

International business (research) and the LGBTQIA+ community: advancing theory and societal relevance

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Abstract

Purpose – The study aims to catalyze research on lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and other non-heteronormative sexual identity (LGBTQIA+) issues within the international business (IB) field in a structured manner beyond human resource management (HRM) or marketing topics. In addition to the growing number of diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) researchers, the authors also want to speak to a broader audience of IB scholars focused on multinational enterprise (MNE) non-market strategy, IB policy and strategic management scholars.

Design/methodology/approach – The study first looks at the evolving LGBTQIA+ terminology. It then synthesizes the extant LGBTQIA+ literature, as it relates to the IB field, starting with the marketing literature from the 1990s.

Findings – Within the IB literature, HRM issues, particularly around expatriation and the diffusion of LGBTQIA+ policies and practices, dominate. The study also finds that the majority of LGBTQIA+ research is *etic* rather than in nature and is heavily dominated by Anglo-American terminology and western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic (WEIRD) ontologies.

Originality/value – The IB field has only recently started systematically addressing diversity, such as gender, ethnicity and race. The interest in sexual orientation and the LGBTQIA+ community is even more novel. The authors make a case for more emic-type of LGBTQIA+ research and stronger cultural theorizing to provide nuanced and pluralistic approaches beyond so-called WEIRD perspectives. The study also provides guidance on how the IB field should engage with LGBTQIA+ topics across multiple levels of theorizing and analysis and provides some supporting research questions.

Keywords LGBTQIA+, Diversity, Equity and inclusion (DEI), Multi-level research framework, Future research directions, Theorizing

Paper type Viewpoint

1. Introduction

While we have become accustomed to the social construction of the homosexual, from a psychological perspective it is peculiar that we would classify and characterize a group of people entirely by their sexual behavior. As essential as sexuality is in human life, sexual behavior does

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not constitute a complete relationship to another or a complete life, and sexual practices are not close to a complete description of anyone.

(Walt Odets, *Out of the Shadows: The Psychology of Gay Men's Lives*, 2020, pp. 22-23).

A quick search within *Critical Perspectives on International Business* yields a single hit for the "LGBT" term [1], which ironically turns out to be a paper on *intersectionality* by [Primecz and Mahadevan \(2025\)](#) included in the first part of a double special issue on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI), guest co-edited by one of us. However, one should not wonder how this is possible in the only journal dedicated to the advancement of critical management studies within the international business (IB) field. We have seen a very gradual recognition of the rainbow community across organization science over the last 20 years ([Köllen, 2016](#)) and the IB field has only recently started to systematically address diversity such as gender, ethnicity and race. The lack of visibility of lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, intersex, asexual and other non-heteronormative sexual identities (LGBTQIA+) continues to be jarring.

Beyond early interest in the LGBTQIA+ community by marketing scholars in the 1990s (e.g. [Fugate, 1993](#); [Kates, 1999](#)), the IB field has not engaged with the LGBTQIA+ community in a theoretically systematic manner apart from a handful of human resource management (HRM) studies on expatriation (e.g. [Moeller and Maley, 2018](#); [McPhail et al., 2016](#); [Paisley and Tayar, 2016](#)). Moreover, the majority of such research has been *etic* in nature (i.e. done by non-LGBTQIA+ outsiders on the LGBTQIA+ community). The underlying implication underpinning the abovementioned research deficit goes beyond the assumption that a whole swathe of LGBTQIA+ issues and experiences can simply be reduced to an HRM issue in multinational enterprises (MNEs), or marketing strategies and virtue signaling. Apart from being socially unjust, not recognizing the theoretical potential offered by LGBTQIA+ research across different theoretical and analytical levels ([Choi et al., 2023](#); [Earle et al., 2021](#)) for/in IB theory is also theoretically narrow minded ([Muzio, 2022](#)) and significantly limits IB theorizing and hinders IB practice through its *etic* stance ([Buckley et al., 2014](#)).

Even within the expanding body of IB DEI research (e.g. [Fitzsimmons et al., 2023](#); [Newbury et al., 2022](#)), LGBTQIA+ topics seem to be missing or have been at best covered peripherally. Compared to the mainstream management literature (e.g. [Köllen, 2016](#); [Roberson et al., 2024](#); [Lin and Chang, 2023](#); [Choi et al., 2023](#); [Rumens et al., 2018](#)) and even strategic management (e.g. [Shan et al., 2017](#); [Conti et al., 2022](#); [Mohliwer et al., 2023](#)), the IB literature requires significant catching up when it comes to LGBTQIA+ representation, theoretical development and a more nuanced managerial understanding beyond HRM issues and marketing strategy.

But why should a field characterized by the uniqueness of place, space and organization ([Beugelsdijk, 2022](#)) need to care about the LGBTQIA+ community estimated at around 9% globally or some 730 million people ([Ipsos, 2021](#))? After all, there is already rich LGBTQIA+ research carried out within psychology, social psychology, sociology, health studies and queer studies. The community has also attracted research attention from organizational studies, HRM and marketing disciplines. This is a valid question. By answering it, we hope to show how probing theoretically into LGBTQIA+ issues across multiple levels of analysis and theorizing ([Newbury et al., 2022](#)) can help address the ongoing debate between a business case vs a social justice case for DEI research ([Rašković et al., 2025](#); [Vangeli, 2024](#); [Ely and Thomas, 2020](#)). As Rumens and colleagues have pointed out: "MOS [management and organization studies] queer theory scholarship [... can be...] a productive site for acknowledging both heterosexuality's coercive aspects and its non-normative forms" (2018, p. 593). We further believe it can also support the IB discipline's

paradigm shift toward wider societal issues (Tung, 2023) and greater global societal impact (Doh *et al.*, 2023).

In a world of shifting global paradigms (Luo, 2024) and growing politics of identity (Rašković, 2021; Vaara *et al.*, 2021), engaging in LGBTQIA+ research can, for example, help enhance the IB discipline's understanding of social identity and identity politics, explore related socio-political risks, help theorize social movements and MNEs' interaction with civil society, explore corporate activism and corporate political activity, theorize about the politicization of human rights, advance our understanding of discrimination and exclusion, as well as address a range of traditional DEI issues. Such issues have come under attack in the era of populist identity politics (Alcalde, 2024), given new oxygen by the new Trump administration (Yoshino *et al.*, 2024) in what Hicklin (2025) has called the end of rainbow capitalism. Probing systematically into LGBTQIA+ issues at the nexus of society and global business can also provide new insights on the global war for talent, innovation, entrepreneurship and corporate reputation, as well as help us better understand some of the central concepts in social science research, such as stigma, legitimacy and the link between social identity and human agency across different levels (i.e., individual and collective levels).

By outlining common theoretical and phenomenological touchpoints between LGBTQIA+ issues and IB research across multiple levels of theorizing and analysis (Choi *et al.*, 2023; Earle *et al.*, 2021), the purpose of our viewpoint is to catalyze research on LGBTQIA+ issues within the IB field in a structured manner beyond HRM issues, marketing or global strategy. Our aim is to go beyond the growing number of DEI researchers and speak to a broader audience of IB scholars focused on multinational enterprise (MNE) non-market strategy, IB policy researchers and strategic management scholars. Integrating LGBTQIA+ research into IB can help address both the transnational and global nature of LGBTQIA+ issues, which existing fields like queer studies, sociology or psychology haven't focused on theoretically. However, addressing international/transnational aspects of LGBTQIA+ issues requires appropriate theoretical frameworks, such as institutional theory, stakeholder management theory and non-market firm strategy.

We start by first discussing the evolving LGBTQIA+ terminology and the relevance of labels. We then follow this with a quick-and-dirty-type literature review of the existing LGBTQIA+ research linked either to IB directly or somehow global/transnational in nature. We conclude our viewpoint by providing a research framework spanning different levels of theorizing and analysis to guide future IB LGBTQIA+ research, operationalized through different research directions and supported by some guiding research questions.

2. On LGBTQIA+ terminology and labels

The LGBTQIA+ terminology, labels and associated language are continuously evolving by way of introducing new concepts (Ferris, 2006), as well as through changes to the meanings of existing concepts (Thelwall *et al.*, 2023). For example, the term *queer* was originally associated with oddity and abnormality, subsequently became a more neutral term for *gay* and is today used for either people who do not identify as heterosexual (but also not as lesbian, gay or bisexual), or might be curious or questioning their sexual identity. Such changes reflect the evolving socio-political power dynamics and cultural forces, which have over time resulted in distinct frames of reference linked to, for example, abnormality, deviance, collective identity and/or social distinctiveness (Anteby and Anderson, 2014).

In recent years, such changes have been further facilitated by the growing awareness, visibility and inclusion of diverse and intersecting social identities (Anteby and Anderson, 2014) – both in the Global North and the Global South (Thelwall *et al.*, 2023). While the

evolution of terminology and language shows progress, it doesn't mean that the LGBTQIA+ community is no longer discriminated against or no longer faces significant adversity (Wang *et al.*, 2019). For researchers and policymakers, particularly those who are not part of the LGBTQIA+ community, the changes in terminology, understanding and framing contribute to an opaque landscape. Practitioners, on the other hand, may often feel they are operating against a moving target where they can be accused of being woke (DiTomaso, 2023) and become exposed to significant types of risk (Rahman, 2019).

There is also a lot of confusion with an ever-expanding set of acronyms (Köllen, 2021). For example, some letters can be linked to different concepts. With regards to the longest among the acronyms, the LGBTQIA+ acronym, the letter "A", which most commonly refers to members of the community who identify as *asexual*, is sometimes also linked to allyship or even activism. Similarly, the letter "Q", which is often considered to refer to *queer* identity, is sometimes also linked to people who might be questioning their identity or are sexually curious. While usually meant to denote openness to different kinds of identifications and the idea of the *other*, the plus sign (+) is sometimes also linked to allies or even activists (Thelwall *et al.*, 2023). Additional confusion among the general public also arises from mixing *sexual identity* (i.e. linked to desire and sexual behaviors) and *gender identity* (i.e. linked to identity and behavior related to gender). The two are very distinct concepts and while they should not be theoretically confused (Monro, 2020), their intersection does compound already existing complexities among the general public, especially among older generations.

While the LGBT acronym (and its derivatives or permutations)[2] has become part of the general public vernacular over the last couple of decades, the origin of the terminology can be traced back to the term *homosexual*, which was first recorded in a private letter in 1868 by Hungarian Karl-Maria Kerbenty (Taylor, 1998). The term subsequently appeared in the 1897 book on sexual inversions by English-French physician Havelock Ellis as the first book on homosexuality in English (Weeks, 2000).

In the 20th century, the Stonewall riots of 1969 were considered an inflection point in terms of the public's awareness of both LGBTQIA+ issues and terminology (Motschenbacher, 2020; Bolden *et al.*, 2021). Prior to the Stonewall riots, the existing terminology was used to describe members of the community from a heteronormative position, often in pejorative terms. However, from the 1970s onwards (Cant and Taket, 2008, p. 80):

Self-identification has been a central part of the development of politics, community development, policy development and language since then to the point where there is a widely accepted usage of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender to encompass the principal population groups of this sexuality coalition.

Regardless of the used acronym (i.e. LGBT or LGTBQIA+), identification and identity remain central to the terminology, labels and framing associated with the community (Monro, 2020). Some members of the community have also decided to avoid using labels altogether, while for others, the terminology might vary considerably across different community groups and demographic cohorts within the same country (Blechinger, 2016) and across different countries (David, 2021). It is also important to emphasize that the LGBTQIA+ vernacular reflects terminology from an Anglo-American perspective, which has been developed mostly through an *etic* process (Buckley *et al.*, 2014).

One example would be the widely used term *transgender* in the English-dominated Global North, while in the Global South, different societies in South Asia and the South Pacific have specific terms that differ in their onto-epistemology. In the South Pacific

kingdom of Tonga, for example, the term *fakaleiti* (or simply *leitī*) refers to individuals with an assigned male sex at birth who identify as women, but do not necessarily see themselves as members of the LGBTQIA+ community, such as in the Global North (Richards and Barrett, 2020).

Even within the Global North, there are at least five different sources and terminology domains for the LGBTQIA+ community (Thelwall *et al.*, 2023): terminology adopted and applied by hostile groups, activist groups (i.e. reclaiming the pejorative word *queer*), health and care groups, academia and those outside the Global North (i.e. transgender people being referred to as two spirits by Native North Americans).

The rich and dynamic landscape of terminology, labels and language reflects the socially constructed and contentious nature of sexual and gender identities and sexuality (Monro, 2020; Odets, 2020; Rahman, 2019) with regards to both heteronormative society and within LGBTQIA+ communities themselves. It also reflects the *etic* background of the terminology, which has implications for the IB field by potentially limiting theorization and managerial practice (Buckley *et al.*, 2014). For example, MNEs applying North American terminology may pursue culturally insensitive actions which may not be understood in cross-cultural and local settings. We need more *emic*-type LGBTQIA+ research led by the community itself within IB academia to provide more nuanced and pluralistic approaches beyond western, educated, industrialized, rich and democratic (WEIRD) perspectives and terminology.

The highly discursive nature (Thelwall *et al.*, 2023; Cant and Taket, 2008) and increased corporate politicization (Maks-Solomon and Drewry, 2020) of LGBTQIA+ issues are another touchpoint with IB, which has itself become increasingly politicized (Beugelsdijk and Luo, 2024). The best testament to the complexity of the issue of terminology, language and labels is perhaps the existence of an entire journal dedicated to language and sexuality, as well as numerous special issues within the humanities and social sciences. Language constitutes an important touchpoint with the IB discipline (see, e.g. Buckley *et al.*, 2014; Tenzer *et al.*, 2017; Piekkari *et al.*, 2022; Gaibrois *et al.*, 2023) due to its performative role and associated social structuration mechanisms reproducing social inequalities through structural barriers (Vangeli, 2024).

3. An international business lens on the existing LGBTQIA+ literature

There are very few IB papers that focus exclusively on the LGBTQIA+ community or frame specific LGBTQIA+ issues in purely IB terms. The majority of such papers would be confined to either the LGBTQIA+ expatriate literature or the literature on the adoption/diffusion of various DEI policies in the context of MNE headquarters-subsidary relations within the domain of global strategy. Outside these two domains, there are but a handful of papers by IB and/or global strategy scholars which address LGBTQIA+ issues as a focal feature and not merely as a side note (e.g. Newburry *et al.*, 2025). However, they are published in more mainstream management and strategy journals.

A systematic review of the highly heterogeneous LGBTQIA+ literature, most of which is scattered outside the IB and global strategy fields, is outside the scope of our viewpoint. It would, however, make for a fruitful future research endeavor (i.e. as a potential scoping or integrative literature review). It is for this reason that we provide a quick-and-dirty-type synthesis of some of the key works and strands of literature, which can guide the IB discipline's engagement with LGBTQIA+ issues and inform specific directions of future research and theory development of relevance to the fields of IB and global strategy.

We used a relatively simple screening process for all academic literature in the English language within the business and management domains in Scopus, as well as specific adjacent domains, like marketing, international relations and political sciences. Using search terms, such

as, “LGBTQIA+” and all its variations (i.e. “LGBT”, “GLB” or “LGBTI”), as well as individual search terms, such as “gay” or “lesbian”, we further supplemented the search string with additional search terms like “international”, “multinational” and “transnational” to capture perspectives and issues of relevance to an IB audience. In doing so, we followed the approach used by [Lewis et al. \(2024\)](#) within the marketing domain.

To ensure the robustness of our search, we also ran our search terms through Google Scholar to identify any missing literature not picked up by Scopus. We then manually screened the titles, keywords and abstracts of all identified papers, ruling out those which were out of scope or did not have clear or at least implicit IB angles. What follows is a simple summary and surface-level content analysis focused on breadth rather than depth. We wanted to provide general understanding of how LGBTQIA+ topics have been covered within the literature and the evolution of the various strands of literatures which we believe IB scholars should be at least aware of.

3.1 *The marketing literature and the LGBTQIA+ community*

The earliest acknowledgement of the LGBTQIA+ community within the broader fields of management and organization comes from the marketing field and dates back to the early 1990s when the iconic *Out* magazine was established (1992). The first example of marketing’s interest in the LGBTQIA+ community was from a market segmentation perspective by [Fugate \(1993\)](#). As a marketing theorist, Fugate was interested in whether gays and lesbians could be considered a market segment in their own right based on the four key segmentation criteria of *identifiability*, *sufficiency*, *stability* and *accessibility*. Due to many members of the community not being open with their sexual identities and hiding for fear of persecution or public judgment (i.e. during the AIDS epidemics of the 1980s and 1990s), Fugate did not believe the homosexual market was sufficiently identifiable as a segment. He pointed out that: “Using conventional characteristics of segmentation as decision criteria, the male homosexual and lesbian markets do not yet seem viable for many major consumer product firms” ([Fugate, 1993](#), p. 54). At the same time, however, Fugate already hinted at the likelihood of this changing soon. Three years later, [Penalzoza \(1996\)](#) acknowledged queer shopping as a “dream market segment” – albeit not in a marketing journal. 1997 also marked the first tourism publication by [Hughes \(1997\)](#) on the distinct (consumer) characteristics of LGBT tourists where holidays were seen to provide an opportunity for the construction and/or expression of homosexual identities which in the 1990s were still largely hidden or repressed.

By the end of the 1990s, Kate’s ([1999](#)) publication of marketing to gay men in the *Journal of Advertising* firmly established a clear theoretical focus on attitudinal characteristics of the LGBTQIA+ community as consumers. However, by the early 2000s, the majority of marketing research on the LGBTQIA+ community focused more on their consumer behavior. For example, in a seminal marketing study, [Aaker et al. \(2000\)](#) examined how targeted advertising affected both the intended audience and the non-target market when it came to LGBTQIA+ messages. The research that followed started incorporating stakeholder perspectives, linking LGBTQIA+ marketing and policies with strategy and corporate performance (which we examine separately). The integration reflected marketing’s ubiquity and widespread influence on various facets of corporate performance and organizational life.

Yet, marketing’s interest in and exploration of the LGBTQIA+ community also expanded in different directions, well beyond consumer behavior, attitudes or branding. In their comprehensive narrative review of LGBTQIA+ marketing scholarship, [Lewis et al. \(2024\)](#) analyzed 78 papers in 34 different journals published between 1993 and 2021, grouping them into the following conceptual topics:

- (1) attitudes and identity;

- (2) brand meaning and advertising;
- (3) marketing practice and institutions; and
- (4) LGBTQIA+ imagery and advertising. They also outlined specific LGBTQIA+ research domains linked to consumption behavior, brand positioning and LGBTQIA+ consumers as market segments.

From an IB perspective, the marketing practice and institutions topical area seems most relevant. However, this research strand, while critical in nature, focused more on the nature of marketing as a particular kind of institution, exploring the role of ideology and power (Keating and McLoughlin, 2005), as well as justice (Ro and Olson, 2014). It has a strong consumer behavior focus supported by a Western neo-capitalist onto-epistemology (see also Montecchi *et al.*, 2023). Surprisingly, little attention has been paid to cross-cultural or other differences across international markets around the world, despite growing globalization in the 2000s.

3.2 The LGBTQIA+ expatriate literature

The review of opportunities, barriers and challenges for lesbian and gay (LG) expatriates by McPhail *et al.* (2016) provides a comprehensive and systematic exploration of LGBTQIA+ expatriation within a multinational context. It approaches the topic from the viewpoint of the MNEs' quest to leverage a global talent pool through so-called nontraditional expatriates. Drawing on 20 interviews from LG expatriates, McPhail and colleagues used social capital theory to establish that LG expatriates faced barriers and glass ceilings to organizational promotion within their organizations at home, which could compel them to pursue expatriation to host countries where being lesbian and gay posed less of a risk. Using social capital theory, McPhail *et al.* (2016) were able to explore how leveraging structural, relational and cognitive social capital allowed LG expatriates to create and pursue career opportunities through expatriation, while overcoming significant barriers due to their sexual minority status within their organizations. However, their results were skewed to expatriation to low-risk countries, which is why their emphasis was on internal organizational barriers and not external host-country risks.

The issue of host-country risks for LGBT expatriates and the MNEs' duty of care was covered in another paper by McPhail and McNulty (2015), where they approached the issue from the perspective of global talent management. Developing a duplicity matrix of being "out" or "in the closet" in terms of their organization and the host country pointed to the hidden double cost of LGBT expatriates stuck in a "global closet" (McPhail and McNulty, 2015, p. 742). Operationalizing the danger of host locations along legal and cultural dimensions, their findings reveal the importance of acculturation processes in LGBT expatriation, pointing to the role of host-country and local culture social norms "as a more legitimate assessment of the threat to be expected in terms of discrimination or negative homophobic attention" (McPhail and McNulty, 2015, p. 737).

Interviewing three gay and one lesbian expatriate, Kim and Von Glinow (2017) developed a three-dimensional typology of *personal* (i.e. past experience, marital status, family structure), *organizational* (i.e. org. policies and support, org. culture and composition of the expatriated group) and *country* context factors (i.e. legal, regulatory and policy systems related to LGBT rights) influencing LG expatriation. Unlike McPhail and McNulty (2015), however, their operationalization of the host-country contexts focused solely on the formal institutional environment and did not take into consideration the informal influence of local cultural norms.

[Paisley and Tayar \(2016\)](#) focused on LGBT expatriates' identity management practices and the distinction between convergent vs divergent intersectionality. They operationalized the important role of host-country context in a two-by-two matrix of *tight vs loose* cultures and *hostile vs inclusive* environments. Conceptual in nature, their work shows that tighter and hostile environments facilitate divergent forms of intersectionality which lower the expatriates' productivity and provide additional MNE costs. However, such negative external environment effects can be potentially offset by a strong and inclusive organizational culture.

[Moeller and Maley's \(2018\)](#) review focused on the concept of LGB expatriate stigma and the role of strategically focused organizational legitimacy to support LGB expatriates. It again followed a logic of global talent management and provided a typology of *internal vs external* and *personal vs professional* outcomes associated with LGB stigmatization behavior in MNEs. The authors then developed a process model of how MNEs can support LGB expatriates. Through its focus on nontraditional expatriates, [Moeller and Maley \(2018\)](#) provided a unique IB perspective on existing literature on LGBT work-related outcomes (e.g. [Pichler et al., 2017](#); [Stavrou and Ierodiakonou, 2018](#); [Drydakis, 2021](#)).

Beyond the LGB expatriate literature, the existing body of LGBTQIA+ research conducted by either IB or global strategy scholars, or with an explicit IB or global strategy focus becomes much sparser. In the following sections (from Sections 3.3–3.6) we outline just some of the key works from (mostly) other fields and domains that we believe to be particularly valuable and have also guided the development of our own framework later on.

3.3 LGBTQIA+ policies and the diversity management literature

Apart from the LGBT expatriate literature, the next stream of IB literature focusing on LGBTQIA+ issues approaches the topic from two perspectives. One follows the strategic management route, while the other is more functional in nature and focuses on HRM issues. Both perspectives are also imbued with a typical IB and international management (IM) focus on global integration vs local responsiveness (see, e.g. [Newburry et al., 2025](#)) which has historically resulted in examining the diffusion, standardization and/or adaptation of MNE LGBT HRM policies and practices across markets (see, e.g. [Rašković and Sinha, 2022](#)). Looking at LGBTQIA+ issues from a distinct MNE perspective, one also quickly observes that there are very few studies focusing on LGBTQIA+ diversity issues compared to cultural, ethnic or gender diversity MNE issues. Even when LGBTQIA+ issues are a focal point, they are often contrasted against more traditional surface-level types of diversity, like gender ([Newburry et al., 2025](#)). The handful of studies that exist usually look at western MNEs operating in emerging markets (i.e. [Röell et al., 2024](#); [Newburry et al., 2025](#)).

At a more strategic level, the inclusion of LGBTQIA+ issues has moved away from corporate social responsibility and an outcome-focused organization-centric logic which emphasized organizational culture, brand equity and better reputation among stakeholders in addition to stronger job satisfaction, commitment and loyalty among LGBTQIA+ employees ([Choi et al., 2023](#)). Instead, more recent research focuses on the antecedents and determinants of LGBTQIA+ corporate friendliness, as well as more specific outcomes. Despite this shift, “theoretical foundations for explaining organizational behaviors and strategies toward LGBT-relevant issues remain scant” ([Choi et al., 2023](#), p. 997).

Elevating the management of LGBTQIA+ inclusive organizational practices to a strategic level, [Roberson et al. \(2024\)](#) introduced the logic of LGBTQ systems in the context of strategic HRM with two distinct dimensions: the *content* of such systems and their *strength*. With regards to content, [Roberson et al. \(2024\)](#) identify five specific sets of practice bundles, namely: compliance and anti-discrimination, representation, work-life issues, inclusion and

corporate social responsibility. In terms of LGBTQ system strength, they highlighted the importance of distinctiveness, consistency and consensus as determinants of system strength. While their systems framework in no way addresses the question of multinationality, it raises clear and specific implications for international HRM and strategic HRM of MNEs, which we hope IM and IHRM scholars might explore further within the IB literature. Two such examples would be the question of the relationship between standardization vs localization vs glocalization of compliance, anti-discrimination and corporate social responsibility when it comes to the system content, and the link between the LGBTQ system's distinctiveness and its global/multinational/international strategy (e.g. [Newbury et al., 2025](#)).

At a more functional HRM level, the majority of LGBTQIA+ literature in this area addresses the implementation of various allyship activities (e.g. [Röell et al., 2024](#)), the role of employee resource groups or the role of specific leadership styles and initiatives. What is distinct among this literature in terms of a clear IB angle, is the interest in the level of localization and adaptation of generally-accepted HRM policies and practices in an international context ([Lazarova et al., 2023](#); [Röell et al., 2024](#)) and the need for their integration across different levels of the environments in which MNEs operate ([Dutta and Srinivasan, 2024](#)). One such example would be the employment of covert LGBT allyship practices by MNEs for employees (not just expatriates) in more adversarial contexts ([Röell et al., 2024](#)).

3.4 LGBTQIA+ workplace policies, business strategy and performance

Research on the effects of LGBTQIA+ workplace policies and their impact on various aspects of performance emerged from the dichotomy between the social and economic imperatives of diversity and inclusion workplace policies ([King and Cortina, 2010](#)) originating in affirmative action. This strand of research is also the most directly associated with the so-called business case approach to LGBTQIA+ issues ([Rhodes, 2017](#)).

The literature in this area can be generally sub-divided into three distinct and oftentimes interrelated research streams. The first stream focuses on the general link between LGBTQIA+ policies, business strategy and financial performance (e.g. [Pichler et al., 2017](#); [Pichler et al., 2018](#); [Fatmy et al., 2021](#)). In a review of the literature, [Fatmy et al. \(2021\)](#) found that the link between LGBTQIA+ policies and firm performance occurs through more committed employees, job satisfaction, higher employee productivity and more altruistic workplace behavior. Their empirical study showed that among US publicly traded firms (2003–2016), firms with one standard deviation higher corporate equality index had a 50 basis points higher profitability and a 7% increase in stock market price after controlling for size, industry and a host of other characteristics. Interestingly, however, [Schopohl et al. \(2024\)](#) on the other hand found that LGBTQ+ corporate friendliness led to greater labor investment inefficiencies, which decreased over time and were mitigated by a range of contextual moderators.

The second stream adopts the same logic but focuses more on “localized outcomes” ([Roberson et al., 2024](#), p. 1153), like specific types of innovation (e.g. [Hossain et al., 2020](#)) or marketing capabilities (e.g. [Patel and Feng, 2021](#)). Drawing on Rawls' justice theory and also stakeholder theory, Hossain and colleagues found that one standard deviation in the Human Rights' Campaign Corporate Equality Index (HRC CEI) resulted in a statistically significant increase in firm innovation, albeit the increase was small in terms of actual effect size. On the other hand, [Patel and Feng \(2021\)](#) found that firms with better LGBTQIA+ workplace equality policies were able to achieve higher customer satisfaction through enhanced marketing capabilities even in industries with unstable demand.

The third stream of research focuses more on stock market reactions to LGBTQIA+ workplace policies (e.g. [Johnston and Malina, 2008](#); [Wang and Schwarz, 2010](#); [Shan et al., 2017](#); [Do et al., 2022](#); [Hassan et al., 2022](#); [Shanaev et al., 2023](#)) and the corporations' public

stance on LGBTQIA+ issues (e.g. [Shan et al., 2017](#); [Pichler et al., 2018](#); [Mohliiver and Hawn, 2019](#)). In a seminal study, [Wang and Schwarz \(2010\)](#) analyzed the link between the HRC CEI index of firms and stock market performance across 27 different industries in the US between 2002 and 2006. They found that LGBTQIA+ workplace equality policies had mostly a positive impact on stock market valuations but that this effect varied across industries. Juxtaposing [Friedman's \(1970\)](#) shareholder theory and [Freeman's \(2010\)](#) stakeholder theory, they outlined competing hypotheses for the effect of LGBTQIA+ workplace equality policies on performance, which continue to motivate contemporary studies.

In another seminal study almost a decade later, [Pichler et al. \(2018, p. 274\)](#) still noted: "LGBT-supportive policies are controversial, stigmatized and may have negative consequences for firms that adopt them." The contested nature of LGBTQIA+ policies and their impact on performance has become even more relevant through stock market reactions to corporate political activism and firm's taking a stance on controversial issues, including LGBTQIA+ rights ([Maks-Solomon and Drewry, 2020](#)). A study by [Shanaev et al. \(2023\)](#) published in *Research in International Business and Finance*, for example, found that firms with LGBT CEOs performed better in terms of stock market returns, but that such performance was capped at around 1% superior performance per month, pointing to the existence of so-called "rainbow ceilings".

A recent study by [Mohliiver et al. \(2023\)](#) has challenged the long-term assumed one-sided link between socially progressive LGBT corporate policies and firm value creation ([Fatmy et al., 2021](#)). They instead found that in an increasingly polarized world, the stock market seems to reward not just firms that take on socially progressive LGBTQIA+ stances but also firms that assume extremely negative positions – pointing to a bifurcated relationship between LGBT corporate policies and stock market performance. This is a significant shift from the prevailing view 15 years ago when the HRC CEI index was launched and [Johnston and Malina found that \(2008, p. 602\)](#): "GLBT-friendly workplace policies are at worst value neutral and firms are not penalized for supporting GLBT workforce diversity."

3.5 Macro-level perspectives

In a comprehensive scoping review of LGBTQIA+ labor market outcomes, [Gould et al. \(2024\)](#) identified 53 studies of which 17 (32%) focused on country- or state-level policies and 27 (51%) focused on workplace-level policies. Strikingly, 37 of the studies (70%) were on either U.S or Canadian data, showing that while there is a stream of macro-level LGBTQIA+ research, it tends to be heavily North American centric ([Newburry et al., 2025](#)).

The majority of LGBTQIA+ studies dealing with macro-level effects of interest to IB and global strategy can be generally classified into three streams: work-related outcome effects, more general macroeconomic effects and other types of effects. With regards to work-related outcomes, studies by [Klawitter \(2015\)](#) and [Valfort \(2017\)](#) found that gay and bisexual men earn significantly less than their heterosexual counterparts (on average about 11% according to [Klawitter, 2015](#); see also [DeFilippis, 2016](#)), while lesbian women were found to earn about 9% more than heterosexual women. U.S. census data for 1990 and 2000 also showed that women in same-sex couple relationships earned around 8% more than women in heteronormative relationships. While such data is compelling, [Badgett et al. \(2021\)](#) point to possible endogeneity issues in terms of labor force participation, as well as "racial and ethnic heterogeneity in outcomes for sexual and gender minorities" ([Badgett et al., 2021, p. 165](#)).

In terms of other, broader macro-level effects, [Badgett et al. \(2019\)](#) found that an eight-point increase in the Global Index on Legal Recognition of Homosexual Orientation was associated with a \$2,000 higher GDP per capita at the country level. There are several

mechanisms at play with such an effect, related to both human capital (Vu, 2022) and the elimination of a grey economy as a refuge for the socially excluded (My *et al.*, 2024). From a human capital point of view, Vu (2022) found that higher levels of LGBTQIA+ inclusion at the country level were also linked to greater innovation capacity.

Ahmed and Hammarstedt (2021) found that the heteronormative norms underpinning entrepreneurship meant that lower levels of LGBTQIA+ inclusion could significantly hinder entrepreneurial activity at a country level, while higher levels of inclusion could yield both positive effects for business, as well as for the national economy (Kidney, 2021). In a comparison of LGBT versus traditional markets, Cavalcanti *et al.* (2024) found that the impact of personal attitude is significantly higher on entrepreneurial intention for general markets (i.e. all markets) compared to markets focused on LGBT audiences. On the other hand, the impact of subjective norms on entrepreneurial intention was the opposite, where subjective norms have a stronger positive effect on entrepreneurial intention for markets focused on LGBT audiences compared to general markets. The result points to the centrality of attitudes, opinions and support of close social ties on entrepreneurship career choices (Cavalcanti and Ferreira, 2022).

From a macroeconomic point of view, the false belief of a so-called white gay affluence construed by corporate America in the 1990s (Badgett, 1997) overlooks the more complex issue of LGBTQIA+ poverty where race, class and economics interact (DeFilippis, 2016) to produce significant income and wealth disparities between the heterosexual population and the LGBTQIA+ community, as well as within the LGBTQIA+ community.

Among other types of macro-level effects, Zhu and Smieliauskas (2022) have explored the impact of state-level macro-social movements for marriage equality in the USA across 50 states and found that while the effect was generally positive in terms of market value across the corporate world, trailblazing states and those with more comprehensive and socially progressive legislation enjoyed significantly bigger gains through accumulated human capital.

Black *et al.* (2002) were among the first to explore the migration choices of various sexual minorities, which were influenced by income and attitudes of the local population. Badgett *et al.* (2021) have also shown that the LGBTQIA+ community is more mobile than the heterosexual community, with a higher share living in large urban areas. Analyzing state-level LGBT policies, Baumle *et al.* (2023) established both *push* and *pull* factors in terms of their effect on attitudes to migrate within the USA. However, this applied to the whole US population and also captured abortion laws and policies. In the most comprehensive analysis of the impact of state-level legislation on LGBT workplace policies, equal employment opportunity policies, as well as specific benefits and inclusion subcomponents, Gardberg *et al.* (2023) have explored the simultaneous existence of social coercion, construction and competition diffusion forces, which explains the continued diversity in corporate America's LGBTQIA+ workplace equality policies. Their results offer firm-level insights which can, among other things, also shed light on the mobility patterns of the LGBTQIA+ community within the USA with profound inter- and intra-state economic effects yet to be fully explored.

3.6 Other LGBTQIA+ literatures: insights from political science and international relations

As expected, this last category can turn into an endless and rather electric mix of works and disciplinary perspectives. Among them, however, we believe the works from the political science and the international relations domains offer perhaps the most relevant insights for the IB discipline with regards to the increasingly politicized nature of IB (Beugelsdijk and Luo, 2024) and the infusion of international relations' thinking into mainstream IB research where geopolitics also come into play (Han *et al.*, 2024).

Within the political science field, Kollman and Waites' (2009) introductory piece on the global politics of LGBT human rights outlines the global evolution and diffusion of LGBT

human rights and advocacy around the world beginning in the 1990s and links it to a strong juxtaposition of Western and non-Western perspectives. Answering three specific questions addressing the role of global developments related to LGBT human rights, exploring LGBT issues through a human rights lens (as opposed to equality and justice) and looking at the global institutional isomorphism of LGBT human rights through transnational human rights networks, [Kollman and Waites \(2009\)](#) positioned political science research on LGBT rights “at the heart of global political struggles over culture and identities” (p. 1). It is precisely through a postmodern society interface that global LGBT politics can nicely connect to IB and its focus on globalization-deglobalization processes and issues.

Drawing on both political science and sociological theories, [Kollman and Waites \(2009\)](#), for example, further showed that social change processes require political institutions and agency, and that these are subject to a “myriad of factors including institutional structure, ruling party coalitions, elite attitudes, economic climate, cultural understandings of welfare and historic timing” (p. 12). Critical of western-imposed and universally-constructed social identity labels within the global LGBT human rights agenda, [Kollman and Waites \(2009\)](#) made a critical point of relevance for IB’s place, space and organization nexus ([Beugelsdijk, 2022](#)) by pointing out that: “It is clear that these categories neither are universal nor cover the diversity of sexual expression available to human beings in different times and places” ([Kollman and Waites, 2009](#), p. 13).

[Kollman and Waites \(2009\)](#) also made an excellent point on how neo-liberal globalization has commodified sexuality, turning human rights issues into business issues and corporate and political playgrounds where market and non-market strategies intersect. It is through such intersection of the non-market and market spheres related to LGBT issues and rights, that one is able to challenge conspiracy theorists who have criticized LGBT political studies as merely “political advocacy masquerading as scholarship” ([Mucciaroni, 2011](#), p. 18).

More recently, [Thiel et al. \(2023\)](#) have provided a comprehensive follow-up to the seminal work by [Kollman and Waites \(2009\)](#), where they discuss the instrumentalization of LGBT politics of inclusion and exclusion in the European Union through the link between identity politics, political mobilization and the social inclusion/exclusion of the LGBT community. Such political instrumentalization can also become visible in international relations through so-called “queer diplomacy” and the weaponization of LGBT human rights by the Global West as an international geopolitical strategy, particularly against the Global South and specific emerging markets ([Janoff, 2022](#)).

In the global LGBT human rights and policy spaces, the work by [Velasco \(2018\)](#) should also be singled out. Creating a comprehensive overview of global LGBT norms across 156 countries through the construction of a novel LGBT policy index, Velasco’s results demonstrate:

[...] that human rights INGOs (international non-governmental organizations) are not adequate vehicles for pressuring national adoption of LGBT policies. Instead, targeted advocacy efforts, embodied through LGBT INGOs, are required in order for policy adoption to transpire (2018, p. 377).

For IB and global strategy scholars interested in getting acquainted with the complex and highly contested landscape of global LGBT and sexual diversity politics, the *Oxford Handbook* with the same title commemorating the 50th anniversary of the 1969 Stonewall riots provides an excellent resource linking discrete events of activism and advocacy to social movement patterns with individual and collective change agency across not only places, spaces and various organizational forms, but also *time* ([Bosia et al., 2019](#)).

4. A framework for integrating LGBTQIA+ issues into international business theory, policy and practice

Table 1 outlines the different levels of influence of LGBTQIA+ issues on IB research, policy and practice. We further outline relevant theoretical touchpoints and also provide some guiding research questions that can support level-specific future research directions.

LGBTQIA+ issues influence IB theory and practices from global and supranational levels, to national and sub-national levels, to organizational levels, to the team and individual levels. While **Table 1** looks specifically at influences at a particular level, many research questions can be influenced by factors at multiple levels of analysis – pointing to the relevance of cross-level effects and interactions typical for social science research. Given the exhaustive list of examples, theories and guiding research questions in **Table 1**, we in the remainder of this section focus more on discussing cross-level issues and interactions.

Looking across the different levels of theorizing and analysis, and of particular relevance to IB theory, is institutional theory. Institutional theory bridges the gap between business, government, global society and a variety of organizational-level phenomena of interest to IB. At the global/supranational level, for example, IB scholars may wish to examine institutional isomorphism and de-evolution related to LGBTQIA+ issues. However, these issues also span global, national, regional and local levels. Such kind of multi-level research has theoretical relevance for the increasingly politicized nature of IB (Beugelsdijk and Luo, 2024), as well as research on global democracy (Shaw, 2023). Against growing populist undercurrents which are of relevance to MNEs and IB (Rašković *et al.*, 2024), a key question worth exploring is how much of the current LGBTQIA+ attacks are anti-woke backlash and how much do they reflect deeper structural democratic backsliding against weakened international pressures (O'Dwyer, 2024)?

Exploring LGBTQIA+ issues can also help in providing insights for stakeholder management theory and its intersection with global strategy, transnational governance and the issue of re-solving global wicked problems through IB activity (Rašković, 2022); especially in the context of MNEs (Rašković, 2024). For example, the omission of the LGBTQIA+ community limits identification of both challenges and opportunities around (global) education, housing, healthcare, etc.

Integrating LGBTQIA+ voices, perspectives, experiences and issues into existing IB research can help IB scholars, policymakers and practitioners better understand social movements (Tian *et al.*, 2021), corporate responses to social activism (Wu and Liu, 2023) and socio-political risks (Lawton *et al.*, 2023; Beugelsdijk and Luo, 2024), which have become cornerstones of MNE non-market strategy (Shirodkar *et al.*, 2024). While supporting LGBTQIA+ communities might have emerged from the corporate social responsibility strand of non-market MNE research, recent developments given oxygen by the Trump administration have made the corporate political activity much more pertinent.

At national or sub-national levels, policies regarding different marginalized groups may also vary significantly by group. For example, reducing gender differences is widely recognized as an area of interest driven by UN Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) #5. At the other end of the spectrum, LGBTQIA+ issues are currently among some of the most contested issues – at national and sometimes even more at sub-national levels (i.e. increasingly the case in the USA).

Additional attention could also be directed to issues where local LGBTQIA+ policies may be evolving in opposing directions (i.e. Western Europe vs Eastern Europe), as well as how these emerging differences impact overall MNE policies, operations and practices. This may be particularly important as attention continues to gear toward emerging markets around the world, where a focus on LGBTQIA+ issues may play a lesser role in economic

Table 1. LGBTQIA+ Influence levels and international business perspectives

Level	Illustrative examples	Examples of theories related to IB	Guiding research questions for IB
<i>Global/ Supranational</i>	World Bank set of proposed indicators for the LGBTI Inclusion Index (Badgett and Sell, 2018)	Institutional theory (i.e. neo-institutional theory, institutional economics, supranational institutions) Varieties of institutional systems Political science theories (i.e. geopolitics, political economy) International relations theories (i.e. diplomacy, human rights) Wickedness theory (i.e. wicked problems, grand challenges) Institutional theory (i.e. neo-institutional theory, comparative institutionalism) Regional studies	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What role do supranational institutions play in the global diffusion of LGBTQIA+ rights, policies and issues? 2. What is the relationship between supranational/national institutions and MNEs when it comes to LGBTQIA+ rights? 3. What are the specific geopolitical aspects of LGBTQIA+ rights and issues? 4. How do global LGBTQIA+ issues translate into specific types of IB risks, challenges and opportunities? 5. How does the omission of the LGBTQIA+ community limit identification of both challenges and opportunities around global education, housing, healthcare, etc.?
<i>Regional</i>	Regional cultural expectations or LGBTQIA+ laws (e.g. Article 21 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union or the European Commission LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020–2025)	Institutional theory (i.e. institutional logics, institutional fields, historical institutionalism) Social identity theory (inter-group dynamics) Socio-Cognitive theory Social movements Linguistic theories Theories of social cohesion Cultural theories (i.e. cultural values)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What is the link between competing institutional arrangements and ideology, religion and cultural differences between regions (and even sometimes global cities)? 2. How do MNEs manage tensions when the MNE's internal policies expectations differ from those of regional governing bodies? 3. What is the impact of regional institutions (i.e. law, cultural values) on various aspects of mobility (i.e. people, capital, knowledge)? 4. How are LGBTQIA+ rights and policies influenced by regional politics, histories and cultures?
<i>Country/ Society</i>	Societal differences in acceptance of LGBTQIA+ issues and communities (e.g. Poushter and Kent, 2020)	Institutional theory (i.e. institutional logics, institutional fields, historical institutionalism) Social identity theory (inter-group dynamics) Socio-Cognitive theory Social movements Linguistic theories Theories of social cohesion Cultural theories (i.e. cultural values)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To what degree do MNEs adapt LGBTQIA+ policies based on differing societal expectations where they operate? 2. How do stakeholder expectations differ regarding corporate LGBTQIA+ policies for groups and/or countries? 3. How do specific institutional logics and various institutional fields influence MNE staffing choices with regards to LGBTQIA+ and non-LGBTQIA+ employees? 4. How do historical and institutional legacies shape LGBTQIA+ institutional frameworks and outcomes? 5. To what extent are LGBTQIA+ issue driven by identity politics, how and

(continued)

Table 1. Continued

Level	Illustrative examples	Examples of theories related to IB	Guiding research questions for IB
<i>Within-Country regional</i>	US state differences in LGBT practice support (e.g. Gardberg et al., 2023)	Geography theories (i.e. political geography, economic geography, geography of migration) Human rights	<p>why?</p> <p>6. How does language shape the social cognition and societal perceptions/judgements of the LGBTQIA+ community and/or specific Sub-groups?</p> <p>7. What specific cultural, historical, colonial and/or religious nuances influence societal attitudes towards the LGBTQIA+ community and/or specific Sub-groups?</p> <p>1. How do differences in LGBTQIA+ policies within MNEs' host countries influence MNE policy adoption?</p> <p>2. To what extent are LGBTQIA+ policy differences at a Sub-national level determined by rural-urban divides, regional cultures and other place-based determinants (i.e. language, religion, education, colonial influence)?</p> <p>3. What kind of industry-specific differences exist in LGBTQIA+ policies and practices relevant to MNEs?</p>
<i>Organization/Firm</i>	Human Rights Campaign Corporate Equality Index (e.g. Kaplan and Berkley, 2021)	Resource-based view of the firm and resource dependence OLI paradigm Strategy tripod/institution-based view for the firm Dynamic capabilities theory Stakeholder theory Signaling theory Cultural theories (i.e. cultural distance, cultural frictions)	<p>1. To what degree do MNEs create a global LGBTQIA+ identity when operating in diverse environments?</p> <p>2. How do MNEs manage cultural frictions and overcome physical distance across different host markets when it comes to LGBTQIA+ issues?</p> <p>3. To what extent do MNEs engage in LGBTQIA+ issues as a form of corporate social responsibility and corporate political activity?</p> <p>4. To what extent do MNEs pursue LGBTQIA+ issues from a business case perspective or as a social justice cause?</p> <p>5. To what extent do MNEs or their corporate and business brands engage in corporate activism or act as social change agents and why?</p> <p>6. How are MNEs LGBTQIA+ policies and practices linked to its corporate reputation and public trust?</p>

(continued)

Table 1. Continued

Level	Illustrative examples	Examples of theories related to IB	Guiding research questions for IB
<i>Within-Firm/ Team level</i>	Effectiveness and dynamics of global (virtual) teams in terms of identity-, resource- and knowledge-based subgroups (e.g. Gilson et al., 2015).	Social identity theory (i.e. identity work, intra-group dynamics and inter-group conflict) Social categorization theory Institutional theory (i.e. institutional logics, institutional fields) Faultline theory Contact theory	7. How does a CEO's LGBTQIA+ attitude/identity influence organizational LGBTQIA+ policies and practices? 1. How do LGBTQIA+ policies fit within existing DEI policies and how do they shape specific inter-group dynamics within organizations? 2. How do LGBTQIA+ issues impact team dynamics in cross-cultural settings? 3. How do firm LGBTQIA+ policies impact the operations of global virtual teams? 4. How do org. culture and inter-group dynamics interact in a LGBTQIA+ context? 5. How do specific LGBTQIA+ Sub-groups produce and reproduce specific institutional fields across different subsidiaries, organisational units and/or teams?
<i>Individual(s)</i>	Global careers of LGBT expatriates (e.g. McPhail et al., 2016). Microfoundations of strategy	Social identity theory (i.e. identity work, intersectionality) Social capital theory Institutional theory (i.e. institutional work) HRM theories (i.e. expatriation, career capital, belonging, discrimination, stigma) Microfoundations of strategy	1. How do LGBTQIA+ employees pursue their (global) careers? 2. What types of capital are pursued by the LGBTQIA+ community in transnational contexts, how and why? 3. What forms of identity work do members of the LGBTQIA+ community address stigma and pursue legitimization? 4. What is the <i>habitus</i> of different members of the LGBTQIA+ community in different parts of the world and how might it influence the microfoundations of global strategy? 5. How do LGBTQIA+ individuals create optimal distinctiveness with regards to collective LGBTQIA+ identities?

Source(s): Authors' own work

development policies. Given the degree to which LGBTQIA+ issues are deeply entrenched in many national and supranational cultures and political systems (i.e. through the European Commission's LGBTIQ Equality Strategy 2020–2025), the influence of issues on geopolitics is worthy of consideration and can be linked back to studying social movements (Tian *et al.*, 2021) and MNE non-market strategy (Shirodkar *et al.*, 2024).

With respect to corporate political activism or corporate responses to social activism (Wu and Liu, 2023), given their size, MNEs are known to have a degree of influence over local host governments. However, this has been more explicitly acknowledged in the context of sustainability and stepping up in the “Decade of Action” (van Tulder *et al.*, 2021) or related to other demographic variables such as *gender*, where MNEs have been seen as providing relatively greater benefits for women than domestic firms (e.g. Newburry *et al.*, 2014). Whether MNEs have the same influence with respect to LGBTQIA+ issues is an important area of future research (e.g. Newburry *et al.*, 2025), particularly as MNEs scale back their DEI efforts – not just in the current anti-DEI climate (Sands and Ferraro, 2025) but also to mixed results when it comes to societal-, organizational- and individual-level outcomes (see Wickham *et al.*, 2025). Yet, one thing is clear, rolling back DEI initiatives has an impact on consumer trust, brand positioning and corporate reputation (Sands and Ferraro, 2025), as well as on societal trust and social cohesion.

At the same time, however, it is important to also keep in mind that stakeholders/ audiences may differ in their expectations about corporate LGBTQIA+ policies themselves (see Dwivedi *et al.*, 2025). Similarly, the degree to which LGBTQIA+ issues might become part of an MNE's non-market strategy is also a potential areas for future research interest, given existing evidence on how LGBTQIA+ messaging impacts both targeted and non-targeted stakeholder audiences (Aaker *et al.*, 2000; Mohliver *et al.*, Mohliver and Hawn, 2019) and the impact of LGBTQIA+ advocacy on corporate reputation that varies across institutional environments (Zhou, 2021).

It is important to note that most institutional theory in IB stops at national borders and does not examine the supranational aspects of global institutions and their relationship with national institutions and MNEs (Hartmann *et al.*, 2022). IB studies using institutional theory also do not consider situations where the institutional environment is highly contested (e.g. Gardberg *et al.*, 2023), making it less clear which facet of the institutional environment should dominate in influencing firm policies and actions, let alone how different facets and institutional levels interact (Hartmann *et al.*, 2022). Exploring politically and socially highly contested environments can help us theorize about institutional erosion and de-evolution, democratic backsliding and institutional experimentation and prototyping, with important lessons for MNE strategy and IB policy more generally (Rašković *et al.*, 2024).

At the firm level, while the influence of host country LGBTQIA+ polices and cultural attitudes on lower-level corporate decisions such as HRM policies and marketing in host environments has received some research attention, greater examination of how MNEs manage differences between corporate policies and local host policies when political climates differ are still warranted. Indeed, an LGBTQIA+ component may be included within measures of cultural distance in some instances, however, it may be more appropriate in the context of LGBTQIA+ issues to replace cultural distance with the concept of *cultural frictions* (Shenkar *et al.*, 2008). Moreover, how MNEs manage the collection of policies related to various minority or disadvantaged groups (i.e. gender, differently abled, race, etc.) also deserves greater attention (Newburry *et al.*, 2025) and should be linked to the literature focusing on faultlines (Lau and Murnighan, 1998) and intersectionality.

We have discussed above just a few examples of the many complex and cross-level issues arising from Table 1 where an LGBTQIA+ research lens can link up with existing and new

IB research avenues. In turn, IB theory and the IB discipline's research toolkit can also provide important insights for the LGBTQIA+ research domain, particularly by honing in on its transnational and national aspects or firm-level organizational and strategic aspects.

5. Conclusion

We started our scene-setting viewpoint by first reviewing the evolving LGBTQIA+ terminology and the relevance of labels, highlighting the *etic* nature of LGBTQIA+ terminology and its WEIRD ontological background. Such ontology can significantly limit IB's potential for theorizing, as well as managerial practice and IB policy effectiveness (Buckley *et al.*, 2014). We then conducted a quick-and-dirty-type literature review of existing LGBTQIA+ research linked to IB directly or somehow global/transnational in nature in terms of application. It showed that IB scholars have so far engaged with the LGBTQIA+ community mostly across narrow pockets of topics and issues (i.e. marketing topics, HRM, diffusion of LGBTQIA+ policies) where the community has been approached either as a marginalized social group assuming a fault-based logic or under the wider banner of DEI research in a peripheral manner.

IB LGBTQIA+ research calls for an approach spanning multiple levels of theorizing and analysis, which has been lacking in IB's exploration of LGBTQIA+ issues (Newburry *et al.*, 2022). Such an approach is also essential for MNE strategy implementation (Šilenskytė and Smale, 2021). Our framework has highlighted not just different levels of theorization and analysis, but specific research directions to guide future research at the intersection of LGBTQIA+ and IB research.

We hope that our viewpoint catalyzes new streams of LGBTQIA+ research where the LGBTQIA+ community is not just seen as a backdrop for the contextualization of existing theories but that this research helps to also theorize LGBTQIA+ contexts and their transnational, international and global nature (Michailova, 2011). Such research, however, needs to be led by the LGBTQIA+ community or at least done in partnership with it. It needs to be also more mindful of the differences between *etic*- and *emic*-types of research and terminological backgrounds (Buckley *et al.*, 2014), requiring not just critical reflexivity (Rašković *et al.*, 2025) but also a degree of vulnerability on the part of the researchers (Hibbert, 2025). *Etic*-type of LGBTQIA+ IB research has a much greater chance of appropriately theorizing context and not just contextualizing existing theories (Muzio, 2022; Whetten, 2009).

Finally, we also hope that IB LGBTQIA+ research focuses not just on different institutional and cultural contexts (Moreno *et al.*, 2020; Cole and Geist, 2023), but that it can also pursue more culturally aware theorization and methods (Hughes *et al.*, 2021; Wynn and West-Olatunji, 2009) – both for the sake of the research participants and the researchers (i.e. psychological safety). Marrying case study methodology, as a disciplinary convention within the IB field (Welch *et al.*, 2022), and the uniqueness of the IB discipline in theorizing about the nexus of place, space and organization (Beugelsdijk, 2022), we believe IB researchers are well-positioned to advance the future of IB LGBTQIA+ research through the intersectionality of LGBTQIA+ and IB contexts beyond the common DEI interface and its business case (Newburry *et al.*, 2022). Like other types of DEI research, IB LGBTQIA+ research has the potential to serve as a whetstone for sharpening IB research more generally (Rašković *et al.*, 2025).

Notes

- [1.] While we have decided to consistently use the broadest term with regards to its inclusivity, that is the LGBTQIA+ term referring to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transsexual, queer, intersex, asexual

and other identities (i.e. the plus), our search was for the most widely known and most common term of “LGBT”. We acknowledge that the LGBTQIA+ term is more prevalent within the Anglosphere and is also more WEIRD-centric (i.e. related to western, educated, industrialized, rich and developed). However, we have opted for it given its widespread use, international recognition and high level of inclusivity for people who do not fit specific labels (i.e. queer people, curious, asexual).

- [2.] ILGA-Europe, for example, which includes over 700 non-government organizations in Europe and Central Asia – consistently uses the term LGBTI, which covers only the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex communities. O’Dwyer (2024) on the other hand uses the term LGBTQIAP, which also includes intersex, asexual/aromantic and pansexual.

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