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The career development of gay men, lesbians and bisexuals

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The career development of lesbian, gay and bisexual people is under-researched, especially in the UK. In this paper I begin by attempting to quantify and describe this group of people before exploring how LGB young people develop an identity in a heteronormative, and often oppressive, environment. I then provide a partial overview of the (mostly American) literature regarding LGB careers, including why and how LGB people choose certain occupations and the largely stereotyped nature of those decisions. I also explore how being LGB affects people at work. Finally, I offer some suggestions for career guidance practice with LGB individuals.

Introduction

Although great strides have been made in countering discrimination against minority groups in the UK, discrimination (whether intentional or otherwise) continues to be experienced by lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) individuals in the workplace, and homophobic bullying continues to be a problem in educational settings (Guasp, 2012). Young people therefore continue to be born into a heteronormative society, which means that:

> '…heterosexuality is the norm in culture, in society, in politics. Heteronormativity points out the expectation of heterosexuality as it is written into our world…heteronormativity emphasizes the extent to which everyone, straight or queer, will be judged, measured, probed, and evaluated from the perspective of the heterosexual norm.' (Chambers, 2003, p26).

In a heteronormative society, white heterosexual males still dominate many organisations (Hearn, 2004) - including schools and colleges - and LGB people are expected to conform to this heteronormative workplace. This article draws attention not only to the effects of heteronormativity on the careers of LGB individuals but also the need for career guidance practitioners to become more reflective in their practice in order to challenge society's (and possibly their own) heteronormative assumptions, prejudices and biases.

The primary focus of this article is on the careers of LGB individuals (although there is a paucity of literature on the careers of bisexual people). Since the focus is on sexuality rather than gender, I will not discuss issues such as transgender and non-binary identities, or gender dysphoria. I will, however, refer to 'LGBT' (and variations on this) where appropriate.

According to the Office for National Statistics (online) in 2016:

> 'Just over 1 million (2.0%) of the UK population aged 16 and over identified themselves as lesbian, gay or bisexual (1.2% identifying as gay or lesbian)… The population aged 16 to 24 were the age group most likely to identify as LGB in 2016 (4.1%).'

Also in 2016, in a survey of 17,000 Year 10 (14-15 years old) students in North Yorkshire, a significantly larger proportion (7%) said they were LGB (North Yorkshire County Council, 2016).

A distinction needs to be made between sexual orientation and sexual identity: the former refers to 'the direction of one's sexual or romantic attraction' (Giddens, 2006, p. 450), whilst the latter refers to how one defines oneself socially (Prince, 2013). Whilst a person's sexual orientation can be context-

specific, sexual identity is acknowledged to be socially constructed and fluid, especially amongst today's young people. Indeed, Savin-Williams (2005) says that 21st century teenagers are less likely to label themselves as lesbian or gay. This is exemplified by Coleman-Fountain's 2008 study of 5 lesbians and 14 gay men aged 16-21 in the north-east of England which found that, whilst some of his cohort still used terms such as gay, they questioned the meanings of these labels. For example, one young man argued that he was gay, even though he had sex with females (Coleman-Fountain, 2014). The ways in which sexual identity affects career choice are the focus of the next section.

LGB young people

Erikson (1968) famously posited that young people between the ages of 12-18 undergo a period of psychosocial development during which time they ask questions about their identity. Perhaps the best-known psychologist to develop Erikson's work on identity is Marcia (1980, 1987). He proposed that in late adolescence an individual can be in one of four states of identity formation: identity achievement, moratorium, foreclosure, and identity diffusion – all but the first indicating young people who are still searching for a complete identity. During their teenage years young people will be exploring their sexual identity which is one of the main 'tasks' of adolescence and 'a fundamental aspect of personal identity' (DePalma & Jennet, 2010, p. 20). Morrow (1997, p. 5) identified common threads in various lesbian and gay identity development models as follows: beginning to feel different; having 'identity confusion'; attempting to make light of one's feelings; identity tolerance, without full acceptance; identity acceptance; 'identity pride'; and finally, 'integration with other aspects of self'. As part of their exploration, LGB young people may adopt different identities as they try to develop both a social identity that allows them to 'fit in' with society, as well as developing a more personal, individual identity (Cooper, 2013, p. 18).

At the same time as many LGB young people are attempting to form a sexual identity, they are also expected to develop a vocational identity (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) and make important educational or career-related decisions. Some authors (e.g. Morrow, 1997) argue that the dual focus on career decisions and sexual identity creates tension and leads to a 'bottleneck effect' (Hetherington, 1991), whereby young LGB individuals focus on their sexual identity at the expense of their career identity, which can lead to greater indecision (Mobley & Slaney, 1996) and a lack of vocational maturity (Dunkle, 1996). Conversely, some LGB students may prioritise their career rather than their sexual identity (Morrow, 1996). Coleman and Hendry (1990) argue that teenagers are more successful in coping with stressful events if they deal with one issue at a time; dealing with both their sexual identity and career decisions is therefore likely to be problematic for some LGB individuals and this possible tension needs to be recognised by practitioners.

The process of coming to terms with one's sexuality is problematic for many LGB people and can be especially difficult for those from certain cultures which have less tolerant attitudes (Fukuyama & Ferguson, 2000). King et al. (2008, p.1) conducted a systematic review of the literature on the health of the LGB community and concluded that 'LGB people are at higher risk of mental disorder, suicidal ideation, substance misuse, and deliberate self-harm than heterosexual people'. Guasp (2012) also found that some of these issues (e.g. self-harm, depression, drug-taking) begin in adolescence.

Heteronormativity prevails in schools, and its presence creates an environment where homophobic bullying can flourish (O'Higgins-Norman, 2009) and where students can be seen to be 'policing the boundaries of sexuality for their school and for the wider society' (Norman & Galvin, 2006, p. 25). Although some authors suggest that homophobic bullying is in decline (e.g. Guasp, 2012), it remains a problem in many schools and colleges; for example 69.1% of respondents to an LGBT Youth Scotland study (2012) claimed to suffer from homophobic bullying. In comparison, 55% of the LGB students in Guasp's 2012 (Stonewall) study had suffered homophobic bullying (down from 65% in 2007). Warwick et al. (2004, p. 10) identified a number of effects that homophobic bullying can have on an individual, such as 'lack of sleep, loss of appetite, isolation, nervousness, and being upset or angry'; whilst Drydakis's (2014) review of the literature identified another two important effects on career choice, namely lower self-esteem and lower academic performance.

Other studies have also found that homophobic bullying has a negative effect on LGB young people's educational attainment (e.g. Guasp, 2012).

Homophobia – which can be defined as 'the dislike of or prejudice against homosexual people' (Oxford dictionaries online) – is, of course, not just an issue for school pupils since its effects are recognised as a wider issue for society (Equality Network, 2015). Homophobia is also widespread and shows similar patterns across different countries (Plummer, 2001).

LGB career development

In this section I explore some of the key variables at play in LGB career development. For many LGB individuals career decision-making is different from that of many straight people. And, of course, not all LGB individuals come to terms with their sexual identity until later in life, which could lead them to changing career when much older (Dunkle, 1996), thereby highlighting the need for lifelong careers advice. As Boatwright et al. (1996) found, accepting and then integrating a lesbian identity later in life can have a profound effect on one's career development.

Not surprisingly, given the time that they were developed, classic career theories simply did not consider the LGB community (e.g. Ginzberg, Ginsburg, Axelrad & Herma, 1951; Holland, 1985; Krumboltz, 1976; Super, 1957). According to Ragins (2004) these theories failed to consider the discrimination faced by LGB individuals in the workplace and did not acknowledge the possibility of disrupted and non-linear career development for LGB people.

Some authors have investigated the applicability of some of these classic theories to the LGB community (e.g. Chung & Harmon, 1994). However, these tend to be one-off studies that make it hard to draw conclusions for the wider population. For example, Chung and Harmon tested the relevance of Holland's theory to gay men and found that 'compared to heterosexual men, gay men's interests were less Realistic and Investigative but were more Artistic and Social'.

Other writers have explored the relevance of Dawis and Lofquist's Work Adjustment Theory (1984) to LGB decision-making, with Lyons et al. (2005) finding that the workplace environment was especially important to LGB individuals' job satisfaction.

With regard to social learning theories (e.g. Krumboltz, 1977; Lent et al, 1994), a number of authors have tested their relevance to the LGB community. For example, Morrow, Gore and Campbell (1996) considered the relevance of social cognitive career theory to the career development of lesbians and gay men and argued that widespread homophobia might affect one's self-efficacy – 'beliefs about one's ability to successfully perform particular behaviours or courses of action' (Lent et al., 2008, p.329). Morrow (1997) argues that self-efficacy can be improved by, for example, securing a placement in a non-stereotyped occupation which can also offer vicarious learning opportunities. However, as Morrow et al. (1996, p.141) say in relation to LGB career decision-making, 'the crucial issue may not be, "can I do it?", but "what will happen if I do?"'; thus drawing our attention to the part that external factors play in career decision-making. As Datti (2009) points out environmental factors such as the political climate and geography can have an effect on LGB individuals and they can internalise society's attitudes about sexuality and work (I say more about this later).

Lambert (1954, cited in Etherington, Hillerbrand & Etringer, 1989) was one of the first authors to consider the careers of 'homosexuals' in the USA, and although a number of authors since the mid to late 1980s have written about LGB careers or LGB counselling (e.g. Chung & Harmon, 1994; Colgan et al, 2008; Elliot, 1993; Morrow, 1997; Ragins, 2004; Schneider & Dimito, 2010), there is still a lack of literature on such matters, especially in the UK.

The bulk of the literature suggests that sexuality affects many LGB individuals' career decision-making directly (e.g. Croteau, Anderson, Ditefano & Kampa-Kokesh, 2000; Tilcsik, Anteby & Knight, 2015). For example 64% of Schneider and Dimito's (2010, p. 1361) cohort said that being LGBT+ had influenced their career and academic decisions, of whom 45% felt being LGBT+ had had a positive influence on their career a 'great deal'.

Young people's tendency to make gender-based, stereotyped career decisions is very well known (see,

for example, Gottfredson, 1981; Weisgram, Bigler & Liben, 2010; White & White, 2006). As Gadasi and Gati (2009, p. 903) put it, 'occupational stereotypes are internalized by both boys and girls from a young age'.

Although some writers argue that LGB career decision-making is becoming less stereotyped (Dati, 2009), others such as Tilscsik, Anteby & Knight (2015, p. 446) argue that 'gay men are more likely to be in female-majority occupations than are heterosexual men, and lesbians are more represented in male-majority occupations than are heterosexual women'. Gay men are more likely therefore to become hairdressers, air cabin crew, artists, actors or nurses, whilst lesbians are more likely to become training officers, probation officers, vehicle mechanics or engineers. However, according to the results of Schneider's (2010) Canadian study, lesbians felt that being gay opened up more doors, whilst gay men felt it closed them.

In one of the few British studies, Simpson (2005, p. 174), argues that there are a number of reasons why gay men seek out work in female-concentrated or gender-neutral jobs; for example, they can 'relax and be themselves' or employ empathy in their contacts with service users. Gay men also suffer from less role strain and experience no embarrassment, shame or discomfort by taking non-traditional jobs (Simpson, 2005), and are more comfortable with aesthetic labour than their straight counterparts (Huppatz, 2012).

The concentration of lesbians and gay men in certain occupations, or in specific organisations, might also be because they seek 'safe-havens…which holds that career decisions of LGB workers are driven by their desire to find careers, occupations and workplaces that allow them to disclose their sexual identity and protect them from workplace discrimination' (Ragins, 2015, p. 97). As Schneider (2010, p. 1365) notes: 'those who had experienced the highest level of anti-LGBT discrimination reported a greater impact of sexual orientation, less satisfaction with their career choices and narrower options.'

Therefore LGB individuals actively avoid certain occupations and/or employers (Chung, 1995; Hetherington, Hillerbrand & Etringer, 1989; Schneider & McCurdy-Myers, 1999) because they are seeking a tolerant/safe workplace.

Tilcsik et al. (2015) say that lesbians and gay men seek out occupations which provide them with task independence and/or the opportunity to utilise social perceptiveness - the 'accurate anticipation and reading of others' reactions' (p. 447). Ultimately, 'occupational segregation is shaped by gay men and lesbian workers' adaptation to potential discrimination and the dilemmas of disclosure they face in the workplace' (p. 470). In other words, jobs that require task independence and/or social perceptiveness afford lesbians and gay men the opportunity to manage potential difficulties at work.

Whatever accounts for LGB individuals' concentration in certain occupations, by entering these occupations, they often perpetuate occupational stereotypes (Chena & Keats, 2014). In addition, by entering stereotypical occupations, many LGB people are therefore restricting the range of occupations they consider (Fassinger, 1996). In such cases, are LGB people also more likely to simply respond to the locally available, and stereotyped, opportunity structures (Roberts, 1977)?

Experience in the workplace

Whilst there are many examples of LGB employees who are content in their work, research suggests that there are a number of issues that affect LGB individuals more than their heterosexual counterparts. Although the 2010 Equalities Act strengthened the position of LGB people in Great Britain, employer discrimination, and treatment at work, can still lead to LGB individuals suffering from anxiety and lower job satisfaction (Ozeren, 2014) and lower self-confidence (Keeton 2004). The consequence could be that 'anticipated or prior experiences with discrimination may lead to a re-assessment of career goals and "safe-haven" career decisions' (Ragins, 2015, p. 108).

In a study of 534 American gay and lesbian professionals, a third had been on the receiving end of physical or verbal harassment and many had resigned from their jobs as a result (Ragins et al, 2007). According to Parnell (2012), LGB employees who worked in heterosexist organisations had lower job satisfaction which could lead to poorer mental health (Ragins, 2015). Faced with a toxic work environment, LGB employees may adopt a number of coping strategies, of which there are five according to

Chung (2001, p. 39): 'acting' as heterosexual by having a heterosexual relationship; 'passing' as heterosexual; 'covering', i.e. hiding information to protect one's sexual identity; being 'implicitly out'; and being 'explicitly out'. LGB employees therefore learn how to organise and manage their sexual identity at work. However, these forms of what Goffman (1959) calls 'impression management', or what Croteau et al. (2008) refer to as 'sexual identity management', can take a heavy toll. Indeed, rather than being out at work it is often easier for individuals to stay 'in the closet' and 'hide their sexual orientation' (Rheineck, 2005, p. 88). Conversely, being out to colleagues can have positive effects such as an increase in one's physical and mental wellbeing (Croteau et al., 2008) and greater job satisfaction (Day & Schoenrade, 1997). However, the specific workplace and associated colleagues can influence whether someone comes out because 'concealment may actually be a necessary and adaptive decision for individuals in hostile environments' (Prince, 2013, p. 279).

The considerations for career guidance practice are clear: we may well have clients who are considering leaving, or have already left their career due to perceived or real discrimination, or as part of their coming out process. These clients may well seek our advice, but are we prepared for this and do we have strategies in place to support them? The next section therefore considers, albeit briefly, some possible responses to LGB clients.

Implications for practice

There are various ways in which career practitioners can help LGB clients and there is an increasing amount of literature on this topic (e.g. Beck, Rausch, Lane & Wood, 2016; Carroll & Gilroy, 2001; Datti, 2009; Hancock & Taylor, 2018; Kumashiro, 2002; Morgan Brown, 1991; Maree, 2014; Morrow & Hawxhurst, 1997; Pollock & Meek, 2016; Prince, 2013;) and some innovative work has taken place with LGB individuals (e.g. Hutchinson et al., 2011). Also, Morrow and Hawxhurst (1997) suggest that career practitioners can empower LGB individuals at the personal, interpersonal, and social/political levels. In a similar vein, Hancock and Taylor (2018) suggest what 'progressive and radical' career positions (Watts, 1996) might look like; for example, careers offices could easily become more inclusive by displaying Stonewall's poster 'Some People Are Gay, Get Over It' and/or their other posters specifically referencing lesbians and bisexuals. Practitioners could also become more familiar with LGB culture (Beck et al, 2016). Moreover, if LGB people are still making stereotyped career decisions practitioners might also want to broaden their clients' 'horizons for action' (Hodkinson & Sparkes, 1997).

However, it could be argued that an important starting point for all practitioners is for us to consider our own prejudices, biases and stereotypes (Pope et al, 2004) and how much we unconsciously adopt heteronormative ways of seeing the world. As part of his 'Career Counseling with Underserved Populations' model, Pope (2011) outlines a series of 13 questions that practitioners can ask themselves before embarking on work with members of minority groups – these have been adapted for work with LGB clients by Beck et al. (2016, p. 203), as follows:

1. What are my experiences in working with and advocating for students identifying as LGBQQ? [lesbian, gay, bisexual, queer or questioning]
2. What thoughts and feelings do I have toward youth identifying as LGBQQ?
3. What supports do I have in place to help address any harmful attitudes, prejudices and biases I may have?
4. What preconceived thoughts do I have about what types of colleges students identifying as LGBQQ should attend?
5. How will my reactions impact my work in creating an LGBQQ-inclusive college and career readiness program?

Conclusion

This paper presents an overview of some of the salient aspects of LGB career development. I believe that Beck et al's 5 questions, as well as other suggestions contained within the literature, provide a useful checklist for practitioners working with LGB clients and which could be easily adapted for work with other minority groups. Implicit in this paper is the need for continuing reflective practice and continuing professional development, both of which are central to the work of a modern careers adviser in a global society. We need to recognise that not all of our

clients are heterosexual and adopt strategies to support each client's individual needs. Finally, this paper highlights the need for more British research into the career development of LGB (and T) individuals, as there is a clear and unacceptable gap in our understanding of LGBT career development.

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