
Affirmative Career Counselling with Transgender and Gender Nonconforming Clients: A Social Justice Perspective

Orientation professionnelle affirmative auprès de clients transgenres et transsexuels : une perspective de justice sociale

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ABSTRACT

The ongoing lack of scholarly attention to, and limited counsellor competence in, career counselling with transgender and gender nonconforming (TGNC) individuals contributes to perpetuating the marginalization of these populations. The career-related challenges and disparity in career outcomes of TGNC populations have been documented. This article takes a social justice orientation to stir a transformation from within the field of career counselling. We first critically examine the applicability of career theories with TGNC clients, and review the strengths and limitations of the following three theories: Super's developmental theory, Gottfredson's theory of circumscription and compromise, and social cognitive career theory. We then propose an affirmative career counselling model, which (a) takes gender and intersectionality into account throughout the career counselling process, and (b) effectively integrates contemporary theories that address systemic factors. The article concludes with suggestions for future research, highlighting the need for collaborative, participatory research that leads to social change.

RÉSUMÉ

Un manque constant d'attention pédagogique et une compétence déficiente des conseillers en ce qui concerne l'orientation professionnelle auprès des personnes transgenres et transsexuelles font en sorte de perpétuer la marginalisation de ces populations. Les défis de carrière et la disparité des résultats professionnels qui affligent ces populations sont bien documentés. Cet article, rédigé dans une perspective de justice sociale, vise à provoquer une transformation interne dans le milieu de l'orientation professionnelle. Dans un premier temps, nous examinons l'applicabilité des théories sur la carrière aux clients transgenres et transsexuels et passons en revue les points forts et les limites des trois théories suivantes : la théorie du développement de carrière de Super, la théorie de la circonscription et du compromis de Gottfredson et la théorie sociale cognitive de l'orientation professionnelle. Nous proposons ensuite un modèle affirmatif d'orientation professionnelle qui (a) prend en compte le genre et l'intersectionnalité tout au long du

processus d'orientation professionnelle et (b) qui intègre efficacement les théories contemporaines abordant les facteurs systémiques. Le texte se termine par des suggestions de pistes pour de nouvelles recherches, soulignant au passage la nécessité d'une recherche collaborative et participative menant à un changement social.

Despite a growing literature on the life experiences of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) people, transgender and gender nonconforming (TGNC) people remain underrepresented in academic study, and their career issues have received little scholarly attention. In fact, the scarcity of literature on the career issues of TGNC people is longstanding (Chung, 2003; McFadden & Crowley-Henry, 2016; O'Neil, McWhirter, & Cerezo, 2008). In a recent content analysis of trans-related scholarship published between 2002 and 2012, only 15 out of 960 publications were focused on career development and 9 on job outcomes, while the remaining articles primarily focused on psychosocial challenges such as psychological and identity issues as well as behavioural risks (Moradi et al., 2016).

Similarly, a systematic literature review by McFadden and Crowley-Henry (2016) identified underrepresentation of TGNC experiences in the scholarship on LGBT workplaces and careers. O'Neil et al. (2008) suggested that this dearth of scholarship may reflect the profession's biases, resulting in "the dismissal of transgender career concerns as amusing or trivial" (p. 289). Widespread pathologization and exoticization of trans identity, which have arguably been adopted by the field of psychology, may cause "normal" concerns such as career to be considered an afterthought.

However, the available research on work experiences of TGNC people indicates that these populations face numerous forms of oppression in fundamental areas of life such as school, work, family, community, and physical and mental health, which in turn adversely affect their work experiences and career outcomes. For example, according to the 2015 United States Transgender Survey (James et al., 2016), the unemployment rate is three times higher for TGNC populations than for their cisgender counterparts. Moreover, among the survey respondents who were employed, 15% reported having been verbally harassed, physically attacked, and/or sexually assaulted in the past year at work because of their gender identity or expression (James et al., 2016).

Canadian data from the Trans PULSE Project in Ontario (Bauer & Scheim, 2015) echoed the U.S. report. In total, 27% of respondents who held or applied for a job in the past year reported not being hired, being denied a promotion, or being fired during that year due to gender identity or expression, while 17% had declined a job offer due to the perception of an unsafe and transphobic work environment. Although respondents reported a wide range of incomes, their median salary of \$15,000 CAD (compared to the national median salary of \$34,000 CAD) demonstrated significant underemployment, especially considering that 44% of the respondents had a postsecondary or graduate degree (Bauer & Scheim, 2015; Statistics Canada, 2016).

This gap between barriers faced by TGNC populations and the attention given to these populations by the career counselling profession is clearly a social justice issue. The field of career counselling has seen a call to take a social justice orientation to reduce systematic barriers and discrimination while promoting social equity (Arthur & Collins, 2011; Chope, 2008; Ginsberg & Sinacore, 2015). A social justice orientation accounts for the unequal distribution of power at all levels, including within and between individuals, institutions, and communities, and at larger societal levels such as employment, career counselling practice, the discipline of counselling, and the impact these unequal power distributions has on clients and their well-being (Sinacore, 2011, 2016). As for TGNC populations, research shows that only a minority of mental health professionals have experience and competency in working with these populations, and TGNC individuals tend to be referred between service providers (Ansara, 2016; Lev, 2004). This lack of clinician competency, along with the longstanding neglect of TGNC populations in the career counselling literature, recreates forms of oppressive marginalization that TGNC individuals experience elsewhere.

Thus, the purpose of this article is to examine the current state of career counselling with TGNC populations through a social justice lens and to offer future directions. We also hope to foster transformational change from within the counselling profession. To this end, we will first provide critical analysis of career theories concerning their underlying assumptions and applicability to TGNC populations. Specifically, Super's developmental theory, Gottfredson's theory of circumscription and compromise, and social cognitive career theory (SCCT) will be reviewed. We will then propose a TGNC-affirmative approach to the career counselling process that integrates intersectionality and more contemporary career theories and offers future research directions aiming to promote social justice action further.

TERMS AND AUTHORS' SOCIAL LOCATIONS

Throughout this article, we will be using the term Transgender and Gender Nonconforming (TGNC), which was employed in the American Psychological Association Guidelines for Psychological Practice with Transgender and Gender Nonconforming People (American Psychological Association, 2015; herein referred to as the APA Guidelines). The APA Guidelines describe TGNC individuals as "those who have a gender identity that is not fully aligned with their sex assigned at birth" (p. 832). While the term TGNC encompasses individuals who identify as transgender or gender nonconforming, it is crucial to keep in mind that the lived experiences of TGNC individuals are unique and this term may not be accepted or used by all. There is vast diversity encompassed within the TGNC community. TGNC individuals may identify with a variety of terms (e.g., genderqueer, genderfluid, nonbinary) and pronouns (they/them, ze/hir). For instance, at least one in five TGNC individuals does not identify with either the male or female gender (Pyne, Bauer, & Bradley, 2015). Thus, the counsellor

working with these populations must recognize this diversity and verify with each client how they identify themselves.

Additionally, TGNC individuals have varying experiences of gender identity, gender expression, transition, and embodiment. For example, a person's gender expressions, that is, their outwardly exhibited gender (whether masculine, feminine, androgynous, or any other forms of expressions), may not align with the person's gender identity—their inner felt sense of gender (APA, 2015). Transition is, therefore, a complex and multidimensional (e.g., social, legal, physical, and medical) process, and TGNC people embody gender differently. Some may desire to be identified within the traditional gender binary, while others reject the binary by locating and expressing that their bodies are outside of it (Halberstam, 2018). However, existing normative assumptions of gender insist on binary and congruence between identity and expression, while state and institutional policies and their influences limit the extent to which TGNC people can freely exert control over their transition and embodiment (Hunt & Pelz, 2016; Spade, 2011). As we will demonstrate throughout this article, these dynamics impact not only TGNC people's experiences of marginalization, discrimination, and victimization, but also their career-related experiences.

Before proceeding, we feel that it is necessary to acknowledge our social locations considering social justice practices that address interactions between power and identity. We are four cisgender females who all go by the pronouns "she/her"; however, we are diverse regarding other social locations such as race/ethnicity, sexual orientation, religious affiliations, and immigration statuses. We began this project to gain a thorough understanding of TGNC populations' career issues to better inform our clinical and research practices and, critical to this process, we met and consulted with several professionals and TGNC community members and sought further training and professional development. We acknowledge that our experiences influence our discussion in this article as members of a dominant cisgender group and the inevitable biases these experiences engender. However, we strongly felt the need to respond to Singh's (2016) call for cisgender professionals to become TGNC allies. Given the scarcity of TGNC professionals, Singh argues that social equity is not possible without support across populations and transformational change in professional practice. By responding to this call, we hope to advance research and practice for these neglected populations.

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT THEORIES

Career counselling theories set the framework from which counsellors understand clients' career-related concerns and help them with decision-making processes. To better meet the vocational needs of TGNC people, it is imperative to critically examine established theories in the field. We will examine the following: Super's developmental theory, Gottfredson's theory of circumscription and compromise, and the SCCT. These theories are chosen not only because of their long-lasting influence in career psychology, but also due to their shared premises

that (a) processes of socialization and development of self are central to people's career development, and (b) gender is an influential factor in these processes. Thus, on the one hand, they provide potential utility in understanding TGNC individuals' career development, and yet, on the other hand, other aspects of these theories may have harmful effects on TGNC clients when applied uncritically.

Super's Developmental Theory

Donald Super (1980) viewed career development as a series of vocational choices, through which individuals implement their evolving self-concepts in the context of developmental stages and other life roles. According to this theory, individuals go through five stages: growth, exploration, establishment, maintenance, and disengagement (Super, 1980). Each stage is characterized by specific career-related developmental tasks and life roles (child, student, leisurite, citizen, worker, and homemaker), which are thought to interact with one another within and across stages. These stages and roles culminate in Super's Life-Career Rainbow, which depicts the unfolding of the life-career of a person from birth until death (Super, 1980).

Super's theory is intended to allow for individual variation in how one proceeds with career stages. However, it has been critiqued for its underlying assumptions that successful career development entails linear and prescriptive progression, and that failure to transition between stages is due to personal qualities, such as career maturity and adaptability (Richardson, 2012). Given the previously discussed systemic barriers faced by TGNC people in their educational and career trajectories, counsellors must refrain from locating the causes of career failure and dissatisfaction within the person (Fassinger, 2017). In fact, TGNC literature elucidates mechanisms through which TGNC people's unique challenges make it challenging for them to stay in track of the "normal" progression. For instance, the bottleneck hypothesis posits how the energy, time, and resources needed to deal with issues and barriers related to gender identity may cause TGNC individuals to postpone engagement in career development (Scott, Belke, & Barfield, 2011).

Further, TGNC people's employment history may be under a different name and gender, which can put them in a particular quandary: choosing to share employment history outs TGNC status and therefore risks discrimination, whereas not sharing past work experiences decreases the chance of being hired (Pepper & Lorah, 2008). Including past work experiences may mean facing previous references who were discriminatory and will not provide appropriate and positive feedback (Scott et al., 2011). Although Super's theory does not explicitly address gender, Coogan and Chen (2007) effectively applied Super's theory to women's career development.

Similarly, a counsellor using Super's theory with TGNC clients must consider gender identity as one type of self-concept and understand how TGNC people's implementation of gender identity interacts with their career and personal development. Take an example of a young transgender man counselled by the first author at a college counselling centre. Anticipating the challenges of gender transitioning

in the workplace (Budge, Tebbe, & Howard, 2010) and desiring to build a “clean work history” (i.e., consistent gender and legal name on CV and references) from the start, the client was eager to transition quickly and spent summer months undergoing and recovering from gender-affirming (reassignment) surgeries.

Consequently, as the bottleneck hypothesis suggests, he postponed career development tasks, while his cisgender peers were engaged in internships and summer employment. At the end of the summer, although content with his progress with gender transition, he felt that it was unfair that his career exploration had been delayed vis-à-vis his cisgender peers. Acknowledgement of the interactions between gender identities, ensuring barriers and privileges, life roles (i.e., student role in this example), and career development validates clients’ experiences and renders them accessible for dialogue; overlooking these variables discredits their existence and instills within clients a sense of failure to stay on an expected career trajectory.

Gottfredson’s Theory of Circumscription and Compromise

Gottfredson (2002) proposed that two processes shape career development: circumscription and compromise. Circumscription refers to the process in which young people progressively eliminate career options that seem intolerable or in conflict with their self-concepts. Sex type and level of prestige are the two dimensions that shape the zone of acceptable alternatives. Compromise refers to the process by which individuals choose an accessible option within the zone of acceptable alternatives, often by downgrading their aspiration to something “good enough” (Gottfredson, 2002, p. 103). Through these processes, people seek their occupational “niche” or place in society. Despite its explicit focus on sex, application of Gottfredson’s theory to TGNC people requires caution. The theory rests on a biological, binary conceptualization of sex and fails to distinguish between sex, gender, gender identity, and gender expression. Thus, the theory does not consider people whose gender identities and expression do not fit into a binary. Also, past distinctions between “feminine” and “masculine” occupations have been challenged and are evolving.

Furthermore, Gottfredson (2002) emphasized heritability in human development and rejected socialization theory. However, her theory can be seen in a radically new light when viewed from a postmodern perspective of gender as a socially constructed reality. Judith Butler’s (1990) notion of gender performativity is particularly illuminating.¹ According to Butler, we all perform gender through repeated behaviours that enact on and stylize our bodies. Most of us *do gender* in conformity with social expectations and norms, even without realizing, because gendered discourses are “coercive and prescriptive” (Chinn, 2010, p. 111). These performances may then act as a force that further reinforces binary gender categories, from which initial expectations and norms are derived. However, it is incoherent gender performativity that reveals the lack of original form of gender and its unnaturalness, hence Butler’s argument of gender as that which is only achieved through imitation with no original.

Applied to career development, we can gain a more in-depth understanding of how people, not only TGNC individuals but all people, come to pursue or not to pursue “gender-appropriate” occupations or *do* gender at workplaces (Butler, 1990). For example, TGNC people may make career choices or perform gender roles consistent with their assigned sex as a survival strategy to avoid bullying and discrimination, just as women give up male-oriented occupations (Blickenstaff, 2006) or perform emotional labour and minimize one’s visibility (Hochschild, 1979; Long, Hall, Bermbach, Jordan, & Patterson, 2008) at work, to meet societal expectations or for fear of sexism and harassment. Conversely, they may pursue choices based on a desire to express their gender identity (e.g., a trans woman choosing a “feminine” occupation) or to challenge an unequal gendered system, while others resist performing work roles based on gender norms and binary.

Given that occupations are gendered in ways that reflect uneven power distributions, career counsellors need to be cautious not to unwittingly, and however subtly, enforce gender-conforming performativity, which results in perpetuating power hierarchy and inequality. At the same time, naively pushing people into gender nonconforming performativity may put them at risk for backlash and victimization. Instead, appreciating a variety of ways that people (un)do gender, the career counsellors’ role is to explore with clients the meanings, intentions, and consequences of their performativity, and how these interacted with their gender and other identities to have impact on the process of circumscription, compromise, and overall career development. Finally, Gottfredson’s theory can potentially address intersectionality as it encompasses the dimension of prestige (i.e., social class). Career counsellors can use this theory to explore how social classes and economic means affect TGNC people’s career decisions. In a later section, we will discuss intersectionality in more depth.

Social Cognitive Career Theory

Based on Bandura’s (1981) social cognitive theory, social cognitive career theory (SCCT) concerns itself with how personal attributes (e.g., gender, race/ethnicity) and environmental factors (e.g., contextual affordance) interact to have impacts on career-related cognitive variables, which in turn influences the person’s career development (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). That is, the varying opportunities and learning experiences available to people lead them to develop different ideas about what they can do (self-efficacy), and what will happen if they pursue a particular option (outcome expectation), which further influence their career interests, choices, and performance.

SCCT is one of the most researched theories of career development, and some of its constructs, such as that of career expectations, have demonstrated a particular utility to understanding career-related challenges faced by sexual minority populations. For example, lesbian, gay, and bisexual individuals have reported lower salary expectations than heterosexual counterparts (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2012), as well as expectations about encountering general and sexual orientation-specific career barriers (Parnell, Lease, & Green, 2012). Homophobic workplace

climates influence LGB workers' decisions about disclosing their sexual identity, which also impacts their career satisfaction (Ozeren, 2014). Related to the notion of contextual affordance, support from family and friends (Fisher, Gushue, & Cerrone, 2011), as well as support from LGB communities (Boatwright, Gilbert, Forrest, & Ketzenberger, 1996) also play a significant role in career aspirations among lesbian women.

While these studies looked at constructs related to the SCCT among LGB populations, research on these constructs among TGNC populations has been mostly nonexistent, with a few notable exceptions. For one, Dickey, Walinsky, Rofkahr, Richardson-Cline, and Juntunen (2016) examined career decision self-efficacy (CDSE) among a convenient sample of TGNC people. Participants who self-identified as posttransition reported higher CDSE scores than those who self-identified as pre-transition. Based on these results, these authors suggested that the increased self-knowledge and skills (e.g., information-gathering) TGNC people may gain through gender transition may be transferable to career self-efficacy, while reducing the psychological distress and social discrimination that accompanies living in a body that does not express one's gender identity may result in increased self-efficacy for TGNC individuals. However, it is important to acknowledge that not all TGNC people have definite pre- and post-transition phases in their lives, nor go through or desire transition the same way (APA, 2015).

The other SCCT-informed study specific to TGNC people's career issues is Budge and colleagues' (2010) grounded theory study. By interviewing 18 transgender participants, these authors elucidated how their experiences fit with or differed from SCCT. Results indicated that while occupational barriers and contextual influences were salient and interplayed with participants' occupational prospects, aspirations, and actions (consistent with SCCT), the role of learning experiences and self-efficacy were downplayed (inconsistent with SCCT).

Given the results from these studies, SCCT has much to offer in addressing TGNC people's career beliefs. For example, career counsellors should explore how clients' gender identity, gender transition, past experiences, and anticipation of transphobia and discrimination shape their career self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Given the protective role of support systems, it is also important to help clients seek and mobilize support from family, friends, and communities, which will, in turn, strengthen clients' contextual affordances. Furthermore, clients may also benefit from locating a TGNC role model who may instill self-efficacy and hope, since vicarious learning (e.g., "If someone like me can do it, I can do it") is a robust predictor of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

Additionally, counsellors can assist TGNC individuals in developing self-efficacy through acquiring knowledge about employment laws and where they can find legal resources and support. As such, it is crucial for counsellors to be able to access such knowledge and support themselves, and to be able to communicate employee rights and employer responsibilities to TGNC people. Bill C-16, in which gender identity and expression were added to the list of prohibited grounds of discrimination in the Canadian Human Rights Act, passed in 2017.

Employers have subsequently been obligated to take appropriate actions to eliminate discrimination and harassment in the workplace, and to make reasonable accommodations to individuals' needs arising from these grounds (Canadian Human Rights Commission, n.d.). In response, Public Service and Procurement Canada ([PSPC], 2017) have published a document, *Support for Trans Employees: A Guide for Employees and Managers*. Although this document is intended to be used only within the federal departments and agencies overseen by PSPC, it lists Canadian court decisions involving transgender issues and pertinent resources. While provincial-level resources should be complemented, this document will serve as an initial step for career counsellors to gain efficacy in advocating for their clients, which in turn models for clients to advocate for themselves.

In this section, we identified the strengths and limitations of three career theories regarding their applicability to TGNC populations. We proposed ways to use these theories to understand how TGNC clients' careers are shaped dynamically by factors such as identities, gender role expectations, life roles, self-efficacy, social locations, systemic barriers, and opportunities. However, knowledge of traditional career theories alone does not translate into a TGNC-affirmative career counselling. To provide affirmative career counselling to TGNC clients, we argue for greater awareness and sensitivity throughout the career counselling process, as well as the integration of an intersectional lens and contemporary career theories into practice.

AFFIRMATIVE CAREER COUNSELLING WITH TGNC CLIENTS

Scholars have advocated for adopting an affirmative approach to counselling sexual minority populations (Heck, Flentje, & Cochran, 2013). Although affirmative approaches initially grouped LGBT populations, more recent scholarship has begun to specify affirmative approaches for TGNC people (Singh & dickey, 2017). Affirmative counsellors openly embrace TGNC people's fluid and nonbinary identities while remaining reflective about their own biases. They are sensitive to TGNC people's experiences of discrimination and minority stress while seeking to maintain a balanced view by attending to their resiliency and strengths.

Furthermore, affirmative counselling with TGNC clients urges professionals to move from taking the role of gatekeeper of services to that of an advocate for social change, which entails a deep understanding of how gender serves as a systemic force that controls and maintains power relations (Singh & Burnes, 2010). In other words, affirmative counselling is transgressive, with a deliberate "affirmation of strength in resisting social norms and of claiming the power to define and explain one's own life" (Fassinger, 2017, p. 41). Extant literature on TGNC-affirmative counselling, however, primarily focuses on mental health counselling and has yet to be extended to career counselling. Thus, in this section, we demonstrate ways to implement affirmative career counselling, with the hope of stimulating more discussions in the field.

Career Intake Interview

Affirmative career counselling starts with the counsellor's self-reflection. To foster cultural competence through self-reflection, Heck et al. (2013) delineated some questions that clinicians need to consider when conducting initial interviews with LGBT populations. Although their focus is on psychotherapy practice with LGBT clients, the questions they raised are relevant for career counselling with TGNC people. Adopting Heck et al. (2013), we propose in Table 1 a set of modified questions that are tailored for career counselling with TGNC clients. Specifically, we have replaced the word LGBT with TGNC, to highlight their applicability to TGNC people. In addition, we changed Heck et al.'s (2013) sixth question, "Am I familiar with the research regarding *LGBT mental health* that applies to this client," to "Am I familiar with the research regarding *TGNC people's general, psychological, and career-related experiences* that applies to this particular client?" This change not only makes the question more suitable in the career counselling context (as opposed to mental health counselling) but also emphasizes the inseparability of career and personal spheres (e.g., Betz & Corning, 1993).

Career counsellors need to be familiar with the unique career challenges faced by TGNC people. For instance, the US Trans Survey study found that TGNC individuals often hide their gender identity (53%), delay gender transition (26%), or work at jobs for which they are overqualified (24%). The researcher suggests

Table 1

Considerations for Conducting Career Intake Interviews with TGNC Clients, adopted from Heck et al. (2013)

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1. Have I acquired the necessary training and knowledge to be competent to work with TGNC clients, and am I aware of the limitations of this training and knowledge?
 2. Have I examined my attitudes and pre-existing beliefs about individuals who identify as TGNC?
 3. Will TGNC individuals feel comfortable coming to my career counselling office, and will other staff members treat these clients with respect?
 4. Does my intake and assessment paperwork honour the many dimensions of client diversity? (E.g., Do the forms ask male or female, is there room for other kinds of relationship status than married or not married?)
 5. Do I ask my clients affirming and open-ended questions about relationships, family, sexuality, and gender?
 6. Am I familiar with the research regarding TGNC people's general, psychological, and career-related experiences that apply to this particular client?
 7. Have I assessed the impact of minority stress and discrimination on this particular client, and factored this into my case formulation?
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that this is due to factors such as anti-transgender bias, discrimination in hiring processes, and unsafe workplace culture (James et al., 2016). In addition to these institutional factors, TGNC people may experience discrimination at an interpersonal level, such as colleagues deliberately using incorrect pronouns (Dispenza, Watson, Chung, & Brack, 2012). Moreover, institutional policies create career barriers for TGNC individuals. For instance, a procedure that is prohibitive of updating names or pronouns on transcripts and employment references could result in an unwanted “outing” of TGNC individuals (Bauer & Scheim, 2015). The expectation of discrimination based on minority identity status may result in hypervigilance, internalized negative self-messages, and desire to hide discriminated identities (Meyer, 2003; Rood et al., 2016). Along with an understanding of career issues, counsellors should familiarize themselves with a broader range of issues that influence general well-being, such as developmental, social, legal, and biomedical aspects of TGNC experiences.

Upon reflecting on the above questions adopted from Heck et al. (2013), career counsellors may regard themselves as lacking competence in working with TGNC clients and be tempted to refer elsewhere. In certain situations, referral may be appropriate, especially when the counsellor requires not only competence but also resources for self-education, consultation, and supervision. However, it is critical to consider the consequences of routinely referring TGNC clients. Given that few TGNC-identified professionals exist (Singh, 2016) and TGNC resources are often located only in metropolitan areas, TGNC clients may not receive needed services promptly or at all. Under such power dynamics, career counsellors may perpetuate the status quo: TGNC clients remain continuously underserved while the field does not develop the capacity to work with TGNC populations.

Career Assessment

Career assessment is an integral part of the counselling process (Chartrand & Walsh, 2001). However, as is the case with theories of career counselling and development, available assessment tools have developed as byproducts of broader sociocultural climates and contexts that have marginalized TGNC populations (Sinacore, 2011, 2016). Thus, it is imperative that career counsellors examine the limitations of traditional career assessment tools and understand how these limitations affect TGNC populations.

First, it is important to recognize the assumptions of the gender binary and cis-normativity in assessment instruments. For example, some instruments use separate-sex norms and suggest gender-stereotypical occupations to male and female test takers. Such gender biases are problematic even to cisgender test takers, but TGNC people may experience discomfort and confusion when they are forced to align themselves in a gender binary, and their scores are compared to cisgender norm samples. Fortunately, there have been improvements to redress gender bias in career assessment tools. For example, the current edition of the Strong Interest Inventory recommends that all clients self-select their identified gender for norm comparison, and initial validation of the instrument with trans- and LGB-clients

have been reported (Schaubhut & Thompson, 2016). Also, based on Holland's theory, the unisex edition of ACT Interest Inventory (ACT Inc., 2009) was developed to create a gender-balanced interest scale through careful test construction and the development of combined gender norms.

When using traditional assessment instruments, affirmative career counsellors may consider collaborating with TGNC clients to interpret quantitative scores qualitatively. Informed by the narrative approach to career counselling, Watson and McMahon (2014; also see McMahon & Watson, 2012) illustrated a process-oriented use of the Self-Directed Search (Holland, 1997) and Super's Work Values Inventory (Rottinghaus & Zytowski, 2006), in which clients are encouraged to connect test scores and life experiences through storytelling and meaning-making. In applying this approach to TGNC clients, counsellors can capitalize on the advantages of established career assessment instruments to efficiently gather information, while circumventing their limitations.

Also, counsellors may use measures of workplace experience that are designed explicitly for TGNC populations. These measures are particularly helpful in advocacy and consultation, allowing the deconstruction of institutional power dynamics that silence and marginalize certain individuals. Notably, Brewster, Velez, DeBlaere, and Moradi (2012) reported three measures modified explicitly for use with transgender individuals: Workplace Heterosexual Experience Questionnaire (WHEQ; Waldo, 1999); the Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgendered Climate Inventory (LGBTICI; Liddle, Luzzo, Hauenstein, & Schuck, 2004); and the Workplace Sexual Identity Management Measure (WSIMM; Anderson, Croteau, Chung, & Distefano, 2001). Although these measures are typically developed for research purposes, career counsellors may use them in a qualitative, process-oriented manner similar to the process described by Watson and McMahon (2014). By understanding the effects of workplace experiences on themselves, TGNC clients could work against internalizing negative workplace experiences (e.g., attributing them to personal failure), and identify ways to combat future occurrence (e.g., finding an ally). Furthermore, career professionals may use these tools in outreach and consultation work with employers to create diversity-affirming hiring practices and workplace culture (Collins, McFadden, Rocco, & Mathis, 2015). For example, the LGBTICI could be adopted as an outcome measure when administered at a pre- and post-systemic intervention aimed at improving workplace climates.

Integrating Intersectionality and Contemporary Career Theories

Social justice practice argues for the recognition of individuals' multiple and intersecting identities (Sinacore, 2011, 2016). Rooted in Black feminist theory and critical race theory, intersectionality refers to analytic approaches that examine how individuals' multiple categories of social locations and associated power structures simultaneously shape their experiences. Thus, intersectionality attends not only to heterogeneity within TGNC populations, but also to how cis-normativity and transphobia interact with other systems of oppression such as sexism, racism, and

class differences. According to Halberstam (2018), “poverty, sex work, and race remain significant variables in determining ways in which transgender people are regularly subjected to violence on accounts of their gender expression” (p. 18). An in-depth discussion of the theoretical underpinnings and methodological implications of intersectionality is beyond the scope of this article, and we direct interested readers to writings such as Cole (2009) and Moradi and Grzanka (2017). However, it is imperative to note that intersectionality is, and should be, inherently a social justice project. As Sinacore (2011, 2016) and McCall (2005) suggested, social justice without attention to intersectionality could lead us to build equality for some people based on inequality for others.

Scholars have incorporated an intersectional lens in their writings on TGNC issues (e.g., Brabender & Mihura, 2016), but have yet to focus on career counselling specifically. This is consistent with Namaste’s (2009) critique of mainstream feminism and queer theories that tend to neglect the centrality of labour in the lives of transgender people. Namaste argued that sex work has been often the only available means to afford sex assignment treatments. The 2015 U.S. Transgender Survey corroborated this point; in addition to a higher unemployment rate than the general public, 65% of TGNC respondents had experienced homelessness in their lifetime, and many turned to the underground work economy for income, such as drug sales and sex work (James et al., 2016).

Namaste (2000) further illustrated the salience of race/ethnicity and immigrant status among the trans women sex workers who are most vulnerable to health risks and victimization. This point, too, is confirmed by the US Trans Survey; TGNC respondents of racial or ethnic minorities experienced more discrimination and higher unemployment and poverty rates than white respondents (James et al., 2016). Thus, the discrimination that one experiences as a gender minority may compound with other statuses, such as racial minority, immigration status, and language(s) spoken, and contribute to increasing discrimination, violence and, particular to this article, accessing work and workplace challenges.

Similarly, one’s age and social progress, intersected with other dimensions of one’s social locations, is likely an important category in TGNC peoples’ career trajectories. Currently, a small group of TGNC children, mostly limited to those from middle-class White families in urban areas of Western countries, may have access to hormone-blocking medication prior to or at the time of the onset of puberty, which may reduce the need for some surgeries in adulthood (Halberstam, 2018). They will have different life experience than older generations of TGNC individuals or their contemporary counterparts who did/do not have access to these means. Also, young TGNC people in Western urban areas today see a growing number of large corporations that are openly espousing workplace diversity policies, although these employment opportunities are still limited in number and access is affected by geographical location and other factors. Consequently, career theories and counsellors must then consider differential impacts that social structures have on different groups of TGNC individuals. Young TGNC people working in corporations that openly embrace diversity may feel caught in the gaps

between policies and practices, leading them to feel tokenized. In contrast, the needs of TGNC youth who do not have access to such workplaces may become invisible in light of the apparent social improvement, while older generations of TGNC people may continue to suffer from the cumulative financial impact of underemployment on their retirement.

Contemporary theories of career counselling offer utility in understanding how intersecting identities and social locations influence a career. For example, Blustein's (2013) theory of psychology of working highlights work as a means of survival, recognizing that many people do not have choices in their work lives. In contrast to traditional career theories focusing on constructs such as interests, choice, and aspiration, this theory is more helpful in understanding the lives of those who engage in sex work to pay for gender-affirming treatments "and/or a way to pay the rent" (Namaste, 2000, p. 11). Similarly, the systems theory framework (Arthur & McMahon, 2005; Patton & McMahon, 1999) considers the recursive influences of cultural, social, and environmental factors on individuals' careers. Further, this theory encourages counsellors to engage systemically and act as advocates at various societal levels, rather than limit their work to one-on-one counselling.

In sum, TGNC-affirmative career counselling starts with gender-responsive intake and assessment processes, as well as the integration of intersectionality and contemporary career theories into counselling practice. However, these modern theories, along with more traditional ones, were not conceived by considering the career and work lives of TGNC people, and their applicability has yet to be empirically tested. This leads to the next section, in which we argue for the need for more research to better understand the requirements of this population and best practices for career counselling.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Despite growing attention to the experiences of TGNC people, there is a lack of research on their career counselling needs. Moreover, the existing TGNC research relies on convenient and purposive sampling, which tends to solicit the participation of urban young adults with relatively higher education and dominant racial/ethnic backgrounds (dickey, Hendricks, & Bockting, 2016; Moradi et al., 2016). While these techniques are useful to access otherwise hidden populations, researchers need to be intentional and creative in their recruitment efforts to include TGNC people at diverse social locations.

Concerning content, we have just begun to know more about the work experiences of TGNC people. One future direction is research into models of career development and counselling that builds on TGNC people's lived experiences and intersectional identities. As a starting point, Budge et al. (2010) proposed models of transition negotiation and career decision processes based on their grounded theory study. Further scholarship that builds on and tests these models is needed.

Another area that warrants more study is TGNC people's experience in career counselling. Research questions, to name a few, may include the following: To what

extent do TGNC clients utilize career counselling and how satisfied are they with the career counselling they receive? What do they consider helpful and unhelpful? What could increase accessibility to career counselling? These questions will inform us as to how best to prepare career counselling trainees to work sensitively and competently with TGNC clients. Lastly, research can be woven into advocacy and consultation activities. For example, researchers may use measures of organizational culture and transphobia discussed above (see Brewster et al., 2012) as an outcome measure of their interventions at organizational and systemic levels. Disseminating the results of such studies will help other TGNC communities to access funding and design their interventions that meet their local needs.

Selecting appropriate research methods is crucial for a culturally competent and social justice approach. At a minimum, such methods do not replicate oppressive power dynamics and inequalities perpetuated by social norms. Furthermore, socially just, trans-responsive methodology requires researchers' reflexivity and a commitment to research ethics that goes beyond standards set by institutional review boards (Sinacore, 2011, 2016). Consultation and program evaluation should involve relevant stakeholders, with a great deal of attention paid to confidentiality, safety, and power differentials at all levels. Mandates to funding agencies and institutions' biases and hidden agendas may influence numerous aspects of the research process.

Moreover, attention needs to be paid to the way we collect demographic information and ask questions to honour the unique and intersectional experiences of TGNC people (see GenIUSS Group, 2014, for best practices pertaining to identifying TGNC respondents in research). For example, scholars have pointed out that research on LGBT issues often fails to ask for participants' racial and ethnic backgrounds, while racial and ethnic minority research tends to omit questions about sexual orientation and gender identity (dickey, Hendricks, & Bockting, 2016; Moradi et al., 2016). Additionally, most LGBTQ research does not accurately capture or reflect trans experiences and thus perpetuates TGNC marginalization (McFadden & Crowley-Henry, 2016; GenIUSS Group, 2014). The multiplicity of lived experiences arises from intersectional identities, and these can be studied either qualitatively or quantitatively, but require much epistemological thought (McCall, 2005; Moradi & Grzanka, 2017).

Central to the social justice approach is the need to use research to the benefit of communities (Sinacore, 2011, 2016). Asking participants to provide personal experiences for data, a request that requires energy and vulnerability, is often made in the promise that the research will bring improvement to the lives of TGNC people. Research that does not follow through on this is irresponsible. Knowledge dissemination should be planned and be part of the research proposal. There have been calls to utilize methodologies that promote pairing research processes with action to promote systemic changes, such as critical action research, the participatory critical incident technique, and feminist participatory action research (Bierema, 2015; Chou, Kwee, Buchanan, & Lees, 2016; Singh, Richmond, & Burnes, 2013). Employing an emic approach and collaboratively involving the community

stakeholders in all aspects of the research (such as forming questions, data analysis, and social action) honours the voices and needs of the participants and promotes meaningful and sustainable change (Bierema, 2015; Chou et al., 2016).

CONCLUSION

There is a great need for research and scholarship that further informs counselling practices, challenges oppressive systems, and advocates for TGNC clients. While we do not suggest that counsellors should merely dismiss existing career counselling theories, we encourage critical examination and thorough consideration of how they are in part a byproduct of the historically oppressive sociocultural contexts and institutional practices that have marginalized and silenced TGNC people. Further dialogue and collaborative research initiatives on this topic have the potential to inform substantive systemic changes and social actions.

Regarding career counselling practice, an ongoing reflection of Heck et al.'s (2013) modified questions (Table 1) prompts introspection about our own cultural identities and locations, a requisite for cultural competence. We encourage utilizing resources, such as the APA Guidelines (APA, 2015), and supervision to foster competence. By taking an affirmative, collaborative approach, the career counsellor can begin to understand the interplay between the client's unique cultural life experiences, gender identity and expression, and career development. By employing approaches such as storytelling, and by being cognizant of the impact of social factors and gender performativity on career self-efficacy and other career beliefs, the counsellor can better address the individual's career challenges and aspirations. Finally, open exploration and acknowledgement of the oppressive systems that have marginalized TGNC individuals and other cultural groups will validate individuals' experiences and begin to carve out space for individual development and social change. Taking a social justice perspective, career counsellors are now called upon to promote systemic changes to organizations, institutions, and society through consultation, outreach, and advocacy work.

Note

- 1 Although drag played a central role in Butler (1990)'s theorization of performativity, *Gender Trouble* is a foundational text for queer theory and its application to TGNC people and transgender theory has been critiqued, for lacking an emphasis on embodiment (see Elliot, 2010). Butler's later work, *Undoing Gender* (2004) and *Bodies That Matter* (2011), better address embodiment and material dimension of sex/gender.

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