

Working with Special Population

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### **Explanation of Target Group Selected**

The transition to universities/ colleges or careers can be challenging not only for the general student population but especially for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer+ (LGBTQ+) students. In an effort to motivate and encourage, this study will examine High School Seniors who have identified as LGBTQ+, help bring equitable resources and opportunity to ensure a path for career and college transition. In recent studies, LGBTQ+ students in schools continue to feel the hostility in their communities and a lack of support from school personnel (Ken, 2017). They may also struggle in school, have a higher rate of school dropout rates and/or have lower aspiration for postsecondary education. These potentially negative school experiences can affect LGBTQ+ youth as they transition into employment or University/ College. Research suggests that LGBTQ+ students who had difficulty establishing sexual identity had related difficulty with career development and social support when choosing a career path (Ken, 2017). As future school counselors, providing support and addressing emotional/ social and career needs of LGBTQ+ students is essential for students' safety and future success.

LGBTQ+ students continue to feel unsafe and harassed in their high schools with high reports of bullying, which has caused students to feel disconnected to school, higher rate of absenteeism, and lower academic achievement along with other significant barriers (Ken, 2012). As a result, LGBTQ+ youth experiencing in school victimization has been shown to be related to harmful psychological effects, such as social ostracizing, depression, substance/drug use, and suicide risk behavior (Ryan, Huebner, Diaz & Sanchez, 2009). Without resolving issues transitioning to college/ universities or careers can elicit high levels of distress. Furthermore,

students who perceive their social environment as uncomfortable may struggle in their adjustment. These challenges may be seen the most with first year university/ college students, however, this may be especially the case among students of different marginalized groups (Sotardi, Surtees, Vincent, Johnston, 2021). It is critical to provide a safe space for LGBTQ+ students to feel heard, validated, and seen. Research has found that when educators show support for LGBTQ+ youth, can have a positive impact on the experience of those students with more positive school staff, feel safer in their schools, experience less victimization, report greater psychological well- being, and have better academic outcomes (Kosciw& Singh, 2016). The role of the school counselor provides understanding on how to improve the school experience of LGBTQ+ youth, particularly as they transition from high school to college/ universities, or careers (Ken, 2017).

### **Summary of Career Development Theory Selected**

Career development theories such as Social Cognitive theory and Chaos Theory will be an essential aspect to consider when working with this demographic. Theories as such will inspire and meet the needs of LGBTQ+ youth who fall through the cracks every year in the education system. The Social Cognitive theory is utilized to conceptualize components of career development, such as choice, interest, and performance. Social cognitive theory is typically used to address a less rational component of career decision-making processes by incorporating a sense of meaningfulness and emotional connection to careers of interest. (Kaminsky & Behrend 2014). Chaos Theory is an approach to help students construct their identity and map out a potential plan. Chaos Theory is about being logical and rational in planning and decision-making while taking into account how students will be able to adapt and recover from unplanned

events as they impact lives and careers (Pryor, and Bright, 2014). I believe these theories can be useful by providing opportunities for students to explore assumptions and perceptions of blockages for achieving goals, meet the needs of students, and better prepare them for their future.

The traditional models of career decision making overlooked the dynamic, interactive, and adaptive nature of human functioning in the world (Pryor & Bright, 2014). In a recent study, researchers found traditional methods did not adequately take into consideration student's possible interests, attitudes, and abilities may change with experience. Social Cognitive theory relates to the career development of a diverse range of persons facing challenges such as the LGBTQ+ community considering personal, social, and cultural context that surrounds individuals' career development. Along with Chaos Theory, it is set to help students construct their identity and map out a potential career plan (Pryor & Bright, 2012). Chaos theory will examine the reality that LGBTQ+ students will face when they make their transition and provide resources for students to be successful. Both of these theories will help prepare students to become self aware, open minded, allow them to envision all the possibilities and be able to express their preferences. This is a way for students to imagine potential career opportunities without internalizing a sense of failure if plan A does not go according to schedule (Mesaros, 2019). It is essential for counselors to understand the crucial impact these experiences have on LGBTQ+ individuals implementing their goals (Hoffshire, 2017). I believe these theories can set a framework for school counselors when working with this population.

It is very challenging to identify a career choice at such a young age and some individuals often make decisions with incomplete knowledge (Pryor & Bright, 2014). Utilizing Chaos

Theory promotes open mindedness and reliability when creating a college/ career plan and prepares students for both certain uncertainties when making decisions (Bland & Roberts-Pittman, 2013) This method creates a space that allows students to explore different career choices without the pressure of selecting just one option. It also helps students balance realism with flexibility in their current and future situations by identifying and building upon their previous successes to clarify their work values, potentials, and limitations, in order to search for developing trends in the work world that translate into career possibilities (Bland & Roberts-Pittman, 2013). Many students struggle with the transition from high school to college, but that is especially true for LGBTQ+ students. In recent years, many students feel Chaos theory meets their needs and better prepares them for their future. Furthermore, Social Cognitive theory will provide the opportunity to have students explore their likes or dislikes in different activities (Hoffshine, 2017). Social cognitive theory suggests self-efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations are significant in understanding why people choose certain career paths over others. (Kaminsky & Behrend 2014). For example, a student's career development may be influenced by how they are viewed within the workplace, family influences, and how they may be seen in the LBGTQ+ community (Hoffshine, 2017). Counselors help students to acquire skills to investigate careers and achieve future goals while assisting them to understand the relationship between personal qualities, education, and training (ASCA, 2004).

### **Five Ideas for College and Career Readiness to Implement with Direct Connection**

#### **to Theoretical Reference**

#### **LGBTQ+ Affirmative School Climate**

Having an LGBTQ+ affirming school climate is necessary to support LGBTQ students. The climate of a school has a direct impact on both how well students learn and how well they interact with their peers. When LGBTQ+ youth have supportive and understanding relationships with others and develop positive coping strategies will impact their success in adapting to the stigma they inevitably face (Byrd & Hays, 2012). It is essential that LGBTQ+ students have supportive counselors and are acquired the same opportunities that other students and minority groups are provided (Byrd & Hays, 2012). School counselors are to develop ways to foster an affirmative school climate by being visible. GLSEN (2009) suggests making offices and classrooms inclusive by displaying LGBTQ symbols such as the pink triangle, rainbow triangle, or safe space stickers. Also, it is essential to not ignore anti- LGBTQ+ comments or behavior. LGBTQ students are victims of acts of school violence and sexual harassment, and nearly one-third of the students who reported assaults of harassment to a school official or staff member state that school staff did nothing (Kosciw, Diaz, & Greytak, 2008). Ignoring this behavior sends a message that it is okay to discriminate and bully as a result leading individuals feeling unsafe in school (Byrd & Hays 2012, ). Understanding the needs of this population will help counselors and educators to assist these individuals to provide the support system needed for LGBTQ students' success (Byrd & Hays, 2012). By establishing an LGBTQ+ inclusive school climate, students will be more willing to participate in the following activities and will be more likely to ask for help. I will be conducting small group sessions. Each session will cover topics such as college options, college majors, careers options, transitional programs and resources.

### **River of Life**

This activity allows each student to be seen and heard, which will strengthen the group's trust, understanding, and appreciation for the gifts and struggles of each group member. The objective is for group members to increase their knowledge of experiences that inform different perspectives and provide space to explore resilience. We will discuss how every person has a rich life story that reflects both hard places and great celebrations. Taking the time to hear those stories increases appreciation for different experiences and the perspectives that arise from these experiences. We will all learn from one another's struggles, successes, and hopes for the future.

Students will create a picture that reflects the river of their life. Like a river, your life has a certain flow. There are times when a river is rushing and flowing over the banks. At other times, the river goes over rapids and rocks or moves slowly and peacefully. Students will take a few minutes to consider where they have been and what has been significant in shaping the direction of your life. Lastly, where do you see your river flowing from here?" I will ask participants to use the markers and paper to create a picture that describes their life journey and hopes for the future. Then the group will share about their journey and what the images they drew represent in their life, as well as their hopes for where their river will flow in the future. When everyone has finished sharing, ask a series of questions to prompt group discussion: What was it like for you to tell your story to this group? What was it like for you to hear all of these stories? How do you feel about your future? When working with this demographic, it is crucial to provide space where students can be their authentic selves which will spark interest in their planning their life and give students the confidence to pursue college or career. In addition, this activity aligns well with Social Cognitive theory and Chaos theory because it allows students to explore their identities, challenges, and resilience when they start thinking about their future

plans. In this activity, students have the opportunity to picture what their future will look like and what steps they need to take to accomplish their goals.

### **Learn to Reach Out**

In this activity, I will be working with a small group of identified LGBTQ+ students and we will research professional associations through the lens of networking, social media, and conduct an informational interview. Students will be able to identify professional associations that align with student's values, utilize social media to conduct research, and develop a list of places to interview and conduct an informational interview. Students will use the [careerexploration.com](http://careerexploration.com) Web site to research professional associations and informational interviewing. Students that have identified as LGBTQ+ will have the opportunity to network with the following associations including, National LGBT Chamber of Commerce, Action Link, LGBTQ+ Funder jobs, Campus Pride and more. Students will identify social media tools used by associations, develop a personal networking list, and conduct an informational interview. When utilizing this website, students can start exploring which college and career opportunities best support their needs. Students will write a summary of the informational interview and summarize their experience in an oral presentation. In this lesson, students will build their own network by developing an initial list of professional contacts. The list could include teachers, counselors, current or past employers, community services, adult leaders in organizations. Social Cognitive theory will be used to help students identify their true purpose and Chaos theory will create the idea of flexibility such as having students have a back up plan. In this activity, students will be able to advocate for themselves, and get involved in LGBTQ+ communities outside of school.



### **Choosing the Right School**

In this activity, we will discuss different resources that University/ Colleges offer for LGBTQ+ students when visiting colleges. It is important to consider resources that are available in colleges such as looking for LGBTQ housing community, LGBTQ affirming health care, and discussing nondiscrimination policy in an effort to assist students transitioning from high school to college. We will also discuss what to do if the campus is not right for the students. Students will be given handouts of college visits checklist, campus visit, college comparison.

We will begin lessons with giving instructions to review the College Visit Handout.

1. Go over the “The Campus Visit” allowing time for questions and discussion.
2. Give each student the “College Visit Checklist” and talk about how the list can also be useful if a student attends a college fair. This “College Visit Checklist” will allow the student to have a visual representation of which school met their needs. This checklist will include a to-do list of things to do when a student visits. For example, talk to professors, visit the library, visit the admissions office, and sit in on a class. Students will also rate from a scale to 1-5 five being the best following people, social life, classroom, dorms, town, campus, and food. Students will then write the best and worst part of their visit. This will be done for each school student's visit.
3. Describe what occurs on a tour and in an information session.
4. Talk about how students can possibly use the campus visit as a time to have an interview, if the college requires or allows one.
5. Emphasize the importance of filling in the comparison worksheet as soon after a visit as possible and securing the name and contact information of someone in the admission office.

6. Give students the names of four schools nearby and ask them to find out when the schools schedule tours and information sessions. Students should use the available resources to find this information.

7. Describe the differences among reach, target and likely schools.

In this activity students will start thinking about what school will best fit their needs. After visiting campuses, students will fill out the college comparison worksheet before going to another campus. This worksheet will be a guiding tool for students to refer to when it is time to choose a school. It is important to have students explore different schools so they are aware of what is out there and exploring which school they will be more successful in. In this activity, utilizing theories such as cognitive social and chaos theory, students will have the opportunity to grow self awareness and develop a plan to which they feel meaningful and identify schools that best meet their needs.

### **Reality Check**

In this lesson each student will log into their computers and search up [texasreality.com](http://texasreality.com). Each student will complete the online activity provided on the website and record their answers on the Reality Check worksheet reflecting their choices. Also, students must write about their expected annual salary on their worksheet. The goal is for students to calculate their cost of living, determine a high skill, high- growth job that would meet their cost of living, and investigate their determined occupation.

When students work on the Reality Check Worksheet, they will find 6 boxes to choose from for lifestyle expenses he or she might choose to have after high school or college. If the box says “Choose 1”, then the student would only choose one option. For example, for housing,

students will choose the line that matches the type of housing he or she would like to have . If a student selects “rent a one bedroom apartment” they would circle this choice. For boxes that have more options, students would choose as many as they think they need or want. For example, for entertainment, if a student plans to go out with friends in town and also take short vacations, they would circle both of these options. Students will total the number of circles points and write and answer in the final space. Using Reality Check Results Grib, students will find a column that matches their points and have students write down the salary ranges for that column in the box. Next, have students choose one or more occupations he or she might consider to achieve this salary. When embracing Chaos Theory for college and career readiness it is important for this assignment to encourage preparation, empathize adoption over decision making, and try creating goals that are flexible. As it relates to Social Cognitive theory, provides a framework for understanding and predicting the processes involved in the development of career interests along with self-efficacy beliefs and expectations significant in understanding why students choose certain career paths over others (Kaminsky & Behrend, 2014).

### **Summary and Recommendations for Practice**

The transition from high school to University/ College or workforce can be very challenging for anyone, but that is especially true for LGBTQ+ community. Much research has been dedicated to the difficulties LGBTQ individuals face. However, it was challenging to find how to bridge the gap in providing support for LGBTQ senior students. Understanding the needs of this population will help counselors and educators assist these individuals to provide the

support system needed for LGBTQ students as they transition to college or career. When working with this demographic it is important to utilize Social Cognitive and Chaos theory to provide space for student's to explore their identity, self- efficacy, and create a plan for potential career interest. Social Cognitive Theory is a motivational tool to empower students in their career and college exploration or choices. Chaos Theory encourages students to prepare and emphasizes adaptation over deciding. These activities will be an essential part of bridging in the gap of resources to better support LGBTQ+ youth. . Students utilizing these methods will be encouraged to prepare, grow- self awareness, and build transferable skills as they enter the workforce or college. Along with these theories and activities, we will prepare students for change, provide resources and help them create many plans that best meet their needs. It is important for School Counselors to consider adapting affirmative LGBTQ+ school culture when working with this demographic. Many LGBTQ students do not feel supportive in the school setting so it is crucial for school counselors to be culturally aware to be able to understand how students are socially influenced and create a space where students can talk about their concerns about their career decisions. School counselors may be the only person youths feel safe to discuss these issues with. These supportive relationships fostered by school counselors may greatly impact quality of life and serve as a positive factor for many LGBTQ+ students (Byrd & Hays, 2012).

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