

LGBT College Student Career Development: Goals and Recommendations for Faculty Members

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ABSTRACT

LGBT college students need mentorship regarding their career development from their faculty members. This paper provides an informed approach, grounded in Social Cognitive Career Theory and supported by empirical research, for faculty members to provide effective career guidance specifically tailored for LGBT students. Goals and recommendations for career advising with LGBT students are provided using an SCCT-informed approach, given the unique needs and experiences of LGBT students. Explanations of how SCCT offers a relevant understanding to faculty members, as well as instructions for how to appropriately advise LGBT students in their career development is provided. Conclusions and future directions are also discussed.

KEYWORDS

Advising, Career Development, College Students, Faculty, LGBT, SCCT, Social Cognitive Career Theory

LGBT COLLEGE STUDENT CAREER DEVELOPMENT: GOALS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FACULTY MEMBERS

Lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) college students need informed guidance regarding their career development. The process of choosing and preparing for a career can be challenging for many students (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994), and marginalized populations, including LGBT students, may experience particular challenges in planning for their careers (Nauta, Saucier, & Woodard, 2001). Faculty members are in a unique position to offer career guidance to LGBT students (Lewis & Ericksen, 2016); however, faculty may not know how to mentor LGBT students' specific career development needs. An informed approach, grounded in a theoretical framework and supported by empirical research, is needed for faculty members to provide suitable and effective career guidance for LGBT students.

Although support is often provided by counselors and university career centers (Beck, Rausch, Lane, & Wood, 2016), faculty members play a vital role in fostering college students' career development (Alexitch & Page, 1997). The National Academic Advising Association (NACADA) emphasizes career planning as a central tenet of the "academic advising curriculum" (NACADA, 2006). Accordingly, research supports faculty members' role in student career development (Alexitch & Page, 1997). Faculty report frequently providing career advice. College students, in turn, look to their faculty members for career guidance, perhaps more so than other university resources. A study by Alexitch and Page (1997) found that students rate faculty advice as more useful than advice received from university counselors. Faculty advising efforts also positively relate to student development of

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career goals (Andrews, Andrews, Long, & Henton, 1987). Taken together, these findings suggest that faculty members should be prepared to offer their students appropriate and helpful career guidance.

Yet, LGBT students face unique issues in their career development that may render traditional career guidance insufficient and unhelpful, given barriers that arise and cognitive demands associated with sexual identity development (Schmidt & Nilsson, 2006). A useful framework for faculty members to better understand and foster career development for LGBT students is Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT). Extensively researched, SCCT offers a sound and empirically validated context for faculty advising (Erlich & Russ-Eft, 2011) and is one of the few career theories effectively applied to LGBT populations (Lent & Sheu, 2010).

SCCT focuses on the concepts of career self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and perceived barriers to help move students forward in choosing their careers (Lent et al., 2002). SCCT highlights how LGBT students face unique barriers and self-efficacy issues related to their sexual orientation and gender identity that may interfere with positive outcome expectations (Lent et al., 2002), which then predictively limit life goal pursuits (Lent, 2005). Research has extensively documented these influences on career development (e.g. Betz, 2006; Lent, 2005), and studies have highlighted unique predictive trends for LGBT populations (e.g., Morrow, Gore, & Campbell, 1996; Schmidt, Miles, & Welsh, 2011). For example, one study found that LGBT students' vocational indecision was directly impacted by career barriers of perceived discrimination; however, this relationship has not been substantiated in other populations (Schmidt, Miles, & Welsh, 2011). Thus, the career mentorship needs of LGBT students are distinct. SCCT provides faculty members with a context for understanding the challenges, needs, and interventions to help LGBT students achieve career success.

For the purpose of aiding faculty members in advising LGBT students more effectively, this paper provides goals and recommendations for advising LGBT students on career matters using an SCCT-informed approach. The following sections discuss how SCCT offers a relevant understanding for faculty members, and provides specific recommendations for how to appropriately advise LGBT students in their career development.

SCCT and LGBT Students

Understanding LGBT students' experiences and the impact they have on career development is best understood through the lens of SCCT. SCCT is a recently developed conceptual framework aimed at understanding the processes through which people develop interests, make career-relevant choices, and achieve in career-related domains (Lent et al., 2002). SCCT is based on Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (SCT; Bandura & Locke, 2003), which recognizes social learning as the fundamental component to development. Key concepts from SCCT include *barriers*, *self-efficacy*, and *outcome expectations*. In the following sections, these terms are defined and relevant research on LGBT students is discussed.

Barriers

Barriers are defined as "events or conditions, either within the person or in his or her environment, that make...progress difficult" (Swanson & Woitke, 1997, p. 446). SCCT highlights the interplay between a person and their environmental context that may influence personal agency. Such an interplay gives rise to barriers, which Swanson and Woitke (1997) revealed to undermine development. A fundamental assumption of SCCT is that people are unable or unwilling to translate their occupational interests into goals and actions if they perceive insurmountable barriers to career entry or success (Lent et al., 2002). They may redirect their efforts to goals that appear more achievable, or become halted in their career decision-making altogether (Morrow, Gore, & Campbell, 1996). Ideally, students perceive fewer barriers to career success, and any they do foresee are considered manageable. Inasmuch as this is the case, students are more likely to feel unrestricted in identifying and pursuing their ultimate career goals.

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