

Career Intervention for LGBTQ Adolescents

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December 1, 2019

Abstract

LGBTQ adolescents have specific needs pertaining to career counseling that are not always focused on when seeking resources for career development. This population can face stereotypes about the jobs they should hold, harassment, health risks, suicide attempts, and ostracization from friends and family. To help confront these issues, counselors must be aware of their own implicit biases, build a robust rapport with their clients, and have knowledge of work environments that support the needs of LGBTQ employees. This work presents an intervention for LGBTQ youth that will assist their career needs during the transition to adulthood. Super's theory, specifically the developmental stages of growth and exploration, will help drive these interventions because of the importance of self-concept in career choice and this population.

Introduction

Career counseling interventions are important in helping people choose a career. Some populations have more difficulties than others in deciding where they belong in the workforce. For example, commonly, young people have more difficulties in deciding what job they would like to do versus adults. Factors such as maturity and development stages can influence a person's decision. Career counseling can assist people in determining who they are and what job fits their individual needs. Populations such as LGBTQ youth, can be difficult to career counsel because of the many issues they face during the development of the self. This paper will introduce issues and needs of youth who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ). It will then discuss interventions driven by concepts from Super's theory that can alleviate and confront issues faced by this population. The work will summarize with an evaluation for the interventions and a discussion.

Super's Theory

Super's theory takes into consideration multiple stages of life. The theory is built by multiple concepts such as self-concept, developmental stages and tasks, career maturity, life-stage model, and the archway model. The most important facet of Super's Theory is the idea of vocational self-concept. Work environment and work experience transforms the self-concept overtime. Vocational self-concept is the driving force that establishes career patterns one may follow throughout life (Zunker, 2016. p.48). Developmental process of self-concept is multidimensional and is determined by both external factors (contextual interactions) and internal factors (values, aptitude, and personality) (Zunker, 2016. p. 48).

Another core concept of Super's theory consists of five stages and five tasks. Supers initial developmental stages are: 1. Growth, 2. Exploratory, 3. Establishment, 4. Maintenance, and 5.

Decline. Multiple developmental stages can correspond to one or more developmental tasks. These developmental tasks are: 1. Crystallization, 2. Specifications, 3. Implementations, 4. Stabilization, and 5. Consolidation. For example, during the exploratory stage (ages 15-24) one could correspond to specifications and implementation tasks. Individuals gain career maturity by going through developmental stages and tasks.

This paper will focus on the importance of the self-concept in the growth and exploratory development stages of LGBTQ adolescence. Counselors must keep in mind that sexual minority adolescents are searching and exploring their identity of the self. With this comes many challenges for the career counselor and the client. Interventions must be tailored to this group based on a wide variety of needs.

Career Development for LGBTQ Youth

Self-Concept and Vocational Development

There is a lack of understanding of the relationship between LGBTQ identity and vocational behavior that often results in a lack of LGBTQ responsive school counselling, in which career guidance and counselling is an essential component (Chen & Keats, 2016). Many high school students who are a part of the LGBTQ community face barriers in their career planning and exploration due to them struggling with their hidden minority status. In cases like this, many LGBTQ will try to pass as heterosexual or by internalizing their homophobia. Many students who are a part of the LGBTQ community are also victimized by their peers, whether they have openly identified their sexuality or not, which can be crucially damaging due to the lack of available support systems in schools (Chen & Keats, 2016). LGBTQ students can struggle to overcome confusion of their identity and integrating their LGBTQ identity into their self-concept. This can cause them to struggle to make effective career plans. However, those

who are capable of creating career plans will oftentimes restrict their career interests and will occupationally stereotype due to the perception of barriers or negative environmental influences.

There can be complications providing career guidance to many LGBTQ students because they are not fully identified or accept themselves and they can be heavily exposed to social prejudices (Chen & Keats, 2016). This can cause many students of the LGBTQ community to have feelings of internal homophobia or self-loathing related to their sexual identity. This can cause great impacts on their career development and hinder effective decision-making skills. Like their heterosexual peers, LGBTQ students are in need of guidance and help as they are considering and choosing various career directions. During the exploration phase, many LGBTQ students may be hesitant about exploring options addressing their unique needs in light of their sexual orientation (Chen & Keats, 2016). They may feel uncomfortable or unsafe openly addressing their needs pertaining to career exploration.

Harassment

LGBTQ adolescence are more prone to receiving sexual and verbal harassment versus heterosexual adolescence. Research has found that 86.2% of students who identify as LGBTQ report verbal harassment and 44.1% report physical harassment about their sexual orientation, while 66.5% of students report verbal harassment and 30.4% report physical harassment about their gender expression while in schools (Goodrich & Luke, 2009). In terms of sexual harassment, one study found that 66%-72% of LGB adolescence have experienced harassment (Mitchell & Ybarra & Korchmaros, 2014). These experiences can have long term effects that impact an individual's career choice (Bimrose, 2004). Sexual harassment can influence the shape of one's identity and cause people to harm themselves.

Suicidal Tendencies

Sexual orientation is a factor in suicide attempts among sexual minorities, most of these attempts occur before the age of 21 (Zunker, 2016). LGBTQ students are highly vulnerable, conflicts about the disclosure of their sexual orientation might influence them to attempt taking their own life. They can experience personal distress and isolation due to gender dysphoria or internalized homophobia (Grossman & D'augelli, 2007). For example, 528 self-identified LGB youth, ages 15–19, attempted suicide, which is generally comparable to findings in other studies of sexual minority youth (Grossman & D'augelli, 2007). In 2007, Grossman and D'augelli did a study in 2007 where they found 45% of the 55 transgender youth in their study, seriously thought about taking their lives. Although existential thought is not usually associated with vocational counseling, it can have direct application to career- and employment-related issues because of the potential questioning of identity or self-concept (Maglio & Butterfield & Borgen, 2005).

Rejection from Family

An alarming number of runaway and homeless youths identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer/questioning (LGBTQ). “At 20–40%, they are overrepresented in the homeless youth population compared to their heterosexual and cisgender counterparts, and some experts suggest that LGBTQ runaway or homeless youth may be underreporting their sexual orientation and gender identity” (Maccio & Ferguson, 2016). LGBTQ runaway or homeless youth have a great need for finding emotional support and acceptance, along with sex education, and peer support. Many LGBTQ runaways and homeless youth are thrown out of their homes due to family rejection and misunderstanding (Maccio & Ferguson, 2016). Peer support is crucial for LGBTQ runaways and homeless youth because they want to feel supported by people who are like them. Lack of support and family rejection could be huge barriers preventing LGBTQ students from learning more about their career development.

Career Development Intervention for LGBTQ Youth

First and foremost, counselors must provide all clients, including LGBTQ youth with having a safe space where they will feel respected and open to sharing their experiences. Some LGBTQ youth may feel open to discussing their private sexual matters. Knowing their rights to privacy and that they are legally protected by confidentiality laws can help them open up more to the counselor in order to navigate their feelings. Counselors who work with LGBTQ youth should have an awareness about the issues surrounding the development of their self-concept in career development (Zunker, 2016). When working with LGBTQ youth, counselors should also recognize overall health as a vital component of career counseling. Risk-reduction guidelines can be shared with LGBTQ youth in order to help them be more informed about STDs, HIV, and sharing needles (Zunker, 2016). When counselors are working with LGBTQ youth, they should be prepared to convey full acceptance of sexual minorities and should have a non-judgmental attitude (Zunker, 2016).

Providing LGBT youth with a support group can help them find peers who are the same as them and help them feel they are not alone. Straight students may even find themselves at these meetings in order to show their support or to learn more about their LGBTQ peers (Zunker, 2016). The counselor may invite professionals to become part of the group's activities based on the needs required to be met by members of the group. For example, a health professional could become a member of the group in order to help educate students about safe health precautions, or someone from a program that assists people with housing could be a part of the meeting to help RHYs students find housing. Guests from the community could also come to meetings. Examples could be members of the LGBTQ community with successful careers who could share with students the obstacles they faced and how they overcame them.

The counselor should also be prepared to counsel LGBTQ youth and their family members if necessary/needed. Family members can sometimes act hostile or have a wide variety of feelings and reactions when they discover the sexual orientation of a loved one (Zunker, 2016). Having a safe space to navigate their feelings and to talk with their LGBTQ youth can help them effectively communicate with one another to better understand and cope with their emotions.

Intervention Implementation

When working with LGBTQ youth, it is important to remember the obstacles they will face during their career development. Examples previously mentioned are difficulties with their self-concept that causes them to ineffectively explore career options, physical and verbal harassment they may encounter, suicidal thoughts, and family rejection/lack of support. The use of Super's Theory throughout the intervention process can help the targeted youth members better develop their self-concept, which can help them develop a vocational self-concept over time. This will help LGBTQ youth learn more about various career paths that would suit them and help them find success in various careers paths they aspire to pursue. This intervention process could be used during group counseling, or with individuals. Group counseling would be a great way to utilize this intervention because it will provide members of the group with a support system and help them know they are not alone, that others are sharing the same experiences as them.

During the first session, The students would be given a questionnaire to answer. This would be used as a post-test assessment to help the counselor gauge how useful the group was upon completion of the group. During the first session, the counselor would have some warm up activities to use with members in order to build rapport among the group. This will allow group

members to learn more about one another, to share their interests, and know they are capable of trusting their group when sharing information. During this session, the counselor would also discuss the rules of the group and about confidentiality standards that are expected to be upheld throughout the course of the group.

During the second session, group members could share information about themselves and the passions they have. This would help encourage dialogue among members to learn more about and explore various types of careers, while also learning more about themselves. A homework assignment would be given for group members to do. This assignment would be for students to research three careers they see themselves doing in the future and journaling about why these careers would be a good fit for them.

During the third session, group members would learn more about health (particularly sexual health) and about self care. This would give members time to share about experiences they have encountered, while also opening the floor to questions they may have about the subjects. The group would close by brainstorming various types of self-care they can easily implement into their lives and will be asked to try to incorporate one into their daily schedule for the week until the next session.

The fourth session's subject would be about harassment and what they can do about it. Members could share the types of harassment they may have faced, while listening to their peers about how they may have handled a similar situation. The counselor would provide the group with safe and helpful strategies they can use when facing harassment and the counselor will also provide them with a list of resources they can utilize when encountering harassment.

During the fifth session, members could talk about their family relationships and support groups. They could discuss if they face rejection from their families, or a lack of support and

how they can combat these issues. The group would also focus on discussing how to build their support groups over time and strategies they might use to begin conversations with family members in the hopes of building those relationships over time. If students have not had conversations about their sexual identity with their families, the group could discuss how to start these conversations and role play various conversations. The counselor would also let members of the group know that she is available for counseling sessions between the parent and member of the group to act as a mediator during their conversation of coming out.

The group would last for a semester during the school year and meet weekly. The previous sessions are examples about various topics the group would cover. Throughout the course of the semester the group would have conversations about: if they have ever had suicidal tendencies and cover various coping mechanisms they can use to combat these feelings, more in-depth conversations about their self-concepts and how to strengthen and grow them, more conversations about career paths and options, and more conversation about support systems and family relations. Throughout the group, members will be provided with a vast amount of resources they can utilize for sexual health, career development, support, housing, and more. Once the group ends, the counselor would give the students a questionnaire survey as a post-test to see the impact the group had on its members.

Evaluation of Intervention

For the evaluation process, the members of the group will be given a pre-test and a post-test that will help measure their self-concepts. This will help the counselor understand what parts of the counseling process effectively worked for the group and what they might need to change when having a future group for LGBTQ youth. The pre-test and post-test will start out with a section comprised of statements that students will respond to using the provided Likert Scale.

Examples of statements would be “I am satisfied with myself” or “I have a strong understanding about careers I would like to pursue.” The second portion of these assessments would be comprised of a checklist where students will checkmark all adjectives, they believe apply to them. Both of these sections can help the counselor determine development and evolution members’ self-concepts, vocational self-concept, and subject self-concepts (such as math or English) throughout the group counseling process (Strein, 1994). The aspiration would be for the group counseling sessions to be effective in helping LGBTQ develop their self-concepts and help improve their career development. This would be seen through students having improved answers on the Likert Scale section and that they would pick more adjectives to describe themselves (including describing themselves more positively).

Conclusion

By using Super’s Theory during group career counseling session with LGBTQ youth, it would students learn more about themselves, while helping them strengthen and grow their self-concepts. It would also help them learn more about career development and help them discover careers that best suit them. This group would provide LGBTQ youth the resources they would need to feel confident in making effective career decisions for their future. The group would provide students with a support system and help them develop skills with their peers that they can use throughout their lives. The assessments given would help the counselor determine how effective the group was for its members, while allowing her to know if certain dynamics of the group were more effective than others and what sections might need to be revised for future groups.

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