, not a lesbian." In Singapore, she sees the restriction on openly 'coming out' as a small price to pay for living a life that is largely free from discrimination, even if that means never being able to legally marry her new partner as she could in the UK or elsewhere.

Today, Talia holds down a job in Singapore working part-time to maintain her employment pass status, while also freelancing in her own business. She is, by all accounts, a successfully acculturated lesbian expatriate who has achieved her life's goal of work-life balance. She puts her success down to personal awareness—being clear that she does not want a 'big corporate career' and that she has no interest in actively fighting for gay rights in a country were homosexuals are marginalized, at best. "I am pro-woman, not pro-gay. I am driven by standing up for feminist issues, not gay issues. I'm defined by my gender, not my sexuality," she says.

Talia's advice for other lesbian expatriates is simple: "Don't fear international mobility," she says, "because it's not as bad as one thinks or anticipates. Choose the location wisely, and then go live your life."

By all accounts, while Talia's situation remains somewhat unique, she nonetheless shares similar struggles to other non-traditional expatriates: stigmatized by her status, limited in access to others like her, and practical restrictions relating to immigration and marital status. Although Talia was able to legally relocate to Singapore as a lesbian, the move largely came at the expense of her relationship with Maria, being further complicated by an inability to have their marriage legally recognized and hence to openly grieve the loss (see Vijayan, 2013 for a recent commentary). Tellingly, Talia has decided to call Singapore home despite knowing that her sexual orientation will never result in being granted the full status and privileges afforded to heterosexual expatriates.

5.3. Split families

A split family is one where an international assignee's immediate family remains in the home country or prior location while the assignee expatriates 'unaccompanied' to the (new) host-location (KPMG, 2011). Such arrangements may be temporary, for example, to allow a child to finish the school year in the home/prior location before the family then re-joins the assignee in the new location; or permanent, for example, where an assignee enters into a 'commuter marriage' situation indefinitely due to a spouses' career (Worldwide ERC, 2011). While split families have been studied extensively in domestic relocations (e.g., Anderson & Spruill, 1993; Shellenbarger, 1999), only a few studies and reports have been published about international relocation (e.g., Cartus, 2012a; Copeland, 2009a; KPMG, 2011; McNulty, 2014). Brookfield Global Relocation Services (2014, p. 19) report that,

> split families exist in a variety of forms including: (1) family stays in the home location and assignee relocates with more frequent trips home; (2) family and assignee relocate to the host country, and family lives in a tier 1 location while assignee commutes to a 2 or 3 tier location and returns on the weekend (an arrangement common in non-governmental organizations such as the United Nations when families are sent to hardship or dangerous locations); or (3) family and assignee relocate to a 'livable' host country and assignee commutes from there to a different country. While option (1) may be less expensive or cost neutral, and options (2) and (3) more expensive, these options are nonetheless used in a number of industries and locations where the expense is viewed as a non-optional business cost of positioning key talent and candidates of choice.

While split family assignments are used by companies to reduce the barriers to mobility and address talent shortages, there are nonetheless likely to be significant personal costs arising from the separation and absence of a spouse from their partner and dependent children. This can include the temporary single parent status the at-home parent assumes (McNulty, 2014). To illustrate this point, consider Amber's story.

Case 3: "I've got to be everything to everyone"

Amber Wilson is a 39-year old UK mother of three boys, happily married, and living alone to raise her children in a small town outside London. Her French-born husband, Rafaele, commutes to his job in Belgium once a month, ideally working there for two-week stints, and then returning home to England to work from his home-office for the rest of the month. This arrangement has been in place for three years, with a further 12 months anticipated before Amber and Rafaele will revisit the situation and assess an alternative. Lately, Rafaele has been required to work three-week stints in Belgium, and is able to be home in the UK for only a week before needing to return to Europe. "It's certainly an unusual family life," explains Amber, "I mean, I never intended it would be like this!" As seasoned expatriates whose family had recently lived abroad for nearly a decade, and with children born in three different countries, Amber and Rafaele were used to a nomadic, live-by-the-seat-of-their-pants existence. Still, she contends, her eventual repatriation to the UK while Rafaele continued in an expatriate lifestyle has been hard to get used to.

"I miss being abroad. I miss the excitement, the constant change, the ever present challenges that inter-cultural living demands. But the decision to engage in a split family assignment was a no-brainer. We did it for one of our children and I have no regrets."

Moving back to the UK in 2011 from their assignment in Belgium and during the height of the recession meant that fulltime jobs for Rafaele were hard to find and of a much lower salary, which would have then required Amber to return to fulltime work in order for the family to retain even a modest lifestyle. Amber was not able, however, to be absent from home, as their UK repatriation was necessitated by their eldest son's developmental problems that required educational support that was not available at international schools. "In the end, the decision was made that Rafaele should continue with his job in Belgium, and commute from the UK," she explains, "while the rest of the family remained in the UK permanently. From a financial perspective, the rate of pay in Belgium is much higher, and with three children it was the only logical decision to make. Plus, his company is very flexible and supportive. He has an apartment and a bike in Belgium, and it works well."

While Rafaele is employed on rolling 3-month contracts which can be terminated at any point in time, the reality is that the contracts are constantly renewed and have been for the past three years, resulting in a somewhat indefinite life. "It's created a culture in which we all live in the present moment," says Amber. "We are used to being in a state of change and flux, which actually began when we were expats and has simply continued, so the knowing and planning ahead doesn't happen for us and won't for some time. There's no forward planning; we live 3 months to 3 months."

Undoubtedly, the single mum lifestyle can be challenging, even for someone that is happily married. "I take my hat off to single parents that do this 100% of the time. I mean, every other week I've got to be everything to everyone. I have to wear every hat. There's no back up. Getting the homework done, food on the table, the logistics are tough. The loneliness is tough—getting to Wednesday and thinking I've got two more nights until he's back. Unless I make a massive effort and book a babysitter, I can end up going a bit stir crazy."

Amber has been fortunate to find a portable career as an executive coach that enables her to work part-time and often from home, but contends that as manager of the house it takes a lot to keep it all going, particularly with no family support to call upon. "I have to do a balancing act over my needs and the children's needs in things like getting myself into London every other week, just for the day, to energize my soul and feed that need. We live in the country, and whilst I absolutely love it and it's beautiful, it doesn't fulfill all my needs. I've learned that simple things make the biggest

difference—like a reliable babysitter, a house cleaner, and an ironing lady." Exercising what Amber calls "exquisite self-care" is an important success factor that she believes makes a significant difference in successfully acculturating to a new lifestyle. "Expats are under so much more stress than the average person, navigating twice as many things as others. Managing that stress is absolutely essential. Awareness is absolutely critical."

As for how long Amber thinks she can continue to be in a split family arrangement, only time will tell. The best advice she can offer to other families considering a similar arrangement is to be practical: put in place domestic help that is flexible, on call, and reliable, and prioritise the reconnection process when you see your partner again. "It's important to keep the conversation and communication going and not to take it for granted," she suggests. "It's also important to keep asking 'are you happy, are we happy, is the family ok? That conversation needs to be had every month, at least."

Amber's situation is undoubtedly not a rare one. Cartus (2012a) and Brookfield Global Relocation Services (2014) report that the percentage of married/with partner expatriates that elect to undertake an unaccompanied assignment has remained steady at between 18 to 20% for the past six years since 2007, with approximately 35% of MNCs using 'unaccompanied' as an assignment type or policy (KPMG, 2011). Yet, in contrast to Amber's experience, much less support for split families is offered by companies beyond only home-leave assistance. But the challenges that split families face are those that many other non-traditional expatriate families also face: access to support networks and overcoming loneliness, and the financial pressure to continue with expatriation beyond what many families can often cope with.

5.4. Overseas adoption

Although there is not yet an academic study that explores overseas adoptions for expatriates, there is ample practitioner evidence (e.g., Anderson, 2011; McNulty, 2014; Saurine, 2013) to suggest that it is not only common among assignees, but growing. Expatriate adoption is defined by the Australian Government (2014) as,

> [A citizen] who lives abroad that adopts a child from the country in which he or she is resident. Expatriate adoption can also include third country adoption, where [a citizen] living abroad in country B, adopts a child from country C. In both instances, the adoption must comply with the domestic adoption laws of the child's overseas country of usual residence and must be finalised in that country.

ORC Worldwide (2008) and KPMG (2011) report that overseas adoptions are increasingly supported by companies as part of the policy provisions provided to expatriates, where 'dependent children' for the purposes of assignment benefits includes,

> those who rely on the assignee for the majority of their financial support, and are usually considered family for the purpose of calculating the assignee's international assignment-related allowances. This may include unmarried children (natural or adopted) typically under the age of 19 who would normally reside with the employee in the home country or other dependent relatives as approved by the organization's international assignment policy. (KPMG, 2011, p. 88)

To understand the acculturation challenges that overseas adoption presents for expatriates, let's consider the final case relating to Bianca and Roberto's experience.

Bianca and Roberto's story highlights that prior to an actual adoption, many expatriates engage in lengthy and expensive pre-adoption experiences that often require years of invested time and dedication. This may impact on assignees performance and adjustment in a number of ways. First, as many adoptions require stable residency, expatriates may be unwilling to re-assign or repatriate away from the host-country. Second, overseas adoption can be particularly onerous as it involves lengthy application procedures, often in a foreign language and at great expense, for which there is no guarantee of success. Thus, assignees and their families may be distracted by events in their personal life over a long period of time that an employer may be powerless to control. Third, not all adoptions are recognized in an expatriates' home country even if an adoption visa is granted to a child. This then necessitates that the child becomes a guardian of the State, with guardianship powers delegated to State and Territory adoption authorities. In Australia, for example, such an arrangement may be in place until either the provisions of the Act cease to apply, the child becomes an Australian citizen, or the child turns 18 (Australian Government, 2014). This may then present talent management challenges for MNCs when an assignee is reluctant to repatriate or re-assign if their home- or new host-country does not legally recognize an overseas adopted child as a legal dependent.

6. Discussion

The purpose of this study has been to examine the lived acculturation experiences of non-traditional expatriates in relation to the stressors they face when relocating abroad, including the barriers and challenges that arise in deciding whether or not to relocate, and how these stressors can be mitigated both by the companies employing them and expatriates themselves. A further goal has been to explore how hyper-diversity translates into reality, i.e., meaningful outcomes that impact on non-traditional expatriates international assignment experience. Undoubtedly, the four case studies presented here show that the stressors faced by non-traditional expatriates can be immense, but often not worse than the stressors also faced by traditional

Case 4: "We did what was right for us"

There has never been anything conventional about Bianca and Roberto Giovanni. Married for nearly 20 years, and with three children, including a 17-year old son born biologically to Bianca, and adopted daughters, both under the age of five, born in different countries in South-East Asia, the Giovanni's take hyper-diversity in their stride. When Bianca and Roberto first met in their native Italy, she was a divorced, 43 year-old, single mother-of-one falling in love with a man 15 years younger. Never one to care too much about what other people might think, the couple made plans shortly after they married to relocate abroad, taking Bianca's son, Mario, then 12, with them. Despite a custody battle with her ex-husband that she eventually won, that would allow Bianca to take their child out of the country for an indefinite period of time, the Giovanni's arrived in Singapore, on their first assignment, with tentative plans to expand their brood.

"However, I was 45 by now," explains Bianca, "so it was at this point that overseas adoption became a reality. We had lots of discussions about the pros and cons of adopting away from our home country, and about adopting children from another culture and taking them away from that culture. Adopting from Italy would have been a much bigger barrier than adopting in Asia, given my age. So, in the end, we decided to go for it."

Over the next two years, the Giovanni's adopted two infant girls, born only 19 months apart—Sana (now 5 years) from Cambodia, and Maya (aged 4) born to Indian parents in Malaysia. Living in Singapore for the past nine years, the Giovanni's have no plans to repatriate anytime soon. With a holiday home in Thailand, and the full support of Roberto's company that includes full health insurance and parental leave, such is the strength of their ties to Asia that the family has recently applied for permanent residency. "We are certainly unique in expat circles," says Bianca, "but we don't pay much attention to it to be honest. We are strong and self-sufficient. We have a strong family connection and we draw on that strength. We don't rely on others' acceptance."

As for what makes this unusual family successful, Bianca is adamant it has everything to do with attitude. "It suits us to go our own way," says Bianca, "and to make decisions that for others would be unthinkable. I mean, my husband is 15 years younger than me, so we've always been doing things differently, and we have never really been too worried about what other people think. We were non-traditional way before we adopted the girls; I married a younger man; I had a son and so we became a blended family; and then we moved overseas and I continued working, which is highly unusual in affluent expat communities. The success factor is that while we are mindful as to what others may think, it doesn't necessarily guide our life choices." Another success factor is the skillset the family was able to acquire, as expatriates, which were then transferable to the adoption process. "We learned to adapt to uncertainty and ambiguity when we first arrived in Singapore, so by the time we adopted the girls we already had intercultural awareness and could handle the lack of clarity and structure and the appallingly unclear adoption process. You need perseverance to get through setbacks, and we had many of those!" Other setbacks included a three-year period when Mario relocated back to Italy to spend time living with his father and step-mother. "He left when he was barely 14, and came back to Singapore to live with us when he was 16. I missed him terribly, and being in a split family set up was horrible, but I couldn't deny him that opportunity. I had to allow my son to maintain a relationship with his father."

Bianca's advice for other expatriate families considering adoption is simple: don't seek the approval of family back home and friends in the host country. "Successfully acculturating to a non-traditional type of life means letting go of what other people think. So while I like to be challenged by others' opinions," says Bianca, "I quickly realized that many of those trying to advise us didn't have the hard, or even soft, facts about our situation and what we were trying to do. We did what was right for us. Being accepted socially has never played a role in our life. We were convinced we were doing the right thing, and we're yet to be proven wrong."

expatriates. For example, Roberto and Bianca's decision to adopt children while they were abroad is one that traditional expatriates also engage in, thus the stressors that they felt were not necessarily exacerbated their non-traditional status, but may have in fact helped prepare them for the emotional and psychological process of adoption. Like others, the Giovanni's overall acculturation can be viewed as a combination of their ability to effectively balance demands against capabilities (i.e., reduce stressors and develop effective coping behaviors), facilitated in part by the extent to which they received adequate organizational support. Additionally, the four cases show that non-traditional expatriates' acculturation is reflected in their ability to successfully navigate critical aspects that make up the new 'context' of their lives once abroad. In Case 1, Jacqueline Carter's shift from married stay-at-home wife to working single mother-of-two is a case in point; Jacqueline's ability to transition to a new life circumstance is facilitated by a combination of sociocultural adaptation (seeking support at work, at home, and in the broader community) as well as psychological adaptation to the situation she found herself in (e.g., infidelity, divorce). A similar situation unfolded for Talia (Case 2) who, shortly after expatriating, was confronted with a divorce from her same-sex partner. Of particular interest is the decision by each to remain in the host-country indefinitely, despite more support being available back home.

A contribution to the overall debate about whether current theories of acculturation hold true is to consider the extent to which global organizations are able to deal with the issues that hyper-diversity presents. Understandably, it is not possible to devote organizational time and resources to consider every individual characteristic that non-traditional expatriates possess or face, nor should we want to, given the limited resources that are often available. Rather, bounded rationality dictates that addressing some challenges is better than addressing nothing at all. Thus, more research is needed to limit where, exactly, policy improvements are required for non-traditional expatriates and to determine the precise issues that need to be addressed. This is likely to result in determining strong (but flexible) boundaries in terms of when managers should say 'no' to some issues while considering others. These boundaries should emerge ideally from analysis of a combination

of talent management considerations, size and skill level of the available candidate pool, and assignee supply and demand cycles.

A further contribution is that this study has focused on the lived experience, where the context within which the expatriate experience unfolds underscores “the situated nature of acculturation” by emphasizing “the important role that the environment plays in shaping and modulating the acculturation process” (Doucerain et al., 2013, p. 689). The case method, in particular, has provided a unique opportunity to study the environment that acculturating individuals navigate and thus to focus on the concrete nature of their lived experience by capturing the complexity of their hyper-diversity. This is best illustrated by noting that all of the participants have been successful in negotiating expatriation despite their unique status and have done so despite their fear of being stigmatized, unsupported, or discriminated against by colleagues in both the home and host country, or lacking in confidence to be successful in an international setting (see Gedro, 2010a; McNulty, 2014 for similar findings). More research is nonetheless needed to understand the indirect and covert barriers that exist that prevent more non-traditional expatriates from actively participating in the international labour market, and why some continue to hide their non-traditional status (e.g., lesbianism). An important consideration is undoubtedly the context within which expatriation occurs (e.g., foreign setting, nature of the arrangement) which may pose problems for some non-traditional expatriates in terms of, for example: (a) the safety of the host culture for homosexuals; (2) the ability to relocate to a location where an adopted child may not be recognized as a dependent; and, (3) critical family challenges such as loneliness, resentment, a feeling of abandonment, and physical and financial stress arising from split family assignments.

A central question is whether traditional acculturation paradigms provide sufficient ‘fit’ in the case of non-traditional expatriates; whereas traditional acculturation involves to a large degree an element of assimilation to the foreign culture, even if the extent of assimilation is little more than fitting into a community of other expatriates, the situation is somewhat different for non-traditional expatriates. In their case, none of the participants believe that fitting in or assimilating, even within an expatriate community let alone the local population, is a requirement for successful acculturation, where the very nature of being non-traditional makes it near impossible to achieve anyway. Thus, their acculturation seems to rest more on the internal strength of the family unit or wider support network (both at home, and abroad if one exists) to help them through experiences that to outsiders are considered odd or strange (e.g., divorce, adoption, or living apart). This finding is significant because it underscores the personal factors that contribute to acculturation as conceptualized by Berry (2008), i.e., that non-traditional expatriates acculturate by: (a) focusing on the context of their unique situations; (b) being aware of the hyper-diversity they must deal with on a daily basis; (c) adopting positive attitudes toward acculturation, e.g., by publicly adapting to the host country culture while simultaneously maintaining their own hyper-diverse culture in the privacy of their home; and, (d) acquiring multiple cultural identities as a coping mechanism.

Furthermore, it is apparent that the acculturation process: (a) is the product of a complex interplay between micro (personal) and macro (policy, cultural, organizational) factors; (2) is largely fluid and determined ‘on the go’ rather than prepared for in advance; and, (3) that repeated exposure to the non-traditional lifestyle eventually solidifies into stable and positive states of being. The findings thus constitute a starting point for future studies to examine not only micro and macro success factors, but also intrinsic versus extrinsic elements. Additionally, participants’ hyper-diversity represents a qualitatively different expatriate phenomenon than simply being non-traditional. From a policy perspective this may require that, rather than simply adjusting a policy to cater for ‘exceptions’, entirely new policies for different types of expatriates may be required (e.g., LGBT, single-parent, split-family). Doing so would likely increase talent attraction opportunities for MNCs keen to expand their pool of assignee candidates.

6.1. Limitations and future research

A limitation of the study is undoubtedly the scarcity of research on non-traditional expatriates that precludes interpretation of the results in light of existing theory. Thus, the findings raise more questions than they answer. For example, what are the implications of expatriates’ hyper-diversity across many assignments and locations, given that this study has focused only those expatriates who have relocated to one country and then remained there? The case studies presented here cannot answer this question, but the participants experiences do emphasize that hyper-diversity matters, thus underscoring the need for further theoretical and empirical examination of their experiences. This can include survey-based studies, but also requires a multi-method approach that triangulates information so as to provide a more complete picture. The current research should be seen primarily as establishing the feasibility of studying non-traditional expatriates as an important component of the global staffing pool.

Further limitations include that the participants are all women, and two are represented as being, or once were, trailing spouses whose career did not facilitate their moves abroad (i.e., Amber/split family, and Bianca/overseas adoption). One was also not a non-traditional expatriate prior to relocating abroad (Jacqueline/single parent). It would be interesting to examine a larger cohort of non-traditional expatriates relocated by an MNC to provide a more in-depth perspective of employee and employer experiences as well as to enable greater triangulation of data by analyzing the policies used to support them.

While a number of theories can be applied to the acculturation of non-traditional expatriates (e.g., family systems theory, ecological theories, acculturation typologies; Chuang & Moreno, 2013), few studies have yet done so and research on this topic remains in its infancy. What is especially needed are in-depth studies that examine specific types of non-traditional expatriates so as to better understand how to support them at the policy level. For example, the experiences of split-family expatriates (see Case 3) is an urgent area of study of which scholars know little about, despite that it is a topic of increasing

concern in practice given the rise in numbers of split family assignments over the past five years (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2014; Copeland, 2009b). Likewise, virtually nothing is known about expatriates with special needs children, of which there are likely to be many given that nearly two-thirds of expatriates relocate abroad with their children (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2014; Cartus, 2012b). Two important questions are: (1) whether and how companies are able to support the educational needs of expatriates with special needs children; and, (2) to what extent employees opt out of international assignment opportunities because of the issues associated with expatriating a special needs child (i.e., what is the refusal rate among these families and what can be done to mitigate it?). Future studies also need to consider the context in which expatriation unfolds for non-traditional expatriates taking into account significant variability in: (a) host-country acceptance of one's non-traditional status (e.g., Case 2/lesbian expatriate); (b) support mechanisms available in the host country to acculturate (e.g., Case 1/single parent expatriate); and, (c) how prior assignment experience facilitates adjustment and assimilation (e.g., Case 4/overseas adoption expatriate). On this basis, future studies need to examine more homogeneous samples of non-traditional expatriates, for example, separate studies of split families, single-parents, and so on. This is because: (1) while non-traditional expatriates share common characteristics and challenges, each nonetheless has a unique set of circumstances that warrants attention both from a practical (policy) point of view and also theoretically in terms of the personally relevant elements and behaviors that drive non-traditional expatriates' acculturation success; and, (2) a single interview of, for example, a lesbian expatriate may not be generalizable across an entire population of LGBT expatriates, thus providing a poor representation of the actual life experiences of the different types of non-traditional expatriates.

7. Conclusion

In this article, I have delved deeper into the dynamics and intricacies of global mobility for non-traditional expatriates in terms of their background culture, family development, and work progress to more fully understand the factors that contribute to their acculturation. I have done so by engaging in case studies of this unique cohort's lived experience to enable a deeper exploration of their issues beyond the superficiality of self-reports and surveys as found in most of the literature on this topic to date. In this way, I have tried to account for the multidimensionality of non-traditional expatriates' mobility experience in terms of both ongoing transitions (i.e., how moves unfold across one assignment versus many assignments) and the meaning that is attached to them (see, as an example, Sarah's story in McNulty, 2014). Beyond the limitations noted above, it is worth reiterating that more research about non-traditional expatriates is needed with the potential to generate new research questions and to spur theoretical developments. Indeed, this study highlights that the traditional model of expatriation, along with its corresponding policy, is quickly becoming an outdated approach that no longer meets the needs of many of today's globally mobile employees (see McNulty & Inkson, 2013). Furthermore, while this study represents one promising study, among others (e.g., Gedro, 2010a; Gedro et al., 2013; McNulty, 2014; McPhail et al., 2014), it is important for the field to engage in a more fundamental discussion about non-traditional expatriates (i.e., how they are defined), the complexity of their experiences, and the extent of their acculturation in order to increase the potential for non-traditional expatriates to expand the assignee candidate pool. These elements are worth exploring further to prompt the development of a range of new perspectives about expatriation, which, in turn, is likely to help advance the field of global staffing.

References

Adler, N. (2002). Global managers: No longer men alone. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *13*(5), 743–760.
Anderson, E. (2011). *An Australian/Ethiopian adoption story*. (Retrieved from http://whileabroad.com/adoption/ on 28 February 2014).
Anderson, E. A., & Spruill, J. W. (1993). The dual-career commuter family: A lifestyle on the move. *Marriage and Family Review*, *19*(1/2), 131–147.
ANZA. (2014). *Single parents networking forum*. Singapore: ANZA.
Arends-Tóth, J., & van de Vijver, F. (2004). Domains and dimensions in acculturation: Implicit theories of Turkish–Dutch. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *28*(1), 19–35.
Australian Government. (2014). *Fact sheet—Expatriate adoption*. Canberra, Australia: Department of Immigration and Citizenship Attorney-General's Department.
Beechler, S., & Woodward, I. (2009). The global "war for talent". *Journal of International Management*, *15*(3), 273–285.
Berry, J. (2008). Globalisation and acculturation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *32*(4), 328–336.
Brookfield Global Relocation Services. (2014). *Global relocation trends survey report*. Woodridge, IL.
Buriel, R., & Ment, T. (1997). Immigration and socio-cultural change in Mexican, Chinese and Vietnamese American families. In A. Booth, A. Crouter, & N. Landale (Eds.), *Immigration and the family* (pp. 165–200). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
Caligiuri, P., Hyland, M., & Joshi, A. (1998). Families on global assignments: Applying work/family theories abroad. *Current Topics in Management*, *Vol. 3*, 313–328.
Carlton, J., & Perelstein, L. (2013). Mobility challenges and strategies: Children with special needs. *Mobility*, *34*(6), 54–57.
Cartus. (2012a). *Global mobility policy and practices survey: 2012 Trends in Global Relocation*. Wilmington, NC: Cartus.
Cartus. (2012b). *Trends in global relocation survey—Biggest challenges*. Wilmington, NC: Cartus.
Chuang, S., & Moreno, R. (2013). Theoretical perspectives on acculturation and immigration. In M. Fine, & F. Fincham (Eds.), *Handbook of family theories: A content-based approach* (pp. 316–337). New York, NY: Routledge.
Cole, N., & McNulty, Y. (2011). Why do female expatriates 'fit-in' better than males? *Cross Cultural Management: An International Journal*, *18*(2), 144–164.
Colgan, F., & McKearney, A. (2012). Visibility and voice in organisations: Lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgendered employee networks. *Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion: An International Journal*, *31*(4), 359–378.
Copeland, A. (2009a). *Voices from home: The personal and family side of international short-term assignments*. Brookline, MA: The Interchange Institute.
Copeland, A. (2009b). *Voices from the road: The personal and family side of international short-term assignments*. Brookline, MA: The Interchange Institute.
Copeland, A., & Norell, S. (2002). Spousal adjustment on international assignments: The role of social support. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *26*(3), 255–272.

Creswell, J. (2003). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2000). The discipline and practice of qualitative research. In N. Denzin, & Y. Lincoln (Eds.), *Handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 1–28). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Doucerain, M., Dere, J., & Ryder, A. (2013). Travels in hyper-diversity: Multiculturalism and the contextual assessment of acculturation. *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*, *37*(6), 686–699.

Eisenhardt, K. (1989). Building theories from case study research. *Academy of Management Review*, *14*(4), 532–550.

Eisenhardt, K., & Graebner, M. (2007). Theory building from cases: Opportunities and challenges. *Academy of Management Journal*, *50*(1), 25–32.

Findlay, A. (2006). Brain strain and other social challenges arising from the UK's policy on attracting global talent. In C. Kuptsch, & E. Pang (Eds.), *Competing for global talent* (pp. 65–86). Geneva, Switzerland: International Institute for Labor Studies.

Gedro, J. (2010a). The lavender ceiling atop the global closet: Human resource development and lesbian expatriates. *Human Resource Development Review*, *9*(4), 385–404.

Gedro, J. (2010b). Understanding, designing, and teaching LGBT issues. *Advances in Developing Human Resources*, *12*(3), 352–366.

Gedro, J., Mizzi, R., Rocco, T., & van Loo, J. (2013). Going global: Professional mobility and concerns for LGBT workers. *Human Resource Development International*, *16*(3), 282–297.

Gertsen, M. C., & Søderberg, A.-M. (2010). Expatriate stories about cultural encounters: A narrative approach to cultural learning processes in multinational companies. *Scandinavian Journal of Management*, *26*(3), 248–257.

Glanz, L., Williams, R., & Hoeksema, L. (2001). Sensemaking in expatriation: A theoretical basis. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, *41*(1), 101–119.

Goby, V., Ahmed, Z., Annavarjula, M., Ibrahim, D., & Osman-Gani, A. (2002). Determinants of expatriate success: An empirical study of Singaporean expatriates in The Peoples Republic of China. *Journal of Transnational Management Development*, *7*(4), 73–88.

Harvey, M. (1997). Dual-career expatriates: Expectations, adjustment, and satisfaction with international relocation. *Journal of International Business Studies*, *28*(3), 627–658.

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

Harvey, M., & Moeller, M. (2009). Expatriate managers: A historical review. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, *11*(3), 275–296.

Harvey, M., & Wiese, D. (1998). The dual-career couple: Female expatriates and male trailing spouses. *Thunderbird International Business Review*, *40*(4), 359–388.

Haslberger, A. (2010). Gender differences in expatriate adjustment. *European Journal of International Management*, *4*(1/2), 163–183.

Haslberger, A., & Brewster, C. (2008). The expatriate family: An international perspective. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, *23*(3), 324–346.

Haslberger, A., & Brewster, C. (2009). Capital gains: Expatriate adjustment and the psychological contract in international careers. *Human Resource Management*, *48*(3), 379–397.

Hutchings, K., French, E., & Hatcher, T. (2008). Lament of the ignored expatriate: An examination of organisational and social network support for female expatriates in China. *Equal Opportunities International*, *27*(4), 372–391.

Janssens, M., Cappellen, T., & Zanoni, P. (2006). Successful female expatriates as agents: Positioning oneself through gender, hierarchy, and culture. *Journal of World Business*, *41*(2), 133–148.

Kaplan, D. (2014). Career anchors and paths: The case of gay, lesbian and bisexual workers. *Human Resource Management Review*, *24*(2), 119–192.

KPMG. (2011). *Global assignment policies and practices survey*. Geneva: KPMG.

Malecki, J., Day, B., Franklin, N., & D'Argenio, R. (2013). . *Global mobility and the changing definition of family mobility* (34) Arlington, VA: Worldwide ERC.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. (2006). *Designing qualitative research* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

McGoldrick, M., & Carter, B. (2003). The family life cycle. In F. Walsh (Ed.), *Normal family processes: Growing diversity and complexity* (3rd ed., 34, pp. 221–239). New York, NY: Guildford Press.

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.

McNulty, Y. (2014). Women as female breadwinners in non-traditional expatriate families: Status-reversal marriages, single parents, split families and lesbian partnerships. In K. Hutchings, & S. Michailova (Eds.), *Research handbook on women in international management* (pp. 332–336). Cheltenham, UK: Edward Elgar.

McNulty, Y., & Inkson, K. (2013). *Managing expatriates: A return on investment approach*. New York, NY: Business Expert Press.

McPhail, R., McNulty, Y., & Hutchings, K. (2014). Lesbian and gay expatriation: Opportunities, barriers, and challenges for global mobility. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2014.941903 (in-press)

Miles, M., & Huberman, A. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: An expanded sourcebook* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Mirvis, P., & Louis, M. (1998). Self-full research: Working through the self as instrument in organizational research. In D. Berg, & K. Smith (Eds.), *The self in social inquiry: Researching methods* (pp. 229–246). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

ORC Worldwide. 2008. Worldwide survey of international assignment policies and practices. New York.

Parkinson, P., Cashmore, J., & Single, J. (2010). The need for reality testing in relocation cases. *Family Law Quarterly*, *44*(1), 1–34.

Patterson, J. (1988). Families experiencing stress. *Family Systems Medicine*, *6*(2), 202–237.

Patterson, J. (2002). Intergrating family resilience and family stress theory. *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, *64*(2), 349–360.

Peltonen, T. (1998). Narrative construction of expatriate experience and career cycle: Discursive patterns in Finnish stories of international career. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *9*(5), 875–892.

Punnett, B. (1997). Towards effective management of expatriate spouses. *Journal of World Business*, *32*(3), 243–257.

Rossman, G., & Rallis, S. (2003). *Learning in the field: An introduction to qualitative research* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Rothausen, T. (1999). "Family" in organizational research: A review and comparison of definitions and measures. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *20*(6), 817–836.

Saurine, A. (2013). *Quicker, easier for Australian couples to adopt children while living overseas, Sydney Morning Herald*. Sydney: Fairfax.

Selmer, J., & Leung, A. (2003). Expatriate career intentions of women on foreign assignments and their adjustment. *Journal of Managerial Psychology*, *18*(3), 244–258.

Shaffer, M., Kraimer, M., Chen, Y.-P., & Bolino, M. (2012). Choices, challenges, and career consequences of global work experiences: A review and future agenda. *Journal of Management*, *38*(4), 1282–1327.

Shellenbarger, S. (1999). *Work & family: Essays from the "Work & Family" column of The Wall Street Journal*. New York, NY: Ballantine Books.

Sidani, Y., & Al Hakim, Z. (2012). Work-family conflicts and job attitudes of single women: A developing country perspective. *International Journal of Human Resource Management*, *23*(7), 1376–1393.

Smith, K., & Berg, D. (1988). Introduction. In D. Berg, & K. Smith (Eds.), *The self in social inquiry: Researching methods* (pp. 9–17). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

Sorrentino, C. (1990). The changing family in international perspective. *Monthly Labor Review*, *113*(3), 41–58.

Süssmuth-Dyckerhoff, C., Wang, J., & Chen, J. (2012). *Women matter: An Asia perspective—harnessing female talent to raise corporate performance*. Shanghai, PR China: McKinsey & Co.

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

Takeuchi, R., Lepak, D., Marinova, S., & Yun, S. (2007). Nonlinear influences of stressors on general adjustment: The case of Japanese expatriates and their spouses. *Journal of International Business Studies*, *38*(6), 928–943.

Tharenou, P. (2013). Self-initiated expatriates: An alternative to company-assigned expatriates? *Journal of Global Mobility*, *1*(3), 336–356.

Tung, R. (2004). Female expatriates: The model global manager? *Organizational Dynamics*, *33*(3), 243–253.

Vijayan, K. (2013). *'Better reasons needed' for gay sex law, The Sunday Times*. Singapore: Singapore Press Holdings.

Ward, C. (1996). Acculturation. In D. Landis, & R. Bhagat (Eds.), *Handbook of intercultural training* (2nd ed., pp. 124–147). Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
Westwood, R., & Leung, S. (1994). The female expatriate manager experience: Coping with gender and culture. *International Studies of Management and Organization*, *24*(3), 64–85.
Wilson, D. (2011). Working with the family. In N. Keltner, C. Bostrom, & T. McGuinness (Eds.), *Pyschiatric Nursing* (6th ed., pp. 119–127). St Louis, MS: Mosby Elsevier.
Worldwide ERC. (2008). *Family issues survey*. Arlington, VA: Worldwide ERC.
Worldwide ERC. (2011). *US mobility survey*. Arlington, VA: Worldwide ERC.
Yin, R. (2003). *Case study research: Design and methods* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.