

CAREER COUNSELLING GLBTQ POPULATION

Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered, and Questioning (GLBTQ)

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Psychology 200: Introduction to Career Development (C1)

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November 20, 2013

Abstract

This paper will address career development issues for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender (GLBT) as a group due to lack of research. The discussion will focus on population characteristics, group needs, health and safety concerns, the importance of identity formation, and societal views that impact career development for this group. There will be a discussion of career resources that will support the particular needs of this group with a focus on implications for gay women whenever possible.

Client Group

There have been great societal changes made for gays and lesbians in past forty-five years. Since 1967, when Pierre Trudeau's Liberal government claimed that the 'state had no place in the nation's bedrooms' (Steele & Nemeth, 1994, para. 9) stigma and stereotypes still entrench the socio-economic system for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered, and questioning (GLBTQ) people. Limited research has been done in this area and between 1978-1989 it has been reported that only 43, out of over 6000 articles published in 6 major psychological journals, addressed gay and lesbian issues (Buhrke, Ben-Ezra, Hurley, & Ruprecht, 1992 as cited in Fontaine & Hammond, 1996, para 1). In the labour force, the percentage of visible minorities including women continues to increase (Canada Statistics Canada, 2013) and with that comes the increased need for diversity counseling (Niles & Harris-Bowlesby, 2009). For a woman being gay puts her doubly at risk of discrimination and career barriers. Sexual orientation discrimination was found to be the number one career-related concern for gay women (Keeton 2002, as cited in Schreier, 2007, p. 9).

“Researchers and practitioners do not fully understand the nature and extent of actual and perceived barriers in lesbians' career development” (Morrow, Gore, & Campbell, 1996 as cited in House, 2004, para. 1). What has been identified consistently in studies is that the process of sexual identity formation for gays and lesbians has a significant impact on career development. Two specific concerns in the career development of lesbians include their decision to disclose their sexual orientation and their view of discrimination that is based on sexual orientation (Degges-White & Shoffner, 2002). The overlap of career and personal life for GLBTQ's affects their overall health and wellness, identity formation, community connectedness, and career

satisfaction. As there will always be overlap in career and personal counseling, the implications for the career counselor is to be skilled in diversity issues that impact this group, address the overlap in their career and personal lives, and make referrals when necessary to support their needs (Brown & Lent, 2013).

Identity Formation

The social environment plays a critical role in an individual's identity formation. Environmental systems such as school, family, neighborhood, and work setting assist in this process (Fontaine & Hammond, 1996, para. 6). This development of identity can be a particularly stressful, secretive, and a painful time for GLBTQ individuals as they face emotional and social barriers. Fontaine and Hammond (1996) point out that this stigmatization is reflected in the disproportionate psychological problems that affect gay and lesbian teens. "Runaways, substance abuse, depression, anxiety, suicide attempts, and prostitution have been evidenced by this group in higher proportions than by non-homosexual youth" (Jay & Young, 1979; Bell & Weinberg, 1978; Hetrick & Martin, 1987; Remafedi, 1987a as cited in Fontaine & Hammond 1996, para. 7).

Brown (1991) identified the process of cultural identity development as being critical in their lives (Pope, Barret, Szymanski, Chung, et al., 2004, para. 12). This may be exemplified by the mean study results of lesbian college respondents in the growth, exploration, establishment, and maintenance stage. Compared to heterosexuals, the results showed delay or lack of confidence in completion of most tasks in Super's Life Space and Life Span approach to career development (Schreier, 207, p. 66). Day and Schocnrade (1997) looked at identity management in relation to work attitudes and found that closeted gay persons had significantly higher job

stress than heterosexuals. More closeted workers were also found to have lower job satisfaction, and more work-home problems compared to those more open (House, 2004).

Health & Safety

Past studies have shown that sexual orientation discrimination and stigmatization among gay and lesbian teens increased stress and anxiety resulting in a disproportionate frequency of psychological disturbance for this group. Many studies confirm that among this group there are higher rate of substance abuse, depression, anxiety, suicide attempts, and prostitution compared to heterosexuals (Jay & Young, 1979; Bell & Weinberg, 1978; Hetrick & Martin, 1987; Remafedi, 1987a as cited in Fontaine & Hammond, 1996). The GLBT group is more likely to be homeless, endure regular anti-gay slurs and a 30% risk of suicide (PFLGA Canada, 2013). Maintaining sexual orientation secrecy also expends energy that that is needed to for job performance, career satisfaction, and career development (Fogarty, 1980). These high levels of stress and fear influence the decision to disclose sexual orientation or not to others (Degges-White & Shoffner, 2002).

An article regarding health care use among gay, lesbian, and bisexual Canadians found that GLB's were more likely to consult and receive mental health care., gay women consulted family doctors less often and were less likely to have a regular doctor, and fewer regular pap tests than heterosexual women (Statistics Canada, 2008, p. 1).

Keep in mind as well that the degree of non-disclosure of sexual orientation is unknown and such study results only represent those who have willingly self-identified as being GLB

(Tjepkema, 2008). Nonetheless, the noted disparity in areas of health and wellness and different health-care-seeking behaviors compared to heterosexuals requires further study.

Past research has indicated that a positive gay/lesbian identity is related to healthy psychological adjustment (Hammersmith & Weinberg, 1973; Miranda & Storms, 1989 as cited in Bringaze & White, 2001) which is difficult to attain when feelings of discrimination and fear are a regular part of their societal experience. A survey of the GLB group reported 32% were the target of physical violence because of their sexual orientation (American Psychological Association [APA], 2001). Statistics Canada (2004) refers to a hate crime as an offence that is motivated by bias, prejudice or hate based on race, national or ethnic origin, language, colour, religion, sex, age, mental or physical disability, sexual orientation, or any other similar factor. Sexual orientation was the motivation for one-tenth of the hate crimes reported that year.

Community

Societal acceptance strengthens positive health and well-being in individuals. Those who have insufficient social support networks to initiate or maintain acquired gains in counselling are predicted to have poor outcomes, regardless of sexual orientation. Helping the client identify or develop strong, positive social supports is a predictor of counselling outcomes. Another useful scale for working with this group is the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) which is utilized to assess the client's perceived social supports (Harmon, Hawkins, Lambert, Slade, & Whipple, 2005). Scheier (2007) pointed out that Ford's (1996) review of literature found that lesbians' career decisions were influenced by six factors including gender, the desire to be independent, the ability to control their identity management, career gender and sexual orientation stereotypes, gender/sexual orientation discrimination, and the overall view of

them by the community. The fear of ‘coming out’ and being subjected to discrimination may alienate gays and lesbians from their community and have a negative impact on their psychological adjustment. However, some of these anxieties and fears can be mitigated by having positive social supports (House, 2004).

Career counselors must follow professional and ethical guidelines to assist GLBTQ clients experiencing prejudice, limited opportunities, stigmatization, isolation, and other societal barriers that may impact or delay their identity formation and career development. The American Psychologists Association (APA) provides Guidelines for Psychological Practice for GLB clients. As well, the APA provides assistance in “areas such as religion and spirituality, the differentiation of gender identity and sexual orientation, socioeconomic and workplace issues, and the use and dissemination of research on LGB issues” (American Psychologist Association [APA], 2013, para.1). Sharing these guidelines with the client may help clarify the counselling approach and/or position, and competency while building trust and rapport.

Like heterosexuals, gays and lesbians seek stable, long-term relationships and trying to have a relationship where it is against the law “can lead to chronic social stress and mental health problems. Psychologists are particularly concerned that such stigma may undermine the healthy development of adolescents and young adults” APA, 2013, para. 3). Community Organizations can provide information, peer support, ‘out’ community leaders, mentoring, job-shadowing, social-emotional support, community events, and a variety of other resources for GLBTQ people; their parents, families, and colleagues. These resources will help the individual develop positive self- identity and positive connections in their community.

Career Counseling Services that meet the needs of the target group

Career Services

O*Net Work Importance Profiler. This profiler measures the importance of six work values – achievement, independence, recognition, relationships, support, and working conditions. This instrument can be downloaded without a fee from www.onenetcenter.org. This resource is useful as it helps the counselor determine the client’s needs and it can also be used as a measure of progress or change (Niles & Harris-Bowlsbey, 2009). Identity management is area that requires discussion when utilizing surveys or assessments that do not account for sexual identity as an essential variable. The “TWA seems to be an equally appropriate theory that is applicable to minority populations, particularly given TWA's focus on the individual's interface with the work environment” (Degges-White & Shoffner, 2002, para 6) and when assessments like Holland’s (1997) Person-Environment Fit and Super’s Archway Model addresses many variables that impact career development, but not sexual orientation, when positioned within the Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA) measure it can account for this needed variable (Degges-White & Shoffner, 2002). The Workplace Sexual Identity Management Measure (WSIMM) can also be used to help lesbians and gay workers assess their work environment and explore appropriate strategies for sexual orientation disclosure (Anderson, Croteau, Chung, and DiStefano, 2001 as cited in American Psychological Association [APA], 2008).

Career Counseling Services

InformAlberta.ca

This service was chosen in proximity to the client’s community offering counseling on Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgendered, and Questioning (GLBTQ) identity issues. This service

also provide sexual and gender diversity information, referrals, and support for GLBTQ in the community (InformAlberta.ca, 2013). As one's career development starts at an early age and issues related to identity may delay growth in this area due societal stigmas and barriers - these concerns need to be explored as part of the career counselling process in order to assist career development. Steele & Nemeth (1994) reported in research interviews that many GLB's find it hard emotionally and socially to discuss their sexual orientation and to come out for fear of being labeled which puts them at a higher risk of dropping out of school, substance abuse, and suicide (para 16). Just as the roles and stages identified by Super (1990) overlap and interconnect, identity formation may progress or be delayed (Amundson, Harris-Bowlsbey, & Niles, 2009, p. 21). During the exploration stage when sexual identity is sought - disclosure may create even more anxiety and negative risk and "some career options may be discarded during this process" (Elliot, 1993 as cited in Schreier, 2009, p. 22).

During the process of sexual identity formation, negative views from community may leave an individual robbed of needed career development energy (Dunkle, 1996; Fassinger, 1996 as cited in House, 2004). One qualitative study, found that sexual identity development could "delay, disrupt, or derail" lesbians' career development (Boatwright, Gilbert, Forrest, and Ketzcnberger, 1996) and lesbian identity development in later life may affect work role, self-esteem, and career advancement at work (Dunkle, 1996, as cited in House, 2004). For gays and lesbians, identity development can be significantly delayed due to society's stigmatization (Cass, 1979; Coleman, 1982) and this harmful environment affects their overall health and well-being (APA, 2008).

Community Services

PFLAG Canada – Community Resource

This is a national organization that assists individuals struggling with issues of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. It provides services in education and resources for parents, families, friends and colleagues. The PFLAG Canada provides resources to all individuals with concerns 24 hours a day and 7 days a week (PFLAG Canada, 2013). Living in communities that routinely discriminate against GLBTQ people makes it virtually impossible to avoid internalizing negative stereotypes about themselves as a minority group. Counsellors must also be aware of the client's stage of gay/lesbian identity and other developmental concerns in order to provide effective career counselling and it especially with dual or multiple identity discriminations (Pope, Barret, Szymanski, Chung, et al., 2004). the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) to assess client social support systems (Harmon, Hawkins, Lambert, Slade, & Whipple, 2005). Studies presented by the American Psychological Association (2008) found that when sexual minority groups gained social support from religious institutions, families, GLBT friends and heterosexuals it led to most of the participants experiencing a greater feeling of safety and happiness (See Appendix A: Community Services List). Another study identified that the family members of GLBT people were highly impacted by anti-GLBT movements and felt equally attacked and rejected by the community (APA, 2008).

The implications for career counselling GLBTQ population is the need for the counsellor to have adequate diversity training, and knowledge of the population but more importantly, the uniqueness and needs of each client. The client's life stage, identity formation, and their decision to 'come out to self' and/or to 'come out to others' must be approached in relation to how these interconnected factors affect career development from the client's perspective.

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Community Services List**Appendix A****PFLAG Canada**

This is a national organization that assists individuals struggling with issues of sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression. It provides services in education, resources for parents, families, friends and colleagues, and in group setting where people can share their feelings and experiences. PFLAG Canada provides resources to all individuals with concerns 24 hours a day and 7 days a week (PFLAG Canada, 2013).

Catholic Family Service Counseling Centre

This service was chosen due to proximity to client's community. This service offers multi-cultural, diversity counseling to designated groups as part of the diversity initiative for women, Aboriginals, persons with disabilities, and GLTB individuals. The services help people deal with a full range of life challenges from career, family, and personal challenges. Referrals can be made if necessary (Catholic Family Service, 2013).

InformAlberta.ca

This resource offers counseling, family support, youth counseling, sexual and diversity support for GLBT individuals. Offers a community drop-in centre for LGBTQ community, promotes cross-cultural relationships within the diverse variety of communities in the city. Community contacts, peer-support, social support groups, and other community services are provided at this site (InformAlberta.ca, 2013).

University of Calgary - The SU Centre for Sexual and Gender Diversity

This service provides a safe space, resources, peer support, and volunteer opportunities (University of Calgary, 2013).

American Psychological Association (APA) – LGBT Concerns

This resource provides information on gender identity and sexual orientation provided to benefit society and improve LGBT people's lives (APA, 2013).

AlbertaTrans.org

Calgary's GLBT Community organization designed to create networking and community building among all people. The organization provides GLBTQ (Gay / Lesbian / Bisexual / Transsexual / Two Spirited / Questioning) support groups, education, and resources (AlbertaTrans.ca, 2013).

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