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Lesbian and gay expatriation: opportunities, barriers and challenges for global mobility

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The research presented in this paper addresses an important gap in the expatriation literature in examining perceptions of opportunities, barriers and challenges for expatriation of lesbian and gay (LG) expatriates. This is an area that is under-researched despite such individuals representing a growing sector of the global talent pool. Based on an analysis of interviews with 20 LG expatriates, the study draws on social capital theory as a lens for highlighting LG expatriates' unique attributes and networks. The research is significant in suggesting that the expatriates' sexual minority status is viewed as both a disabler and enabler in expatriation. We suggest that there is a corporate ceiling for LG expatriates, and that they experience discrimination and stereotyping, and oftentimes limited organizational and host-country support. Significantly, the findings also extend research in suggesting that LG workers may have more opportunities in global staffing than previously thought and a valuable role in contributing to inclusivity debates and policy development on the global business stage. Furthermore, LG expatriates may be accepted in host countries when homosexuality is deemed legally or socially unacceptable for locals, and legal and financial independence within LG partnerships may provide them with more mobility than their heterosexual counterparts.

Keywords: expatriates; gay; gender orientation; global mobility; lesbian; LGBT; sexual minority; social capital theory

Introduction

Recent studies highlight that expatriation is a key element of multinational corporations (MNCs) strategies for maximizing and broadening the use of global talent and increasing firm performance, levels of international diversity and subsidiary labor productivity (McDonnell, Lamare, Gunnigle, & Lavelle, 2010; Stahl et al., 2012). Yet, much of the research on expatriation and global talent management has thus far been focused on, and predominantly driven by, traditional international assignees (e.g. Makela & Suutari, 2009) which has largely involved heterosexual people in trailing spouse or dual career expatriate families. Although current studies have focused attention on emerging forms of expatriates (e.g. McNulty, 2014; Reiche, 2012; Selmer & Leung, 2002; Sullivan, Aldred, & Taylor, 2013), until recently the academic literature has been all but silent on an increasingly prevalent segment of the non-traditional assignee workforce, namely, lesbian and gay (LG) expatriates (for notable exceptions see Gedro, 2010; Gedro, Mizzi, Rocco, & van Loo, 2013; McNulty, 2014). To date, studies have not sufficiently explored bisexual or transgender expatriates and despite the literature using 'LGBT' (for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) as an overarching term, the focus of such research has been primarily on lesbians and gays. In this article, the term LGBT is used when referring to its use in the extant literature and as

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part of the broader debate, whereas the term ‘LG’ is used to accurately reflect the focus and sample of the current research.

Given the increasingly high demand for qualified people to work in internationalized organizations, LG expatriates are a potentially important but insufficiently tapped part of the global talent pool. Thus, understanding the opportunities, barriers and challenges they face in expatriation is critical to addressing a significant gap in the expatriation literature and highlighting their access to, and experiences within, expatriation. While it is also important to recognize that other social relational factors will impact on the expatriate opportunities and experience of individual assignees, including gender, race, ethnicity, dis/ability and class, the focus of this paper is specifically on the experience of being LG.

This article extends prior studies (e.g. Gedro, 2010; Gedro et al., 2013; McNulty, 2014) on the selection and deployment of LG expatriates, with the purpose of assisting organizations to understand the potential value of widening their global talent pool with LG assignees. The article also recognizes the support required by organizations to effectively facilitate LG expatriate adjustment. Drawing on interviews with 20 LG expatriates (with experiences in over 20 host countries) to examine the opportunities, barriers and challenges they perceive in relation to expatriation, the article responds to Gedro et al.’s (2013) call for empirical research to further explore the lived experiences of LGBT expatriates. This study addresses this gap. Moreover, it extends Gedro et al.’s (2013) LGBT ‘employer/employee rubric’ to provide a framework for international assignment selection to consider a range of additional factors which impact on assignment opportunities and which may present challenges in selection. The framework explores issues such as legal status in the selected destination, social climate, organizational climate, individuals’ status of disclosure (i.e. in/out) and partner/children considerations. Suggestions for both employer and employee actions in terms of what information should be gathered are presented in relation to each of these issues.

The research also provides a theoretical point of departure for future studies in examining LG expatriation experiences through the lens of social capital theory (SCT). Central to the research is the assertion that, in order to capitalize on productivity and performance in the international business arena, global talent managers cannot continue to rely solely on heterosexual single or coupled assignees as the predominant means by which subsidiary staffing is addressed (Kaplan, 2014; McNulty, 2014). In examining this insufficiently explored segment of the talent pool, our research counters the view held by many managers (and LG expatriates themselves) that LGBT status necessitates postponing international assignment opportunities or precludes engagement in global mobility altogether (see Gedro, 2009). Specifically, this article examines the following key research question.

RQ1: What are the opportunities, barriers and challenges for global mobility for LG expatriates?

The article begins by examining the literature on LG expatriates (within a broader literature on LGBT expatriates), highlighting existing gaps. SCT is then introduced and explored in relation to the unique attributes LG expatriates may possess. How the research was designed and undertaken is then described in detail. Next, the findings are presented and analyzed with respect to the research question and extant literature. The article concludes with contributions of the study, implications and suggestions for further research.

The nature of LG workers and expatriation

LG expatriates, as part of the broader category of LGBT expatriates, are defined by Gedro et al. (2013, p. 282) as constituting ‘a sexual minority . . . of people that cross international

borders for professional reasons.’ The global mobility of LG workers in general is a growing area of interest to both academics and practitioners. For instance, it was recently announced in the USA that the State Department will give equal treatment to the applications of LGBT married couples who wish to travel with their partner, processing requests from them in the same way it handles those from heterosexual couples (Wroughton & Heavey, 2013). This follows other countries (e.g. New Zealand, Argentina, The Netherlands and Uruguay) having, in the last decade, passed laws legalizing same-sex marriage (Bohlen, 2012). In a similar vein, the US-based ‘corporate equality index’ – an annual analysis of company LGBT policies and practices for employees and customers – found that in 2002 only 13 organizations received an index rating of 100%, which rose in 2009 to 259 organizations (HRCF, 2009). The potential 100% rating comprises maximum scores given for the following criteria and their assigned percentiles: equal employment opportunity (30), employee benefits (35), organizational LGBT competency (20) and public engagement (15). Up to 25 points can be deducted for anti-LGBT activities. In addition, 53% of Fortune 500 companies in the USA provided same-sex partner benefits by 2009, representing a 150% increase since 1990, with 98% of companies including sexual orientation in their non-discrimination policies by 2007 (Brooks & Edwards, 2009). Furthermore, in India, where Christian, Sikh, Hindu and Muslim communities denounce homosexuality, same-sex relationships between consenting adults was decriminalized in 2009 in a landmark judgment that subsequently saw companies such as Google and Goldman Sachs set up LGBT networks for their Indian employees (Joshi, 2013). This suggests that there is increasing awareness of a commitment to inclusivity at the policy level.

From an international assignment policy perspective, ORC (2008) reported that the most prevalent definition of ‘expatriate spouse’ used by MNCs to determine international assignment-related benefits includes a married, long-term or live-in partner of the opposite *or same-sex*, noting that this was the first time the definition had included same-gender partners for the majority of companies surveyed (38%). Likewise, KPMG (2011) found that nearly half of participants in their survey of 554 MNCs included same-sex married or unmarried partners for similar purposes.

While these changes might represent positive steps forward for the expatriation and mobility of LG workers and their partners, homosexuality is still punishable by death in seven countries and illegal in a further 85 countries (Expat Gay, 2013; Silver, 2014). Thus, complex expatriation and mobility issues still exist for LG workers and their organizations. Gedro (2010) notes, for example, that LG workers remain marginalized and stigmatized, and represent an unequally protected part of the workforce, with those engaging in expatriation often being required to ‘come out’ to an employer (and sometimes family) in order to pursue international career opportunities. McNulty (2014) contends that LGBT expatriates potentially face a lack of support in the host country, necessitating them having to deal with prejudice and discrimination, concerns for security and safety, and reduced access to family benefits and entitlements automatically afforded to heterosexual colleagues. These concerns are not unlike those experienced by non-expatriating LG workers but may have broader ramifications, e.g. fear of discrimination, lack of job security, limited career progression, safety concerns in ‘coming out’ to their employer, fear of stereotyping and constant scanning for signs of acceptance (Brooks & Edwards, 2009; Colgan & McKearney, 2012).

It is clear that LG workers face challenges that are often different to, or have more serious potential consequences than, their heterosexual counterparts. Gedro (2010), for example, suggests there may be a corporate ceiling or ‘glass border’ that does not allow homosexuals to advance and prosper either at home or abroad because doing so requires

that they reveal to their employer the true nature of their sexuality, which they may not choose to do. This then may result in LG workers pursuing less-rewarding careers because they are 'safer' and often 'more welcoming' and do not require that their homosexuality is known by an employer (Gedro, 2010, p. 392). This form of self-discrimination limits international career opportunities as LG workers fear they will be unsupported, or discriminated against, by colleagues in the home and host country, or because they lack confidence to successfully engage in expatriation. In a study of non-traditional expatriate female breadwinners (including lesbian partnerships), McNulty (2014) found that another problem common to LG workers is the lack of access to, and easy interaction with, other people like them. In much the same way as male trailing spouses face difficulties (Selmer & Leung, 2002), LG expatriates similarly perceive that support mechanisms provided by employers and/or expatriate associations and clubs tend to focus predominantly on the needs of mainstream traditional expatriates. This then exacerbates the discomfort LG workers and their partners and/or children face due to their non-typical status.

Problems and issues aside, an important determinant of success for LGBT expatriates with accompanying partners is undoubtedly the strength and dynamics of the relationship between them. Much research posits that expatriate family problems including dual-career issues, lack of trailing spouse adjustment and marital stress are among the leading causes of international assignment failure and a strong predictor of unwillingness to relocate (Brookfield Global Relocation Services, 2013; Lazarova, Westman, & Shaffer, 2010). Many of these problems arise from the legal and financial dependency, on the working spouse, that accompanying spouses and other family members are required to assume in order to engage in expatriation, resulting in identity loss, feelings of isolation and low self-esteem (McNulty, 2012; Shaffer & Harrison, 2001). Traditional expatriate families, where members frequently assume dependent status tied to the working spouse, may have fewer financial and legal options available to them when problems arise, given that one spouse effectively 'holds all the cards' relating to employment and residency in the host country. LG workers who expatriate may find that they experience less of these dependency challenges given that the nature of their relationship means that the partner is usually required to seek host-country employment and visa status of their own volition for residency purposes.

Given the limited extant literature on LG expatriation, we utilize SCT as a lens for understanding the unique attributes of LG expatriates and the implications of such for their expatriate experience. In the following section, SCT is examined in terms of the dimensions of structural, relational and cognitive capital. How these dimensions are shaped in terms of the use of the unique networks, need for trust and reciprocity and obtaining a sense of belonging in the context of LG expatriation is then proposed.

SCT and LG expatriation

Social capital is a long established theory built upon several key perspectives. Bourdieu (1983) first developed and defined the differences in capital as being economic, cultural and social with social capital consisting of two dimensions: (1) social networks and (2) sociability. Coleman (1988) added to this stating that social capital is (a) a relational construct and (b) provides resources to others (and self) through relationships. He went on to include expectations and obligations of trust and reciprocity and the establishment of norms and values in relationships as benefits of social capital. Putnam (2000) distinguished between physical, human and social capital and related them to societies and communities in general. He applied the notions of trust and reciprocity raised by

Coleman to the community level stating that this generated a sense of ‘civil virtue’ (p.19) where individuals and networks knew each other and were actively involved in the relationships. The extension to community and society led to the development of three levels of social capital: (1) bonding, i.e. to internal ties between those who are ‘within group’ only, (2) bridging, i.e. to individuals and groups joined to achieve a common goal and (3) synergy, i.e. where government and community networks and organizations join to achieve common goals (Putnam, 2000).

Social capital has been recognized as maximizing a firm’s human capital through the valuable resource of social ties and relationships, thereby improving organizational effectiveness (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). Significant reputation, social status and advantage can come from membership in certain networks especially where specific criteria or restrictions to these groups apply (Bourdieu, 1986; Burt, 2009; D’Aveni & Kesner, 1993). Social capital has been defined as the ‘... actual and potential resources embedded within, available through, and derived from the network of relationships possessed by an individual or social unit’ (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998, p. 243). As this research explores the individual and their social units, the definition and following framework of SCT by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1998) are utilized.

The social capital framework applied in this research constitutes structural social capital (networks), relational capital (trust and reciprocity) and cognitive social capital (sense of belonging) (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). The structural dimension consists of network ties, network configuration and appropriate organization. Network ties provide access to resources and information benefits i.e. ‘who you know’ affects ‘what you know’ (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998, p. 252). Network configuration is the structures networks form. Appropriate organization refers to the ability to transfer, from one setting to another, the social capital developed including norms, trust and ties. To explore this dimension of social capital, the following is proposed:

Proposition 1a: LG expatriates will use their LGBT structural social capital, specifically their network ties (personal, profession and via the LGBT community), to locate and facilitate expatriation.

Proposition 1b: LG expatriates will use their LGBT structural social capital, specifically their network ties (personal, profession and via the LGBT community), to establish, maintain and transfer these ties before, during and after assignment(s).

The relational dimension consists of trust, norms, obligations and identification. Trust is the willingness to be vulnerable to another coming from confidence of the good intent (Mishra, 1996). Norms establish the agreed rules among individuals and groups, while obligations are the expectations within relationships, and identification is the way in which an individual sees themselves in relation to groups and networks. To explore this dimension of social capital, the following is proposed:

Proposition 2: LG expatriates will use their relational social capital to determine the perceived levels of LGBT acceptance and equality both societally and organizationally prior to and during expatriation.

The cognitive dimension is constructed by shared language and codes and shared narrative, and influences a sense of belonging. Codes organize information and provide frames of reference by which groups navigate, solve problems and make decisions about their present and future, and recall their past. Narratives are the stories through which

experiences can be shared, meaning made and on which future decisions are based (Nisbet, 1969). To explore this dimension of social capital, the following is proposed:

Proposition 3a: LG expatriates will use their cognitive social capital to determine a sense of belonging, both societally and organizationally, before, during and after expatriation.

Proposition 3b: LG expatriates will use their cognitive social capital to ascertain levels of acceptance, equality and access to support before, during and after assignment(s).

While SCT has been applied widely in various fields, it has received little attention in relation to IHRM approaches (Makela & Suutari, 2009). A recent exception is a study of 20 global managers in Finnish MNCs by Makela and Suutari (2009), who found that for those with global careers there were both weak and strong ties, connected internally and externally, both professionally and socially, with both having distinct advantages and disadvantages which they termed the 'social paradox' of international careers. A further example is Liu and Shaffer (2005) who identified social networks in terms of opportunity, motivation and ability, suggesting that each impacted on expatriate performance and to a lesser extent adjustment. Reiche (2012) also applied social capital to IHRM in his exploration of inpatriates and the impact of their ties upon host-unit knowledge sharing within work groups. He measured social capital by the number of ties, type and degree of trust attributed to them to arrive at a ratio of structural and relational dimensions of SCT. This informs practice and theory by identifying the conditions and way that knowledge of the assignee's host unit will benefit from their social capital.

On the basis that this study adopts a qualitative methodology, this research does not seek to 'measure' social capital, but rather to explore it with respect to individuals' perceptions of how they use their relational, structural and cognitive capital to address the opportunities, challenges and barriers related to their global mobility as LG assignees.

Methods

Drawing on an interpretivist paradigm, this research utilized a qualitative, inductive approach as it provided the ability to elucidate rich, in-depth data on perceptions of individual, organizational and societal issues which are perceived to impact on LG expatriates' experiences. The research involved semi-structured interviews with 20 expatriates who identified as lesbian or gay. Semi-structured interviews allowed for categorization of findings into core themes but also provided the flexibility to allow participants to identify issues that they considered important and to elaborate on critical incidents (see Creswell & Clark, 2007). Interviews were conducted face-to-face, and by Skype and telephone. While there are relative merits to each approach in terms of the interviewer's ability to build rapport with an interviewee or maintain academic distance, the format of the interviews was determined based on preference and availability of participants. As expatriates are frequently involved in work that involves long hours and regular travel, Skype or telephone interviews conducted after hours were deemed most suitable by many who agreed to participate.

Interview data were collected through a combination of non-probability convenience sampling and purposive sampling which utilized a snowballing approach (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Given that people who are LG may not identify as such to their employers or through traditional expatriate associations or networks, the study commenced with a convenience sampling method by contacting individuals who were

known to one or more of the researchers through personal networks. From these initial contacts, purposeful sampling was utilized and the snowballing technique was then employed to gain interviews with other individuals who self-identified as LG and could be characterized as expatriates. Convenience sampling was deemed a valuable approach for a study such as this in which random sampling may not have provided access (or sufficient numbers) due to difficulties associated with finding the appropriate respondents in a general expatriate population group. However, the limitations of convenience sampling are acknowledged with respect to it potentially having less generalizability and more bias than random sampling (see Sekaran, 2000) and those who have a particular interest in the research topic responding to requests to be interviewed (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Thus, a possible limitation of the convenience sample is that it reflects the responses of LG expatriates who may have differing views of the experience than non-LG expatriates or people who are LG but who have not identified and/or have not expatriated and perceive different challenges and opportunities associated with such.

Expatriates were defined as those who are currently working or had previously worked in countries outside their country of origin – whether this be in traditional, long-term assignments or in newer forms of short-term, commuter or frequent flyer assignments (for classification, see Collings, Scullion, & Morley, 2007), and included both company-assigned expatriates (CAEs) and self-initiated expatriates (SIEs) who had relocated internationally (for key differences between these types, see Tharenou, 2013).

Following the initial interview, each interviewee was asked whether they could recommend and provide contact details of other potential participants whom they believed to be both an expatriate and self-identified as LG. Atkinson and Flint (2004, p. 1) suggest that the snowballing technique may be particularly useful in exploratory research where it may be more difficult to access a specific sample noting that ‘such techniques of “chain referral” may imbue the researcher with characteristics associated with being an insider or group member, which can aid entry to settings in which conventional approaches have great difficulty’. Though snowballing was utilized, there was no information shared by the research team among the participants beyond contact referral information and no interviewee knew of the content discussed in any other interview.

To minimize potential bias of responses from a sample which had commenced with convenience sampling and been broadened through snowballing, we also recruited potential participants through social media. Namely, a request for volunteers was posted via the LGBT LinkedIn private group (of which one of the researchers is a member) and some members of this group then re-posted the invitation to participate to other social media groups to which they belonged. Each potential interviewee 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 being utilized in any published research. All participants were provided with an overview of the research project and required to provide informed consent.

The interviewees included 5 women who identify as lesbian and 15 men who identify as gay. The majority of participants had an accompanying partner while working internationally. The participants work in a range of industries including banking/finance, government, healthcare, hospitality, media/film/television and trade unions, with the majority working in senior positions including general manager, manager, vice president, deputy vice president and director roles. For further demographic information on the interviewees, see [Table 1](#).

Table 1. Sample characteristics of participants.

Code name	Male or female/ LGBT	Age	Marital status	Child	Partner or child with them	CAE/SIE	Industry of current company	Position held in company	Number of employees in current company	Country of birth	Expatriate country (bold)/other countries and time spent	Highest qualification
Abigail	F/L	37	Engaged	0	Y	SIE	Health	Manager	39,000	USA	Switzerland 2 years/ Mexico 6 years/Canada 1 year	Masters
Brittney	F/L	42	Partnered	0	N	SIE	Trade union	Deputy vice President	200	New Zealand	Australia 17 years	High School certificate
Charles	M/G	39	De facto	0	Y	SIE/w company transfer	Film/television	Director	4500	USA	Australia 9 months	Masters
David	M/G	36	Partnered	0	Y	CAE	Hospitality	General Manager	397	Australia	Thailand 2 years/ Singapore 4.5 years/ New Zealand 9 months	Bachelors
Edward	M/G	30	Engaged	0	N	CAE	Banking	Vice President	600	USA	Hong Kong 4 years/ Singapore 3 months/ UK 3 years	MBA
Frank	M/G	36	De facto	0	Y	SIE	Health/IT	Director	8	Australia	USA 1.5 years	Diploma
Georgia	F/L	55	Married	0	N	OAE/ secondment	Government	Consultant	1	Canada	Thailand 3 years/ France 2 years/ Switzerland 1 year/ Italy 6 months/UK 8 months/USA	Postgraduate
Harry	M/G	37	Married	0	Y	CAE	Retail development	Managing Director	3	USA	China 3.5 years/ Macau 3.5 years/ Australia 6 months	High School certificate
Ingrid	F/L	31	Engaged	0	N	CAE	NGO international relations	Manager	3000	Norway	Switzerland 1.5 years/ Lebanon 2 years/UK 3 years/Zambia 1 year	Masters
Joseph Karl	M/G	64	Single	0	N	SIE	Healthcare	Consultant	1	USA	Thailand 11 years	Bachelors
	M/G	51	Single	0	Y	CAE	Finance	Manager	400	UK	China 2 months/Hong Kong 7 years	Bachelors
Lenard	M/G	59	De facto	1	Y	SIE	Educational finance	Consultant	1	Canada	Thailand 1.5 years/ Hong Kong 7 years	Masters
Mark	M/G		Married	0	Y	CAE	Entertainment	Regional HR Director	600	USA	China 2 years/Hong Kong 7 years/France 4 years	-
Nicola	F/L	42	Single	0	N	SIE	Wholesaler	Director	3	Brazil	Australia 3 years	Masters

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Table 1 – continued

Code name	Male or female/LGBT	Age	Marital status	Child	Partner or child with them	CAE/SIE	Industry of current company	Position held in company	Number of employees in current company	Country of birth	Expatriate country (bold)/other countries and time spent	Highest qualification
Oliver	M/G	33	De facto	0	N	Trailing spouse CAE	IT	Director	1	USA	China	Masters
Peter	M/G	42	De Facto	0	Y	CAE	Hospitality	Vice President HR	200,000	Australia	Hong Kong 2 years/US 2 years	Graduate certificate
Quinton	M/G	33	Single	0	N	CAE	Mining	Manager	80	Australia	South Africa 6 months	Masters
Raphael	M/G	37	Married	0	Y	CAE	International relations	Program officer	3000	Ecuador	Switzerland 4.5 years/USA 2 years	Masters
Simone	F/L	49	Married	1	N	SIE	Pharmaceuticals	Principal investigator	75	England born Canada raised	USA 14 years	Doctorate
Trent	M/G	36	Married	0	Y	CAE	Government	Technical specialist	8000		Norway 2 years/Yemen 1 year/Egypt 6 months/Panama 2 years/South Africa 3 yrs/Colombia 1 year	Masters

Interviews ranged from 35 to 80 minutes. All were recorded and transcribed. For internal validity, participants were asked whether they wished to review the findings of the analysis of the interviews,¹ as a means of providing explanation building within the context of a logical chain of evidence which would allow for tying propositions to existing literature (see Klenke, 2008) – in this case literature on LG mobility.

Interviews commenced with collecting demographic and expatriation information from participants. Utilizing the semi-structured interview protocol developed around opportunities, challenges and barriers, the participants were asked to comment on the following questions: (a) the process of finding and applying for their current job, (b) visa issues, (c) legal/moral stereotyping, (d) their experience as a CAE or a SIE, (e) the perception of levels of acceptance of sexual orientation relative to country of origin, (f) company policy/practice in relation to LG expatriation, (g) types of organizational support provided, (h) his/her partner's experiences of the move (where relevant) and (i) recommendations they might have for LG workers considering expatriation.

Data were categorized into themes using manual coding. One of the researchers coded data into clustered themes using primary-level codes and another member of the research team checked the codes against data to ensure consistency of interpretation. From these codes (which used phrases associated with particular issues), a final list of themes was established which are presented in the findings. It is acknowledged that because we were oriented toward identifying what the participants viewed as opportunities, barriers and challenges, 'our analysis and interpretation . . . reflect[s] the constructs, concepts . . . and theories that structured the study in the first place' (Merriam, 1998, p. 48; cited in Saldana, 2013). Thus, coding did not occur only as a post-interview process but rather was occurring in concert with the interviewing, with adjustments being made to the interview protocol as participants focused on particular issues and as data saturation began to occur. Manual thematic analysis was selected because it provides for systematic categorization of a large but manageable amount of qualitative data.

Findings

The findings are presented within the coded themes relating to the perceived opportunities, barriers and challenges to ensure that the descriptions are structured, planned and purposeful (see de Vaus, 1991). Representative quotes are included where illustrative. Where responses from participants diverge from the view of the majority, these are included to support the analysis.

Opportunities: the process of finding and applying for jobs

All participants expressed a strong desire to expatriate but for varying reasons. These included career progression, greater financial gain and commonly 'an overseas experience' i.e. living and working in a different culture and location from that of their home country. With respect to how they found and applied for positions, participants who were CAEs mostly used networks to find suitable positions and followed internal recruitment processes in applying for the positions. CAEs also spoke of aligning themselves with organizations that would facilitate their international mobility. In contrast, SIEs looked first to companies, societies or communities that could support their international mobility, and then to the laws of particular countries and importantly a culture that provided a 'comfort factor', as defined by one participant as follows:

Even if you are legally protected, are you okay if the people around you are a little squeamish about gay people or lesbians or transgender? Because that's beyond the safety factor, that's the "comfort factor" [C]

Another participant further explained:

The idea of going somewhere completely different ... that had a great ... gay and lesbian community and culture was really appealing ... I could actually explore who I was without the constraints of my hometown [D]

Views among the participants as to whether LG expatriation opportunities were readily available and uncomplicated to put in place were nonetheless mixed. One participant matter-of-factly stated,

There's expatriation and then there's LGBT expatriation [L]

and another expressed frustration by saying,

There's so much work we have to do globally, so many countries where even the rights of women are just not ready, until that happens we haven't got a prayer [C]

But others felt that LG expatriation was not always as difficult as it was perceived to be in that,

Being gay part is actually an enabler to opportunity, rather than a disabler. It's easier to move, not as encumbered, not as expensive, and easier to get the decision in my view [M]

The process of applying for and finding jobs was also linked to the use of networks and community.

Opportunities: LGBT networks/community

A strong theme emerging from responses of all of the participants was the networks and resources available to them via the LGBT community to assist in their expatriation. Most reported this as a distinct advantage with one expatriate explaining:

Knowing and having some sort of community already in place to fall into from my experience helped a lot (O)

Another explained how she used these networks to make connections upon her arrival in Australia:

I found myself here and started to know where the gay and lesbian community was and I was really welcomed. I think it was easier because if I had found myself here not gay then it would have been more difficult ... our community [LGBT] is smaller and they come together and make groups for lots of things [N]

Participants reported using numerous online groups such as Fridae.com, Utopia Asia, Pinksofa and Gay Expat to make connections with their new local LG communities.

Barriers: in or out?

In our study, half the participants described varying degrees of being 'in/out' at work (i.e. their sexual orientation is not known/known by an employer). In less comfortable locations, expatriates tended to be 'out' to colleagues at work but remained 'in' when dealing with people external to the organization (although several remained 'in' at all times). One participant in Zambia described being 'in' at all times but finding it very uncomfortable having to lie, while other participants told of being 'outed' (i.e. having their status revealed against their wishes) while on assignment. In one case, after leaving a club

with a group of gay men, an expatriate was held and detained for 3 hours in custody (in Panama) on the grounds of not carrying correct identification and police officers phoned the expatriate's employer to explain the situation – in an attempt to out him. Another gay expatriate described that while he was 'in' at work, he was publicly 'outed' in Hong Kong when he attended a concert with his partner at which a paparazzi took a photo of them which appeared the next day on the front page of the daily newspaper (L). Of concern to another expatriate was being advised *not* to join the organization's LG workplace employee resource group (ERG) on the basis that membership was public and it could impede future career progression opportunities.

Whether employees should reveal their LG status to potential employers during job interviews was of concern, with one gay expatriate claiming that revealing his homosexuality during an interview with a multinational bank in Hong Kong resulted in his application not progressing, whereas another counter-argued that being 'out' at interviews is an obligation wherein *if you want people to accept and open doors for you, then you have to take the step* [M]. The idea that companies can also 'come out' in support of LGBT employees is a newer phenomenon, as noted by a gay expatriate who recently witnessed several managing directors attending and supporting the 'Out in the Street' conference sponsored by some of Hong Kong's biggest banks.

Challenges: extent of company support

Company support for CAE LG expatriates varied. On the one hand, several specifically mentioned active company-sponsored ERGs for LG employees that provided them with additional support such as policy advice, social connections and a sense of belonging. While one participant admitted, *that's an extra consideration that straight people don't have*, she also stated *but straight people don't necessarily need that* [A]. In contrast, not all LG expatriates were treated equally (in comparison to their heterosexual counterparts) from a policy perspective, with variations ranging from having the same policy for all partnered employees regardless of sexual orientation, to 'equivalent' policies being in place, and there being substantially less or no policy in place to cater for LG workers. In the latter case, where no support is provided in terms of healthcare, allowances, relocation assistance or help with the visa application process for partners, there can be serious implications, as one participant candidly explained:

There is the claim that well, in that country it's illegal, and therefore we can't give you the same benefits, which is rubbish . . . you can, sort of, challenge them on that or . . . move away from that employer, because they're not going to be as supportive as they should be [K]

A common issue regarding benefits and support was related to the laws of the LG employee's country of birth (COB). If, in the COB, a legal same-sex marriage had taken place and was legally recognized in that country, then the partner would be offered full benefits and support as any heterosexual married couple might expect. Conversely, no benefits are typically afforded to employees whose marriages are not legally recognized.

Companies adopted a range of programs in an attempt to address policy discrimination problems for LG expatriates. One organization implemented a 'personal status policy' in 2012 stating that 'any legal, legally performed, or civil union or marriage, no matter where it started, no matter what your nationality' would be recognized for assignment benefit purposes. Another provided full assistance to domestic partners regardless of their gender or the couple's marital status with, for example, the provision of housing allowances for two people, medical insurance for two people and so on. Another participant reported that

he accepted a senior international human resources (HRs) position with a manufacturing company because it did *not* have a LGBT policy, and where part of his regional responsibilities were to develop and implement an explicit policy against discrimination of gays and lesbians in Asia Pacific.

These findings support prior studies (e.g. Human Rights Campaign Fund Annual Report [HRCF], 2009) showing a steady increase in companies' awareness to cultivate an inclusive and anti-discriminatory culture, including complementary policies and practices. As the same participant said,

It becomes about what do you have to do to provide the support necessary for your employees to be fully productive at work, and protected at work, based on your company's level of policy? For us to provide benefits to same-sex domestic partners has nothing to do with the law ... [but] that's what makes us unique as an employer and makes it a place where people want to work and stay to work. These are not legal issues; these are benefit, contractual issues ... that are in no way in contravention to the law [M]

Several participants noted that their organization also provided in-house equity and diversity training for staff, while others utilized professional networks as information channels about LG workplace reforms.

Challenges: degrees of legal protection and moral stereotyping

All of the participants perceived that they had experienced some degree of lack of legal protection or moral stereotyping, either personally or professionally, as LG expatriates. A sense of vulnerability was a common theme as the stereotyping and discrimination covered a wide range of topics, such as having to live in certain countries to feel safe (e.g. Australia), difficulty in finding suitable housing and the need for LG-friendly neighborhoods (e.g. Switzerland) and adverse dealings with doctors and government officials despite legal protection (e.g. Canada). As one participant noted,

There will always be people who want to espouse moral judgment on the perceived value of your lifestyle choices ... if you're outside the norm, you're going to be subject to behaviours that are symptomatic of making people uncomfortable [B]

A lack of legal protection created a sense of fear in some locations, such as in Lebanon where, for example, a local man stalked one lesbian participant and her partner, after which she discovered,

There was absolutely no kind of official way of receiving protection from him or for him to be told off by anyone in authority. You couldn't go to the police. You couldn't go anywhere [for help] [I]

In South Africa, another gay expatriate perceived that LGs were so morally unacceptable in the local community that he had to be careful as to how he portrayed himself or there could be ramifications for him – both socially and in terms of his business dealings. A colleague of another expatriate was reportedly informed that his career progression had come to an end as the company determined there were no remaining destinations to which he could be sent that were considered 'gay safe'. This is in contrast to others who viewed 'safe countries' as an irrelevant detail:

A lot of LGBT do go to difficult countries. I wanted to meet my own prejudice at the door and I'm so glad I did. I went to a country in a part of the world that I have never seen [T]

Subtle workplace discrimination was also felt by over half of the participants. A lesbian expatriate working in Geneva, for example, after having taken an approved leave day off and missing a work meeting to visit with her girlfriend residing in another country, was

told by her employer, *I didn't tell them that you were in Paris with your girlfriend* [I]. Although she wondered if she was just being too sensitive, she nonetheless said that it was not what he said but the 'way' that he said it, explaining:

I suppose having a girlfriend in Paris just probably conjured up the wrong image ... I feel if I claimed that as family responsibilities it certainly wouldn't be taken seriously ... I just felt if I had said "my husband and children" it would be more okay [I]

While nearly all stereotyping experienced by the LG expatriates in our study made them feel uncomfortable, one participant living in Thailand who was often labeled a 'sex-pat' did admit to this particular stereotype as being 'partly true', stating:

There is some reality to that [gay stereotype] specifically regarding access to young, attractive and much younger men so ... there is also some truth to it [J]

Interestingly, several LG expatriates also held stereotypes about host-country colleagues and citizens. For example, public signs of same-gender affection predominately among males (although in private it was also reported between females) were frequently mistaken as indications of homosexuality (*wow, these guys are holding hands, it is fantastic* [T]). Where such same sex socialization was more acceptable, it made it easier to 'hang out' with the same rather than the opposite gender in societies where LGBT is illegal such as Lebanon and Yemen. A participant who was kidnapped in Yemen describes observing signs of affection between the young men who were his captors, which included lying on top of each other, caressing and holding hands. Having seen such male-to-male affection publicly in South Africa, India and parts of Egypt, he realized that these were not expressions that the men were gay but rather *another type of holding hands* that was not associated with homosexuality, otherwise they *would not be doing it* [T].

Challenges: levels of acceptance

While discrimination and stereotyping were common experiences of participants in the study, many also felt that they were excused from conforming to local norms and laws in spite of their LG status. A participant described how, as an expatriate, one is already considered to be strange and different so *being gay is really not that much of an add-on*, suggesting that *there are huge numbers of gay expatriates wherever you go and there is acceptance out there even if the laws haven't caught up* [M]. Several other participants described how their expatriate status actually led to higher levels of tolerance and acceptance, dependent of course on their comfort level in the host country, with those in less comfortable societies, such as Nigeria, needing to 'park' their activism:

At home I've always challenged assumptions ... but that's not my job when I'm in a place that's very foreign... my job is to be respectful and pay attention to the social norms [G]

Another warned, however,

Those tolerances and freedoms that are enjoyed I don't think you should ever take for granted, and I never consider them to be a permanent state of being [B]

Different interpretations of local cultural acceptance to LG workers were experienced by participants. One, for example, told of how an important monk in the country of Thailand made a public statement saying that, because Thai people believe in multiple lives and reincarnation, *you either are now, will be, or have been gay, so you shouldn't be judgmental* [J]. Another local observation was of Chinese and Thai gay men looking for lesbian wives. Other participants in Lebanon, for example, observed that, within groups of lesbian friends, there is an understanding that you will be girlfriends until a certain point and then it will be

your duty to be married, with one expatriate noting a lot more people are openly bisexual with their friends until it is time that they *were sent to marry* [I]. Yet another gay participant described how the Yemeni were secure in knowing that homosexuality is a crime and punishable by death if anyone were to find out, but that the local Yemeni have always been extremely welcoming people, so it was an odd contradiction.

Challenges: partner considerations

For most LG participants, an ideal situation was when both partners were able to work independently as expatriates in the same location, as was the case for the majority of participants who elected not to apply for temporary migration as a couple but rather as individuals. These expatriates subsequently had more alternatives in financial and residential matters than traditional heterosexual couples, where the trailing partner in many cases cannot work and is dependent on the working spouse for support. In those cases where the LG couple preferred to, and could, relocate as a couple, some applications were rejected while others were accepted, with CAEs relying on their organizations to handle immigration matters on their behalf. Several couples stressed the importance of retaining documentation with regard to ‘proof of relationship’ as being helpful for visa and temporary migration purposes. For example, one participant explained,

What I thought was an insignificant start of an e-mail conversation, almost 11 years ago, has helped me numerous times. So keeping documentation of history together is very important [A]

In instances where an LG partner could not relocate as a dependent of their working spouse, creative alternatives were employed, including their partner returning to study, changing career direction and establishing their own business, or gaining employment within the same company as the spouse. One employer had established a local expatriates’ spouse association providing a space for partners to find jobs, to do things together with other spouses, or to start up businesses. However, as found in prior research on expatriates generally (e.g. McNulty, 2012), most participants acknowledged that having a trailing partner meant it was more stressful to relocate, noting it was a *bigger adjustment for them, career wise, in social status and the changes they experience* [than for me] (P). Another participant recommended considering the strength of the relationship as a predictor of relocation success by saying:

If that’s not there, then the mobility issue might be defunct because the relationship might end [because of] the trials and tribulations of not just moving to a new place but then having to navigate the complexities of LGBT issues as well [A]

Some participants nonetheless found that expatriating with a partner was a positive experience. Whereas several mentioned the advantages and benefits of their partners establishing separate interests and networks to their own, others expressed support for future expatriation particularly when mobility would enhance their partner’s career as well. As one participant said:

It’s been enriching for us professionally, it’s been enriching for us as a couple, it’s been enriching for our family. We left some things behind because we don’t get to as many birthdays, or anniversaries, you know, those kinds of things, but we’ve gained so much more than we’ve lost [M]

Having presented the findings in relation to the opportunities, barriers and challenges faced by LG expatriates related to their global mobility, the findings are now discussed in relation to the literature and SCT framework.

Table 2. SCT and LGBT expatriation.

<i>Dimension/type of social capital</i>	<i>Impact upon/locus</i>	<i>Application to LGBT expatriation</i>
Structural social capital (1) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Network ties • Network configuration • Appropriate organization 	Social networks (6) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Flow of knowledge and coordination of subunits or networks (2) • No. and strength of ties • Ability to use as a resource • Private/bonding 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use of LGBT networks to determine destinations suitability both socially and legally • Use of ties to find and apply for jobs • LGBT network/community used before/during expatriation • Policy of benefits/support from company • ERGs • Stereotyping both legal and moral • In or Out? • Perceived levels of acceptance of orientation both socially and organizationally • Company support
Relational capital (1,6) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Trust • Norms • Obligations • Identification 	Trust and reciprocity (7) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Within groups and between groups • Personal relationships • Internal and external • Built over time • Public and shared/bridging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGBT ERGs internal and external • Company policy regarding equality of LGBT • Equality of partner benefits/support from company • Level of acceptance
Cognitive social capital (1,3) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared codes and language • Shared narratives 	Sense of belonging (6) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Shared goals, norms and values • Common vision, culture, norms and frame of reference (1,4,5) • Generates civic virtue/trusting involved communities • Public and shared/bridging 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGBT ERGs internal and external • Company policy regarding equality of LGBT • Equality of partner benefits/support from company • Level of acceptance

Source: Adapted from: Naphapiet and Ghosal (1998), Kostova and Roth (2003), Inkpen and Tsang (2005), Lengnick-Hall and Lengnick-Hall (2012), Taylor (2007), Bourdieu (1984), Coleman (1990), and Putnam (2000).

Discussion

In this article, unique social capital opportunities, challenges and barriers related to LG expatriation have been identified. LG expatriates have a form of social capital which is not common to traditional expatriates. Table 2 presents a summary of SCT in application to LG expatriation.

Opportunities may exist for LG expatriates in their structural social capital in the form of unique and often exclusive networks. As highlighted by Propositions 1a and 1b, LG expatriates did note the capacity to use their LGBT structural social capital in the form of personal, professional and LGBT community network ties to both locate and facilitate expatriation and establish, maintain and transfer these ties before, during and after assignment(s). These networks contain extensive amounts of information and resources highlighting a comprehensive and complex array of configurations. These can also be transferred from one context to another, professionally and personally and across cultures and borders, enabling the appropriate organizational dimension of social capital.

Table 3. LGBT employer/employee framework for international assignment selection.

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Employer actions</i>	<i>Employee actions</i>	<i>Additional perspectives raised in the current research</i>
What is the legal status of LGBT in the country of relocation?	Know and understand the laws pertaining to sexual orientation; secure legal counsel in the country of relocation; contact the embassy or consulate to ascertain the political ramifications	Know and understand the laws pertaining to sexual orientation; contact the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) to glean information on the climate in the relocation country	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Variation across countries with respect to legal or social acceptance of LGBT people. • Laws against LGBT acts exist in some countries but laws may not be enforced. • Expatriates observed as being excused for behavior which may not be tolerated among locals and the most excessive punishment observed was deportation. • Countries with legal protection for LGBT people may still demonstrate social stigma and active discrimination.
What is the social climate for LGBT in the country of relocation?	Determine the social climate by reviewing popular media; contacting Human Rights Watch and other organizations; make inquiries with host-country nationals	Contact organized groups for sexual minorities in or near the country to determine the social climate; speak with immigrant populations; review relevant articles and books; speak with fellow expats from the region	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The 'comfort factor' more important than national law. • The most favored strategy for determining social acceptance was to visit the locations many times before relocation and follow this with use of local networks to further ascertain comfort levels and acceptance. • Regions or areas within countries change in comfort levels according to social acceptance of LGBT, so caution is required when generalizing information. • SIEs often select climates which are open to and have a strong LGBT community compared to CAEs that are deployed by org's to countries that may not be as friendly. • LGBT expatriates often required to adjust their behavior to fit local social norms, e.g. not engage in activism.

(Continued)

Table 3 – *continued*

<i>Issue</i>	<i>Employer actions</i>	<i>Employee actions</i>	<i>Additional perspectives raised in the current research</i>
What is the organizational climate for being LGBT in the country of relocation?	Determine the organizational climate by reviewing the organization's non-discrimination policy, use of inclusive language in training, support and security systems; domestic partner benefits (see Hornsby and Munn, 2009, 78–79 for a more complete checklist)	Monitor non-formal interactions in the workplace; join or create an LGBT association; inform reporting structures of policy gaps	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organizational acceptance and support in the host country is equally important to national legal and social climate when considering LGBT expatriation. • Organizations can harness LGBT expatriates knowledge in developing LGBT-friendly policies in the host country. • Organizationally assigned expatriates align themselves with organizations which would be viewed as providing a supportive environment. • LGBT expatriates may have different forms of being 'out'.
Has the employee disclosed sexual minority status at his/her present location?	If not, the organization should reflect on what elements in the organizational culture might make disclosure difficult; conduct a 'rainbow audit' (or another measurement of LGBT friendliness) of the workplace	Discuss the issue of 'coming out' with past and present colleagues; work within your comfort levels; find allies in the workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • LGBT expatriates may have advantages over heterosexual couples as they can move independently and apply for work visas which may be restricted for spouses of heterosexual expatriates.
Is the employee relocating with a partner?	Any policies that pertain to relocating different sex partners should be applied to same-sex partners; ensure host-country nationals are trained on LGBT issues	Raise any issues to the attention of the supervisor; involve HR staff to ensure these issues are addressed for future staff members; use support mechanisms, like expatgay.com or internationations.org	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A to this study
Is the employee relocating with children?	Any policies that pertain to relocating cross-sex partners with families should be applied to same-sex partners and families	Learn of and inform family members of the different cultural context and how it views homosexuality; make a 'family plan' in case hostility is detected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • N/A to this study

Source: Adapted from Gedro et al. (2013).

Note: Columns 1, 2 and 3 appear in the original source while column 4 presents additional perspectives based on findings from this study. Where Gedro et al. (2013) have used the term 'inpatriates' we refer instead to host-country nationals (bold text in column 2).

Examples include the use of such unique networks to source and secure positions, source suitable destinations with respect to safety and security, seek policy equality and have access to and use of exclusive ERGs and community-based groups.

Relational social capital may present challenges and barriers for LG expatriation in terms of trust and reciprocity. LG expatriates may face stereotyping, varied levels of acceptance, and inequality and company support issues for self and partner, both internally and externally. There is, however, opportunity for organizations to improve this relational aspect by improving internal organizational conditions by providing comprehensive and equitable policy and support via ERGs. This finding is in line with Proposition 2, which suggested that LG expatriates will use their relational social capital to determine the perceived levels of societal and organizational acceptance and equality received prior and during expatriation.

Opportunities, challenges and barriers may also exist for LG expatriates' use of, and access to, cognitive social capital. The shared codes, language and narratives serve to provide a resource to guide and assist individuals, couples and families in decision making in relation to expatriation. A sense of belonging may also be facilitated by access to LG ERGs. Challenges and barriers may occur when inequality of policy and varied levels of acceptance are experienced by an LG expatriate. Therefore, the findings lend some support to Propositions 3a and 3b in that LG expatriates use their cognitive social capital for social and organizational belonging and ascertaining levels of acceptance, equality and access to support before, during and after expatriation.

The research presented here expands prior studies by providing empirical evidence to support, for example Gedro et al.'s (2013) previously identified issues for employer and employee actions. Table 3 details additional perspectives raised in the current research and in particular highlights some variations in (a) the experiences of CAEs and SIEs (b) the impact of, and variation between, legal and moral climates and (c) allowance for expatriates to behave differently from locals. Specifically, Table 3 extends the work of Gedro et al. (2013) who called for further research which '... questions the expatriate experiences of LGBT people on the ground ...' (p.24).

Gedro et al.'s (2013) rubric was extended by the addition of the perspectives of LG expatriates. In terms of the legal status of a country, nuances exist in how this may impact on global mobility and in some cases act as an enabler. For the majority of the participants, the social climate of the country was found to be the most important factor and was named as the 'comfort factor' despite it being acknowledged that assignee behavior may need to be modified in some destinations. Disclosure of status was found to be different in various scenarios and highlighted the many ways in which this may or may not be managed by assignees and their organizations. In addition, the ability to relocate with a partner, with each as an 'individual expatriate' in their own right, enabled a greater level of mobility for many of the participants compared to studies that have reported problems for the partners of traditional expatriates (McNulty, 2012; Permits Foundation, 2012).

This research extends the limited LG expatriate research published to date and in particular contributes to existing understanding of issues and actions of employers and employees in relation to LG expatriation. While McNulty (2014) suggested that LGBT expatriates may have difficulty in finding associations and clubs away from the mainstream, this research has highlighted the unique and comprehensive networks the members of the LG expatriate community (who participated in this research) have developed globally. This structural social capital featured predominately as being used to locate and secure international positions. Furthermore, networks were used to locate destinations of 'choice'. Interestingly, despite Nunan and Vittorio (2009) suggesting that

some destinations may not be a viable option for expatriates, many participants had lived and worked in what might be considered the most 'dangerous' locations for LG expatriates (e.g. Yemen, Lebanon), which were deemed as such because being homosexual is illegal and can result in serious consequences. Individuals used various methods, including degrees of being 'in' and 'out', to manage their LGBT status in these destinations. A unique finding of this study is that the extent of 'being different' between the host/home country can be an advantage to LG expatriates in terms of same gender affection and association being readily practiced and accepted in some of the host-country locations where, for example, some participants found that the ability to associate freely with the same gender (given cultural norms segregating the sexes) was an advantage. In addition and by contrast, the findings also support the existence of a 'glass border' for LG expatriates (Gedro, 2010, p. 392), in that several participants found themselves curtailed from future international career development, employment or assignments due to their sexual orientation, despite having similar motives for expatriation as their heterosexual peers (e.g. personal adventure and professional advancement).

This study supports the work of McNulty (2014) which suggested that LG expatriates may lack host-country support, leaving them to face discrimination, safety and security issues, and reduced equality of benefits. While some participants did receive adequate company support, all reported facing some form of stereotyping and discrimination. Interestingly, safety and security issues were less prevalent, with the 'comfort factor' of the destination factoring highly in responses. These findings from LG expatriates also support the suggestion that LGBT expatriates (more broadly) face challenges and barriers in terms of their relational social capital.

The nature of LG expatriation requires that most LG workers and their partners relocate with financial and legal independence of each other, thereby providing each with more options to address legal and financial problems that might arise if a partnership or marriage results in separation or divorce. Thus, while expatriate family life remains gendered to some degree, it may not always have negative implications for LG expatriates, for whom legal and financial independence of partners is frequently a necessary requirement in order to expatriate.

This research provides theoretical contribution through using the qualitative data to apply SCT to the IHRM (specifically expatriation) literature and extending Gedro et al.'s (2013) rubric to implications for managers. SCT was noted as a useful lens through which to examine expatriation issues in that relational, structural and cognitive capital of LG expatriates is used to facilitate their global mobility. The unique ties LG expatriates can call upon extend our understanding of the structural capital dimension. This supports the work of Coleman (1988) in recognizing that these ties are resources that can be used by the individual. The varied methods of being 'in/out' and how this is related to the social and organizational levels of support also extend our understanding of relational capital as a resource. In addition, cognitive capital was explored through unique access to groups (internal and external) that are used by LG expatriates. The importance of ties such as 'bonding' and 'bridging' within and between groups supports the findings of Putnam (2000). Researching policy and practices of organizations to determine levels of acceptance and equity was also reported by LG expatriates and highlighted the impact these may have on organizational performance and engagement as proposed by Nahapiet and Ghoshal (1988).

In addition, Gedro et al.'s (2013) global assignments rubric for LGBT assignees was extended by utilizing the empirical data collected in this study. Specifically, the rubric has been expanded to include understanding the nuances of what 'legal status' may mean in a

destination, the importance of the 'comfort factor' in terms of acceptance, ways in which being 'in/out' may be managed and advantages of same-sex mobility for dual-career LG expatriates.

Implications and issues for future research

The expatriate literature has recently broadened to consider different types of international assignments (Collings et al., 2007; Meyskens, von Glinow, Werther, & Clarke, 2009), yet this literature has tended to focus primarily on heterosexual expatriates who are single, in dual-career families or with trailing spouses. The current research is significant in extending the limited literature on LG global mobility about safety, inclusion and equity, by exploring the perceptions that LG expatriates have of the opportunities, barriers and challenges they experience during expatriation. This research highlights that some LG workers view their sexual orientation as a disabler to expatriation, while others felt it enabled expatriation. Thus, the research extends earlier studies that highlight the challenges and barriers for LG expatriates (e.g. Gedro, 2010; McNulty, 2014) by also noting some distinct opportunities that LG expatriates may have relative to their heterosexual (and partnered) counterparts. Just as other minorities (e.g. female expatriates) face unique challenges (Selmer & Leung, 2002), the findings suggest that LG expatriates may also experience barriers in selection which in part may reflect perceptions that organizations have of their potential acceptance in certain foreign locations. Importantly, our research includes both CAEs and SIEs who have worked in a range of developed and developing countries including Norway, Switzerland and Thailand which were more accepting of their sexual orientation, and regions of the Middle East, South America and Africa where there was less or no acceptance. Similar to issues noted in the women in international management literature with respect to being viewed as a foreigner first (see Adler, 1987), the findings highlight that LG individuals were often viewed as expatriate foreigners first, with their sexual orientation seen as either secondary or not relevant, given that they were already outsiders or 'excused' for non-local behavior.

Implications for managers and expatriates

The findings of the research highlights that while the participants believe that they have an individual onus to understand laws and barriers within the local context of their host country and to seek out networks (either existing or to develop new contacts) and other support mechanisms, they believe that they also benefit from membership to a community which has unique, established networks. The participants highlighted some important considerations for other LG expatriates which have previously been noted in the general expatriation literature as being relevant to all expatriates, such as visiting the host location prior to relocation, learning the local language and establishing local allies. Importantly, though, participants also stressed some issues of particular importance for LG expatriates, namely, the need to undertake careful planning and brainstorming with their partner to prepare for expected and unexpected events (such as being sexually 'outed'), having an exit strategy if things should go wrong particularly where the legality of their status in some countries may place them or their partner in danger and keeping good records and documentation as legal proof of the LG status of the relationship.

The participants also expect that organizations provide the same support for them and their families that they provide to employees in heterosexual relationships and recognize the need for diversity awareness training for their colleagues. Importantly, that the

participants were able to identify relative legal and social acceptance of sexuality across countries in which they have lived and worked provides valuable information for organizations when selecting employees for particular locations (i.e. cultural fit), in recognizing contextual challenges and in providing consequent levels of support relative to need in individual locations.

Interestingly, our research also underscored that LG expatriates' partners might actually have more employment opportunities than heterosexual partners (who may not be granted a work visa) as they frequently have the ability to move to a host location separately and of their own volition, suggesting that organizations need to give greater consideration to the family situation of individual expatriates in tailoring employment and social support. This finding also suggests that managers who may have previously not considered LG employees as suitable or willing to relocate to certain locations could reconsider this position in order to fully utilize the talent pool available to them. In addition, employees who may not have considered relocating may now consider this as a potential career path and use their unique network ties to access recruitment opportunities.

Limitations and issues for future research

Despite the value of this research in extending the current expatriate literature, several limitations are noted. First, convenience sampling and purposive sampling using snowballing meant that we did not have access to the whole population. While use of social media broadened the potential sample size and gave access to a wider population group than those who were known through personal networks, it included only those people who self-identified as LG. Therefore, the views of the participants may not reflect the experiences of those who do not self-identify but perhaps feel that because they are not supported by their organization in being 'out', they may experience barriers to their selection for expatriation. From this perspective, as our research has examined only those who sought and have undertaken expatriate work (and selected organizations which they viewed as relatively supportive), there is need for future research to account for the views of those who have declined or avoided expatriation and what they see as the challenges that affect them with respect to opportunities (or lack thereof).

Second, the participants in our study were predominantly gay and to a lesser extent lesbian, thereby limiting the sample to only two segments of the broader LGBT cohort. Future research should therefore actively seek to ascertain the views of bisexual and transgender expatriates who we suggest may have a discreet set of challenges. Third, given that research on expatriates generally has focused on the impact of spouse/family on adjustment and the need for organizational support for them, it would be valuable for future research to also interview partners and perhaps children of LG expatriates to ascertain their perspectives about international assignments and areas where organizational and individual network support are required. Fourth, while our research is significant in highlighting the perceptions that LG expatriates have of expatriation, it would be beneficial for future research to undertake dyadic research with their managers and HR managers in other organizations (including those that are LGBT friendly and family friendly) to gather data on managerial views of LG expatriates' experiences and organizational support. Fifth, the participants comprised both SIEs and CAEs and each group was not explored distinctively; therefore, future research could provide more detailed data to assist in the development and updating of policies that are in place in organizations to cater for these differences in career orientation.

Note

1. Although participants were invited to review the analysis of the findings of this study, none accepted the offer, requesting instead to be sent a copy of the final report and/or publications arising from the study as a resource/benefit for them and their organizations.

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