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## **'Oh, the places you won't go as an LGBT expat!' A study of HRM's duty of care to lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender expatriates in dangerous locations**

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**Abstract:** This paper examines lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) expatriates' perceptions of HRM's duty of care for their well-being and safety in dangerous geographical locations. We use respondent data from 13 LGBT expatriates to examine both perceptions of, and the 'lived experience' in relation to, duty of care for LGBT expatriates. Using global talent management as a conceptual lens to frame the study, findings demonstrate that the 'comfort factor' is more important than the legal status of LGBT people in a particular host country when assessing the risk to LGBT expatriates in dangerous locations. While LGBT may be legally accepted, the social norms of the local culture are perceived as a more legitimate assessment of the threat to be expected in terms of discrimination and negative homophobic attention. Implications are outlined for selecting, training and preparing LGBT expatriates for deployment to dangerous locations.

**Keywords:** expatriates; LGBT; lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender; duty of care; risk; dangerous locations.

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## 1 Introduction

*"The prospect of becoming an [LGBT] expat is both exciting and daunting. Yet one of the most critical decisions is where to go. Choose correctly and you can enjoy a country that recognizes gay marriage or at a minimum where homosexuality is legal. Choose incorrectly and you could find yourself living in a country where homosexuality is illegal and at worst punishable by death."*

Expat Gay (2013)

Traditional expatriates have been a focus of much of the research to date on expatriation and global talent management (GTM) (e.g. Makela and Suutari, 2009; Reiche et al., 2009), which is generally focused on a heterosexual couple with a male expatriate and female trailing spouse or a dual-career couple and children (e.g. Harvey et al., 2009; Haslberger and Brewster, 2008). Recently, some attempts have been made in the literature to reflect the diversity that exists among expatriates and their families (e.g. single parents and female breadwinners among others; McNulty, 2014; Selmer and Leung, 2002); however, little research is still to be found about Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) expatriates and their assignment experiences, with only a few studies available (Gedro, 2010; Gedro et al., 2013; Kaplan, 2014; McNulty, 2014; McPhail et al., 2014). 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". Gedro (2010) notes that LGBT workers face unique challenges compared to their heterosexual co-workers and that many still suffer from being marginalised and stigmatised despite international assignments having become increasingly important for career progression. In response, LGBT employees often choose 'safer' career paths, essentially self-discriminating themselves out of international assignment opportunities. One common reason is that some are required to be 'out' to their employer as a precursor to undertaking an assignment, which they are unwilling to do (Gedro, 2010). To date, studies in the management field have not sufficiently explored bisexual or transgender expatriates and despite using the term 'LGBT' as an overarching reference the focus has been primarily on lesbian and gay employees. 'LGBT' when used in this paper is used to reflect its use in the literature thus far, as part of the broader debate and as an overarching term adopted by HRM in organisations to reflect the homosexual and/or non-heterosexual community. The current literature on diversity widely accepts that identities operate at multiple complex levels (see Ruggs et al., 2013). The intersectionality of a minority sexual orientation with other categories such as age,

race and gender results in diversity within and between members of LGBT groups and within those groups (Fish, 2008). The participants in this study identified as being lesbian, gay and bisexual (but not transgender) and we explored their perceptions of HRM's duty of care to LGBT expatriates in general. It is acknowledged that each of these groups is unique and while no transgender expatriates participated in the research, the perceptions of duty of care to *all* LGBT expatriates were the focus, hence the use of the term 'LGBT'.

Research on LGBT expatriates shows that expatriation among this unique cohort, while small, is nonetheless growing. In a recent study of 20 lesbian and gay assignees, McPhail et al. (2014) found, for example, that although HR support to expatriate is perceived to be limited, sexual minority status is viewed as both a disabler and an enabler in expatriation for LGBT employees. Furthermore, legal and financial independence within lesbian and gay partnerships tends to provide them with more mobility opportunities than their heterosexual counterparts owing to the ability for partners (some married) to immigrate independently but together, thereby accessing work visas and increasing employment flexibility. Importantly, the study did not find that expatriation to dangerous locations for LGBT employees was restricted; instead, lesbian and gay employees are often accepted in host countries where homosexuality is legally or socially unacceptable for locals because their 'foreigner' status overshadows sexual orientation.

In another study, Gedro (2010) shared her own experience of navigating safety and security issues when negotiating permission with her Dean to travel, alone, to an academic conference in Bahrain in December 2009. Noting that she is "*a totally out and easily identifiable lesbian*" (p.396), the issue at hand involved the Dean's concern as to whether her sexual orientation would result in actual experiences of discrimination, harassment or even danger while travelling in the Middle East. As the author explains, "*the perception that such could happen is the primary point*" (p.396), which may lead an employee to subsequently hide their sexual orientation taking into account safety and security issues (Gedro et al., 2004).

This supports McPhail et al.'s (2014) finding that lesbian and gay expatriates give due consideration to living and working in dangerous locations by predetermining the extent to which they will be required to hold different forms of being 'in' and 'out' whilst on assignment, e.g. being 'in' at work whilst being 'out' in their private life. Thus, "*decisions to come out in organizations are driven in part by workplace safety and acceptance*" (Hill, 2009, p.40), where security, stability, lifestyle, autonomy and independence may also be mitigating factors (Kaplan, 2014). Furthermore, the study found that the importance of the 'comfort factor' in relation to locals' social acceptance of being LGBT in the host country was found to be more important than restrictions on sexual orientation within the national law.

We note a recent focus in studies related to the intersection of sexuality, diversity and inclusiveness in relation to international assignees as a way to guide policy and practice for Human Resource (HR) professionals (e.g. Gedro, 2010; Gedro et al., 2013; McNulty, 2014; McPhail et al., 2014), along with a growing interest in LGBT careers in general (e.g. Colgan and McKearney, 2012; Kaplan, 2014; McDevitt-Pugh, 2011). We also note a recent push to engage in research that is focused on minority populations of expatriates (e.g. Pattie and Parks, 2011), including female expatriates with male trailing spouses (Selmer and Leung, 2002), Asian expatriates (McNulty and Rason, 2015) and split families (Copeland, 2009; McNulty, 2015), among others. These studies highlight the unique experiences of minority groups and strengthen the need for more research about LGBT expatriates in particular.

On this basis, and in line with recently published studies, we take as our starting point in this paper that (1) expatriation for LGBT expatriates is increasingly visible; (2) LGBT expatriates' deployment to dangerous locations is supported by both assignees and the organisations that employ them; and (c) the perceived level of HR support for LGBT expatriation is limited. We further note that the physical risks for sexual minorities who relocate abroad for work can be immense, particularly in countries that are unwelcoming.

We borrow from Gedro (2010, p.387) in stating that the aim of this paper is to "sensitize" expatriate researchers and practitioners whose goal it is to create "inclusive and equitable" policies for expatriating LGBT employees, in particular to dangerous locations. We acknowledge that while there is a growing body of research about LGBT expatriates, this field of studies nonetheless remains under-researched and in its infancy. Our study therefore represents an incremental, but important, step towards understanding the challenges faced by LGBT employees seeking upward career mobility through international assignments, and specifically the assistance they receive from HR in relation to relocating to dangerous locations where their sexual orientation may pose a threat to their safety and security. This study is likely to uncover helpful insights of benefit to Multinational Corporations (MNCs).

Building on prior studies, this paper focuses on LGBT employee's perspectives of HRM's duty of care to protect their health, well-being, safety and security when deployed to dangerous locations. By drawing on two richly detailed vignettes and extensive quotes from a combined sample of 13 LGBT expatriates, we examine both perceptions of, and the 'lived experience' in relation to, duty of care for LGBT expatriates. We aim to address the gap in the literature by addressing the follow research questions:

- 1 What are LGBT expatriates' perceptions of HR's duty of care when deploying them to dangerous locations?
- 2 How do LGBT expatriates define 'dangerous locations' for the purposes of expatriation?
- 3 How do LGBT expatriates engage in successful expatriation to dangerous locations?

Our objective is not to reinvent theories about LGBT employees who engage in global mobility, given that recent studies suggest their experiences are somewhat similar and often more positive than heterosexual expatriates (Gedro, 2010; McPhail et al., 2014). This is likely owing to the fact that LGBT 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 of whether one is LGBT in status or not. Rather, the intention is to use an empirical approach that explores the actual lived experience of some LGBT expatriates' in dangerous locations through which, when combined with others' perceptions, we can explore HR's duty of care and the ways in which policy and practice for this unique cohort of assignees can be enhanced.

This paper begins by situating LGBT expatriation within a GTM framework to firstly justify why LGBT expatriation is of increasing importance to both employers and LGBT employees, and the challenges that LGBT expatriates face when engaging in GTM initiatives. Next, we position our study within the broader context of global mobility by providing a detailed overview of HR's duty of care to international assignees, particularly in dangerous locations. We then explain our methodology, after which findings are

presented in relation to the research questions. We conclude with a detailed discussion of the implications arising from our study for theory, research and practice, including future research directions for further study on LGBT expatriation.

## **2 Global talent management and LGBT expatriates**

GTM is derived from domestic talent management initiatives where 'talent' is characterised as the "*superior mastery of systematically developed abilities or skills, being confined to the top 10 per cent in a field of activity*" (Swales, 2013). As early as 2007, it was noted by Haas et al. (2007) that LGBT employees are often in higher levels of management than their heterosexual counterparts, thereby increasing the likelihood that they form a substantial percentage of the top 10% of talent. GTM as a field of study was developed from a need to modify and customise domestic talent policies and practices to better suit locations outside of an MNC's home country (Minbaeva and Collings, 2013). GTM is defined by Tarique and Schuler (2010) as "*systematically utilizing IHRM activities (complementary HRM policies and policies) to attract, develop, and retain individuals with high levels of human capital (e.g., competency, personality, motivation) consistent with the strategic directions of the multinational enterprise in a dynamic, highly competitive, and global environment*" (p. 123).

Academic literature tends to take a general and prescriptive focus on GTM (e.g. Mellahi and Collings, 2010; Minbaeva and Collings, 2013; Scullion et al., 2010; Vaiman and Collings, 2013), to the extent that further research is needed on country-specific factors that impact on GTM in practice (see, as an example, Scullion and Collings, 2011). This includes how IHRM activities (attraction, development and retention) operate together to address the challenges of GTM specifically in relation to different stakeholders (see, e.g., Scullion and Collings, 2011). We aim to fill this research gap by examining why LGBT expatriates undertake international assignments to dangerous locations and how, through the lens of their employer's duty of care, they successfully navigate the risks that are presented to them when doing so.

### *2.1 Why LGBT expatriates matter*

One of the biggest challenges HR professionals face when managing a global talent pool is to "*ensure just the right amount of talent, at the right place, at the right price, and at the right time when at times there may be shortages of talent and at other times surpluses of talent*" (Tarique and Schuler, 2010, p.130). Recent research suggests that, more often than not, MNCs struggle to find the talent they need, particularly for overseas deployment (Beechler and Woodward, 2009; Farrell and Grant, 2005; Findlay, 2006). Thus, amidst a shrinking talent pool, coupled with an increasingly high demand for qualified people to engage in international assignments, LGBT expatriates represent a potentially important but insufficiently tapped and under-researched component of the global talent agenda. While this gap in the literature may be explained by a lack of access to, or interest in, studying this unique cohort of assignees, McPhail et al. (2014) found that a significant pool of LGBT expatriates is not only already engaged in global mobility, but also willing to participate in academic studies. McNulty (2014, 2015) and Gedro et al. (2013) found similar results by studying the lived experience of non-traditional expatriates and lesbian and gay academics, respectively. Thus, central to the

aims of our study is the assertion that GTM cannot be confined to a reliance on solely heterosexual single or coupled assignees as the predominant means by which global staffing shortages are addressed (Kaplan, 2014). Indeed, recent research (as shown above) suggests that LGBT status neither postpones international assignment opportunities nor precludes engagement in global mobility altogether.

Furthermore, McPhail et al. (2014) found that LGBT expatriates' sexual minority status can be viewed as both a disabler and *an enabler*, whereby some may be accepted in host countries even when homosexuality is deemed legally or socially unacceptable for locals, and others may enjoy legal and financial independence within their home-life partnerships that provide them with more mobility 'successes' than their heterosexual colleagues. Additionally, some have been found to play a valuable role in contributing to inclusivity debates and policy development about LGBT expatriation within the MNC, whereas others have been able to leverage unique networks of support available only within the LGBT community to facilitate their successful expatriation both professionally and personally as well as across cultures and borders (see also McPhail and Fisher, 2015).

## 2.2 *The challenges of LGBT expatriation*

Little is known about the challenges that HR professionals face in compensating and supporting LGBT expatriates from a policy perspective, particularly when policies and benefits assigned to them in the home country are not as readily transferable once deployed abroad on an international assignment (see Malecki et al., 2013). This is likely complicated by LGBT expatriates' hyper-diversity; 'diverse' in the sense that, before even relocating abroad, LGBT employees represent a unique point of difference compared to many of their heterosexual colleagues, and 'hyper' because expatriation adds another layer of complexity to their already unique status (Doucerain et al., 2013). For example, when one's sexuality is hidden there is a double cost: firstly, to the individual who must remain alert, thereby incurring stress, and, secondly, to the organisation which suffers the decreased productivity of that worker owing to lower levels of trust the employee experiences (Woody, 2007). During expatriation, an additional cost may be borne by both the employee and the MNC in the form of unplanned 'crises' that arise when one's sexual minority status becomes unexpectedly 'known' in an unwelcoming host country.

In the light of the above, HR's duty of care to LGBT expatriates is undoubtedly challenged by factors both internal and external to the MNC. These include issues surrounding globalisation, changing demographics, the changing nature of employment, the demand for workers with specific competencies, the availability and identification of employees who embody the specific competencies required, as well as finding employees who are motivated to live and work abroad and to succeed in doing so (Tarique and Schuler, 2010). Additional challenges at the individual level include how best to develop an MNC's internal global talent pool given that employees' skills and abilities can vary from complete inexperience and naivety to over-inflated self-assurance, which may impact on LGBT employees' receptiveness to safety warnings (Beechler and Woodward, 2009; Schuler et al., 2011; Scullion and Collings, 2011), particularly in dangerous locations.

To overcome these challenges at the individual level, an 'employer/employee rubric' which builds on the work of Gedro et al. (2013) goes some way towards providing a

framework for LGBT international assignment selection (McPhail et al., 2014). The framework includes important issues such as legal status in the selected destination, social climate, organisational 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 at the point of selection are presented in relation to each of these issues. Importantly, while Gedro et al. (2013) proposed the initial questions and provided suggested actions that employees and employers could enact prior to relocation, McPhail et al. (2014) went on to add empirical findings from 20 lesbian and gay expatriates in relation to the relevance of each action.

In this study, our aim is to further extend the framework by focusing only on the issues Gedro et al. (2013) proposed and to consider these in the context of LGBT expatriates' deployment to dangerous locations and their perceptions of HR's duty of care. Our approach implies two things: (1) more 'duty of care' is required when expatriating LGBT employees and (2) even more 'duty of care' is required when expatriating LGBT employees to dangerous locations, but only in the context of how this is defined by LGBT expatriates themselves. This distinction is critical because there are likely to be mismatches relating to expectations of HR's duty of care in terms of the support received, offered and taken up by both parties (the MNC and the expatriate) dependent on the degree to which either party perceives a particular location to be 'dangerous' or not. For example, Mizzi (2014) investigated the (in)visibility of LGBT expatriates prior to their departure to Kosovo and found that pre-departure orientations given by their agencies were deemed insufficient for LGBT expatriates. As a result, Mizzi (2014) argued that LGBT expatriates have to seek support, information and direction from other parties. This implies that the agencies still operate within the hetero-normativity framework. Moreover, Jolly (2011) argued that hetero-normativity can serve as a reliable framework for understanding the work of international development. Further, hetero-normativity can be used to identify trends and instances where development work has prolonged inequalities associated with gender and sexuality. An example of how hetero-normativity interferes with an individual's life is the pre-departure orientation held by two aid agencies studied by Mizzi (2014), in which they excluded families with same-sex parents from discussions that focused on the role of family members in missions. Mizzi (2014) proposed the need for applying a radical shift in pre-departure orientations and thus, to include mainstream sexuality and gender differences as core curriculum knowledge to contextualise the foreign work assignment. However, Fee et al. (2013) acknowledged that HR professionals do not perceive duty of care to expatriates as being one of their main job responsibilities and instead consider it as an operational, reputational or public relations issue.

### **3 Duty of care**

Duty of care is broadly defined as an organisation's moral and legal responsibility to protect its employees' health, safety and security (Claus, 2009; Claus, 2011; Fee et al., 2013). Scholars suggest that a good duty of care plan should bring together security, health, travel, legal and HR perspectives and be integrated throughout an MNC's structure and practices (Rendeiro, 2012), be aligned with the strategic direction of the organisation and be widely disseminated internally (Beechler and Woodward, 2009; Schuler et al., 2011). This is in line with Ulrich's (1997) model of HR management

consisting of four roles (strategic partner, change agent, administrative expert and employee champion), of which the latter two describe the legal and psychological role of HR professionals to protect employees, listen to their concerns and respond to their needs (Friedman, 2007). Fee et al. (2013) suggest that crisis and evaluation planning and response should be prioritised in order to protect the strategic, operational and ethical interests of the organisation as doing so is likely to improve employee commitment and performance (see also Liu and Ipe, 2010). Moreover, employees who perceive effective crisis support are suggested to be better adjusted and to have obtained valuable knowledge from the experience (Fee et al., 2013; Haslberger and Brewster, 2009).

### 3.1 HRM's duty of care to LGBT expatriates

From an intercultural perspective, duty of care clearly extends to those HR professionals engaged in global mobility activities. For example, before an employee is sent abroad on an international assignment, there is a duty of care to review the location and the inherent risks involved for the employee, particularly if the employee is known or thought to be in a sexual minority (e.g. LGBT). Indeed, research has found that one of the top stressors for international assignees and international business travellers is “*living or working somewhere hostile or threatening*” (Perkins and Shortland, 2006). Yet, recent studies suggest that HR practitioners commonly have skill and/or knowledge gaps that prevent them from effectively analysing and dealing with security risks and issues that expatriates may encounter while working abroad (Fee et al., 2013; Schuler et al., 2011). Some organisations choose to outsource this responsibly to specialists (e.g. *International SOS*) who are knowledgeable in expatriation and have an up-to-date awareness of the laws, culture, infrastructure and safety concerns of the host country (Cartus, 2012; Fee et al., 2013). While clearly of benefit, doing so may also become a hindrance if HR professionals are not fully aware of the risks involved for both the company and the employee, and this information is not simultaneously shared within the organisation (Fee et al., 2013), particularly in the decision-making stage of the assignment. Duty of care therefore extends not only to employees, but also to significant organisational stakeholders (e.g. line managers in both the home and the host countries) who have immediate responsibility for the assignee's day-to-day well-being and overall safety.

Of particular relevance to LGBT expatriates is the added HR duty of care in relation to organisational knowledge of employment laws and HR policies and practices in host-country locations for sexual minorities *prior to deployment* (Friedman, 2007). If there is great uncertainty surrounding the choice of location to which an LGBT employee may be sent, scenario planning may assist an MNC to anticipate and consider how the organisation might respond to the unexpected (Schuler et al., 2011). Fee et al. (2013) nonetheless contend that HR professionals often perceive their duty of care to expatriates as being outside their main job responsibility and instead view it as an operational, reputational or public relations issue, despite the widely held view that organisations have a legal and arguably moral duty to protect not only their employees but also the organisation and the wider community (Schuler et al., 2011). Thus, knowledge of employment laws and HR policies and practices for sexual minorities may not be known or considered important. In heeding Gedro's (2007, p.153) call, we contend that HR needs to “*lead the profession through researching this relatively recent, but largely under discussed work place challenge*”. We do so on the basis that HR has a clear responsibility to “*advocate, educate, research, and act as change agents for issues*



*related to LGBT minorities in international contexts*" (Brooks and Edwards, 2009, p.146), which is likely to result in providing "*the background for how employees, gay and straight, learn the organizations values regarding inclusion and diversity*" (Munoz and Thomas, 2006, p.88).

### 3.2 *Defining dangerous locations for LGBT expatriates*

Villa da Costa (2009) defines a dangerous location as one where (a) a country is at war; (b) civil insurrection or terrorism exists and presents physical harm or imminent danger to the health or well-being of an employee; (c) there is widespread, uncontrolled violence or disease; (d) a lack of infrastructure exists; (e) there is a lack of family support services; and (f) extreme physical conditions are present. For the purpose of this study, we define a dangerous location for LGBT expatriates as one where there is any event or circumstance that presents a threat, real or perceived, to the health, well-being, safety and security of an LGBT employee including a lack of social or legal protection on the grounds of sexual orientation. We justify our definition on the following grounds.

First, a dangerous location does not necessarily require that a threat to one's health or well-being is real. Rather, a perceived threat is sufficient on the basis that many of the risks LGBT employees face are, in fact, invisible or implicit. Consider, for example, that employees in dangerous locations are faced with many visible, explicit and obvious threats arising from war, extreme physical conditions, violence, disease, terrorism, insurrection and a lack of infrastructure, but that LGBT employees, even without being in a declared and well-known 'dangerous location', face three additional threats in the form of religious, political or legal intolerance that are largely invisible and implicit, and based solely on assumptions about their sexual orientation. This is especially the case in India where same-sex relationships between consenting adults was decriminalised in 2009 in a landmark judgement that subsequently saw companies such as Google and Goldman Sachs set up LGBT networks for their Indian employees (Joshi, 2013), but where Christian, Sikh, Hindu and Muslim communities continue to denounce homosexuality. Although this suggests that there is increasing awareness of a commitment to inclusivity at the policy level within MNCs, it does not alter the fact that India may still remain an unwelcoming host country for LGBT employees, particularly if an employee chooses to be 'out' at work as well as in their social lives. Thus, a seemingly 'safe' location in all other respects can become a threatening location for LGBT expatriates where there exists legal, religious or cultural hostility towards people of a non-heterosexual orientation for which there are likely to be more serious potential consequences than for their heterosexual counterparts (Waddell, 2014).

Second, the threat to an LGBT expatriate's health, well-being, safety and security, including a lack of social or legal protection on the grounds of sexual orientation, may indeed be real. Countries such as Saudi Arabia, Qatar and United Arab Emirates, for example, give death sentence to those convicted of homosexual acts (Expatriate Gay, 2013; Silver, 2014), despite that none of them is technically considered a 'dangerous location' for heterosexual employees. Such ambiguity is an inherent part of the LGBT employee's working life, from which a crisis may ensue simply by the identification of one's sexual orientation. Such crises may be sudden, unexpected and unwanted, requiring fast decision-making and causing immense problems if no action is taken. Additionally, while the probability is potentially low that crises relating to LGBT expatriates will arise in

dangerous locations, the consequences are undoubtedly of high impact and likely to create significant psychological stress for both the employee and his or her employer (Lerbinger, 2012).

Third, the 'global closet' can be perceived as a dangerous location for LGBT expatriates because it entails a circumstance in which stigmatisation and discrimination in the workplace may limit their psychological well-being from a career standpoint. Gedro (2010, p.396) refers to the global closet as one that "*represents the international scope of lesbian challenges ... and the necessary negotiation of lesbian identity when traveling and working overseas including invisibility, discrimination, stigmatization, and safety and security issues*". The global closet can, of course, also apply to gay, bisexual and transgender employees. Importantly, Gedro (2010, p.395) asserts that such discrimination often begins in the home country, where the "lavender ceiling" is perceived by LGBT employees to be a means by which organisations tend not to "*promote those in the sexual minority (i.e., those who are not heterosexual) to positions of increased authority, power, prestige, and formal responsibility*" (see also Hill, 2009). Such discrimination can be direct and formal (e.g. termination) and/or indirect and informal (e.g. exclusion from salary increases, bonuses, promotions and increased responsibility; Noknoi and Wutthirong, 2007). Importantly, because international assignments are often perceived as a critical step on the career ladder within MNCs, lack of access to international assignment opportunities for LGBT employees can represent a covert form of discrimination. Thus, while the global closet may represent a dangerous physical circumstance for those already abroad, there are likely to be many more LGBT employees facing a similarly dangerous psychological circumstance by being stuck under the lavender ceiling.

When defining dangerous locations for LGBT employees, it is important to remember that not all threats to an employee's health and well-being are created equal. This means that many of the risks LGBT expatriates face are moderated by a combination of factors including (1) the individual's own propensity for engaging in risk-taking behaviour; (2) the level of support provided by their organisation prior to and during an assignment; and (3) the degree of knowledge attained about the perceived and real threats one is likely to face in any particular host country. In the latter case, Waddell (2014) found in his study of same-sex expatriates that while Thailand appears at surface level to be accepting of homosexuals, there is nonetheless quite rampant homophobia and varying levels of acceptance of masculine and feminine same-sex persons. Thus, many LGBT expatriates are likely to conceal their sexual orientation from the outside world to protect themselves from legal issues, such as those that exist in anti-gay propaganda laws present, for example, in Russia. Conversely, despite Nunan and Vittorio (2009) suggesting some destinations may not be a viable option for expatriates, McPhail et al. (2014) found that many lesbian and gay participants in their study had lived and worked in what might be considered the most 'dangerous' locations for LGBT expatriates, e.g. Yemen and Lebanon. Indeed, some said the ability to associate freely with the same gender (given cultural norms segregating the sexes) was an advantage.

#### 4 Methodology

This study utilised a qualitative, inductive approach to draw on LGBT expatriates' lived experience as international assignees in dangerous locations, including their perceptions of HR's duty of care. Data were drawn from 13 LGBT expatriates, including nine who

were surveyed and a further four who participated in in-depth interviews, to allow for core themes to be explored with enough flexibility to give participants an opportunity to identify issues that they considered important and to elaborate on critical incidents (Creswell and Clark, 2007).

#### *4.1 Case study rationale*

A case-study approach is justifiable on several grounds. First, it addresses the need for more LGBT expatriate research such as that of McPhail et al. (2014) and Gedro et al. (2013), whose frameworks for international assignment selection represent clear examples of conceptualising duty of care as an ongoing process. Second, the dynamic nature of HR's duty of care is important on the basis that LGBT expatriates' safety and well-being is in a constant state of change according to the degree of risk and danger they are dealing with in different geographical locations. Thus, laws pertaining to the location in which LGBT expatriates are deployed in conjunction with the informal comfort level of local citizens towards homosexuality require more detailed analysis than questionnaires or surveys alone can provide. The case study method allowed us to explore the lived experience in detail, and facilitated access to information that heretofore has been difficult to obtain and publish. While we acknowledge our method is not a typical case approach in that we did not focus on one particular case, but instead on 13 'lived experiences', each with different backgrounds, industries, sectors and host countries, our approach is valuable because it allowed us to distil themes emerging across all of the cases into the two 'case studies' that best exemplify issues that are common to all 13 participants.

#### *4.2 Sample characteristics*

For the purposes of this study, LGBT expatriates are defined as those who are currently company assigned as well as self-initiated (for key differences, see Tharenou, 2013). Importantly, the sample is representative of prior research showing that more assignees, including LGBT expatriates and especially women, are engaging in alternative forms of global work experience, including self-initiated assignments and localisation (e.g. Tait et al., 2012; Tharenou, 2008). The participants reported in this study are 13 male and female assignees who identify as LGBT expatriates, nine of whom have lived and worked, or are still living and working, in dangerous locations. The participants work in a range of industries including mining, foreign affairs and education (see Table 1). We note that differences in participants' age, industry, position and duration of stay in the dangerous host country impacts upon the diversity of the findings and needs to be considered in each participant's responses.

Semi-structured interviews with four respondents were conducted via Skype over a two-month period in August and September 2014, with online survey respondents ( $n = 9$ ) participating over the same period. Interview and survey questions were identical to allow for thematic analysis and core themes to emerge with enough flexibility to allow participants to identify issues that they considered important and to elaborate on critical incidents (i.e. by asking respondents to either 'tell me more' or by inserting in the online survey a 'further comments' box after key questions; Creswell and Clark, 2007).

**Table 1** Sample characteristics of LGBT expatriate participants ( $n = 13$ )

#	Name	Gender/LGBT	Age	Marital status	Child	Partner/ child on IA	CAE/SIE	Employer industry	Position held	Home country	Locations lived in	Dangerous locations*
<i>Interview</i>												
#1	Nicola	F/L	31	Engaged	0	N	CAE	NGO international relations	Manager	Norway	Switzerland 1.5 yrs UK 3 yrs	Lebanon 2 yrs Zambia 1 yr
#2	Will	M/G	33	Single	0	N	CAE	Mining	Manager	Australia		South Africa 18 mths
#3	Yvette	F/L	46	Married	1	Y	CAE	Financial dev'tment	Senior specialist	USA	Brazil 15 yrs	Cameroon 1yr Malawi 2yrs Indonesia 4 yrs
#4	Troy	M/G	36	Married	0	Y	CAE	Government	Technical specialist	Norway	Norway 2 yrs Colombia 1 yr South Africa 3 yrs	Yemen 1 yr Egypt 6 mths Panama 2 yrs
<i>Survey</i>												
#5	Jonah	M/G	50	De facto	1	N	CAE	Education/finance	C-suite executive	Canada	Hong Kong & China 7 yrs Thailand 1.5 yrs	–
#6	Rachel	F/L	40	De facto	1	Y	CAE	Social work	C-suite executive	Australia	Fiji 3.5 yrs	–
#7	Toby	M/G	30	De facto	0	Y	SIE	Foreign affairs	Supervisor	USA	Serbia 2 yrs Mexico 3 yrs	Russia 5 yrs Georgia 1 yr
#8	Sam	M/B	40	Single	4	Y	SIE	Public health	Volunteer	Liberia	US 3 yrs	Ghana 1 yr Nigeria 1 yr
#9	Zac	M/G	30	Single	0	Y	CAE	Science	Manager	USA	Canada 5 yrs	USA 25 yrs
#10	Anna	F/L	37	De facto	0	Y	CAE	Healthcare	Manager	USA	Switzerland 5 yrs Mexico 4 yrs Canada 1 yr	–
#11	Rick	M/G	50	Married	0	N	CAE	Education	Retired	USA	Hong Kong & China 1 yr	Beirut 1 mth Saudi Arabia 1 yr
#12	Yula	F/L	25	Married	0	Y	SIE	Education	Jnr	USA	Spain 5 yrs	–
#13	Irina	F/L	45	Married	0	Y	SIE	Oil and gas	Middle Manager	Ireland	UK 2 yrs Netherlands 17 yrs Thailand 2 yrs Canada 4 yrs	–

Note: \*As determined by respondent.

Using a theoretical sampling approach (Creswell, 2003), two interview participants were invited to join the study via personal invitation, being identified as LGBT expatriates through the authors' personal networks, who then contacted other LGBT expatriates in their network to suggest they also participate, thus leading to a snowball approach (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). The nine survey respondents were sourced using a combination of personal networks, snowballing and social media. Once we had developed the survey instrument using the same questions as used in the interviews, we created a questionnaire using online survey software (at <https://www.surveymonkey.com>) and placed a link online at <http://expatresearch.com>. We then posted an invitation on Facebook, LinkedIn and Google Plus to source participants, using memberships to lesbian and gay associations (e.g. 'Fruits-in-Suits') to gain access to LGBT employees. As a result, 13 LGBT expatriates participated in total. Using a 'small-N' case study approach (see Blatter and Haverland, 2012), two of the four interviews are reported here in richly detailed vignettes as best representing perceptions of HRM's duty of care to LGBT expatriates working in dangerous locations. We further elaborate key findings by using quotes from the remaining respondents.

It is not possible to assess how large the LGBT expatriate population may be from which to determine a non-response rate given that some LGBT employees do not wish to make their status known and are therefore not easily identified. As such, we consider a response rate of 13 participants to be a good result, with the online survey facilitating anonymity for those who felt uncomfortable with being identified.

### *4.3 Case study framework*

Questions asked during the interviews were developed from a limited number of prior studies on LGBT expatriates as well as an in-depth literature review across both academic and industry literatures. An interview guide was subsequently developed. We adopted Yin's (2003) advice to use multiple case studies to uncover what is common among respondents but also what is unique under certain contexts (e.g. by studying unusual or extreme cases; Eisenhardt and Graebner, 2007; Hartley, 1994). We were further guided by Blatter and Haverland (2012) to gather diverse empirical observations from each case in order to intensively reflect on the relationship between our observations and broader theoretical concepts such as GTM and duty of care.

Each participant was advised that the research was conducted in accordance with the participating universities' ethical protocols, that their participation was voluntary and that all responses would be treated in confidence, with anonymity assured by pseudonyms to be utilised in any published research. All participants were further 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.

Interviews ranged from 1 to 2 hours in length, and were recorded and transcribed. Surveys and interview transcripts were 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 and Lincoln, 2000), as well as content analysis to determine how strongly the themes are manifested (Miles and Huberman, 1994). Although participants provided a single-rater response, they can be viewed as expert informants.

## 5 Findings

In this section, we use narrative analysis and develop two vignettes about the lived experiences of LGBT expatriates in dangerous locations. The narrative analysis is applied to two of the four interview participants as best representing across the total sample of 13 respondents the issues and challenges LGBT expatriates face when relocating abroad to a dangerous location. From the remaining respondents we draw insights and aggregated data to further convey key themes. We use narrative analysis as a methodological perspective that recounts the lived experience through stories to humanise those engaged in global mobility (Favell et al., 2006; Marshall and Rossman, 2006). In doing so, we retell their lived experiences through two richly detailed vignettes as representative of the total sample's combined experiences. Narrative analysis is seen as a powerful way to give participants' a voice through which to retell and relive their experiences. A key feature of narrative analysis in this study is to focus on the unusual, i.e. case-based accounts of LGBT expatriates living in dangerous locations that are considered a risk to their health, safety and well-being. In the first vignette, we meet Troy (#4), a native of Norway, who has lived in six dangerous locations as an LGBT expatriate.

### *First vignette*

Troy is a 37-year-old gay married man who has in the past expatriated both with and without his partner. He is a company-assigned government technical specialist who has lived in dangerous locations that include Yemen, Egypt, Panama, South Africa, Columbia and most recently Honduras. Although he has travelled extensively for work as a gay man, it was only recently that he decided to undertake assignments to countries that shun homosexuality. "I received a lot of support to go. I was very positively surprised because I hadn't really considered going to any Islamic law country. Yemen is one of the seven countries in the world where there's still occasional executions of LGBT people. Needless to say, I made a decision to go back into the closet at work when I went there."

In Yemen, Troy experienced first-hand how dangerous a location can be. "I was kidnapped and kept for 12 days by a tribe. I was taken while walking home. That area of Sanaa is not an unsafe area; it is a diplomatic area. I was following all the rules and this car pulled up and out they came with machine guns and brought me up in the mountains where I was kept."

Although he was relatively well taken care of by his kidnappers, for example being served food and given clothes, personal hygiene articles and cigarettes, he was nonetheless fearful about his sexual identity being revealed.

"I was in a very, very homophobic environment where the young men who were taking care of me would sit and be very intimate with each other, holding hands and lying on top of each other. You have to understand that in Yemen I managed to meet quite a large group of local Yemeni gay males through social networks, social media and getting in touch with people in and through referrals from my international friends and that we would have social gatherings with them. And because you're not supposed to be around women at all, it is much easier to have a social gathering at your house with ten or 12 men and hide that you are gay ... which you then know is a clear indication that it is a very homophobic society."

Thankfully, the sexuality issue never came out while Troy was in captivity, largely owing to his own efforts. "I got to keep my phones and I did quite a lot to cover up any sort of trace. I was deleting all my intimate pictures, contacts, videos, everything. I did this very consciously on the LGBT side of things. I don't know what would have happened if it had come out." Eventually, Troy received support from his government and employer to be safely returned home, and was redeployed three months later.

In another incident, in Panama, Troy was detained once again. "We were stopped by the police with some friends, just around midnight, as we were getting a taxi. We were taken to the prison for questioning. But how could they possibly just take you – you have to have done something." In Troy's mind, this incident occurred because of the group's gay status. "In that sense I did feel that being LGBT and out with friends late at night was dangerous."

In both instances, Troy was disappointed with HR's response to his plight. While he believes HR does have a duty of care to LGBT employees – 'most definitely – no doubt' – he does not feel that HR understands what this entails. "I'm not saying that we need a different kind of support, but we need to know that there is support in countries where the situation can get worse because of being LGBT." Although Troy felt he had received good preparation from headquarters before expatriating to dangerous LGBT locations in terms of general safety and security information for each posting, the local HR was found to be overly bureaucratic, with a 'just follow the rules' approach. For example, while he praised HR for agreeing to notify his partner of his kidnapping despite at the time not being his legal dependent, the handling of his situation post-kidnapping was disappointing. "I got mixed messages, and no one stayed in touch. Then I had to take sick leave after the event, which was so odd – I had to apply for sick leave as a sort of 'diagnosis' for explaining my absence owing to the kidnapping. In some ways those 12 days in captivity were almost a breeze compared to the three months of sitting around doing nothing afterwards as HR arranged my redeployment."

At the headquarters, support has been much better. Troy has been working with a group of 25 employees, including senior leaders of the organisation, to make recommendations on policy and practice for LGBT equality. It includes revising the evacuation policy to ensure that assistance is provided to non-legal spouses in dangerous LGBT locations. In Honduras, his workplace conducted a short diversity workshop that was well received by his colleagues. "HR needs to adopt a standardised way of dealing with this, almost a one-page checklist. This could be done when signing contracts and HR can say 'whether you are LGBT or not, just be aware this country is like this and that. And if this is something that applies to you and you would like more information, please get in touch with this person or that person to discuss it further.' It should not be difficult to do, and then HR just has to make sure everybody knows."

Troy also stresses the importance of straight people being provided information. "You cannot count on people always being open about being gay. Diversity training is essential, even just an hour once a year or doing an annual campaign to create awareness or providing emails or networks such as the ILGA's website (<http://ilga.org>) to check what's going on in this and that country."

In the context of this study, Troy's story is not uncommon, not just because the support extended to him by HR was relatively poor but because, like others in the study, he is also actively engaged at the organisational level in improving policy for LGBT employees that deploy to dangerous locations. From a GTM perspective, this fits with the idea that MNCs are both aware of and actively addressing ways to expand their talent pool populations by providing (1) broader safety nets of support for non-traditional assignees (such as LGBT expatriates) to increase their willingness to go and, in turn, (2) a wider range of geographical locations to which they can be sent.

From a duty of care perspective, Troy suggests that policy improvements largely come down to *"the attitudes and leadership in the office"*. In addressing research question 1 (*what are LGBT expatriates' perceptions of HR's duty of care when deploying them to dangerous locations?*), his experiences highlight not only that many assignees have expectations that HR has a responsibility towards LGBT expatriates' well-being particularly in dangerous locations (findings show, for example, that 55% of respondents recognise a mutual responsibility), but also that HR itself probably feels it also has a duty of care. *"Both parties are in agreement"*, he suggests, *"but the challenge is that LGBT expatriates don't perceive HR understands what their duty of care is or what it entails"*. Often this arises because HR is unsure whether *"to ask an uncomfortable question"* (#1 Nicola) particularly if *"I've never hidden my sexuality but me being gay is not something I've disclosed to HR"* (#2 Will). This then leaves an impression that HR either wants to provide support but that *"the resources just don't exist"* (#5 Jonah) or that *"relocation gets farmed out to external consultants, so it is very much the expectation that you work it out yourself"* (#2 Will). Other respondents stated they had not engaged with HR in any way and for those that had, it had been largely transactional: *"HR purely signs your contract and puts it in the system and there's not even really a discussion; it should be about staff welfare [but] there's nothing, absolutely nothing"* (#1 Nicola). Therefore, the view that diversity and inclusiveness policies are largely *"a lot of talk but no action"* (#12 Yula) is one mirrored throughout the findings: when the respondents were asked *"Which of the following reflects your experience of HR in relation to your status as an LGBT expatriate living and working abroad, whether or not in a dangerous location"*, 45% answered, *"Who or what is HR? If we have an HR department, they have never contacted me..."*, with a further 33% indicating *"HR have been hopeless"* or *"HR have been ok but I'm disappointed they didn't do more as I've had to do a lot myself"*. Instances that amounted to perceptions that duty of care had not been provided include (1) a lack of information about the specifics of living and working in a dangerous location as an LGBT; (2) a lack of equal policy; and (3) a lack of support when being outed in the host location. A common issue is that while basic security training and information is often provided, it does not cover LGBT. Furthermore, while information about the recognition of same-sex marriages is also frequently provided (i.e. a same-sex partner will be evacuated if there's a crisis), especially lacking is how to deal with the added emotional burden of living in and navigating a dangerous location, including higher levels of stress and risk that go hand in hand with crisis situations. Findings further show that many respondents source support informally by *"having chats with some people of my age in the office ... to get general advice. It's only probably over 18 months I've been here that I've learnt bits and pieces from different people. There was never a proper preparation"* (#2 Will). Where a duty of care was an organisational priority, participants noted receiving equal support to their heterosexual colleagues, being *"informed of the political*



*climate, regions that might pose a threat and given access to support services"* (#6 Rachel), and in one case a participant was reassigned from Russia at the peak of unrest regarding LGBT laws owing to concerns over their well-being.

Findings in this study show that more dialogue between the affected parties (e.g. assignee, and home- and host-country HR) is needed to understand what LGBT expatriates require from HR from a duty of care standpoint. The types of support that respondents say they require include (a) briefings about policies, procedures and entitlements for them and their partner prior to departure, such as *"the legality within the location, as well as the social expectations or social attitudes towards LGBT people"* (#2 Will); (b) utilising LGBT-friendly relocation agents; (c) proactively facilitating connections to local networks to ease transition during an assignment; (d) ensuring non-discrimination policies exist in host locations and that all staff are trained in these and that they are enforced; and (e) maintaining contact after an assignment, particularly if an evacuation or forced departure from the host location arises. Others state that they need to be deployed to locations that foster an inclusive environment, with the added confidence that their employer will provide access to emergency support *"to get you out of a danger zone in time"* (#8 Sam) and to *"get you out of prison or relocate you if it got too hard"* (#1 Nicola). The sense that the employer is *"only a phone call or email away"* (#1 Nicola) is critically important for all respondents.

In terms of research question 3 (*How do LGBT expatriates engage in successful expatriation to dangerous locations?*), nearly all of the participants perceive that duty of care is a *shared* responsibility between HR and the assignee that each employee must accept at an individual level. One respondent in South Africa, having begun to make connections within the local community and within the company, began to understand where he should be careful and what he should be careful about, particularly in the conservative and traditional mining industry in which he worked. *"I'm not going to put a rainbow flag on my desk any time soon"*, he surmised (#2 Will). Another said, *"It is a personal choice if I want to work in Uganda, so to some extent I have to face the consequences of my own choice even if I don't like it. For example, you can't put your office at risk, by being open. You should be able to be, but sometimes reality is very different"* (#1 Nicola).

#### *Second vignette*

The second vignette is one that focuses on a gay family in Jakarta highlighting another common theme among LGBT expatriates as a major issue in dangerous locations: the safety of their children. As with most of the participants' stories, the ability to cope with the small details of LGBT life that can escalate into bigger challenges and life-threatening situations for the employee and their family members is one that is not openly acknowledged.

<p>Yvette is a 46-year-old American married mother of a 12-year-old girl and an environmental specialist who works for a large international financial and development institution. Her employer makes loans to governments in developing countries for them to boost economic growth and sustainable development. Currently posted in Jakarta, she has already had an extensive international career including posts in Brazil, Cameroon, Malawi and Washington, DC. Yvette's wife currently lives in the USA tending to an elderly dog and visits the family often, with the intention of joining them shortly in Jakarta.</p>
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Yvette has learned what she needs to know about gay life abroad from her experiences in some of the most dangerous locations in the world. “Uganda is where they actually have laws to kill you or put you in jail if you’re gay. Malawi and Cameroon were two field sites that were probably the most dangerous, where I really had to be closeted ... for my daughter. But in addition to national laws, other things also matter, like the overall attitude of a country, your living situation and what the media is saying. For example, in Malawi, the president would come out and say that gay people are worse than street dogs.”

Other issues to contend with include domestic staff living in the house with “access to your dog and to your child and to everything else. You have guards at your house and they have guns and they know where you sleep”. Because her number one concern is the safety and well-being of her daughter, who travels with her, the family currently lives in a serviced apartment so that Yvette does not have to employ any domestic staff or endure the pressure and stress of having “a fake a second bedroom” when her wife eventually joins them. “This gives us a certain amount of freedom, but in previous postings we had a lot of domestic staff, including guards that were armed. You’re handing over your kid to a driver and a nanny who pretty much hate you. So you have to be fairly closeted in those countries simply to survive on a day-to-day basis, particularly if you have a child.”

In terms of living with the duplicity that being gay often requires, Yvette has experienced all sides of the coin: being in/out both inside and outside the organisation, being completely out and also being completely in. “In Sub-Saharan Africa, no matter where I went, because I worked in about 15 countries, I never felt comfortable being out, not to anyone. In Africa, in Malawi and Cameroon, I would never be out to anyone because it was just too dangerous.”

“Here in Jakarta though I feel a lot safer and I’m far more out here in terms of my work space because the office itself is very cosmopolitan. I am out at work because I think it’s very important for local staff who are gay or who have gay people in their family to know that it’s okay to be out. I’m careful though; I’m not out to my clients.”

In terms of HR support, Yvette has always been realistic about what is possible. “I knew my wife would never get a spousal visa in Indonesia; my experience had prepared me for that. So instead I wanted to be guaranteed two things: firstly that my wife could come and stay at least 90 days at a time with multiple entries and second that if there was a medical evacuation or civil strife situation that we would be evacuated as a family. These two matters were more important to me than what type of visa we were allocated.”

In terms of the preparation she received from HR to work in dangerous locations, it could have been better. “Everyone sold Malawi to me as this little rural, dinky country in Southern Africa, very nice, serene, pretty. And I thought, oh, okay, lovely, right? Just perfect for what I want – very family oriented! What they did not tell me is that there are roving gangs of machete wielding expat haters that would come and poison your dog and hack you up.” The briefings Yvette did receive were more about exchange rates, cost of living, risks associated with terrorism or one paragraph in a booklet listing a telephone number that LGBT expatriates could contact if they had questions or concerns.

"I know we're a minority, but we need to make dangerous locations part of the core briefing that we give to staff. While HR is starting to come to the table with the understanding that this is an issue of diversity, and diversity comes in many, many different forms and is not just the white male with his trailing spouse and their 3.5 children, HR is still struggling in a way to get their head around it. How do we look after not just one group of diversity, because there's so many! It's necessary for straight staff, for gay staff and also for staff that have different family compositions – an elderly parent, a disabled spouse, a learning disabled child."

From her current posting in Jakarta, Yvette has many examples of headquarters' duty of care being extended to her and she believes that HR would truly love to be an advocate for LGBT expatriates. She speaks highly of how HR worked together to get her wife a visa, and she was pleased when, prior to her last post, HR recognized them as a family unit in all preparations and documentation. HR also discussed being LGBT in pre-departure training over 15 days of briefings and were "very normal about it". However, local HR in Indonesia was a different story, being largely "under-resourced, basic and transactional". Yvette recommends that HR could adopt a two-tier approach for pre-departure training to dangerous locations, where headquarters provides significant information that is then followed up by host-country HR. "Both should provide local network contacts, and normalise issues by providing information about diversity and the groups within it including various types and forms of 'family'. A brochure about being LGBT should become standard practice across the globe providing sometimes lifesaving support to all areas and especially in the most dangerous locations of all."

After leaving Africa, and before her post to Indonesia, Yvette was determined to make a difference for LGBT in dangerous locations, so she joined her organisation's LGBT Employee Resource Group (ERG) as vice-president. "I implored my employer to get their act together about posting staff in the field because it can be extraordinarily dangerous. I did it by illustrating the diversity of individuals within senior leadership. I mean, we have a vice-president who's a lesbian, we have a senior director who's a lesbian, we have a lot of managers who are out lesbians. So, there's enough out lesbians and out gay men and while we have gay-friendly policies, they've left out this dimension of what it means to send staff out to the field as gay."

Yvette's story, while uncommon from a family perspective, is striking because it illustrates that the experiences of LGBT expatriates in dangerous locations in some cases may have some similarities: threats to their safety and well-being, the duplicity of multiple identities and an activism to make a positive difference for future LGBT expatriates stemming from their experience. From a duty of care perspective, how LGBT expatriates define a 'dangerous location' is an important consideration (*research question 2*), particularly in the light of how HR may respond, taking into account that what is perceived as dangerous to one employee may not be perceived as such by another, or even by HR. While Yvette considers three locations to be dangerous (Indonesia, Cameroon and Malawi; see Table 1 for a listing of dangerous locations as determined by the respondents) and her employer agreed by taking steps to ensure her safety, others expatriate to escape a dangerous *home* country. As Zac (#9) explains, "*I became an expatriate in Canada to escape a dangerous location. Kentucky poses threats of physical violence, refusal to hire or termination from employment. I took great pains to keep my sexual orientation secret ... My productivity and job satisfaction are much*

higher living and working in a GLBT-tolerant atmosphere. Nowhere is perfect, but no one should have to compromise themselves, their well-being or their happiness just to survive.” This definition of a dangerous location fits with others’ views, highlighting the subjective nature of defining what poses a threat to one’s well-being. As Toby (#7) suggests, “Any place that poses an ‘imminent threat’ is dangerous. But even those places may be more safe than others.” John (#5) goes on to suggest that a dangerous location is:

*“one in which quality life or livelihood may be threatened because of sexual orientation. I have answered the questions noting that I felt safe and confident in both locales. However, that came largely from my rank (a big issue in Asia). I was therefore somewhat unassailable. Internally, I felt closeted by my surrounding environment which conspired to pretend my orientation was not evident – and I found this obtuse response difficult to counter without making an issue of it – and in a leadership position, felt that pushing the issue would have brought about negative consequences.”*

While findings show that responses to what constitutes a dangerous location range from “rural areas” (#8 Sam) to “somewhere where local laws do not protect LGBT people, OR, at minimum, where local laws prohibit LGBT activities” (#10 Anna) and “someplace where homosexuality is illegal or in conflict with strong social norms” (#13 Irina), others believe that danger is only present “in places that have the death penalty for homosexual acts” (#11 Rick). We note that, in the case of Zac, his definition of a dangerous location is somewhat provocative because it disrupts a set of assumptions that differ from other respondents’ views, i.e. there may still be parts of Canada that are similar to Kentucky. The idea of a ‘safer’ space in which to live is, then, subjective. As outlined in Table 2, the main themes to emerge in defining a dangerous location for LGBT expatriates include (a) legal/legislated laws that do not protect or that prohibit LGBT orientation and activities; (b) national culture that encourages violence; (c) heightened fear and threat (including death); and (d) threat to or reduced quality of life and livelihood.

**Table 2** Dimensions of dangerous locations for LGBT expatriates

<i>Dimensions</i>	
Legal	Legal repercussions for being ‘out’
	Death penalty for homosexual acts
	Anti-homosexual law/legislation in place or proposed
	Anti-homosexual law/legislation in place and acted on
	Local laws do not protect LGBT people
Cultural	Local laws prohibit LGBT activities
	Rural locations
	Quality life or livelihood threatened if ‘outed’
	Required to be closeted/in
	Imminent threat
	Fear of physical violence, aggression, humiliation, ostracism, demotion and/or termination
Threats of death	
	Culture encourages and does not criminalise violent activity that targets LGBT people

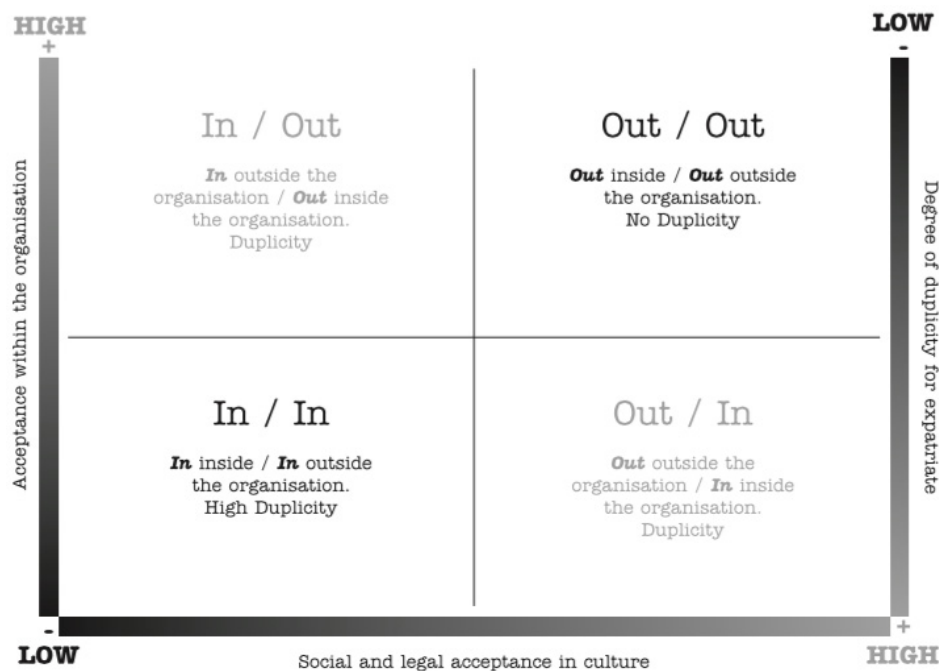
The participants' dangerous locations varied from countries where they had witnessed obvious physical threats such as automatic weapons on a daily basis to having their passport held by their employers in locations with conservative law and religious police to parts of the United States where there was direct physical violence and a refusal to hire LGBT employees and those that were employed being terminated from employment for their sexual orientation. In other countries, participants experienced intense homophobia through the media and religion, e.g. *"right now the church is blaming homosexuals for the spread of the Ebola disease in Liberia"* (#8 Sam) or *"the culture encourages and does not criminalize violent activity that targets LGBT people"* (#6 Rachel). Furthermore, while Troy's kidnapping experience in Yemen is certainly unique (even among respondents in this study), the fear he experienced in Panama at being detained by the authorities for no other reason than being gay is a danger that all the respondents spoke about repeatedly.

In dealing with life as an LGBT expatriate in a dangerous location, participants use a range of coping strategies ranging from heavy drinking and hiding their sexual orientation to keeping a low profile and going to great lengths to understand social (as opposed to only legal) norms. Yvette, for example, spoke of it being important to look at *"the laws of the country and then the attitude of the majority of the population and the domestic situation"*, while Will (#2) suggested, *"although there is no legal discrimination against the LGBT community ... socially it's not very accepted. I had thought prior to my arrival 'there's full equality here; why should there be an issue' but socially I wasn't aware. There is still a lot of negativity towards the LGBT community. It's probably more dangerous within the black community because there are still tribal expectations"*. Troy's situation is a good illustration of understanding social norms as a way to avoid unnecessary risks where, for example, in Yemen it was legislated that *"same sex relationships or intimacy or acts are illegal and punished"*, but in Egypt laws against homosexuality did not exist because in the government's view gay people did not live there. This did not, however, mean that living in Egypt as a gay man was any less dangerous for him than in Yemen.

One critical skill all LGBT expatriates require is the ability to pick up cues from their environment as to how much they can, and cannot, be closeted or restricted in their sexual orientation (i.e. the ability to provide personal duty of care). As Gedro (2010) suggests, coping with duplicity as an inherent part of one's life can be a key issue. This is highlighted in Figure 1 which outlines various degrees of duplicity as a means of facilitating LGBT expatriates' acculturation and, in turn, their overall safety and well-being. When a homosexual assignee perceives, for example, that acceptance of their LGBT status is high within their organisation but low within the host culture, they are required to adopt an 'in/out' level of duplicity by being 'in' outside the organisation and 'out' inside the organisation in order to ensure their physical and psychological safety. If an employee is required to be 'in' within the organisation (i.e. in/in or out/in), Woody (2007) contends that a higher level of duplicity and associated stress occurs because (1) the employee is unable to bring their 'whole' self to work, thus leading to lower levels of productivity and satisfaction, and (2) if the employee can be 'out' outside the organisation, the fear of being 'outed' at work increases owing to a reliance on the organisation for their livelihood, career, next posting and general day-to-day working life. As one participant stated, *"Gays have to be careful and be aware that living silenced and closeted can be lonely and traumatic at times because even when no one is actively discriminating, just having to protect yourself 'in case' brings up a wide range of*

internalised negative social messages about LGBT identity. It's hard and you need at least one 'safe' person that you can be yourself with and who reminds you that you are not alone, and that there are safe places in the world where you can be yourself without fear" (#1 Nicola). Will, for example, having settled into South Africa, is still cautious about whom he discloses his sexual orientation to, noting religion as a potential barrier. Still there are others including entire departments within his organisation who are fully aware of his status. Despite this he cautions, "you're looking for those little social cues, to understand whether or not the person you're talking to is going to react well or react badly" (#2 Will).

**Figure 1** Duplicity matrix for LGBT expatriates



This requires him to adopt forms of duplicity both within and outside of the organisation: "I think a lot of LGBT individuals know how to lie quite well. And I don't think it's about lying, but in some cases, you need to be circumspect, and whilst that's not ideal, sometimes, for your personal safety, it's necessary. You need to read every situation and make sure you are careful about how you act" (#2 Will). Nicola knows this only too well. In one incident in Lebanon she and her girlfriend were stalked by a man for being gay, which she quickly came to realise meant "I couldn't go anywhere for help or talk to anyone to get any kind of justice, which was pretty infuriating and scary. It's dangerous for LGBT for lots of systemic reasons. You can't go to the police. They have a penal code that punishes you for up to a year in prison for any acts against the laws of nature ... there's an egg test performed by police on suspected gay men which has resulted in many of their imprisonment" (#1 Nicola). Will acknowledges that concealing his sexuality does have an impact in the workplace because "You can't be fully who you are with someone,

*so you can't bring that full breadth of knowledge to a strategy discussion or a discussion on how to solve a problem"* (#2 Will). Nicola concurs by explaining: *"In Zambia, I wasn't open to anyone and it wasn't ever talked about. In Lebanon, you can't show any public display of affection and you always have to watch yourself constantly"* (#1 Nicola). Overall, awareness about cultural sensitivities towards LGBT people coupled with an ability to cope with these sensitivities appear to be key traits LGBT employees require when being deployed to dangerous locations.

## **6 Discussion**

An important contribution of this study is the focus on the lived experience of LGBT expatriates, whereby the context within which their expatriation experience unfolds underscores *"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 sexual minority individuals navigate while living and working abroad, and thus to focus on the concrete nature of their lived experience by capturing the complexity of their hyper-diversity in dangerous locations. While Troy's experiences, for instance, represent a deep level of fear and anxiety that seem to plague LGBT expatriates wherever they may be assigned, it is also one of hope – that mobility policies can be improved with education and training and that with sufficient information and communication LGBT expatriates can feel safer about the support that is available to them from their employers.

An important consideration in this study is undoubtedly the context within which expatriation occurs, namely the foreign setting, which may pose problems for some LGBT expatriates more than others in terms of, for example, the safety of the culture for being, firstly, homosexual (McPhail et al., 2014), and then a lesbian (Gedro, 2010), or the inability to relocate to a location where an adopted child is not recognised as a dependent. For others, such as split family assignments, context emerges from the nature of the arrangement where critical family challenges can include loneliness, resentment, a feeling of abandonment and physical and financial stress (Copeland, 2009). It is worth noting, however, that all of the participants at some point during their expatriation could have opted out of the international assignment for fear of being stigmatised, 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, 2010; Gedro et al., 2013; McNulty, 2014, for similar findings). That many of them are successful in negotiating expatriation in a dangerous location despite their LGBT status is telling. More research is nonetheless needed to understand the indirect and covert barriers that may exist to prevent them from actively participating in the international labour market beyond their current assignment, and why some may continue to hide their sexual orientation status out of concern for their safety and security.

A further contribution is that the 'comfort factor' is identified by participants as being more important than the legal status of LGBT people in a particular host country. This means that while LGBT may be legally accepted, the social norms of the local culture are perceived as a more legitimate assessment of the threat to be expected and the extent to which an employer can adequately protect LGBT expatriates from underlying cultural assumptions, discrimination and threats. In other words, while a surface level

investigation of a host country may reveal that minority sexual orientation status is legal and appears to be accepted, identified same-gender people may still be at risk of negative homophobic attention (Schuler et al., 2011). This, then, has implications (a) when selecting LGBT expatriates for deployment to dangerous locations (Can the employee cope in a location where he/she is not socially accepted? Can the candidate engage in a level of duplicity that ensures his/her safety?) and (b) when training and preparing LGBT employees for deployment where, for example, visiting the location many times before relocation to determine the level of social acceptance is a highly favoured strategy amongst the participants, followed by information being obtained informally from local networks to further ascertain comfort levels and acceptance. To assist in the selection of LGBT expatriates, an LGBT employer/employee framework for international assignments, including dangerous locations, should take into account factors such as the legal status, social climate and organisational climate of LGBT in the country of relocation, whether the employee has disclosed their sexual minority status at the home location prior to deployment abroad, and if an employee is relocating with a partner and/or children.

Undoubtedly, the success factors for LGBT expatriates in dangerous locations represent a further contribution of the study (*research question 3*). These include (1) being open-minded, creative and adaptable; (2) being aware of one's surroundings, culture and local customs in relation to LGBT status and how that may be perceived by others; (3) being self-aware and at ease with the uncomfortableness of concealing one's sexuality and/or the degree of duplicity required to mitigate threats and risks to one's life; (4) maintaining a network of trusted and supportive friends among the local LGBT community in the host location; (5) actively seeking out allies; and (6) remaining connected to a range of LGBT-safe and LGBT-friendly spaces in the world even when one is not inside them. Another success factor is the importance of 'coming out' to at least one 'safe boss' in each location and to do it early in the working relationship.

## 7 Implications for practice

From a duty of care perspective, there are a number of implications from our study arising for practitioners. First, the deployment of LGBT expatriates to dangerous locations requires that an integrated risk management strategy is in place. This could include a 'plan-do-check' cycle that involves (a) assessing the risks within countries and their cities; (b) incidence likelihood; (c) outlining and developing policies and procedures to mitigate risk; and (d) communicating, educating and training stakeholders involved in the relocation process (including the assignee; Cartus, 2012; Claus and Yost, 2010; Rendeiro, 2012; Schuler et al., 2011). Ongoing data collection relating to in-country risk is also needed to allow for the analysis of current and future risks in the environment (both internal and external of the organisation) including the regular communication of these findings throughout the organisation (Cartus, 2012). Fee et al. (2013) suggest a similar approach based on a three-level crisis management framework: (1) *pre-crisis* planning, screening, training and housing; (2) *during crisis* decision-making, process and logistics management associated with the crisis, formation of a crisis management team and inter-agency coordination; and (3) *post-crisis* support for the individual as well as organisational learning that feeds back into crisis preparedness. Home and host country



HR should discuss and clarify their roles and responsibilities in relation to the LGBT expatriate. Headquarters HR needs to be alert to countries which may pose a potential threat and work more closely with host country HR in this context given the potential conflict of interest some locals may face. The strength of the organisational culture on inclusivity and diversity will also shape expatriates' experience and needs to be considered.

Further care is required when families accompany LGBT expatriates abroad. As Cartus (2012) notes, cross-cultural training is necessary for all family members, particularly for those deployed to especially risky locations where families may need to be housed in 'safer' separate locations within the host or another country. Other factors that require forward planning, particularly for LGBT expatriates self-initiating or engaging in permanent transfers, include financial matters such as the legality of obtaining family bank accounts, insurance policies and joint mortgages which may prove difficult if not impossible in some countries. When children are involved, there may be issues regarding parentage where both partners may not be considered the legal parents of the child. Future research would also do well to consider the intersectionality of the diversity of separate categories within and between the L, G, B and T groups embedded within the overall LGBT community.

## **8 Conclusion**

Much of the literature to date on expatriate management has focused on traditional assignees who are sent abroad to relatively safe locations. In this paper, we have departed from established norms to explore a relatively under-researched segment of the global talent pool – LGBT expatriates – who are sent to unsafe or dangerous locations. In doing so, we have examined LGBT expatriates' perceptions of the opportunities, barriers and challenges they face when being assigned abroad, including how they have overcome and dealt with potentially life-threatening situations. This study is significant in suggesting that the comfort factor in a host country is more important than the legal status of LGBT people as a means of ensuring HR is able to provide an adequate level of duty of care to homosexual assignees. Furthermore, applying the comfort factor during the decision-making process as to whether to accept an international assignment provides a more realistic assessment of the risk to one's safety and well-being.

From a GTM perspective, this study provides evidence that LGBT employees actively engage in international assignment opportunities despite that, for some, their sexual minority status may not be known to their employer. By examining why LGBT expatriates undertake international assignments to dangerous locations, we have been able to show how, through the lens of their employer's duty of care, they successfully navigate the risks that are presented to them when doing so. This increases the likelihood that LGBT expatriates are part of the top 10% of talent typically deployed abroad and highlights that LGBT expatriates represent a potentially important component of the global talent pool for which more research is needed.

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