Career development and counselling needs of LGBTQ high school students

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There is a dearth of research concerning the career development and counselling issues that are relevant for high school students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ). As such, little is known to understand LGBTQ students when it comes to their career-related struggles and needs. This article attempts to examine the career development needs of LGBTQ high school students, addressing and analysing career problems from the unique circumstances of this student population. To do so, it provides an overview of the various career-related issues afflicting LGBTQ high school students. It then proposes a series of career guidance and counselling intervention considerations that are tailored to address the specific career needs and challenges of the LGBTQ high school students.

ABSTRACT

There is a dearth of research concerning the career development and counselling issues that are relevant for high school students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ). As such, little is known to understand LGBTQ students when it comes to their career-related struggles and needs. This article attempts to examine the career development needs of LGBTQ high school students, addressing and analysing career problems from the unique circumstances of this student population. To do so, it provides an overview of the various career-related issues afflicting LGBTQ high school students. It then proposes a series of career guidance and counselling intervention considerations that are tailored to address the specific career needs and challenges of the LGBTQ high school students.

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There is an abundance of literature available regarding career-related development and career guidance and counselling of high school students (Feller, 2003; Hargrove, Inman, & Crane, 2005; Hughes & Karp, 2004; Powell & Luzzo, 1998; Whiston & Sexton, 1998). However, to date, little research has been conducted on the career development and counselling of high school students who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ). There is a huge need for more research in this area, as it is estimated that over 10% of North Americans (and thus a substantial portion of high school students) are members of the LGBTQ community (Bieschke & Matthews, 1996; Kaplan, 2014). Unfortunately, the needs of LGBTQ students are not often met. The Gay, Lesbian and Straight Education Network recently claimed that high school LGBTQ populations are the one group that remains continuously underserved by the education system (Goodrich & Luke, 2009). In particular, this population tends to struggle with a level of career indecisiveness far exceeding that of heterosexual students (Etringer, Hillerbrand, & Hetherington, 1990; Goodman & Battle, 2014). Notwithstanding the career guidance and counselling needs of LGBTQ students, the lack of understanding of the relationship between LGBTQ identity and vocational behaviour often results in a lack of LGBTQ responsive school counselling, in which career guidance and counselling is an essential component (Chung & Harmon, 1994; Goodrich & Luke, 2009).

The purpose of this article is to consider the career development needs of LGBTQ high school students which can help these students enhance their career well-being in their school-to-school and school-to-work transitions. To this end, this article begins with an overview of the various career-related issues afflicting LGBTQ high school students. Then, it proposes a series of career guidance...
and counselling considerations that are tailored to address the specific career needs and challenges of the LGBTQ high school students.

Although the focus of the current discussion is on LGBTQ high school students, it is important to note that members of this target population are not homogeneous. Just as lesbians differ from gay, transgendered and bisexual individuals, lesbians are also not homogeneous to other lesbians, nor gays to other gays, etc. (Prieto, 2006). It is beyond the scope of this article to elucidate the complexities and differences of sexual orientations and gender identities. Instead, this discussion will focus on LGBTQ sexual/gender identity minority status as a whole, with emphasis on issues that members of the LGBTQ high school community typically experience in a North American (i.e. USA and Canada) context. Notwithstanding this discussion context, the issue of career well-being for LGBTQ students may pertain to other countries and regions around the world. Unless clearly specified otherwise, student(s) and client(s) all refer to LGBTQ high school students, while counsellor(s) refer to guidance counsellor(s) in a high school setting within the current discussion.

**Career development barriers and challenges**

LGBTQ high school students face unique barriers and challenges in their career planning and exploration. Many of these students are struggling with their hidden minority status by internalising their homophobia or trying to ‘pass’ as heterosexual (Cook-Daniels, 2002; Pope et al., 2004). Whether openly identified or not, LGBTQ high school students are commonly victimised by their peers (Goodrich & Luke, 2009; Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, Card, & Russell, 2010), an experience made all the more damaging by the lack of available support systems in schools (Lindley, 2006; Prince, 1997). LGBTQ students struggling to overcome their identity confusion and integrate their LGBTQ identity into their self-concept are unable to simultaneously effectively make career plans (Alderson, 2003; Charles & Arndt, 2013; Mobley & Slaney, 1996). Those who are able to make career plans often restrict their true career interests and instead occupationally stereotype because of negative environmental influences and perceived barriers (Chung, 1995; Chung & Harmon, 1994; Lindley, 2006; Morrow, Gore, & Campbell, 1996; Pope et al., 2004; Prince, 1997). Finally, LGBTQ students who do want to discover their true interests often find no answers in popular career inventories because of the heterosexist testing bias in these tests (Elliott, 1993; Hood & Johnson, 2007; Lonborg & Phillips, 1996; Pope et al., 2004; Prince, 1997). These career-related issues are elaborated in more detail in the following sections.

**Hidden minority status and internalised homophobia**

It is difficult to provide career guidance to many LGBTQ high school students, as many are not fully LGBTQ identified or accepting themselves. These students are heavily exposed to social prejudices during these late adolescent years, and so it may be extremely difficult for them to mesh being LGBTQ with being a decent or worthy human being (Adelman, 1991). The result of such difficulty is feelings of internalised homophobia, or a sense of self-loathing related to one’s sexual orientation/gender identity (Smiley, 2004). This may also persist when the individual is ‘out’ as LGBTQ identified, and is not easily overcome (Pope et al., 2004). Many LGBTQ individuals may even try to ‘pass’ as heterosexual in order to feel and remain part of the majority/mainstream culture (Elliott, 1993). This is possible given the LGBTQ non-ethnic or hidden cultural minority status. Similar to many LGBTQ adults, an LGBTQ student can hardly be identified unless this information of one’s sexual orientation is disclosed (Elliott, 1993). Attempting to ‘pass’ or having feelings of internalised homophobia are quite understandable at the high school age in lieu of how damaging LGBTQ victimisation can be.

The hidden minority status and internalised homophobia (HMSIH) can have an impact on the career development of LGBTQ students (Chung, Chang, & Rose, 2015; Parnell, Lease, & Green, 2012). Perhaps a major career problem the students encounter is a struggle to balance their sexual identity
and its relationship to their prospective career choices and decision-making. Similar to their heterosexual majority student peers, LGBTQ students need much guidance and help as they are exposed to the need for considering and choosing a career direction(s) and/or related options. However, these students may often feel reluctant, hesitant and puzzled to explore options that will address their unique career needs in light of their sexual orientation. They may feel uncomfortable or even unsafe to openly address the pivotal sexual orientation needs in their career exploration. They may feel fearful of others’ reactions should they touch upon such needs even in an inexplicit, covert and subtle manner (Collins & Callahan, 2012).

In fact, the career exploration and development has little or no meaning at all without incorporating sexual identity, that is, who they are as persons in their lives, for these students. Yet, the HMSIH imposes a huge psychological roadblock, making these students feel trapped and isolated in their dilemma of searching for ways that can address both their sexual orientation and career needs. As such these students’ vocational behaviours and career maturity are actually closely intertwined with the development of sexual identity (Lyons, Brenner, & Lipman, 2010). While LGBTQ students continue in this struggle, others in their lives such as parents, teachers, counsellors, may erroneously conceive these students as lagging behind in maturity when it comes to career planning and career decision-making. This could in turn cause more misunderstanding that reinforces the already deep-rooted HMSIH of these students, making them more hesitant and confused in validating and accommodating the positive and constructive integration of their sexual self-identity and vocational self-identity, which is most often an essential necessity for their prospective career well-being.

Victimisation

Perhaps the most visible issue affecting LGBTQ high school students is peer victimisation. The greater these students contrast from hetero-normative society, the more likely it is that they will be victimised or abused at school (Toomey, Ryan, Diaz, Card, & Russell, 2010). Sexual orientation may make these students easier targets of bullying, and therefore, bullying manifests a major form of victimisation. Goodrich and Luke (2009) found that 86.2% of LGBTQ-identified students report verbal harassment and 44.1% report physical harassment about their sexual orientation. As a result, the high school environment can severely impact one’s sense of belonging and safety (Alderson, 2003). Indeed, three-quarters of LGBTQ-identified students claim to feel unsafe in their school (Fedders, 2006). Such hostile learning environments directly impact one’s potential for success and lead to failure because of academic withdrawal and a lowered belief in one’s potential for achievement (Alderson, 2003; Koschoreck & Tooms, 2009). It is not surprising then that a high proportion of LGBTQ students are at increased risk for dropping out of school, substantially hampering their prospective career opportunities (Morrow et al., 1996). The National Mental Health Association in the United States shows that 28% of LGBTQ youth drop out of high school annually, which is three times the dropout rate of heterosexual students (Fedders, 2006).

Those who do remain in school are still adversely affected by victimisation and hostile learning environments. Research has shown that the grade point average of LGBTQ-identified students is typically half a letter grade lower than their heterosexual peers. They are also three times more likely to miss school and twice as likely to report having no intentions of going to college (Goodrich & Luke, 2009). It is difficult to provide effective career counselling for LGBTQ students who are so commonly missing school, dropping out and lowering their aspirations. Perhaps if there were more visible and substantial support for LGBTQ students, the aforementioned negative consequences of peer victimisation could be averted.

Lack of available support

LGBTQ students perceive less support and guidance for their career planning efforts than do heterosexual students (Lindley, 2006). In particular, LGBTQ students believe their school counsellors lack the
competencies to understand their specific career-related concerns (Goodrich & Luke, 2009), such as which career fields are queer-friendly, are they expected to come out, that is, openly acknowledge their sexual orientation, in potential job interviews or on the job, and should they choose careers based on interest or LGBTQ fit (Prince, 1997; Rumens, 2011).

High schools also generally fail to provide appropriate role models for LGBTQ students. These students need to receive encouragement and guidance from someone representative of them to in order to improve their own future life-career hopes and expectations (Lindley, 2006). Being unable to provide these students with appropriate role models is just another way of ignoring their presence in the school system (Goodrich & Luke, 2009). It not only sends the message that there are no successful LGBTQ role models, but it can also delay LGBTQ students’ development of career interests and planning, and thus their career decision-making process (Morrow et al., 1996).

**Identity confusion**

Cass (1996) has suggested that there is a six-stage process that LGBTQ people go through in coming to terms with their sexual identity. The stages are characterised as follows: (a) Identity Confusion: individuals begin to question and become confused about their sexual orientation; (b) Identity Comparison: individuals try to understand why they ‘feel different’ by exploring and comparing their thoughts and feelings about sexual orientation with others; (c) Identity Tolerance: individuals pose as heterosexual in most environments while increasing their contact with the LGBTQ community; (d) Identity Acceptance: individuals develop and embrace positive attitudes toward lesbian or gay identity; (e) Identity Pride: individuals are proud of their identity and seek activities/environments that nurture and support it; and (f) Identity Synthesis: individuals willingly disclose their sexual orientation as one aspect of their identity, and deal with the societal reactions this may elicit from others (Mobley & Slaney, 1996).

High school may be the time in which LGBTQ individuals are in the most turmoil about their sexual/gender identity. As such, most LGBTQ students could be at the identity confusion and identity comparison stage(s) as defined by Cass (1996). While these students may share many similar developmental challenges as those of their same-age heterosexual peers, LGBTQ students may encounter much more complicated and difficult dynamics in this developmental process given the uncertainty and struggle derived from their sexual orientation.

Even though their career interests are crystallising at this age, students may not translate these interests into career choices or goals because they are so invested in integrating their LGBTQ identity into their self-concept (Morrow et al., 1996; Lindley, 2006). Self-concept, self-acceptance, self-efficacy and vocational development are intertwined life tasks (Elliott, 1993; Russon & Schmidt, 2014), and the formation of these students’ career self-identity is always an inseparable and essential part of their total self-identity development and formation. Hence, LGBTQ students need to have positive self-concepts and identity acceptance before they can effectively make career plans. It would be extremely challenging or nearly impossible for these students to choose what they want to do for living before making sense of who they are, as well as feeling totally confident and comfortable with whom they are as persons.

**Restricted career interests**

Restricted career interests refer to LGBTQ students perceiving and feeling that their interest in possible career directions and options is hindered by various intrapersonal and extra-personal factors because of their sexual orientation. Factors such as sexual-orientation-related discrimination and prejudice, concern of safety and harassment, conflicts on values and identity, and the like, can impose circumscription on these students as they try to understand and assess their interest in current and anticipated career prospects. Even if students have successfully integrated and accepted their LGBTQ identity into their self-concepts, they still may be perceived as ‘different’ by others. This
may create negative associations between the student and those interests/behaviours which highlight their differentness. Consequently, students may begin eliminating their true interests, thus restricting the amount and types of interests which can be translated into career-related goals and action (Morrow et al., 1996; Prince, 1997).

For LGBTQ high school students who are trying to make viable career decisions, the crucial issue/question they must ask themselves may not be ‘Can I do it?’ but ‘What will happen if I do?’ (Morrow et al., 1996; Pope et al., 2004). Students may have a clear career interest, but avoid pursuing it out of fear that it will place them in an oppressive or discriminatory work environment (Chung, 1995; Lindley, 2006; Pope et al., 2004). Given the barriers and challenges facing this population, their career decisions may be made based around which careers they perceive to be the most safe, accommodating and supportive for LGBTQ individuals (Morrow et al., 1996), not the career paths for which the students are most competent or interested (Pope et al., 2004). The result is the elimination of various viable, congruent career options, followed oftentimes by a stereotypical career selection, which may or may not relate to their true passion and interests in their current or prospective career pursuit (Morrow et al., 1996).

**Occupational stereotyping**

For many LGBTQ individuals new to or about to enter worklife, LGBTQ stereotypical careers are perceived as the only possible options (Pope et al., 2004). For example, gay men are often stereotyped into artistic professions traditionally held by women such as hairdressers, florists and designers; whereas lesbian women are often stereotyped into more traditionally masculine occupations, such as truck drivers, athletes and trades (Pope et al., 2004). Many LGBTQ individuals themselves choose occupational paths which perpetuate such stereotypes. Not only are such occupations perceived to be safer and more supportive (Morrow et al., 1996), but many other career fields (such as those involving work with children) are considered ‘off-limits’ because of a perceived societal inappropriateness (Chung & Harmon, 1994; McFadden, 2015). Thus, there is a tremendous societal pressure and expectation for LGBTQ individuals to limit themselves to clichéd careers, a process known as occupational stereotyping (Gottfredson, 1981; Pope, 1996).

Occupational stereotyping and its resulting exclusion of qualifying jobs highlights the enormous environmental barriers that LGBTQ students may face when it comes to career planning. However, it may be difficult for a counsellor to pinpoint which career paths are chosen out of interest or out of occupational stereotyping because, among other factors, existing career assessment tools such as career interest inventories are often biased towards heterosexist culture (Elliott, 1993).

**Testing bias**

Psychological tests (many of which are aimed at helping students determine which careers are most congruent with their interests) have been misused with LGBTQ populations (Pope et al., 2004). For starters, unless the student has previously disclosed LGBTQ status, the counsellor/administrator typically assumes a heterosexist bias. This bias can affect the counsellor’s interpretation of the results (Elliott, 1993), as results are only truly representative of the student if LGBTQ status and stage of identity development are taken into account (Pope et al., 2004). However, even if these factors are known, the comparison of LGBTQ student test scores to normative groups are usually invalid, as norming samples are usually too small to adequately represent LGBTQ individuals (Lonborg & Phillips, 1996).

The content of these tests is very heterosexist as well. The Myers-Briggs Type Indicator and Self-Directed Search (i.e. two widely used career interest testing tools in the high school setting), for example, have been criticised of reinforcing sex-role and sexual-orientation stereotypes (Hood & Johnson, 2007; Pope et al., 2004). The opposite sex pronouns and general language of tests are only reflective of hetero-normative users (Prince, 1997; Pope, 1996). Finally, current measures of career decision do not reflect specific LGBTQ career decision-making concerns (Prince, 1997).
Unfortunately, little can be done by the counsellor to minimise this testing-bias issue, aside from becoming aware of personal biases (Chung, 2003) and deciding to not use these tests on LGBTQ-identified or questioning students. Similarly, career information may often be biased, and portrayed in favour of the needs of a heterosexual majority in the general society. As a result, LGBTQ students may find the existing career information has little or no relevance to address the needs, contexts, inspirations and challenges related to their unique career exploration and development experiences.

**Career guidance and counselling interventions**

As illuminated in the prior discussion, LGBTQ students may encounter unique and complex roadblocks in their career exploration, yet they are often substantially underserved with respect to vocational and career wellness. School guidance counsellors are, therefore, called upon to draw more attention to career counselling LGBTQ students. In response to the aforementioned career-related issues, difficulties, and challenges, career guidance and counselling for LGBTQ students in a high school setting should adopt helping considerations that can address the unique psychological needs of these students. Career helping methods and approaches should also take into account the complex intrapersonal and extra-personal factors intertwined in affecting LGBTQ students’ vocational behaviour and career wellness. To this end, several considerations may be advisable with respect to career guidance and counselling interventions.

**Develop competence and establish safety**

Not all counsellors are prepared to deliver effective career intervention service to LGBTQ individuals (Datti, 2009). It is imperative that counsellors are aware of their own biases and refer students to another counsellor if they anticipate that their biases will interfere with the relationship and counselling tasks (Hook & Bowman, 2008).

Then, counsellors need to develop competence in counselling LGBTQ clients, so they are able to provide LGBTQ high school students with adequate and relevant support that many students lack. To do this, counsellors are proactive in fostering Zero Tolerance and Positive Space initiatives that provide a climate of tolerance, respect, inclusion and advocacy (Koschoreck & Tooms, 2009). Upon this basis, they should become familiar with typical LGBTQ issues and how to address them (Datti, 2009). In particular, they need to be aware of the LGBTQ-related barriers that may impede these students’ ability to successfully plan their careers. One of the most effective ways to do this is for counsellors to become familiar with theoretical models of sexual orientation and gender identity (Goodrich & Luke, 2009). For example, knowledge of Cass’s (1996) Identity Stages would lead to more understanding and effective career counselling for these students.

Counsellors must also become familiar with the unique aspects of the LGBTQ community (Chung, 2003). Datti (2009) has argued that it is insufficient to merely read about the characteristics of this population in the counselling literature; rather, counsellors would be better prepared to serve this population if they regularly interacted with LGBTQ individuals socially and professionally (Datti, 2009). In particular, counsellors should aim to increase their understanding of the varied perspectives that LGBTQ students may hold and become knowledgeable about resources and supports available to the students (Datti, 2009).

It is very important for counsellors to consider the hidden minority status of their clients. Establishing a safe counselling environment for all clients may help LGBTQ individuals come out to their counsellors (Datti, 2009). Symbols of support such as a Safe Zone sign or a small rainbow flag may help indicate that the guidance and counselling office is a safe place particularly for the LGBTQ community and clients (Datti, 2009; Morrow, 1998). Counsellors could also display career resources for the LGBTQ community on a visible bulletin board (Datti, 2009). Inclusive language that is sensitive and inclusive of the LGBTQ population can also serve to indicate counsellor support (Morrow, 1998). Such intentional effort and action to establish a safe and trustworthy helping environment can be fundamental.
to the efficacy of the career guidance and counselling tasks. Of note, soliciting support from students’ families may also have a positive impact on the students’ career exploration and coping experiences (Johnson & Best, 2012).

**Explore influences on career prospects**

Concerns about safety and discrimination are very relevant to career choice, and provide a good starting point for this exploration (Hook & Bowman, 2008). Relevant experiences include the coming out process, past experiences of discrimination, and levels of distress over specific life-career issues (Hook & Bowman, 2008). Hook and Bowman (2008) have recommended that these topics be explored directly during the intake process. To this end, some key tenets from career theories that emphasise the interactive and integrative nature of life-careers such as those of Super (1990), Miller-Tiedeman (1997), and Hansen (1997) may have particular relevance in guiding the helping process. While specific helping approaches and techniques can remain situational and flexible, the counsellor helps the client better understand the coexistence of life and careers. Thus, life events and experiences are naturally brought into one’s career planning, whereas career exploration unfolds within one’s life contexts. For example, sexual orientation and vocational identity can be recognised as self-concepts operating within the client’s total self-concept system. These self-concepts interact and intertwine, alongside other elements and factors, in forming career choices that make more sense to the unique life-career needs of the client.

Counsellors also need to have a realistic sense of the levels of discrimination and climate towards LGBTQ persons in specific professions and workplaces (Schneider & Dimito, 2010). This will allow counsellors to more effectively guide LGBTQ students in their career decision-making process. For example, a counsellor can help clients analyse their perception of barriers or evaluate how accepting a prospective workplace is (Morrow, 1998; Hook & Bowman, 2008).

There are advantages in addressing both sexual identity and career concerns simultaneously. First, the development of each of these aspects has a great influence on each other, and therefore, cannot be isolated. Secondly, this ensures that LGBTQ students are not focusing all their energy into one aspect of their life-career experience at the expense of the other. Understanding the relationship between sexual identity and career concerns allows the counsellor to be better equipped to guide LGBTQ students through these key developmental tasks intertwined in life-careers (Schmidt & Nilsson, 2006).

The counsellor should also explore other salient influences on career choice and planning. Factors such as gender role and cultural expectations can serve to narrow choices even more (Hook & Bowman, 2008). For example, lesbian or bisexual youth may rule out certain careers that are perceived as inconsistent with their sexual identity (Datti, 2009). In these cases, it is important that the counsellor explore the interplay between gender socialisation, sexual orientation and career beliefs (Datti, 2009). A better awareness and understanding of the interaction between these influencing factors may help LGBTQ students clarify their priority in coping with these dynamics in a context of career exploration and decision-making. With a clearer picture of the dynamics involved, possible pros and cons of a career choice may become more apparent to be weighted, leading these students to plan and decide in a more informed manner.

LGBTQ students who belong to certain minority ethnic groups, such as African American or Latino Americas, may be at risk of dual marginalisation and be subject to more discriminatory attitudes towards sexual orientation. These students may be more fearful of discrimination, and consequently, face more career difficulties. For more effective career planning, it is important that these issues are processed in conjunction with other career-related concerns (Datti, 2009).

Activities such as co-op placements, afterschool paid work, summer jobs and volunteering placements provide an opportunity for students to learn new skills, and gain a realistic assessment of a work environment. Such first-hand work experiences may even modify LGBTQ students’ self-concept (Morrow, 1998). These students can learn through exposure and gain real learning
experiences of what it is like to work in a certain industry or environment (Morrow, 1998). It can be advantageous both to help students find opportunities in places that are LGBTQ-friendly, or to experience a profession that these students have previously foreclosed (Hook & Bowman, 2008; Morrow, 1998). Some of the more practical ways that counsellors can help their clients find these work opportunities is to introduce them to LGBTQ-friendly places to work, connect these students with workplace mentors, or help the students write their resume in a way that either emphasises or hides their sexual orientation or gender identity as a coping strategy given the needs in each specific vocational and career context (Hook & Bowman, 2008).

**Develop career-related coping strategies**

All youth can benefit from discussion about strategies to cope with discrimination and other challenges that they may face in a workplace (Morrow, 1998). They should be aware of the ways that discrimination can be both formal and informal, and learn how to assess discrimination more accurately and realistically (Chung, Williams, & Dispenza, 2009). LGBTQ students, however, may require more guidance in developing specific career-related coping strategies.

Chung (2001) described three models that can help counsellors to conceptualise these strategies. These models include a Vocational Choice model, an Identity Management model, and a Discrimination Management model. Vocational choice strategies include self-employment to avoid discrimination, job tracking to identify whether a job is LGBTQ friendly, and risk taking by selecting a career cognisant of the potential for discrimination (Chung et al., 2009). The identity management model outlines five strategies to manage the disclosure of information about the LGBTQ status (Chung et al., 2009). These include acting heterosexual, fabricating information to appear heterosexual, selectively withholding information that would reveal one’s sexual orientation, and implicitly or explicitly outing oneself in the workplace context (Chung et al., 2009). Lastly, the discrimination management model discusses coping when discrimination is encountered. Strategies include quitting, remaining silent, gaining social support, or confronting those responsible in the workplace (Chung et al., 2009). Using a combination of these coping strategies, the counsellor can help clients to plan how they might avoid or address potential discrimination. These counsellor–client discussions may help increase the client’s self-efficacy and outcome expectations in coping with workplace challenges, leading to more career options (Adams, Cahill, & Ackerlind, 2005; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 2002).

It is important for counsellors to understand that coping strategies need to be individualised to each client (Adams et al., 2005). Clients will be at different stages of their identity development, have different perceptions of current and potential discrimination, and have varying self-efficacy beliefs surrounding their ability to cope (Adams et al., 2005). As such, counsellors should be wary of promoting more assertive coping strategies over less assertive ones (Chung et al., 2009). Instead, counsellors should be validating the coping strategies that their clients are employing (Chung et al., 2009). Meanwhile, counsellors can help LGBTQ students clarify the individual reason and meaning behind the adoption and preference of the chosen strategies so that both the counsellor and the client are clear of the context and rationale in using or not using certain coping strategies. Thus, there is room for change of strategies whenever necessary. Lastly, counsellors should always be aware of and support their client’s resiliency, encouraging the client to be his or her own change agent (Chung et al., 2009).

**Enhance and facilitate social support**

Counsellors should be aware that the amount of social support an individual receives plays a critical role in his or her career development (Schmidt, Miles, & Welsh, 2011). Research shows that youth with high levels of social support have less career indecision, greater resiliency and better psychological health (Schmidt et al., 2011). Given this, the client’s connection to a social support network should arguably be a central aspect of career counselling for LGBTQ students (Schmidt et al., 2011).
Counsellors can work with their clients to generate more connections to networks that can provide social support. Role models can serve as an important source of support for LGBTQ students (Morrow, 1998). LGBTQ role models, especially those who are successful in non-stereotypical occupations, can be brought into schools for informational interviews or connected with students in career shadowing or co-op opportunities (Pope, 1996). LGBTQ professionals can help to challenge some of the options that students may have previously foreclosed. These role models can provide a trusting and affirming relationship where the student is free to be him or herself (Morrow, 1998). This is important especially for students who do not have support in their home or in other environments (Morrow, 1998).

Role models who are open about their sexual orientation or gender identity can discuss what it is like to be ‘out’ at their workplaces (Morrow, 1998). They can help students to become more realistic about the challenges they will encounter. Some professionals may also be able to share the rewards of being an open LGBTQ person in the workplace (Morrow, 1998). While ‘out’ role models are certainly important, the importance of the role models who are in their ‘closeted’ or private LGBTQ status in various vocational contexts should not to be underestimated (Barber & Mobley, 1999). These role models allow the students who are in a different place on the visibility continuum to learn and receive guidance on how to manage the expression of their identity as they prefer in a current work-life context (Barber & Mobley, 1999).

When identifying and inviting role models, it would be beneficial to find someone who can connect with these LGBTQ students in other cultural ways, such as sharing a similar ethnicity, gender and/or spiritual background (Adams et al., 2005; Barber & Mobley, 1999). Some aspects of a role model’s background may be more crucial than another; it is recommended that the counsellor asks his/her clients what kinds of role models would help them the most (Barber & Mobley, 1999).

**Promote social advocacy**

Social advocacy is a way in which counsellors can help expand the opportunities for LGBTQ youth on a larger, systemic level (Hook & Bowman, 2008; Morrow, 1998). For example, school counsellors can help to establish a more supportive environment, since an atmosphere of respect is essential for the success of any career interventions (Morrow, 1998). One approach to social advocacy is to provide others with information about homosexuality. A study by Alderson, Orzeck, and McEwen (2009) showed that increased knowledge about homosexuality among school counsellors predicted lower homo-negativity. School counsellors can help to educate other school counsellors and staff on important LGBTQ issues in various relevant professional contexts such as in-house professional development opportunities, conferences and other professional communications and encounters.

Some climate-altering interventions that a high school counsellor can conduct include supervising a gay–straight alliance and training teachers on how to address harassment of LGBTQ students (Robinson, Espelage, & Rivers, 2013). Counsellors can also team up with teachers and have a discussion with the general student population about homophobia in athletics, discuss same-sex relationships in sexuality education courses, and facilitate a greater inclusion of LGBTQ role models and issues in the curriculum (Robinson et al., 2013). Toomey, McGuire, and Russell (2012) found that gay–straight alliances and inclusion of LGBTQ issues in curricula were two interventions that made significant differences to how safe students thought the school was for their LBGTQ peers.

For transgendered students, guidance counsellors can provide information to co-op placement employers and employees about the transition process, how to address a trans co-worker, and how to accommodate co-workers who are undergoing routine surgery (Dispenza, Watson, Chung, & Brack, 2012).

Social advocacy is important to changing the school climate, and a positive school climate is imperative for helping LGBTQ students receive the support needed. Counsellors can help support LGBTQ students in their career as well as socio-emotional development, but until there...
is wider acceptance and understanding, these students will be playing on an unlevel playing field. Thus, it is advisable that counsellors are open-minded and proactive in considering advocating LGBTQ students as part of the larger initiative of promoting social justice and equality, that is, for nurturing and furthering a positive school climate that facilitates and supports students of all backgrounds with reference to their gender, sexual orientation, social class, religion, ethnicity and the like.

Conclusion

Adolescence is a pivotal time for career development; however, it is also when harassment for gender identity and sexual orientation are most severe (Robinson et al., 2013). Providing assistance to LGBTQ high school students is critical because these students’ career interest and choice is often compounded by intrapersonal and extra-personal factors pertaining to sexual orientation and its associated roadblocks. It is these roadblocks that can impose negative impacts on LGBTQ students’ career well-being and general well-being (Creed, Prideaux, & Patton, 2005). Career guidance and counselling for these students has to take into account these influencing factors in the helping process so that the unique needs and challenges of LGBTQ students are to be addressed with an array of relevant helping methods and strategies.

In fact, LGBTQ students may encounter many similar career exploration issues and concerns as non-LGBTQ students in their adolescent development experiences and as they approach young adulthood. This means that many positive and effective career guidance and counselling intervention strategies may be applicable to both populations. However, LGBTQ students, as illustrated in the prior discussion, have the unique needs and concerns when their sexual-orientation intersects and interacts with their career exploration considerations. Thus, the core of career counselling for LGBTQ students has to consider the special and specific sexual identity development and sexual-orientation needs that are very different from that of non-LGBTQ students. This calls upon the career interventions for LGBTQ students to be sensitive, meaningful and particularly relevant to their life experiences and unique context of sexual orientation.

We have raised some prominent questions in this paper: What are some of the essential career concerns and needs of LGBTQ students? What are factors that hinder or facilitate LGBTQ students’ unique career needs? How can the current guidance and counselling system better assist LGBTQ students in their career efforts? It is clear that these questions need to be addressed in future research studies that aim to advocate and promote the vocational wellness of LGBTQ students. We urge that it is of essential importance that school guidance counsellors are empathetic and knowledgeable about the unique challenges and struggles experienced by the LGBTQ students as they explore and comprehend viable options in their worklife and career direction. It is equally important that counsellors are competent and skillful helpers who are ready to guide and aid these students in exploring career dynamics and coping with career problems in their school-to-school and/or school-to-work transitions. To this end, much more effort and attention is still needed to enrich the literature, as well as to strengthen and augment career counselling interventions for LGBTQ students.

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