

LESBIAN AND GAY CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND SUPER'S LIFE-SPAN,  
LIFE-SPACE THEORY

by

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## Abstract

The primary goal of the present study was to examine the influence of sexual minority identity on the career decision and trajectory of 15 lesbian women and 14 gay men, between the ages of 18-57. Next, the phase of career development and the social context of these participants were examined through the lens of Super's (1990) life-span, life-space theory of career development. Three main findings emerged from this study. First, although heterosexism and homophobia pervasively influence the career development of sexual minorities, there is evidence of a process by which they mediate the impact of these influences on career development, namely, by minimizing exposure to homophobia, maximizing exposure to affirming professional and personal supports, and by capitalizing on strength and resilience gained over the course of developing a sexual minority identity. Next, although participants' phase of career development was consistent with what Super's (1990) life-span theory would predict, factors related to sexual orientation and homophobia influenced how they maneuvered within and between these phases. Finally, the situational determinants-portion of life-span theory did not adequately describe the social context within which sexual minorities choose and pursue careers, and the addition of oppression as an over-arching influence on the life-space of sexual minority persons is proposed. Limitations of the present study, as well as implications for research and counselling practice are presented.

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## INTRODUCTION

Career development is a complex process involving a variety of components, which in concert direct the individual along certain paths and away from others (Anderson, 1998). The process of career development can be daunting for anyone at times, but for sexual minorities, there are additional and unique concerns around choosing a viable and satisfying career (Bieschke & Matthews; 1996 Croteau, 1996; Fassinger, 1996; Morrow, 1998; Schneider & Dimito, 2010). Indeed, Parnell, Lease & Green (2012) posit that sexual minority career seekers not only experience career barriers common to heterosexual counterparts, they also anticipate barriers related solely to their sexual orientation. These include: the heterosexist social context within which sexual minority persons select and pursue careers, as well as the effects of homophobia and discrimination (Heslin, Bell & Fletcher, 2012; Morrow, 1998).

Career development concerns of sexual minority persons are compounded by sexual minority identity development, often referred to in the literature as the “coming out process,” a process made necessary by the powerful influence of homophobia and discrimination in the lives of sexual minorities the world over. It has been proposed that career development and sexual minority identity development are sometimes competitive processes that leave individuals’ with limited energy and resources to develop fully in one or both domains (Adams, Cahill & Ackerlind, 2005; Morgan & Brown, 1991). Therefore, in order to understand career development for gay and lesbian people, it is important to understand sexual minority identity development.

Early attempts to describe the challenging process of sexual minority identity development (e.g., Cass, 1984; Coleman, 1985; Troiden, 1989) were linear, with individuals’

moving through predictable stages of development to a hopeful outcome wherein sexual minority identity was fully integrated, both within the person as well as within his or her social reality. However, subsequent theorists posited that a number of factors preclude such developmental linearity for many sexual minority persons, including; homophobia, sex, cultural affiliation, age and perceived/actual levels of personal and community-based support (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; Henrickson & Neveille, 2012; Hill, 2009; Kwon, 2013; Langdrige, 2008; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Riley, 2010; Schneider, 2001). With greater recognition that the coming out process can occur at any point across the life-span, as well as the importance of the social context within which sexual minorities develop their identity, researchers of late have proposed theories of development that reflect a more flexible and holistic understanding of sexual minority identity development (D'Augelli, 1994; Fassinger & Miller, 1997; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Ritter & Terndrup, 2002). Understanding sexual minority career development, then, requires career theory that is sensitive to the importance and complexity of the sexual minority developmental process and social context.

The movement from linear to non-linear thinking in sexual minority development research and theory has been mirrored in research and theory on career development. Early theories of career development understood the characteristics of the career seeker as relatively constant, the environment as relatively neutral and career development as a linear process. An example of such a theory is John Holland's Theory of Vocational Choice (1973, 1992), which has occupied centre-stage over the last half-century of career theory (Brown, 1990, 2002). Critics of such approaches argued the need for career theory that could address the role of personality development and the interaction of the individual and his/her environment across the life-span (Leong, Austin, Searan & Kamaraju, 1998; Mobley & Slaney, 1998; Osipow &

Fitzgerald, 1996). A response to this need came from Donald Super (1957, 1980, 1990), whose life-span, life-space approach has relevance to the complex career development and concerns of minoritized populations.

Donald Super's (1957, 1980, 1990) life-span, life-space theory of career development has dominated developmental career theory for the better part of the last century (Leong & Flores, 2013). Super first began conceptualizing career development as a life-long process during the 1940's, and until his death in 1994, he continued to expand and refine what would become the life-span, life-space theory by including consideration of individual development as inextricable from the social context within which the individual exists (Leong & Flores, 2013; Zunker, 2012). Super (1990) defined career development as the implementation of one's self-concept into one's work-life, with the optimal goal of decreasing the dissonance between self-concept and one's career choice(s) - a goal which, when achieved, indicated career maturity. According to Super, this developmental process plays out gradually, over the course of five career phases that correspond loosely with five life-stages, and progression through these career stages is dependant upon mastery of developmental tasks inherent in each. Super's focus on the "dynamic interaction of the individual and society" (p. 203) informed both individual development, and the roles one assumed in one's life. These "life roles" (e.g., student, mother, worker), and the "theatres" in which they were played (e.g., home, community, school, workplace) constituted the individual's life-space. This part of the theory reflects Super's view that people are social beings, and as such, they are subject to the influence of their social environment/context, over the course of their lives.

Super's (1990) theory, then, represents a comprehensive approach to understanding the multiplicity of factors comprising career selection and development across the life-span.

Super's work has been highly influential in the field of career guidance globally (Patton & McMahon, 2006), yet there has been a dearth of research examining its efficacy of for sexual minority career development, with only two researchers directly addressing sexual minority issues through the lens of Super's theory. In a theoretical paper, Dunkle (1996) argued the need for researchers to consider sexual minority identity development as an important addition to Super's life-span theory, and called for empirical examination of the impact of sexual minority identity on progression through phases of career development as defined by life-span theory. Eight years after Dunkle's publication, House (2004) examined barriers to career development, across the life-span, of 10 lesbian women, aged 42-65. This study found that sexual minority identity influenced each stage of development for the 10 lesbians interviewed, particularly during the establishment and maintenance phases. As a result, House proposed that barriers to sexual minority career development be included in the biographical portion of Super's archway model. The present study aims to expand on the efforts of Dunkle and House by directly addressing the influence of sexual minority identity on career development, and its relationship to Super's life-span, life-space theory.

The primary goal of the present study is to examine the influence of sexual minority identity on career decision and trajectory of lesbian women and gay men. Next, this study hopes to determine whether participants move through the "working years" stages of career development (exploration, establishment, and maintenance stages) in a way that Super's life-span theory would predict. Finally, because the working lives of sexual minorities is embedded within a social context steeped in heterosexism and homophobia, the factors influencing career development will be examined through the lens of the social context portion

of Super's (1990) life-space theory to determine its utility for addressing the social context of participants in this study.

This manuscript commences with a review of the literature, starting with a description of Super's work and theory, followed by research and commentary on sexual minority identity development and factors influencing career development for sexual minority persons. Next, the methodology used to collect and analyze data will be discussed, and are followed by the results of this study. The final chapter will discuss theoretical findings, limitations of the present study, and implications for future research and counselling practice.

CHAPTER ONE  
LITERATURE REVIEW

**Career Theory**

Early career theory grew out of the tradition of logical positivism, which assumed that the characteristics of the individual were of paramount importance, and that these could be examined objectively, whereas the environment/social context within which people develop and live were of little consequence to career selection and development (Brown, 2002; Patton & McMahon, 2006; Spokane, Luchetta & Richwine, 2002). According to such theories, if we can understand an individual's particular characteristics, we should be able to determine likely or appropriate career paths for that person (Patton & McMahon, 2006; Savickas, 2002). John Holland's (1973, 1992) trait and factor theory of career development represents such a perspective, built as it was on the assumption that career seekers can be objectively studied apart from their environments, which are considered mostly neutral (Spokane et al., 2002).

Savickas (2002) termed positivistic understandings of career choice the "individual differences" approach to career development, and he juxtaposed this with more recent and subjective "developmental differences" approaches, which place greater emphasis on both the individual's development over the life-span as well as her/his social context. Such approaches to career development arose from the contextualist worldview, and assume the individual is moved to make career choices based on factors related to physical and social environment, group membership (e.g., cultural affiliation), family of origin dynamics and factors related to the historical context (e.g., Astin, 1984; Gottfredson 1996; Krumboltz 1996; Ritter & Terndrup, 2002; Savickas, 2002; Super, 1957, 1980, 1990). Contextualist approaches to career development offer sensitivity to the complex career development of minority populations, such



as sexual minorities (Herr, 2008; Leong, Chao & Hardin, 2000; Zunker, 2012). The most influential career theory in the constructivist camp has been that of Donald Super (Patton & McMahon, 2006). Super's approach holds promise for addressing the complexity of career development from a minority perspective, as it takes into account the individual's self-concept, social location and development experience as critical considerations for understanding career development and trajectory.

### **Super's Life-Span, Life-Space Theory of Career Development**

Super's (1980, 1990) theory represents a marked shift from early career theory which considered career development a "point in time" event, by presenting it instead as a life-long process; one with numerous transitions and "...reassessment of roles, commitments and identity as new dilemmas and questions unfold" (Herr, 1997, p. 239). It redirected the focus of other theories from the career to be chosen, given stable individual traits, to the dynamic characteristics of the career seeker and his or her life experiences (Herr & Cramer, 1996). In so doing, the individual is conceptualized as having multiple roles within her or his particular environmental context, along with opportunities inherent in that context, all of which interact with the individual's self-concept to direct the course of his or her career path (Super, 1990).

The body of Super's work is comprised of three interconnected theories; life-span theory, life-space theory, and self-concept theory, which in concert represent a comprehensive framework within which to understand each person's unique career trajectory. In the words of Super,

What I have contributed is not an integrated, comprehensive and testable theory, but rather a 'segmental theory.' A loosely unified set of theories dealing with specific aspects of career development, taken from developmental, differential, social,

personality and phenomenological psychology and held together by self-concept and learning theory (Super, 1990, p. 199).

Because of the complexity of such a theory, it is important to prudently select components for examination in any given piece of research. Therefore, although all three theories comprising the overall theory will be described here, the present study will only examine issues related to the life-span and life-space theories. The earliest piece in this body of work was life-span theory.

**Life-Span Theory.** Super's early work was heavily influenced by the field of developmental psychology, and focused on individual career development from childhood through to the retirement years; work that eventually comprised the life-span portion of his larger theory. According to life-span theory, individuals progress through five life-stages, which are roughly aligned with chronological age: growth (birth to 14 years), exploration (14-25 years), establishment (25-45 years), maintenance (45-65 years), and disengagement (65 years and beyond). Within each stage there are developmental tasks to be completed in preparation for the tasks inherent in the next stage of development, and failure to complete tasks of a given stage could result in turmoil in later stages. For example, if one failed to explore career options thoroughly during the exploration phase, it is more likely one will experience job dissatisfaction or disruption in later stages.

Super conceptualized career maturity as mastery of developmental tasks across the five stages of career development. In the first, (or growth) phase, as children become increasingly autonomous, they develop the capacity to consider the future and become more concerned about achievement in the present. Accordingly, the child becomes more competent in terms of work habits and attitudes, and begins to think about work options in light of developing

interests and abilities. Eventually, around the beginning of adolescence, the exploration phase generally commences, and occupational considerations narrow to options the youth considers viable in a task known as crystallization, a marker of the commencement of vocational identity development. Crystallization is followed by specification, wherein the adolescent directs the occupational-self into educational and vocational choices that are aligned with his or her environmental context and goals. Ultimately, the individual moves into the tasks associated with implementation by seeking out relevant training and job opportunities.

Between the ages of 25 and 45, Super proposed that most people work through tasks associated with the establishment phase of their careers, and these tasks include stabilizing, consolidating and advancing. In the first instance, the individual enters her or his chosen training or work environment, and attempts to stabilize within the environment and the position occupied. She or he also puts effort into consolidating work habits and cultivating organizational and professional work relationships. As the individual becomes more established in her or his career path of choice, there is often a striving to advance, and steps are taken to do so, though the theory acknowledges that advancing is a task that can be engaged with in other phases as well.

Once the tasks of establishment are mastered, the individual enters the maintenance phase of career development, generally between the ages of 45 and 65 years. During this phase, the individual engages in the tasks of holding, maintaining and innovating. At the outset of this phase, many people question whether they want to continue along their current path until retirement. If the decision is to discontinue, they re-enter the exploration phase once again, recycling through the phases until a path more congruent with their current identity and/or situation is manifest. However, those who decide to continue along the same career trajectory

proceed to work through the tasks associated with this phase by determining what it is necessary to do in order to maintain their position in their career or place of employment. The task representing the minimum effort required to “maintain” is that of holding, or doing at least what one has done to date to maintain his or her job/career. Additional to this, the individual may update skills or knowledge so as to remain occupationally “current,” and s/he may further expand on updating by developing innovative means of meeting career challenges so as to remain competitive until retirement.

Around the age of 65, many enter the final stage of work life, referred to by Super as the disengagement phase. This phase is marked by tasks of deceleration, in anticipation of leaving the workforce, such as planning for retirement years and decreasing involvement with a future-orientation in the work place by preparing junior colleagues to take over relevant work tasks.

As alluded to earlier, developmental age ranges, according to Super (1990), are not absolute. Hence, he included the notion of both “maxi” and “mini” cycles to account for the fact that people may engaged in one or more career phases, or maxi cycles, as they are working through over-lapping tasks, or mini cycles, within and amongst given phases. Hence, the theory allows for a span of about five years between phases (e.g., the age-range 40-45, between the establishment and maintenance phases), during which many people transition from one phase to the next.

**Life-Space Theory.** The life-space portion of Super’s (1990) work situates the individual in terms of his or her social context and resultant roles, at any given point, across the life-span. Super originally proposed the following nine life roles as most common: child, student, leisurite, citizen, worker, spouse, homemaker, parent and pensioner. He further

proposed that these roles are generally played out in the following contexts: home, community, school, and workplace. An individual's life roles provide meaning and interact with each other to create life-space, which Super viewed as the fluid and dynamic way that individuals construct their lives. According to life-space theory, people make career decisions based on the constellation of salient roles at any given stage in life. In this way, life-span and life-space intersect to influence career path. Hence, the job of "Psychologist" may have a very different meaning for a recent university graduate whose other salient roles include mother, friend and sister, relative to the meaning it may provide to a middle-aged woman whose other salient roles include mother, seasoned professional, and daughter to aged parents. Further, most people have two or three core roles, which are foundational to life-satisfaction and personal identity. Examples of such roles include child, mother/father, student, and worker. In addition to core roles, most people also have peripheral roles, which provide meaning and demonstrate what a person values in life. Examples of such roles include; friend, volunteer, and member of a given community. Understanding role-structure, including which are most salient at a point in time, is seen as crucial to understanding how social context impacts career development.

In recognition that multiple factors related to social context influence career development, Super (1990) introduced the archway model (Figure 1). This model distinguishes personal determinants (the left side of the archway) from situational determinants (the right side of the archway). The former includes factors related to the individual, including needs, values, interests, intelligence and aptitudes, while the latter, which will be a point of interest in the present study, subsumes factors related to social context, such as community, school, family, peer groups, and society. At the top of the archway, Super situated the "self" as the keystone, which is supported by role self-concepts and developmental stages, with those

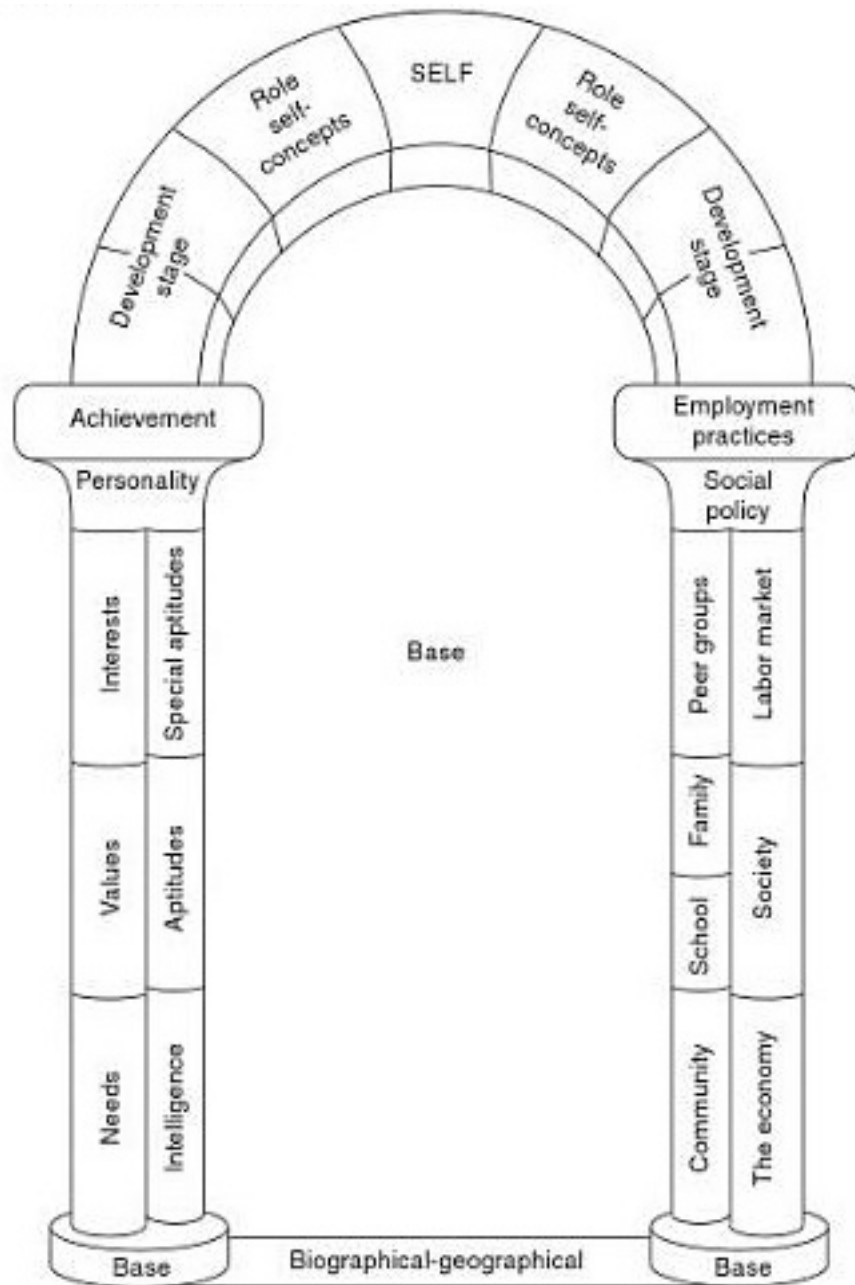


Figure 1: Archway Model of Career Development. Source: From "A Life-Span, Life-Space Approach to Career Development" by D. E. Super in *Career Choice and Development: Applying Contemporary Theories to Practice*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., by D. Brown, L. Brooks, and Associates, pp. 200. Copyright© 1990 by Jossey-Bass, Inc., Publishers. Reprinted by permission.

related to childhood and adolescence on the left, and those related to adulthood and maturity on the right. Learning theory (i.e., social and experiential learning) informed the “dynamic interaction of the individual and society” (Super, 1990, p. 203), conceptualized in this model as the cement which holds the stones of the archway together. Self-concept develops as a result of the individual’s interaction with his or her environment, and what he or she learns as a result, with successful occupational choice and development viewed as the implementation of self-concept into one’s career.

**Self-Concept.** Self-concept, the third part of Super’s overall theory, reflects one’s “...personality, needs, values, and interests” (Sharf, 1997, p. 154). Self-concept includes vocational identity, or the relatively objective and stable interests and abilities of the individual (Holland, 1992), as well as Super’s own addition - personal values - which represent the activities, environments and interpersonal contexts the individual desires. Vocational identity then, can be captured by objective measures, such as career inventories, whereas personal values are subjective, unique to the individual, fuel motivation and sense of purpose, and are foundational to the development of interests. For example, a person who values material wealth would likely make very different career decisions than someone who does not, and so his or her career interests are more likely to reflect that value. According to Super (1990), career decision is a process of self-concept implementation in which one strives to increase the congruence between the objective and subjective parts of one’s self-concept and social context until eventually, choices narrow and a particular career path is selected. Career path, however, may change as new information about the self in-relation-to the environment shifts across the life-span. In sum, the more one’s self-concept is attuned to the requirements of a chosen career path, the more likely one is to experience job satisfaction and stability.

For Super (1990) then, it is necessary to develop a holistic view of the individual in order to understand career trajectory, and, theoretically at least, exploration of a person's place in the life-span, as well as the components of her or his life-space and self-concept should provide us with just such an understanding. To further understand career development of sexual minority persons, it is likewise essential to understand development over the life-span as well as factors influencing the life-space of this population.

### **Sexual Minority Identity Development: The Coming out Process**

To understand sexual minority career development, it is necessary to consider sexual minority identity development (Dunkle, 1996; Leong et al., 1998; Mobley & Slaney, 1996), which includes adapting as a sexual minority within the context of a heterosexist world that is systematically discriminatory toward non-heterosexual persons, relationships and behaviours. (Rosario, Hunter, Maguen, Gwadz & Smith, 2001). Indeed, it is precisely because of the deleterious psychosocial effects of being a sexual minority in a heterosexist world that the coming out process is both a necessary and risky endeavour (Hill, 2009). In this section, several approaches to describing sexual minority identity development will be described, and this will be followed by discussion of how the process can influence career development.

### **Models of Identity Development**

The development of a lesbian or gay identity is called the coming out process, which is defined by Hill (2009) as the process by which sexual minorities "...explore, define, and disclose their orientation in a way straight individuals need not" (p. 346). Early theorists, such as Cass (1984), Coleman (1985), and Troiden (1989) developed stage models of identity development that share a number of commonalities. According to these researchers, the coming out process begins with the awareness of being "other" in a heterosexual society, also



referred to as “identity confusion,” (Cass, 1984), and this awareness fuels the exploration of one’s sexual orientation. Through experimentation, the individual connects with other sexual minorities, eventually adopts a sexual minority identity, and accepts their own status as members of a sexual minority group. For Cass, an important part of the process of coming to terms with one’s sexual minority identity is the adoption of “identity pride,” concurrent with diminished identification with heterosexual others. In the final stage, sexual minority identity is fully integrated once individuals embrace their orientation, are able to disclose it to others, and can “fit” into both the sexual minority and heterosexual community (Hill, 2009). These models of coming out, then, conceptualize the individual as moving from a state of confusion and isolation to more organized and complex understanding of the self as a member of a minority group (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Ritter & Terndrup, 2002).

The coming out process can happen at any point across the life-span (Bilodeau & Renn, 2005; Henrickson & Neville, 2012; Morgan & Brown, 1991; Rosario, Schrimshaw & Hunter, 2011; Savin-Williams, 2008; Schneider, 2001), and a number of researchers have proposed models of identity development reflective of a less linear understanding of sexual minority identity development (D’Augelli, 1994; Fassinger & Miller, 1997; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996; Ritter & Terndrup, 2002). For instance, McCarn and Fassinger, and Fassinger and Miller have proposed a four-phase model of identity development reflecting individual identity development and group membership identity development as dual developmental demands of the coming out process. These researchers present this as a two-pronged process unique to sexual minorities, who, once aware of their sexuality, must then integrate an identity that is both individual and part of a larger minority community. These researchers also use the term

“phase” rather than “stage” to convey non-linearity of development across the life span, and to reflect their view of development as “continuous and circular” (p. 522). Similarly, Ritter and Terndrup (2002) combined several models of sexual minority identity development with research on career development concerns and other issues particular to sexual minorities across the life-span, to create a comprehensive summary of non-linear sexual minority career development. This treatment of career development consists of five sections or “phases,” each of which takes into consideration the individual and social aspects of sexual minority identification, and their impact on career development, including the notion that the latter can be relegated to the margins when more pressing individual and social concerns press for attention. Finally, the “identity processes” model proposed by D’Augelli (1994) proposes that individuals engage, over the course of their lives, with six different processes related to integrating a sexual minority identity. These processes subsume development as an individual, within intimate relationships (e.g., romantic and family-of-origin) and within one’s larger social context. According to this model, the developmental processes are independent of each other, but any number of them may be engaged with simultaneously, with some taking precedence over others at various times in one’s life. For example, one may be in an intimate relationship, but may not choose to be “out” in the sexual minority community.

Models of sexual minority identity development share as a basic tenet that, to come to terms with one’s sexual minority orientation is to experience a “crisis of meaning” within a culture that is largely hostile toward sexual minorities (Henrickson & Neville, 2012). As individuals navigate the coming out process in a largely homophobic and unaccepting world, resources for career development can be limited, creating tension between these competing demands.

**Influence of the coming out process on career development.** The process of coming out as a sexual minority can take precedence over career concerns, resulting in stunting or extension of the career development process (Betz, 1993; Boatwright, Gilbert, Forrest, & Ketzenberger, 1996; Dunkle, 1996; Fassinger, 1996; Heslin, Bell & Fletcher, 2012; Morrow, 1998; Schmidt & Nilsson, 2006). In one of the first studies to link sexual identity development to vocational development, Boatwright and colleagues found that the majority of the lesbian women they interviewed felt they lagged behind their heterosexual peers vis-à-vis career development. Similarly, Adams, Cahill and Ackerlind (2005) found that the youth they interviewed described a tension between their sexual minority identity development and career development, with one or the other taking precedence.

A key factor in the coming out process is developing connection to and – ultimately – identifying with sexual minority community, and the energy required to do so can influence career development. Connection with supportive environments buffers the negative effects of homophobia and promotes healthy identity development. For example, in a survey of 2,269 LGB participants, Henrickson and Neville (2012) found that selecting or creating supportive environments allowed many in their study to feel satisfied within their sexual minority identity. One way many sexual minority persons seek out supportive environments is to live in larger cities where they are likely to find a community of other sexual minority persons. As Schneider (2001) notes, moving to locales where there is the potential for connection with sexual minority community appeared to help women in her study to move further into their lesbian identity than they may have otherwise been able to do. This finding is supported by the work of Riggle et al. (2008) who found that being a part of a community of sexual minority others was often reported as a benefit of being a sexual minority. The energy, time and

resources that may be required to seek out and incorporate oneself into a community of sexual minority others can conceivably complicate, or even interrupt, career development efforts.

***Positive impact of the coming out process.*** Although the coming out process is a fraught experience for many, there are often positive outcomes that may influence career development, such as reduction of psychological stress and greater sense of self-worth and resilience (Riggle et al., 2008; Rosario et al., 2011), yet studies reflecting this have not been well represented in the literature to date (Kwon, 2013; Riggle et al., 2008; Savin-Williams, 2008). For example, in a longitudinal study of 156 sexual minority youth, Rosario et al. found that identity integration, the optimal end point of the coming out process, was correlated with increased psychological adjustment, which they defined as less depression, anxiety and interpersonal conflict, as well as higher self-esteem. Similarly, a survey by Henrickson and Neville (2012) of 2,269 sexual minority women and men revealed that skills for coping with adversity improved with age and level of self-acceptance. For many in this study, the choice to create healthy and supportive environments and connections was cited as a major factor in the development of a healthy sense of self and sexual orientation. These researchers also found that older sexual minority persons felt greater compassion and empathy for others, particularly oppressed others, as a result of their own experience of adversity. This finding was echoed in the work of Riggle and colleagues, who surveyed over 500 lesbian women and gay men and found that self-acceptance was related to a desire to help others, with some specifically stating social justice and advocacy as meaningful venues for this desire. Participants in this study described a sense of self as more authentic with, and understanding of others, as one outcome of the coming out process. Such outcomes are an important consideration, as they may counterbalance the strain the coming out process can put on career development efforts.

## **Factors Influencing Sexual Minority Career Development**

Dworkin and Dworkin (1999) define minority persons as those who hold membership in groups that are disempowered, and who are the subject of discrimination by the majority, an apt description of sexual minorities the world over. Indeed, research indicates that once sexual minorities identify as such – a key part of the coming out process -- their risk for exposure to homophobia and discrimination increases (Rosario et al., 2011). For sexual minorities then, psychosocial stressors are mostly the result of their sexual orientation, due to our society's heterocentric and homophobic views (Harper, Jernewall & Zea, 2004). Since we are social beings, individuals' perception of their place within their social context exerts a powerful influence on career decisions and direction (Beckstead & Israel, 2007; Fassinger, 1996; Savickas, 2002). Accordingly, issues that many sexual minorities face are a combination of social (external) as well as personal (internal) factors. Issues such as homophobia and discrimination, stigmatization and stereotyping, the presence (or absence) of supportive others (e.g., peers) can all play a role in determining which paths are taken and when, and perhaps which are prematurely considered unavailable. It should be noted that the issues mentioned here may also influence the career development of people from any number of groups. However, this paper proposes that such issues manifest in the lives of sexual minority persons in ways unique to members of this group.

### **Homophobia**

Sexual minorities are marginalized and oppressed for reasons related directly to their sexual orientation (Harper et al., 2004). The career choices and development of sexual minority persons may be pervasively influenced by the fact of growing up and living within a heterosexist context, which normalizes and promotes dominant heterosexual privilege while

marginalizing sexual minority experience (Heslin et al., 2012; Morrow, 1998; Waldo, 1999). Under the umbrella of heterosexist experience in the workplace is experience with homophobia and discrimination based on sexual orientation. Chung (2001) defines work place discrimination as negative treatment based on issues pertaining to the person, rather than the job she or he was hired to do; experience not uncommon among sexual minorities. Types of discrimination commonly cited in the literature include bias around hiring decisions, pay inequity, interference with career advancement, and various kinds of harassment and stress experienced by sexual minority workers (Fassinger, 1995). Sexual minorities, then, face a number of barriers to career development as a result of actual or perceived experience of homophobia (Parnell et al., 2012). This experience may lead to career-altering decisions as individuals strive to either avoid homophobia or to ameliorate its deleterious effects.

**Avoiding homophobia.** Sexual minorities often avoid homophobia in the workplace by engaging in image management (otherwise known as closeting), and by prematurely foreclosing on desired/unexplored career options. Related to career foreclosure is career misdirection, which can result from choosing careers for reasons related to avoidance of homophobia, internalization of stereotypes of sexual minorities, as well as social pressure, rather than out of desire, ability, and interest.

**Image management.** The notion of how much to conceal one's identity, and when and when not to reveal it in the workplace is a key topic in research to date, with careful identity management being a common strategy for avoiding the negative impact of discrimination (Bowleg, Brooks & Ritz, 2008; Chung, 2009). Prior to the "gay revolution" in the 1970s, the act of disclosing one's minority sexual orientation carried with it serious legal implications, such as charges of indecency, eviction from one's home, and legalized loss of employment, not

to mention the potential for emotional and physical harm (Cogan & Gillis, 2002; Riley, 2010). Indeed, the Canadian military observed the Sexual Deviation Act until as recently as 1992, and frequently invoked it to seek out and discharge members, which caused extreme psychological distress for many (P-SEC Research Group, 2014; Poulin, Gouliquer, & Moore, 2009). Even though sexual minorities now have the benefit of legal protections (Riley, 2010), the perception among many is that negative social attitudes have not kept pace with legislated change. In a recent review of the literature, Dysart-Gale (2010) found that Canadian sexual minority youth still fear discrimination based on their sexual orientation, and this finding is echoed by Alderson (2004), who posits “dislike of sexual minorities is still widespread” (p. 202). Such fears, then, continue to complicate decisions about disclosure of sexual orientation in the workplace.

Workplace discrimination can manifest in several forms, including formal (e.g., unfair hiring and firing decisions) and informal discrimination (e.g., harassment, verbal and/or physical abuse; Chung, 2001). According to Croteau (1996), between 44% and 60% of lesbians and gay men anticipated discrimination at their place of work, while fully 25% - 66% had actively experienced it. Indeed, many sexual minority persons fear that their sexual orientation has been the source of discrimination as well as possible job loss and/or hampered job security (Boatwright et al., 1996). A recent survey of 126 lesbian, gay, and bisexual people revealed that even those who had not actually experienced discrimination expected they would, were their sexual orientation disclosed in the workplace (Parnell et al., 2012).

Fear of discrimination then, can create barriers to career development, while secrecy about one's orientation has a negative impact on job satisfaction and levels of anxiety in the work place (Fassinger, 1995; Griffith & Hebl, 2002). In a study examining diversity policies

of 16 organizations, the most common reasons given for closeting included prior experience of discrimination and negative feedback from colleagues (Wright, Colgan, Creegany & McKearney, 2006). Alternatively, a study of 220 gay men and 159 lesbians by Griffith and Hebl (2002) found that, where sexual minorities perceived their employers and peers as supportive, they were more likely to disclose their sexual orientation. Chung's (2009) assertion that sexual minorities must carefully consider workplace attitudes toward sexual minorities prior to making decisions about disclosure seems well founded, as such things as professional and personal safety as well as career satisfaction may hang in the balance. Such considerations can influence careers chosen as well as those foreclosed upon.

*Premature foreclosure.* Anticipation of discrimination may influence some to prematurely foreclose on career options prior to a full exploration of those options (Croteau, 1996; Fassinger, 1996). Greenhaus, Parasuraman & Wormly (1990) distinguished between “access discrimination” (barriers to opportunities in the workplace, such as interviews/hiring, that are more readily available to the dominant group), and “treatment discrimination” (lack of equitable treatment of minorities in the workplace with regards to, for example, advancement, security, and pay). There is evidence to suggest that, when minority persons experience access and treatment discrimination, work-search efficacy is compromised, which can result in limiting of viable options (Haslin et al., 2012). In related research, House (2004), found that, not only did discrimination create barriers to career advancement for lesbians in her study (particularly during what Super (1990) referred to as the establishment and maintenance phases of career development), they also reported limiting career options based upon perceptions of which careers permitted them to be open about their sexual orientation, versus perceptions of those which did not.



Some contend that sexual minority persons may frequently make vocational decisions based on safety and perceived levels of tolerance, rather than interests or skills (Morrow et al., 2008); a phenomenon coined “satisficing” by researchers Fitzgerald and Weitzman (1992). The notion of “satisficing” finds support in the literature in the contention that, to attain a relative sense of safety in the workplace, a disproportionate number of sexual minorities may choose atypical career paths, or even self-employment (Fassinger, 1995). As noted by Hook & Bowman (2008), Fassinger’s assertion represents a notable career barrier for sexual minorities, many of whom may minimize their visibility by foregoing desirable career options for reasons of safety, rather than to actualize their potential in the workplace. Satisficing may, in turn, result in delayed career development because of career misdirection. Stereotypes about which careers are considered “appropriate” for sexual minorities and which are not, can exert a powerful influence in this regard.

*Influence of stereotypes.* Many sexual minority persons struggle with, and often internalize stereotypes, making it difficult to formulate unbiased career plans (Sharf, 1997). Sharf further asserts that adopting stereotyped notions of the self may prevent career seekers from “projecting the self” into a variety of career possibilities, effectively limiting their options. As noted by Ritter and Terndrup (2002), it is not uncommon for lesbians and gay men to choose some professions because they are highly represented in them, or – alternatively – to reject such professions for fear of conforming to stereotypes. A potential explanation for this may come from Hetherington and Orzek (1989), who proposed that, when role models for alternatives do not exist, it becomes more likely that sexual minority persons will use stereotypes as a means of narrowing career options. Similarly, Adams (1997) found that gay male flight attendants interviewed chose a line of work considered “typical” for gay men

because it allowed them to integrate both work and cultural identity; an experience evaluated as positive by participants in Adams' study. For such people, potential access to other sexual minorities in the workplace may be a strategy for reducing the influence of homophobia on their careers.

**Mediating the negative effects of homophobia.** Many sexual minority workers attempt to minimize the negative impact of homophobia on career development by seeking out supportive environments, peers, and role models in the workplace. These strategies for staying "safe" in the workplace can come at the cost of limiting career options.

**Affirming environments.** In a study examining the kinds of hate crimes experienced by sexual minorities, as well as where these crimes occurred, Cogan and Gillis (2002) surveyed 450 lesbian, gay and bisexual people, and found that many had such experiences in the workplace. Because of such experience, many sexual minority persons feel isolated in the workplace, and so experience significant difficulties with networking; an important aspect of career development in many fields (Parnell et al., 2012). Such experiences make affirming environments a premium facet of career development for sexual minority workers.

The importance of affirming work environments was underscored by Li and Nagar (2013), who proposed that organizations' positions and policies regarding rights for sexual minorities are likely representative of their attitudes toward diversity in general, and that when human rights policies do not exist, sexual minority workers are negatively impacted. Li's & Nagar's paper finds support in the research of Griffith and Hebl (2002), who surveyed 379 sexual minority women and men, and found that when workers perceived their employers and coworkers as affirming of sexual minorities, they were more likely to disclose their sexual orientation, and when they did, they experienced greater job satisfaction and less anxiety in the

workplace. Similarly, Wright et al. (2006) examined diversity policies in 16 organizations, and found that in those which were affirming of sexual diversity (demonstrated by same-sex benefits, LGBT employee groups, “out” sexual minority colleagues and management), sexual minority workers were more likely to feel safe enough to come out at work.

Another way in which sexual minorities often seek affirming environments is by living in larger urban centres, as noted by Black, Gates, Sanders and Taylor (2000), who found that lesbian and gay Americans tend to cluster in large cities in the United States. Feeling part of a sexual minority community within one’s geographical catchment engenders a sense of belonging (Fassinger, 1996; Riggle et al., 2008), and it may also support individual minority development (Schneider, 2001) and group membership identity development (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996).

***Supportive peers and role models.*** One aspect of affirming environments often cited as important to sexual minority career seekers is the presence of affirming others and/or role models (Riley, 2010). Over the last 20 years, numerous celebrities, such as Ellen DeGeneres, Elton John and Rupert Everett – to name but a few – have openly identified as lesbian or gay, becoming public role-models for other sexual minorities (Riley, 2010). According to Grov et al. (2006), such events, along with increasing legal rights for sexual minorities, have engendered greater cultural acceptance, and have had a tangible effect, as young people in their study came out to both themselves and others up to 10 years earlier than young people in the 1980s. However, many sexual minority persons still experience decreased support from their family and friends once they come out, which can have a negative impact on career development (Nauta, Saucier & Woodward, 2001; Savin-Williams, 1998). In a survey of 102 lesbian, gay and bisexual youth, Schmidt and Nilsson (2006) found that conflict around sexual

identity, when combined with low perceived social support, was predictive of hampered vocational maturity. Conversely, male and female participants interviewed by Adams et al. (2005) indicated that support from those significant to them (e.g., peers) had a positive impact on vocational decision-making. The combination of social/external pressures and internal pressure and isolation then, can have a substantial impact on career development, making the need for access to supportive others all the more salient for sexual minority workers.

Professional role models can provide meaningful career direction to sexual minority persons, as they can actively demonstrate the blending of public and personal life domains, the potential to succeed in a variety of fields, and ways to challenge stereotypes and cope with discrimination (Croteau & Thiel, 1993; Driscoll, Kelley, & Fassinger, 1996). However, research suggests that many sexual minority persons who lack role models, experience a sense of isolation as they navigate the challenges of career development. In a study comparing gay, lesbian and bisexual students with heterosexual peers, Nauta et al. (2001) found that sexual minority students reported significantly less support and encouragement from mentors than their heterosexual counterparts, a situation which Fassinger (1996) and Savin-Williams (1998) identify as a barrier to successful career development. One explanation for the dearth of sexual minority role models is the risk involved in openly identifying as such, namely, potential negative implications for the role model's own career (Croteau et al., 2000; Fassinger, 1996; Heslin et al, 2012). One strategy often used to counteract the lack of available role models may be choosing career options in affirming work environments and/or geographical locations (e.g., large urban centers) where there is access to a variety of resources, community and greater degree acceptance of sexual minority persons and experience (Elliot, 1993; Fassinger,

1996). Once again, however, the trade off may be premature limiting of preferred options in the service of those perceived as more safe.

In summary then, a number of factors come to bear on sexual minority career selection and development, and those noted in the literature have at their foundation issues related to heterocentrism, homophobia, and discrimination. Premature foreclosure on desired and/or unexplored options, the influence – both positive and negative – of stereotypes, concerns about disclosure, and the desire to find or create affirming work/living environments as well as a felt need to connect with sexual minority peers and role models are among those most commonly cited in research to date.

### **Rationale for the Present Inquiry**

Theories such as Super's (1990) life-span, life-space theory of career development permit in depth exploration of issues most meaningful to minority populations, such as challenges, barriers, reinforcements, and the influence of societal "messages" such groups receive about themselves (Herr, 1997). A number of researchers (Brown, 1990; Dunkle, 1996; House, 2004; Leong et al., 1998; Sharf, 1997) have directly petitioned for further examination of Super's theory as it relates to minority experience of career development.

In response to the paucity of research on the efficacy of Super's life-span, life-space theory with sexual minority populations, the present study attempted to qualitatively examine the influence of sexual minority identity on career development and trajectory of lesbian women and gay men, as well as whether participants move through the "working years" phases of career development (exploration, establishment, and maintenance phases) in the way that Super's life-span theory would predict. Additionally, because the working lives of sexual minorities is embedded within a social context rife with heterosexism and homophobia, the

factors influencing career decision and trajectory were examined through the lens of the social context portion of Super's (1990) life-space theory to determine its adequacy for addressing the social context of participants in this study.

It is important to note that, because Super's life-space, life span theory is, in actuality, three interconnected theories, empirical examination of its premises presents a considerable challenge (Brown, 1990; Super et al., 1996). Since a theory so broad in scope and encompassing such flexibility is necessarily more complex than one which deals with the individual at a single point in time (Herr, 1997; Sharf, 1997), it was necessary to be selective about which parts of the overall theory would be explored. Since it was the intent of the present study to examine sexual minority career development from adolescence through to retirement, only participants who were in the "working-years" phases of career development in the life-span portion of Super's model (i.e., the exploration, establishment, and maintenance phases), were selected for participation. Further, only the elements of Super's life-space theory most closely related to social context (e.g., society in general, school/work contexts, peer groups, community) were examined to determine whether this portion of life-space theory was responsive to the social context of lesbian women and gay men.

## CHAPTER TWO

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Qualitative Research and the Interpretive Phenomenological Approach**

The primary purpose of the present study was to explore the impact of sexual minority identity and experience on career development, and to examine the findings through the lens of an influential theory of career development. Since the fundamental question in this study is the experience of participants, the tradition of qualitative research methodology represents the best approach. Qualitative research methods encompass a number of theoretical approaches, such as phenomenology, ethnology, case study, narrative analysis and grounded theory (Bannister, Bunn, Burman & Daniels, 2011; Creswell, 1998). The phenomenological approach, which is most sensitive to individuals' experience and the meaning they attach to their experience (Bannister et al. 2011), was chosen for this study. More specifically, the method of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) was selected as the best fit for this project.

IPA is responsive to both the experiential and experimental needs of psychological inquiry (Smith, 1996), as it is rooted in the philosophical traditions of phenomenology and hermeneutics: the theory of interpretation (Lopez & Willis, 2004; Smith, Larkin & Flowers, 2009). The philosopher Husserl influenced the initial development of IPA with the argument that, to arrive at a comprehensive and meaningful understanding of experience, we must necessarily engage in deep, "rigorous" reflection of it (Smith et al., 2009). However, Husserl also believed that our experiences, prior knowledge, and preconceptions are but distractions that could interfere with the possibility of arriving at the "essential experience," making them a form of static to be "bracketed" (Smith et al., 2009). Conversely, his student, Heidegger, proposed that the very act of human experiencing is imbued with interpretation and meaning

making (Shaw, 2010). For Heidegger, bracketing of preconceptions and past experience is not actually within the realm of the possible; rather, experience is actively processed through our preconceptions and experience, and these allow us to understand and make sense of new experience (Shaw, 2010; Smith et al., 2009). In other words, to be a human engaging with the world, and other humans, is to interpret. In terms of IPA-based research then, when the researcher engages with the research participant, each is attempting to interpret the experience in question (i.e. double hermeneutics), with the researcher perhaps doing so more methodically, while also attending to the influence of her or his own experience and assumptions (Shaw, 2010).

In addition to the influence of factors related to personal and experiential characteristics of the researcher, interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) allows for the researcher to bring to the process of research current understanding of the phenomenon in question (Brocki & Weardon, 2006). Data collection is generally accomplished through interviews, which the researcher interprets, using her or his understanding of current research, as well as his or her and participants' "lifeworld," inclusive of their social, political and cultural realities (Brocki and Weardon, 2006; Lopez & Willis, 2004). Since the present study seeks to understand sexual minority experience of career development, as well as how that experience compares with a well-known theory of career development, the IPA tradition of inquiry was the best choice. By using this approach, the researcher's knowledge of factors that influence career development for this population as well as her understanding of Super's (1990) career development theory were brought to bear in both the interview process as well as in the analysis of participants' experience of career development.

### **Situating the Researcher**



According to Miles & Huberman (1994), researchers "...have their own understandings, their own convictions, their own conceptual orientations; they, too, are members of a particular culture at a specific historical moment" (p. 8). Qualitative research, in general, is a collaborative process between researcher and participant (Creswell, 1998). With this in mind, then, I present my own "history," as it informs my perspective, and potential sources of bias with respect to the current study.

I am a middle-aged, queer-identified mental health professional of aboriginal (Mi'kmaq) decent. I bring to this study a long-standing interest in issues affecting minoritized, oppressed populations in general, and queer populations in particular. The subject matter of this study has direct relevance to my own life experience in that my career trajectory and development were heavily influenced by my personal development and experience as a sexual minority, and as an aboriginal Canadian. I identified as lesbian in my early 30s, and subsequently as queer, a term that I feel more aptly reflects my desire to embrace my past, as well as my socio-political location at present. Over the course of this very personal journey, I have made career decisions which have placed me in a state of regular career transition; I became a consultant with interests in community research and counseling with sexual minority youth and adults, and eventually undertook advanced studies in clinical/counseling psychology, with a research focus on challenges facing sexual minority populations. The present study then, is a work of both heart and mind for me, and I have "recognized" myself in some of the stories of participants in this work.

Prior to commencing the interview process, I also had concerns about how my work as a clinician could influence my contact with research participants. As an experienced clinician, I have become adept at encouraging disclosure of difficult experience for the purpose of

processing emergent material with my clients. The demands of research, however, require more distance than would be helpful in a therapeutic context, and I was keenly aware of this tension in each contact with participants in this study. Because of this awareness, I was able to draw upon clinical practice with maintaining ethically indicated boundaries in a variety of circumstances. My clinical experience, in fact, played an important role in reflexivity management throughout the production of this work.

### **Managing Reflexivity**

When one is navigating the boundaries between researcher and practitioner, reflexivity can both enhance and hinder (Arber, 2004). I fully appreciate that as much as my own experiences as a sexual minority and clinician have intersected with each other, they have likely also intersected with this research, from inception to completion, in decisions regarding study design, to how to make sense of the resulting data. As mentioned earlier, my training and experience as a clinician created challenges when interacting with participants in this study. Conversely, they have also been immensely helpful with respect to reflexivity management. For instance, although I recognize that I have influence in the therapeutic space, I also believe my client to be the true expert on her or his experience and interpretation of it, a practice that served me well during the interview and analysis phases of this study. Additionally, as a clinician, I have developed skill with taking in large amounts of information and distilling it into themes of experience, again, a useful ability during the analysis phase of an IPA-informed study. Indeed, and perhaps most importantly, I am accustomed to maintaining a reflexive stance in my clinical work, as good therapy requires the therapist to attend to three “parties” in the room, the client, the self and the inter-subjective third party. This long-standing practice proved helpful during the course of this study.

## **Establishing Methodological Trustworthiness**

Lincoln & Guba (1985) proposed four criteria for evaluating trustworthiness in qualitative research, each of which will be defined and elaborated upon here as they pertain to this study.

### **Credibility**

Credibility deals with how closely research findings resemble reality. One way this criterion was addressed in this study was by including contributions from participants who were disparate in terms of age, geographical location, and professional affiliation (i.e. source triangulation). Additionally, the test of inter-rater reliability (an example of analyst triangulation) was also incorporated. While secondary interviews were not done with participants in this study (i.e. member checking), each participant did receive a copy of his or her final transcript for review and feedback. While most participants approved their interviews in their original form, several participants included new information, after reflecting on their original contributions. Finally, I engaged in numerous debriefing sessions around the analysis of data, with both my primary research supervisor, as well as with a fellow graduate student.

### **Transferability**

Transferability deals with the extent to which conclusions drawn from a study may be applicable to other settings, situations and people, and is achieved with a thorough description of all aspects of the study (e.g. how data was collected, the number and length of interviews completed), and its participants (e.g. description of participants included). While respecting the limits of ethically sound research practice, all aspects of this study, inclusive of participant demographics and life-context, have been reported.

### **Dependability**

Dependability is the extent to which sufficient information is provided to replicate a study. A detailed description of the research design and its implementation has been provided in this paper. Additionally, the process of submitting the paper to multiple reviewers, and defending the final draft effectively constitute an external audit.

### **Confirmability**

Confirmability deals with how closely aligned the results are to the actual experiences and contributions of participants, rather than to the researcher's own characteristics and biases. In the present study, triangulation was used to check researcher bias (e.g. inter-rater reliability with several other researchers, regular consultation with the supervising researcher), as was discussion of the researcher's own concerns about potential sources of bias, and efforts to mediate those. Also, an audit trail was created, inclusive of the rationale for research decisions, information about sampling, raw data, data summaries, data analysis summaries, and steps taken to complete each step of the research process. Additionally, a research proposal, inclusive of pilot materials (e.g. initial interview questions, recruitment materials etc.) was completed and approved.

### **Research Participants**

Participants in this study were lesbian and gay individuals between the ages of 18 and 57. All but three were currently working or were enrolled in college or university programs as training for their respective career.

### **Participant Groups, Pre-Interview**

The participants consisted of 29 individuals, including; 10 (5 women; 5 men), within the exploration age-range and 10 (5 women; 5 men) and 9 (5 women; 4 men) within the establishment and maintenance-age phases respectively. Within the maintenance age-range,

one other participant (a 55 year-old male) was also interviewed, but due to technical difficulties with recording equipment, his interview was not decipherable, and so was not included in the study. The following three sections detail group demographics according to age-ranges associated with each phase of career development in this study (Table 1).

Interviews from exploration-aged participants, who were 18-24 years-of-age, were obtained from previous research, conducted by Dr. Margaret Schneider, which examined the factors influencing career development of lesbian and gay youth. Contributions from participants in the establishment and maintenance phases were obtained specifically for the present study, via a targeted search for 10 participants (5 men and 5 women) in each of the age-ranges associated with the establishment and maintenance phases of career development (25-44 years and 45-65 years respectively).

**Exploration-aged participants (18-25).** From a total of 15 archival interviews, 10 were randomly selected for inclusion in the present study, with the only criterion being that equal numbers of males and females be represented among the final selection. The five males and five females in this group ranged in age from 18-24 years, with a mean age of 21.4 years. Participants in this group identified their ethnicity as follows: South Asian (1), Black (1), Caucasian (3), Latin American (1), “Man of Colour” (1), and Aboriginal (1). Two people did not identify their ethnicity. All individuals in this age-range were enrolled in undergraduate university programs in a large urban center, and had been for one to five years.

Of the ten participants in this group, four were mostly “out” at work/school and five were completely “out” (one did not indicate one way or the other). When asked if they were “out” to family and friends, four indicated being mostly so, while five were completely out. Only

Table 1

*Participant Groups According to Age - Pre-Interview*

<u>Phase</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>Age Range</u>	<u>Mean Age</u>	<u>Sex</u>
Exploration	10	18-25 years	21.4 years	5 males, 5 females
Establishment	10	27-42 years	34.8 years	5 males, 5 females
Maintenance	9	45-57 years	49.3 years	4 males, 5 females

one person maintained secrecy about his sexual orientation within his family of origin. The average age of identification as lesbian or gay was 17.3 years, with a range of 7 to 21 years.

**Establishment-aged participants (25-44).** The five males and five females in this group ranged in age from 27 to 42, with an average age of 34.8 years. These participants identified their ethnicity as follows: Caucasian (4), Acadian (3), Jewish (1), Filipino (1), and Aboriginal (1). All in this group were either self or otherwise-employed at the time of their respective interviews.

Of the 10 people in this group, seven stated they were “out” in their respective work contexts, while one was “somewhat” out, and two were secretive about their sexual orientation. In terms of more personal relationships, eight were fully “out” with family and friends, one was open about his sexuality with “select friends who are mostly gay too” and one was “out” with friends but identified as having a “don’t ask, don’t tell” relationship with her family. The average age of identifying a same-sex attraction to others was 18.4 years, with a range of 10 to 23 years.

**Maintenance-aged participants (45-65).** The five females and four males in this group ranged in age from 45 to 57 years, with a mean age of 49.3 years. Participants in this group identified their ethnicity as follows: Caucasian (4), European (1), Jewish (1), Portuguese (1), and Acadian (2). All males in this group were employed, and one of these was self-employed, whereas only one of the females was working (self-employed) at the time of her interview. The remainder were unemployed.

All but one person in this group were “completely out” in both work and personal contexts; this individual identified as being completely “out” in his personal life, and “mostly out” in his work environment. The average age of identifying as gay or lesbian for the six

individuals who acknowledged a discreet age of awareness was 13.5 years, with a range of 6 to 22 years. The remaining three individuals described having “always known” they were lesbian or gay.

It is important at this point to acknowledge the possibility of additive effects of sexual minority identity and membership in another non-dominant group (e.g. women, ethnic minorities) on career development for a number of people in the present study. However, the primary purpose of this study is to examine the influence of sexual minority identity on career development, using two complexly interrelated theories of career development. As noted earlier, the complexity of this theory requires judicious consideration of what is reasonably possible when examining its tenets (Herr, 1997; Sharf, 1997). With such consideration in mind, the intersection of lesbian/gay identity and career development (as per Super’s (1990) life-span, life-space theory) was prioritized over consideration of the interactions of multiple identities and career development.

### **Procedure**

Recruitment for participants aged 25-65 commenced in September of 2011 and interviews were conducted beginning September 12 of that year, through to September 16, 2012. Purposive and criterion-based sampling was chosen to source participants. Appeals for participants were initially made through individuals known to the researcher as well as through colleagues who knew lesbian and gay persons in the relevant age-ranges. This recruitment strategy was also a means of appealing to prospective participants from a wide variety of social and professional contexts; a difficult goal to attain when sampling strictly from a university population. These initial contacts were given a flyer (Appendix A), and were invited to distribute these to lesbian and gay persons whom they felt may be interested in participating in



this study. The researcher also contacted a member of a lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender networking group in Toronto, Ontario (“Out and Out”), to assist with recruitment. This individual was provided with an electronic flyer for distribution among group members. For those contacted by email, a brief note inviting distribution of the flyer was sent (Appendix B). The individuals chosen for initial contact lived in both large and small urban locales in Ontario, New Brunswick and Nova Scotia. It was hoped that, by sampling from a variety of geographical contexts, a wider variety of perspectives would result.

The recruitment flyer (Appendix A) highlighted the nature of the study in its title (“Lesbian and Gay Experience of Career Development: Call for Participants”), specified the target age-range and gender/orientation identities sought, as well as what could be expected in terms of time commitment for the individual interviews. Finally, the researcher’s contact information and a request that the flyer be forwarded on to others who may be interested in participating were included. The researcher continued to solicit participants until the requirement of 10 participants (5 women and 5 men) in each the establishment and maintenance age-ranges was met.

Once contacted by prospective participants, the researcher provided each with an information letter outlining the study, how the individual could take part in it, what the time commitment would be, and an offer of \$10 remuneration for participation (Appendix C). It was explained to participants that they could discontinue participation at any point, up until their transcripts were analyzed, at which time their information would be de-identified, making retrieval of a particular individual’s data no longer possible. Those who indicated an interest in participating at that point were booked for an interview, and were provided with a consent form (Appendix D), an information sheet requesting demographic details (Appendix E) and

three paragraphs describing each phase of career development being studied (Appendix F). Each prospective participant was asked to read these descriptions in advance of her/his scheduled interview, and consider which phase best described his/her current career situation. Since participants lived in large and small urban centers, across several provinces, it was necessary to adjust the means of participation accordingly. For those participating from a distance, information and consent forms were sent electronically, along with the request that consent forms be signed and faxed or e-mailed/mailed back prior to the scheduled interview. Interviews with participants in locations at a distance from the researcher (or with those more locally who were unable to schedule face-to-face interviews due to their personal scheduling challenges) were conducted via phone and an audio recording was made. As per the initial proposal, the researcher attempted to use video conferencing with the first two such participants. However, due to poor connections (i.e., repeated “freezing” of conference video and/or poor sound quality), telephone interviewing was deemed necessary and was used for the remainder of the study, when it was not possible to conduct interviews in person. Participants were informed, in the information letter mentioned above, that confidentiality could not be absolutely guaranteed for interviews taking place online or by phone. In-person interviews took place in an office space located in central Toronto. At agreed upon times, semi-structured interviews (Appendix G) were conducted. For consistency across participants (i.e., those interviewed in a former study and those interviewed specifically for this one), interview questions were essentially aligned with those asked of the ten participants whose interviews comprised the archival data. Each interview was recorded and transcribed, and then sent to participants for verification of content and accuracy. Participants were also asked whether they

would like to add any further commentary or make any other changes to their contributions. Participants were paid a \$10 honorarium for participating.

Anonymity and confidentiality were attained by separating consent forms and transcripts and securely storing each. Recordings and paper documents (i.e., consent forms, demographic information) were stored in a locked file cabinet and electronic documentation (i.e., transcripts) was stored on the researcher's computer, and was password-protected. Once recordings were transcribed, they were erased. Further, each transcript was numerically coded throughout the process of analysis, and once analysis was complete, each participant's transcript was given a pseudonym for the purpose of using quotes to support reported results. Because participants were grouped according to age and because the subject of the study is career development, information relevant to these data points was also attached to each person's transcript (i.e., age and general field of professional endeavor). Any data that could be used to identify a participant (e.g., town/city of residence, employer etc.) was excluded. Only the primary researcher had access to client information in its non-coded form.

## **Interviews**

Each interview was 45-60 minutes in length. Questions for the semi-structured interview were based on a review of literature relating both to the career theory being studied as well as issues generally faced by sexual minority persons with respect to career development (i.e., questions related to life-span and social context portion of life-space theory). As mentioned earlier, care was taken to develop questions consistent with those used in the archival interviews for people in the exploration phase. However, the purpose of that study was to more generally understand issues facing lesbian and gay adolescents and young adults in the work-world, whereas for the current study, phase of career development was also an important

consideration. Some questions for current participants were therefore more specific to that issue, and these were used to determine which phase of development each participant was in at the time of his/her interview. At the end of each interview, participants were debriefed, and asked for permission to be contacted with further questions, if necessary. Although all participants agreed to this request, the researcher did not contact any participants after their initial interview.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis was accomplished in two stages. In the first stage, interviews were analyzed to determine which phase of career development (exploration, establishment, and maintenance) best described each participant's current career situation. The second stage involved analyzing interviews to determine the impact of sexual orientation and social context on career development. Each stage of data analysis is discussed in greater detail below.

### **Participant Grouping by Career Phase**

Participants whose interviews were obtained from archival data (i.e., those aged 25 and under) were placed in the exploration group, based on their enrollment in university, which according to Super (1980, 1990) is evidence for career exploration. However, these participants also indicated engagement with tasks consistent with this phase, such as specifying and implementing career plans. The remainder of the participants were first categorized based on their self-report as described above, and the data that emerged from the interviews confirmed the accuracy of the self-report.

### **Influence of Social Context on Career Development**

Methods of analyzing data in the IPA tradition vary, with some researchers beginning the process by creating broad categories, and working toward more detailed themes, while others

use existing theory as the starting point for understanding participant experience (Brocki & Wearden, 2006). To determine the influence of social context on career development, data in the present study were analyzed using a combination of these two approaches, with literature on the influence of sexual minority identity on career development providing the basis for initial broad categories of experience. Once initial categories of experience were determined, data analysis proceeded with what Goodson (2008) described as “bathing in the data” - reading transcripts multiple times until the familiarity with participant narratives revealed themes of experience. These themes were reviewed and revised multiple times to arrive at defensible links within and between the major categories of experience. This process is referred to as “axial coding” (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), and is intended to efficiently qualify participant narratives in terms of their experience, how experiences were related, and what happened as a result of those experiences (Hoepfl, 1997). To ensure reliability of this analysis, two additional researchers were assigned categories and themes distilled from the initial analysis of 4 randomly selected transcripts. Inter-rater reliability was adequate (97%), and consensus was reached on areas of difference. Pseudonyms were used to reference direct quotes from the interviews, as required, to support findings in this study. For a given experience to constitute a theme, it needed to occur at least four times. This figure was determined in consultation with the researcher’s supervisor, and was based on similar qualitative studies, the total number of participant in this study, and the number of participants in each group.

Analysis revealed two central categories of experience related to social context: experience of homophobia and impact of homophobia on career development. Chapter three will describe participant groupings according to phase of development as well as the two central categories, sub-categories and themes.

## CHAPTER THREE

### RESULTS

The first section of the results for this study will address the life-span portion of career development via presentation of participant grouping within the exploration, establishment and maintenance phases of career development. Participants were asked to provide evidence for phase of career, as well as whether sexual orientation had any influence on them in this phase. As will become evident to the reader, sexual orientation had a pervasive influence within phases of career development. However, quotes in this section were chosen primarily because they qualified phase of development, not because of more general issues around the influence of sexual orientation on career development.

The second section of the results will address the social context portion of life-space theory. This analysis revealed two major categories: experience of homophobia and impact of homophobia on career development. Each of these major categories, sub categories, and themes will be discussed in this chapter, and samples of participant quotes will be used to support findings. The reader should bear in mind that, in a number of cases, participant experiences could be subsumed under more than one category, sub-category, or theme. In such cases, the researcher assessed the various possibilities to determine which category, sub-category, or theme was most appropriate.

#### **Participant Distribution: Post-Interview**

Although there are typical ages associated with each phase of career development, these phases are not strictly related to an individual's age, as Super's (1990) theory allowed a span of five years between phases for transitioning from one phase to another. Hence, although the "typical" age-range for people in the maintenance phase is 45-65 years-of-age, a given

individual may begin transitioning into that phase at 40, and this was the case for one participant in the maintenance phase. Also, as mentioned earlier, people not infrequently recycle through these phases, particularly in middle age, or they may be involved in more than one phase at a time. Although no participants were actively involved in two phases at once, three women were actively recycling through exploration in middle age. However, a fourth middle-aged woman had never left the exploration phase, and one person in the maintenance phase, at 33 years-of-age, was considerably younger than would be usual for people in the that phase. In the case of the former, homophobia was one reason cited for stunted career development, while the latter, due to traumatic experience as a youth, did not feel she actively chose a career path, but rather felt forced into her career from a “survival mode” position. Since this participant was considering re-entry into the exploration phase, the question of whether she in fact successfully engaged with all phase-relevant tasks up to and including the maintenance phase was an open question. All participants, then, were grouped in a way that was consistent with Super’s (1990) life-span theory, but for two; one, who in middle-age, had never moved beyond exploration, and one who was in the maintenance phase at an age considerably younger than the theory would predict. Please see Table 2 for descriptive statistics on grouping by phase of career development, post-interview. A brief sketch of each participant, grouped according to phase of career development, along with his or her pseudonym, is presented in Appendix H.

### **Exploration**

The exploration group consisted of 14 participants (9 females and 5 males). The three tasks constituting the exploration phase - crystallization, specification and implementation - are generally completed in sequence.

Table 2

*Participant Groups According to Phase - Post-Interview*

<u>Phase</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>Age Range</u>	<u>Mean Age</u>	<u>Sex</u>
Exploration*	14	18-25 years	30.1 years	5 males, 9 females
Establishment	10	26-45 years	36.5 years	5 males, 5 females
Maintenance**	5	33-54 years	44.0 years	4 males, 1 females

\*Four participants (all female) were older than the usual age-range for this phase. Their ages ranged between 49-57, and their mean age was 51.8 years. Three of these were recycling through exploration after having been in the maintenance phase of their respective careers, while one had never moved beyond exploration

\*\*One participant was younger than would be expected (33 years of age).



**Crystallization.** As people begin the exploration process, they move beyond consideration of numerous possible options and begin to focus on those that are consonant with their interests, abilities, values and life-experience. All participants in this group had completed this task. For example, Isaac indicated a clearer focus when he stated:

I can see myself working with any kind of street youth and heterosexual people as well, specifically women or different cultures. But because I am gay myself, I can relate better to gay youth and gay men and I feel more comfortable dealing with those populations. I think maybe because I can be more candid.

Similarly, in considering the kind of career she may pursue, Maxine also envisioned the kind of environment she desired as a means of focusing her options:

Hiding totally stunts your growth so I have to be out which means that “they” [homophobic people in positions of authority] won’t let me grow career-wise...That is something I think about. If I was in a career/job and I found these people were bigots and my choices are hide and grow career-wise or come out and get fired, I’d rather just quit.

As the quotes above indicate, people in this phase used their life-experience to narrow career options, and this, in turn, informed the task of occupation/job specification.

**Specification.** Once people focus on potential options considered viable, specification of appropriate training or job opportunities (in the case of those not planning university or college education) begins. All participants within the typical exploration age-range were currently

working through the task of specification, owing to the fact that each was enrolled in a program of training/study relevant to future work goals. After considering his options, for instance, Paul determined “...I’ve found there’s a lot that needs to be done for gay and lesbian youth, so that sort of influenced what I want to do. I’m interested in going into social work and working with gay and lesbian youth...”

Three of the four middle-aged participants in the exploration phase were likewise engaged with the task of specification. For instance, Judy, who was exploring options after leaving a long-term corporate management position, stated, “I don’t want to do what I was doing when I last worked. I do want to do something still to do with health-care, at a senior level...”

The utilization of personal experience to discern optimal training or job opportunities for a given occupation was consonant with the strategy used in the crystallization process, and likewise for participants once they set about locating desired, relevant training or work; the process of implementation.

**Implementation.** The final exploration task prior to entering the work world is the implementation of previous efforts vis-a-vis engagement in relevant training, sourcing potential employers, networking, preparation of resume’s and attending interviews. Of the 14 participants in this group, 11 were engaged in the task of implementation of career/work plans, including all who were typically exploration-aged, by virtue of the fact that they were actively training for their future careers. For instance, Lindsay, who was undertaking a general arts degree, was beginning to direct her career toward social justice work via participation in various student groups: “I think the kind of work I want to do is that which has a social justice focus to it and will have some sort of political meaning for me.” As mentioned above,

implementation for some involves movement from specification of options directly into a work environment. Such was the case with Nancy, who, at 57 years-of-age, was working a number of “odd jobs” as of the time of her interview. Nancy described knowing she wanted to work with people in a helping capacity, but had not yet decided how and so was using her contacts in the sexual minority community to “try out” various options: “I’ve met the people who are offering me these jobs through an LGBT group I am part of now...Networking within the community has been really important.” Nancy’s situation stood in contrast to that of her same age-range peers in this group, none of whom had, as yet, commenced the task of implementation.

Three of the four middle-aged participants in the exploration phase indicated that they had had difficulties establishing themselves in careers early in life. For instance, Maggie, who had formal fine arts training, never settled into a career in her field, but rather moved from job to job in the retail sector, until recently leaving the workforce to consider alternative options. Similarly, Donna described feeling that she had never moved past the exploration phase of any career she trained for, though she had several advanced degrees. The relative safety she experienced in educational environments may have precluded engagement in establishment for her:

School had always been a very congenial place for me. I think I kept going back because it felt like a secure place for me.... Yeah. In an academic environment I felt that if someone wanted to challenge me because I am a lesbian, I have the right of a moral authority to make them explain themselves. I don’t have to explain myself on that

basis... you can challenge people on principle there, you know? It's a non-threatening environment in lots of ways.

Likewise, Nancy left a job she held for many years, in her mid-fifties. Because of heterosexism in her workplace, she felt disenfranchised, and she eventually accepted an early-retirement offer to explore other options:

That was a factor in my deciding to explore other options. It was a very straight, male-dominated environment, organization. It just wasn't comfortable for me to be in a workplace where that's how it is...just knowing that there are other places where diversity is welcomed and where people have more diverse views and opinions, and I was in the opposite of that at my work. It felt stifling to me.

As the quotes above indicate, the personal and the professional intersect to direct exploration of career options and the resulting decisions arrived at. This was also the case for those in the establishment phase of their careers, as outlined in the following section.

### **Establishment**

Once tasks of exploration are complete, people tend to move on to establishing themselves in their chosen careers. In this study, there were 10 participants in the establishment phase: five women and five men. The commencement of the establishment phase is marked by entry into the workforce. In the case of those trained as skilled professionals, it is the beginning stage of a career that one expects will last an appreciable length of time. The

following three sections will detail participant engagement in each of the tasks associated with the establishment phase of career development: stabilization, consolidation and advancing.

**Stabilization.** Career stabilization is the “entry task” in the establishment phase, and is marked by obtaining employment and then determining whether one’s particular abilities and skill-set are well matched with job/professional requirements. All 10 participants in this group had or were currently engaged in stabilization. Stephen, who had worked as a cook in several dining establishment, decided to return to school to retrain as a chef in order to more firmly establish and advance himself in this field; a decision borne of his experience that the work was creative in nature, and also because, within this creative space, he felt acceptance as a gay man.

It was always about creation with me. In studying culinary arts, what I want to establish is having a repertoire. I want to establish what I can do. Yes, it’s going to be tested now, so maybe I feel that I am more in establishment mode at this point....I want to really work hard to establish myself, but I don’t want to have to put up with homophobia any more than I have too.

As was the case for Stephen, all participants in this group indicated that choosing a career in which to stabilize was to combine both personal factors and professional goals. Nora, who recently started working independently as a life/spiritual coach, started out with a coach of her own in an attempt to stabilize in her new field after leaving her last job because of homophobia. However, she found that working independent of another allowed her to stabilize in a way more closely aligned with her own goals.

I fired my business coach and have been working to get back into my own skin over the last few months, and am now just really looking at how to bring all that I have invested in this work...the coaches I have worked with are most concerned with helping people do whatever it takes to make six figures. For me though, I don't think that has to be my goal. For me, I need to live my spiritual mission, and part of that is through my business, so I feel I am just now beginning to stabilize in this business.

Though Stephen and Nora were clearly just beginning the establishment phase, others in this group had already moved through it and were engaging in a task more often associated with people who have acquired a sense of stability in their work situation, and were working through tasks related to consolidation.

**Consolidation.** The task of consolidation generally occurs once an individual has settled into a work situation, and involves a striving to master relevant job skills, and perhaps seeking recognition for competence. Of the 10 people in this group, seven endorsed engagement in tasks of consolidation, one of whom was Jonathan, a small business owner.

I would say I'm definitely in the establishment phase, based on my age. My sexual orientation used to be the primary aspect of my identity. Now I feel it's just a part of who I am. It doesn't completely define me. That's made it easier to establish myself in this career. Issues like 'stabilization' and 'consolidation'...I am more able to dedicate myself to these things now. I couldn't have when I was younger.

Phillip, an information technology (IT) professional in an organization he identified as inhospitable to sexual minorities, shared his experience of being a gay man attempting to consolidate in his career:

I'm in the establishment phase. Well, as I said earlier, because of my sexual orientation, I cannot get ahead by making 'the right connections' at work. But I feel good about knowing that I do it based on my abilities and skills.

Phillip's assertion speaks to both the desire for recognition of excellence and also the desire to advance in one's career - both qualities of the third task of the establishment phase: advancing.

**Advancing.** Advancing, a task that may take place at any time during the establishment phase, stems from a desire for greater responsibility, authority and benefits (such as increased financial remuneration and prestige), was a noted press for seven participants in this group. Alison, an educator, delineated her advancement trajectory as she worked to establish herself as a teacher, after leaving the profession for a while because of homophobia:

I eventually went to work at that school as a caretaker in the residence. At the end of that year, in August, the school asked me if I would teach one French course...I did that for two more years, and kept getting a few more courses to teach each year...I got bumped up into full-time. That was six years ago, and now I'm in my ninth year. I have also taken on more responsibility since then.

Lydia, a small business owner, talked about working toward stabilization, consolidation and advancement simultaneously as she establishes herself:

I would say that I am trying to stabilize in this career. I would say I'm really trying to network and cultivate relationships within my industry that will promote my stabilization and how my business grows, yes. I'm definitely trying to get more and more knowledge so that I can be the best that I can be in this business.

Around the time people have adequately established themselves, they begin to engage in tasks that help them to maintain their positions, and this will be discussed in the next section.

### **Maintenance**

In the present study, five participants (four men and one woman) were engaged in the tasks of maintenance in their respective fields. For people in this phase, achievement of relative mastery and success in one's field allows for refocusing of attention to future trends as a means to determine how best to maintain success-to-date until retirement. In order to achieve this goal, two main tasks must be successfully engaged with: holding and updating, while some also take on tasks of innovation in order to maintain a competitive edge until retirement. It is important to note that, in the event an individual does not feel engaged in tasks of maintaining, s/he may begin premature disengagement from his/her career, which often leads to re-entry into the exploration phase; a possibility entertained by two participants in this group.

**Holding.** Although not often sufficient to "maintain" in one's field, holding involves doing what one perceives as required in order retain one's position. All five participants in this group were engaged with holding tasks in their careers. Of these five, two described feeling



“stuck” in this maintenance task. For example, Sarah, a child-youth counsellor working within a school board in a large city, had advanced as far as she could - with the education she had obtained thus far - and described her position as one in which movement past this task was not possible without acquiring further advanced training in her field:

In my current career, there is nowhere else for me to go now...this position has me ‘holding.’ I didn’t really think through my career very much; it just kind of happened. I think the fear of going back to school to try to advance gets me feeling stuck in this career. It took me a long time to get here. I am stable in this career. It’s hard to leave it.

As a result of traumatic experience of coming out, Sarah described having limited options for training/education as a youth; she was in “survival mode” as a result of being kicked out of her home and rejected by family and friends at the age of 17 years, once it was discovered that she was a lesbian. Similarly, Max, a corporate team-leader, felt he too was mostly engaged in holding in his job, and he attributed this largely to institutionalized homophobia:

I have felt there was a ceiling for me. And because I am gay, I wouldn’t necessarily be able to get through it...I’ve felt like the more I tried to climb the corporate ladder, the tougher it would get ....It’s like, Is this all there is, or is there something more?  
Something more interesting that I could be doing now.

Like Sarah, Max felt his educational options were limited by homophobia as a younger man, and he expressed regret at having to “make do” in the career he chose, and subsequently found less-than satisfying. From their responses, it seemed clear that neither Max nor Sarah felt wholly invested in pursuing maintaining tasks beyond those constituting holding, and some level of disengagement from their careers had begun, as both were considering recycling through the exploration phase again. Neither, however, was actively involved in tasks of exploration.

**Updating.** The task of updating is comprised of keeping abreast of and acquiring current knowledge in one’s field so as to be competitive with peers. Three participants in this phase described updating within their respective fields. For instance, Darren, an early childhood educator in his 50s, was asked how he maintained an edge in his field, and he responded:

Every class I get is different. I try to give each kid a kind of individualized program based on what I think they need, what they want. That’s where the creativity comes in. It’s like I can ride the crest of a wave with my creativity.

Similarly, Greg shared: “It’s kind of built into the culture of which I am a part at work.... we go to conferences and take part in training and upgrading.”

**Innovating.** The task of innovating is additional to that of remaining current in one’s field; it entails adding new knowledge to the field, and is another means of maintaining a competitive edge until retirement. Scott, a 40-year-old educational administrator who had advanced to that position while in his 30s, was consciously engaged in innovating in his field. In his words:

I think I moved through the establishment phase more quickly than many do in my profession and so am now in progress with maintaining in my profession. In terms of holding, maintaining and innovating, I am now at that stage where I am asked to present on best/leading-edge practice to colleagues and am now awarded different honours for the work that I've done. I think I am recognized now as someone with specific strengths in my field, not just in local terms but also province-wide. So I feel like I am maintaining an advanced edge until retirement.

### **Summary of “Exploration, Establishment and Maintenance Phase Distribution”**

To determine whether participants were distributed among the three phases of career development in a way that would be consistent with what Super's (1990) life-span theory would predict, participants' were asked, after reading descriptions of each phase, which phase best described them. Analysis of transcripts verified participants' self report. The resulting distribution of participants was as follows: exploration (14 participants; 9 women, 5 men), establishment (10 participants; 5 women, 5 men), and maintenance (5 participants; 1 woman, 4 men). All maintenance-aged women were currently in the exploration phase, and one of these had never moved past exploration. The sole woman in the maintenance phase was younger than would be expected, and was considering re-entry into the exploration phase. The social context of participants was frequently a reference point when they discussed their respective phases of career development, with many pointing to experience of, or concerns about homophobia as highly influential.

## **Experience of Homophobia**

Homophobia influenced life-space elements of all participants in this study. In discussing their experience of homophobia, three themes emerged: Direct Experience, Anticipated Experience and On-Going Experience. Direct experience of homophobia included the following; being subjected to disparaging remarks about sexual minorities from co-workers, fellow students and people in positions of authority (e.g., teachers, university instructors, work supervisors); exclusion, verbal harassment (e.g., name-calling), and physical assault. Reported in this section are accounts of participants who experienced homophobia in educational and work environments, as few discussed homophobic experience beyond these two contexts. Please see Figure 2 for a schematic of the category of “Experience of Homophobia” and related themes.

### **Direct Experience of Homophobia**

A primary challenge to career development for participants in this study was homophobia, and for most, this issue was formative, affecting career development in a variety of ways. Of the total 29 participants, 26 (90%) reported direct experience of homophobia that was influential to career development. Experience of a wide range of homophobic interactions was reported across all three phases of career development, in both school and work contexts.

I was what people would call a sissy, faggot or whatever. It was always known to people. It wasn't something that was easily concealed so I am at the point now where I don't even bother to try to. So that did influence what university I went to because I did want a safer environment. (Mark, exploration)

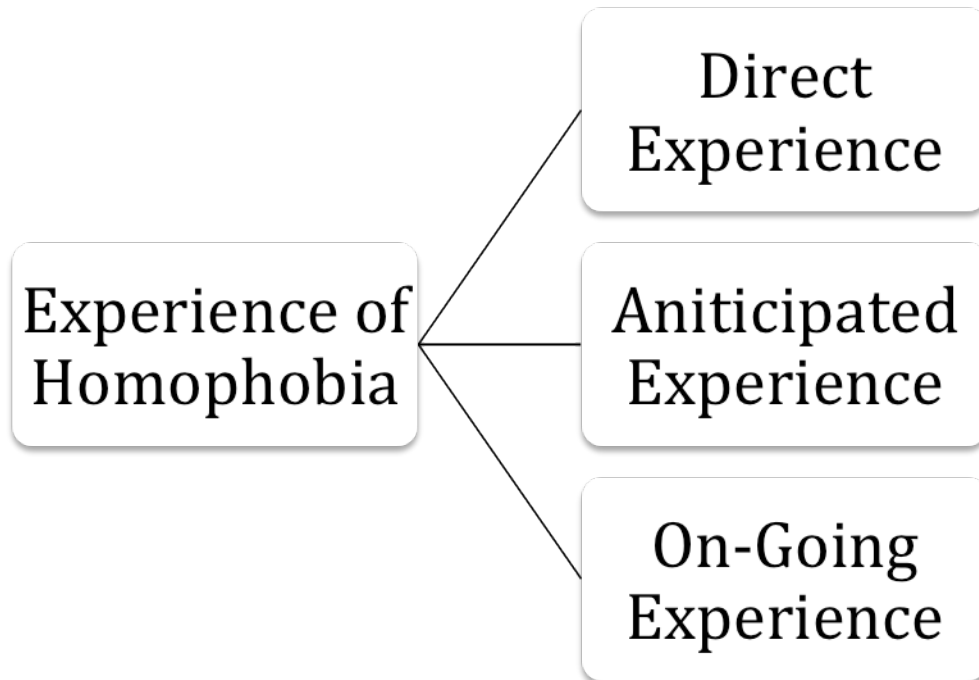


Figure 2. Category “Experience of Homophobia” and Themes

Everyday basically I would be insulted in some capacity in high school. On different occasions I was punched in the stomach, I was thrown down stairs. (Andy, exploration)

Okay, so I was in my forties at that time, and I was competing for jobs with people in their twenties. So I would walk into a room and what people would see was a fat, middle-aged dyke, right? There was literally one interview where the interviewer turned his chair away from me... the old guys didn't really know what to do with me. They didn't even want to talk to me... Sexual orientation absolutely had something to do with it. (Donna, exploration)

There was a lot of bullying...Unfortunately at that time, it wasn't within the realm of my possibilities to not engage, and by engaging it sometimes escalated into the odd physical altercation. But there were constant verbal altercations. Things like sexual slurs and verbally cutting down activities I participated in, or the way I looked or the way I dressed. (Jonathan, establishment)

A young man of 15 came out in one of my classes, and when he brought his partner to school, some boys in the hallway spat on them, and our principal said that it was that young man's fault because he brought his boyfriend to school and that's why they got spat on. That really turned me off. (Allison, establishment)

I worked with one woman who lived in a very small town and she just didn't know how to handle being around gay people. And she made this very clear. She made very clear to

me that she thought I was disgusting, my lifestyle was disgusting and that it was just wrong, everything about me was just wrong and it got to the point where I actually had to leave the job. (James, establishment)

Comments were made. You know, some people made comments about gay people - negative comments, so I couldn't come out. I was very young and not very confident at the time. (Max, maintenance)

Now, you could have a homophobic principal of course, and I did one time. He was a vice-principal and he was just blatantly homophobic with me. I went to the principal, and she was very progressive, and I said, "Here's what's going on with this guy. How do you think I should handle it?" She was very progressive, and she said, "Just let me handle it." (Darren, maintenance)

### **Anticipated Experience of Homophobia**

Of all participants in this study, only three (10%) reported no direct experience of homophobia in work and/or school environments. However, two of these participants (6% of the total) made career-related decisions in anticipation of it nonetheless.

Maybe they wouldn't be disciplined if I was [sic] in a more business-oriented field than social work. Maybe nobody would do anything. I guess it has influenced me to some extent. (Isaac, exploration; discussing why he transferred from one field of study to another)

I actually changed my resume a bit, because one of my resumes gave a description of what the club was about, and I had a friend look it over and he said, “Are you sure you want to leave that description in there because once you’re in it’s one thing, but in advance, there are people who will hold that against you.” I thought about that, and ended up shortening the volunteer section down, for reasons of space. I did leave it in, but I took all the descriptions out, and just left the titles and years. (Judy, recycling through exploration)

### **On-Going Experience of Homophobia**

As of the time of their respective interviews, three individuals (10% of the total) were currently experiencing homophobia in the work place, a dynamic which engendered a sense of insecurity and marginalization.

Well, the corporate culture is such that there is a lot of profanity on the job...you know, words like “cocksucker” and things like that...other words that sound like direct insults to gay people. That kind of language is very common, and it makes the environment feel unsafe. (Phillip, establishment)

I have felt like I was always “the gay guy,” you know what I mean? I knew that I was known as a gay man all over the country in this organization. People would come up to me when I was in other locations in the country, and that would be the topic of discussion, my sexuality. (Max, maintenance)



I think it's probably common knowledge now [that he is not heterosexual] because a number of years ago, [a superior] felt it was her place to "out" me to people at that level, and I think that spread like wildfire throughout the [organization], and since then, I sometimes sense a discomfort among my colleagues; more so among my male colleagues, really... for instance, there may be a social event that I am not invited to and may hear that it happened after the fact. You know, a golf thing or something like that. (Scott, maintenance)

### **Summary of "Experience of Homophobia"**

The majority of participants in this study had direct experience with various forms of homophobia, in both work and educational contexts. A small number of participants said they had no direct experience of homophobia in educational or work environments, but they nonetheless expressed concern that their careers could be deleteriously affected by it at some point. Although most participants spoke about experience with homophobia in the past, it was keenly felt as a current problem in the lives of only three.

### **Impact of Homophobia**

The portion of life-space related to social context was influenced by pervasive experience of homophobia, or concerns about it, for participants in this study, and all described ways in which homophobia influenced both their life-space and, by extension, their career development. Under the major category "Impact of Homophobia", there were three sub-categories: "The Coming Out Process", "Career Foreclosure", and "Seeking Affirming Environments". Please see Figure 3 for a schematic of the major category "Impact of Homophobia," related sub-categories, and themes.

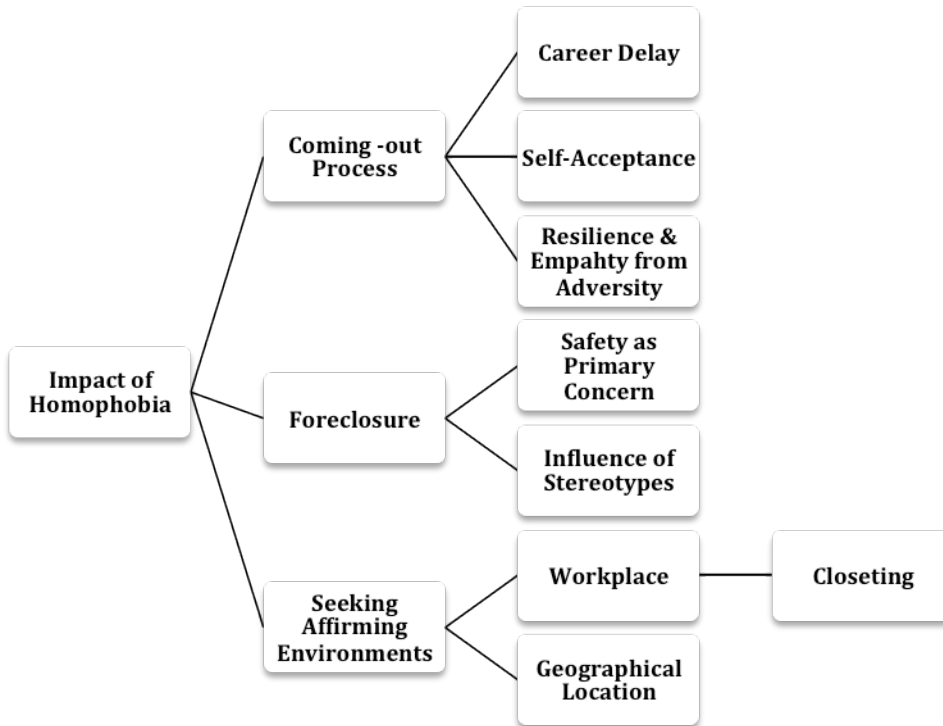


Figure 3. Major Category of “Impact of Homophobia,” Sub-categories, Themes and Sub-theme.

## **Coming out Process**

The sub-category “Coming out Process” was sub-divided into three themes. The first of these, “Career Delay,” dealt with the ways in which participants described delays in moving through the tasks of a given phase as a result of factors related to the competing processes of identity and career development, as well as career delay as a result of career misdirection. The second theme, “Self-Acceptance,” dealt with how acceptance of one’s sexual minority identity translated into career direction clarity and career confidence. The final theme was entitled “Adversity,” and it dealt with positive outcomes of the coming out process - greater resilience and greater empathy toward others, and how these translated into career-related issues.

**Career delay.** More than half of the participants in this study ( $n=16$ , 55%) experienced delays, or in some cases, stunted career development earlier in their lives, for reasons related to their sexual orientation. Career delays occurred because of the tension between career development and issues related to sexual identity development (including traumatic early experience, internalized homophobia and related self-destructive behaviours).

When you are coming out, just to be comfortable with yourself alone is like a task of sorts, it is an ongoing process and I think, you know, it happens simultaneously when you are coming into adulthood and deciding where you want to go with your life....when you know the internalization of homophobia, you don't really think about the future because you are kind of stuck in just that very closed up space. I knew what I wanted to do, but I had to deal with all my inner demons. (Mark, exploration)

(There has) been the fear that there was something horribly wrong with me which was definitely a function of years and years and years of internalized homophobia...I found that when I was coming out, being a lesbian became the overwhelming part of my identity. It was what I was almost exclusively focused on. I attributed everything in terms of my identity as a lesbian [sic]. Now that I am much more comfortable being out, it is still definitely a strong part of my identity, but less so. (Sheila, exploration)

Coming out was so traumatic that I really had a breakdown, so my grades suffered, but it is not the grades that are important, but that I lost a year of learning. (Maxine, exploration)

Before I came out to other people it was certainly difficult. I was raised in a very traditional religious eastern European background where certainly gay wasn't even a word you could mention, never mind, you know, actually be gay. I think it certainly took me a while to get to the point where I was feeling confident in myself and sure about who I was and that I could still accomplish things, and [I] engaged in a variety of self-destructive behaviors. (Lori, exploration)

I got angry because it was forced upon me that I couldn't do that [desired career]... And then I got pretty heavily into drugs... in my memory, it just seemed like there was so much bullshit just because I'm gay. (Stephen, establishment; developed substance abuse issues that he felt were related to frustrated career aspirations during the coming out process)

Participants reported choosing unsuitable careers, which also resulted in delay. They reported choosing such careers due to necessity, pressure from significant others, and default, with some becoming “stuck” in such careers, or having to exit a career to reorient to another, more suitable choice.

*(Did you consider seeking a gay friendly or avoiding a gay hostile environment?) Yes I did seek to avoid that. (And that's what you are saying in terms of...) Social work (and that is part of the reason you shifted away from commerce?) Yes... That's why I can't be in a field like commerce. How am I supposed to fit in being gay, doing calculus? (Imogen, exploration; changed from studying commerce, into a career in helping profession.)*

School had always been a very congenial place for me. I think I kept going back because it felt like a secure place for me...In an academic environment, I felt that if someone wanted to challenge me because I am lesbian, I have the moral authority to make them explain themselves...you can challenge people on principle there, you know? It's a non-threatening environment in lots of ways. (Donna, in exploration in middle age, after repeatedly redirecting her career throughout her life.)

I was looking for places where I could feel accepted. At that point there was just massive amounts of chaos in my mind.... so I started to work in [the sex industry]. I worked there for [#] years. (Stephen, establishment)

After that [working in a homophobic environment], I left at the end of that year, and I never went back. I then travelled in Australia for a year and I sent a letter of resignation from that school district while I was in Australia after I had time to think about it. I knew I didn't want to go back. I just felt like I needed to get out of that place, and I didn't even know if I wanted to teach anymore. After those experiences, I was just questioning everything. (Alison, establishment)

That was a factor in my deciding to explore other options. It was a very straight, male-dominated environment. It just wasn't comfortable for me to be in a workplace where that's how it is.... I think that, just being in the closet for so long...I just felt so invisible. (Nancy, recycling through exploration in middle age, after recently leaving a life-long career)

It's like, is this all there is, or is there something more? Something more interesting that I could be doing now? I feel like I really want to live my life in my own way. I want to be excited about the future. (Max, maintenance; eliminated preferred career in his youth, but is now considering recycling through exploration again, as he felt he chose initially for security, not passion).

**Self-acceptance.** Twenty participants (69%) reported that when they resolved their conflict surrounding their sexual minority identity they found greater clarity vis-a-vis career direction, as well as increased confidence within the context of their careers.

I mean, in terms of career choices, once I got over my own issues, I mean basically, I just thought everything was a possibility. It was just a matter of what I felt I could do from 9 to 5... I think as I became more comfortable with myself I saw the possibilities like all the careers that I had thought about... (Shawn, exploration)

I'm more confident in myself as a whole since I came out, so I can be more grounded in what I want to do, be more comfortable in what career I want to take...(Isaac, exploration)

I've had to learn the leadership. I've had to discover my own power to start these two communities (queer meditation groups)... those were my actual steps into leadership. (Nora, establishment)

So all that creativity...it all came into play in my work as a teacher, and I think being gay really let that flow. When you can be your real self, that's when you can be your most creative. It helps me to make better decisions for myself but also in terms of the people I work with because the exchange as an artist will be more genuine and real. (Morgan, establishment)

*(Was it like...you had to grow into who you are as a gay man in order to do something like become a teacher?)* Yes. Growing into that helped me to realize that I could become a teacher and I could still be gay. When I was in grade 12, I thought there was

no way for me to be a teacher because I'd get fired just for being who I am. (Darren, maintenance)

Self-acceptance influenced decision to work in a helping capacity with others, particularly other sexual minorities.

Because I've been through a lot and because I have dealt with all these problems in my life and I think I can understand what they are going through... I think I would like to work with visible minorities and if possible gay teenagers trying to deal with their sexuality. It doesn't matter what race. (Imogen, exploration)

I guess being gay has helped me to be more aware of different issues and (it has) given me a direction which I consider positive... Since I've come out, I've found there's a lot that needs to be done for gay and lesbian youth. So that sort of influenced what I want to do. I'm interested in going into social work and working with gay and lesbian youth. (Shawn, exploration)

Also, I think my sexual orientation has also increased my confidence in myself. I eventually got tired of being closeted and learned to be proud of myself. That has helped me to be confident in other aspects of my life and in my work too than I might have been otherwise.... It's also helped me to look at the possibility of helping other people as a career option. (Nancy, recycling through exploration)



... And so that's when I realized that yoga felt like a path toward an even greater feeling of self-acceptance. That's when I learned to let go of the negativity in the family drama and the negativity about my sexuality. I feel like it's important for there to be gay or gay positive people who can inspire young people, so I see my purpose also as someone who can inspire and be a role model for young gay people in my community, and I am permitted to do this with gay students in my class. I like to present the possibility that it doesn't matter if you're gay, you can be and do whatever you want. (James, establishment)

From that experience and what that counsellor was able to do for me, I thought, I want to do that for other people. I want to be there for other people the ways she was there for me. So I eventually became a child and youth worker. I don't know if it was what I always wanted to do, but my difficult experience as a young gay person certainly influenced me. (Sarah, maintenance)

Embracing sexual minority identity also had the effect of increasing career-related confidence.

I feel that after I eventually came out and was on the air, and was very out and well known, I think a positive aspect of that is that I was a role model for other gay people, both lesbians and gay men, I was able to lend support to their causes, to our causes...I went from closet to stage you could say. I wanted to stand up for my rights and be who I am, and for those who were once like me - closeted and afraid. (Lydia, establishment)

Being a lesbian is also about being true to myself; true to my joy and true to my desire, and maybe that was the first area of life where I learned to be true to myself, and I'm now using that learning in my business. (Nora, establishment)

I think it may have enabled me to be more innovative than I might otherwise have been because I have been able to recognize ways to improve how things are done based on knowing that some students are having difficult issues to deal with themselves. (Scott, maintenance)

**Adversity.** For the majority of participants in this study ( $n=19$ , 65%), to be a sexual minority was to know the experience of adversity, and that experience acted as “resistance training” of sorts, from which participants sourced resilience and greater empathy for others’ challenges.

I think it helps empathy ... Looking at someone who does have a shit time at life because they have been beaten up or have faced discrimination because of their color or their creed; because I have experienced that as a gay man to an extent, it think it has given me a window on that experience. (Andy, exploration)

I wasn't going to hide who I was or change for anyone. So in essence I believe it made me stronger, a fighter, I wanted to stand up for my rights to be who I am and for those who were once like me. (Lydia, establishment)

So basically, in part because of my own marginalization and also because of caring about the marginalization of other people, I don't want to participate in activities in psychology that somehow feel complicit in enforcing dominant notions of normality or are like, somehow just treating people in dehumanizing ways because of their social position and what kind of vulnerable position they're in at the time. (Madison, establishment)

I think if I were straight, I could be creative too, but because I'm gay, I had to really push myself because of being an underdog and having to face so much adversity...that's what it was to grow up a gay man. Now, I have no fear of failure because of that. (Darren, maintenance)

I think in the sense that I try to be really open when students say things that might not be okay with others. I think being gay and having been rejected at a young age by my family and friends, I feel compassion toward any kids who get rejected for any reason, and so I try to be open and understanding about their needs and the kinds of issues they're facing. (Sarah, maintenance)

### **Foreclosure**

Within the sub-category "Foreclosure" were two themes. The first of these, "Safety as Primary Concern" dealt with the elimination of career options due to perceptions of some career options as unsafe for sexual minority persons. The second theme, "Influence of Stereotypes," dealt with the way participants gravitated toward, or was repelled from some

career options because of stereotypes about the options, or the career-seeker's sexual orientation.

**Safety as primary concern.** More than half of all participants ( $n=16$ , 55%) foreclosed on career options to avoid potential homophobia by dismissing career choices or work settings they considered unsafe for sexual minorities.

If I knew that a certain place had a reputation for being homophobic and not a good place to be for gays, I would try to bypass it. (Andy, exploration)

I think possibly subconsciously it made a difference. There are professions where it is not very safe to be out, at least at this point, and possibly – subconsciously – I decided not to go into those professions. (*Like?*) The police force, the army... (Paul, exploration)

I think in the preliminary stages, based on where I lived then and my emotional level of maturity, I probably gravitated more toward what I'm doing now (hair stylist) because I thought it was more of a "safe place"...Quite frankly, the thought of living in a dormitory with a bunch of 18-to-24 year-old-boys frightened the crap out of me. You know, in my perception of how things might turn out at that time, there really would have been no peace of mind. (Jonathan, establishment)

**Influence of stereotypes.** Of those who foreclosed on career options, the influence of stereotypes was a reason cited by eight (32%). Participants either avoided careers thought to

be “stereotypically gay/lesbian,” or moved toward them, to the exclusion of more desirable options.

I guess after meeting a lot of makeup artists, I found out that most of the males are gay...I didn't want that, not right now, so that led me to not choosing to pick that. (Shawn, exploration)

*(So that influenced your career choices? Trying to stay away from stereotypical “gay jobs?”)* Yes, I think so. I would never be a waiter for that reason. There are things I would choose not to do for that reason. It sounds silly doesn't it, but it makes sense for me. It actually has repelled me from doing certain jobs or going into certain areas. (Stephen, establishment)

I needed to make money and people told me I had good taste or whatever, because I had been doing hair for some of my friends and they told me to go do that because I was gay. That was the thing then. If you are gay, you became a hairdresser. I decided not to stay in hairdressing, as it just didn't feel right for me. So then I applied to another course doing interior design. (Victor, establishment)

I guess, there would be a lot more gay people in the arts, and I knew that...I think it was more obvious, that connection between being gay or gay-friendly and being in the arts...we all had something in common, it seems, now that I think about it. As I think about the characters and personalities in that class, I guess I could identify with people

more there than in other kinds of classes. So I guess that made it more appealing to go in that direction. (James, establishment)

Pressure from others (e.g., media, family) to foreclose on careers thought of as “not appropriate” for lesbian/gay identified people, also influenced decisions to foreclose on some options.

...[there] are jobs that are not seen as appropriate for lesbians. ‘[They] shouldn’t work with children.’ That’s a big thing. I said that I had one job where I didn’t feel comfortable. I was working at a grade school...it just felt really uncomfortable. (Maxine, exploration)

I’d always wanted to be a priest in the army, which is really strange. I was really young when I was thinking about this...from about 8 to 16... It was one of those bastions of denial that I eventually had to confront. Well, all that time, I had to think about the whole gay thing too, you know what I mean? I saw being gay as very separate from what I might choose to do, but for everybody else...it was ridiculous. I couldn’t say anything. I was not taken seriously, even though what I always wanted to do was to help people have faith... It felt like the world, or at least a lot of people were preventing me from doing what I wanted to do. It was always a joke, it was some political joke, or even in my own family, I often feel like I am not taken seriously, you know? (Stephen, establishment; foreclosed on a career as a minister in the army)

I always wanted to be a teacher. Actually, being gay was a big influence in me not doing that. I was only 18 or 19 and I was really going through hard times. At that time I was just learning how to accept myself...I guess I had a very strong general feeling that being gay was wrong, and that it would be wrong for me to go into education because everybody at that time seemed to hate gay people, and I thought if the school found out or something like that, I would be fired and it would just be a bad scene. (Max, maintenance)

### **Seeking Affirming Environments**

The sub-category “Seeking Affirming Environments” was subdivided into two themes. The first of these, “Workplace,” dealt with desires and efforts to find, or create, safe and supportive work environments. The second theme, “Geographical Location,” dealt with the importance of living in large urban centres as a way to find and/or create affirming community.

**Workplace.** Having an affirming work environment was currently, or had been in the past, an important part of career decision for 22 participants (76% of the total). Participants who deliberately sought lesbian/gay affirming work environments cited a number of reasons for this, including a desire for feelings of safety and enhanced support.

I think there is better chances [sic] that they [social workers] would be more aware of it than other professions. Yeah, it has influenced me in that way. I am hoping that places like that will not be as heterocentric as the rest of the world. (Imogen, exploration).

A homophobic environment won't allow me to grow personally. [It would] totally stunt my growth. Also, I won't grow in that environment like in terms of landing a better job or working up the ladder or whatever that bullshit is. (Maxine, exploration)

My experiences as a lesbian working for other people led me to seriously consider the possibility of working for myself so I wouldn't have to worry so much about how my sexual orientation might interfere with my ability to earn a living. (Lydia, establishment)

The presence of other sexual minorities and role models were also cited as features of affirming work environments.

Yeah. When I wanted to be an actor, I think that knowing that a lot of actors were gay and a lot of theatre people were gay...it made it kind of like a safe space to go to. (Darren, maintenance)

...I would want at least a few people to know and I guess I would seek out my own brothers and sisters and maybe ask them how they dealt with it [issues related to sexual orientation] and how they are dealing with it and stuff like that. (Shawn, exploration)

I often think, 'I wish I could just tell someone what's going on with me now.' I think if I could have, it might have been easier to focus on my work then, especially when I was going through something difficult. (Phillip, establishment)



So important! I have so many. I have a lot of lesbian role models and a couple of fags and they are so important. I can't believe how lucky I have been in my life and just like I could go on for hours and hours like the women and men in my life that I've met in my life who have given me the hugest breaks but also have been incredible, incredible role models for me - so important. (Maxine, exploration)

Having the role models out there to say yes we can do this, yes we are respected in this field, we are successful. It really helps. It just goes to show, 'Yeah! I can do that and be as out as I want to be.' I think if there weren't any role models, I probably would have switched to somewhere where there was. (Isaac, exploration)

***Closeting.*** The majority of participants ( $n=22$ , 76%) used closeting as a means of achieving a sense of safety in schools and work contexts. The two forms of closeting engaged in were "passing" (as heterosexual) during the initial stages of work search (i.e., resume sanitizing/passing during interviews/early employment), and "passing" once more established in a job. Participants who engaged in passing during the work search/early employment process did so to "level the playing field" as it were, and intended to "come out" once they felt it was safe to do so (i.e., if a prospective employer seemed open to sexual diversity and/or once they felt secure in their respective work environments).

I want to advance in the world and as much as I am nibbling at the fruit of liberty, if I am applying for a job where I don't know whether the employer is gay friendly or unfriendly I don't put down my gay stuff. (Mark, exploration)

I indicate that I was a facilitator for a support group for women but I do not indicate that it was a coming out group. It has been a conscious choice. (*Could you explain why you decided to censor?*) Yeah. It's been a conscious choice because I don't know who is going to be looking at my resume. Whether or not I address it depends on how I feel in the interview. If I feel that it's a safe place, if I have been able to feel it out, then I do indicate that it was a coming-out group. Otherwise I don't. (Sheila, exploration)

To me, it feels wise to make sure there is a relationship there first before disclosing that I am a homosexual. (Nora, establishment)

Well, to get my foot in the door, I'm thinking it's probably best to present myself as normal as possible, which I feel that I'm not that great at, even when I try, but I do try to do that. It's so much bigger than just sexual orientation, but that's a part of it too.

(Madison, establishment)

Those who continued to closet once employed or admitted to the school of their choice, did so to defend against potential discrimination such as poor treatment by colleagues and those in positions of authority, difficulties with establishing and advancing at work or school, and actual job loss.

...still, very much today in my public health program. I would be afraid of certain professors finding out...I have to keep myself under wraps to people in my class, to

professors, for fear of them being homophobic, or hostile, or thinking ‘well, they are really homophobic and (if) they don’t have a positive image of that then I am not going to get to where I want to get in my career. (Isaac, exploration)

Well, I was closeted for a lot of that time, because... I just told myself ... it’s hard to look back at it now because I think ‘Wow! Why did you do that?’, because now I’m just so open about my sexuality. All those years of like, hiding who you went places with... people at work would say “So what did you do over the weekend” and I’d say “Oh, I went somewhere with my friend.” I guess I just thought I’d be judged if people knew. (*And what implications were there if they did judge you in a negative way?*) I think I was afraid that I could get fired. (Nancy, recycling through exploration)

I don’t feel that it’s safe to be “out” in this work, in this organization. It’s a really “macho man” environment. People think we are protected in government organizations, and although I think (organization name) is maybe more safe than some other places, I think a person could still be targeted for discrimination for being gay. It’s just best not to say anything. (Phillip, establishment)

...there was also always that worry that if I wasn’t able to come out at work, would there be complications if there was an active gay community in the city where I worked in terms of my work finding out because of people talking about my personal life? I was afraid of getting found out and losing my job. I remember thinking, ‘I’m a lesbian and I have family values too. It doesn’t mean that I don’t have values.’ But I learned that

there were people there who felt that being gay meant you had no decent value system, so I was always worried about losing my job there, and had to stay closeted. (Lydia, establishment)

For those who began their careers during a time when the rights of sexual minority workers were not protected in an official sense, age was a factor in the decision to closet.

When I was younger, we weren't protected under the Human Rights Code...in the beginning, I felt I had to keep my minority status quiet. I felt I had to 'pass'. (Donna, recycling through exploration)

Again, because of the generation in which I came of age, I could not be comfortable being open about important parts of my life. I think my life would probably have been a lot easier if I could have felt more free to be who I am in all parts of my life - professional and otherwise. (Scott, maintenance)

It was in the 60s and early 70s then, and it was still illegal, so it was very frowned upon, and there was no protection under the [Human Rights Code]. I had to learn how to protect myself. (Darren, maintenance)

**Geographical location.** For 23 people in this study (79% of the total), living in urban centers was an important influence on career development because people wanted to be near a community of sexual minority persons.

My choice about where to live and where to work will be affected by where do I think I could become a part of the queer community, because that is something that I would like. (Lindsay, exploration)

I chose [university in a large city] because I knew it was, like, a metropolitan place where there is a big gay community. (Andy, exploration)

It was great. I could see, “Wow! Look! There are other people just like me!” Even though no “gay village” had formed yet, there were still pockets where you could see that there were other gay people. If you wanted to meet a guy, you knew where you could go. (Darren, maintenance)

Large cities also had the appeal of a greater sense of acceptance owing to greater diversity in general.

I haven't even considered living in a small town because I feel it would be really homophobic and racist. (Imogen, exploration)

I would be annoyed to live in a place where I wouldn't feel free to hold hands with my partner. So of course I would want it to be a place where in my personal life, I would feel safe and okay being open about my life. (Morgan, establishment)

There is also the fact that there could be some serious implications in terms of people coming to me as a psychologist just because of who I am, and a big part of that is that I am a lesbian. In conservative environments, that's a real drawback. It prevents me from wanting to explore living in a more rural setting, which I think could be really good in a lot of ways. (Madison, establishment)

That was a huge reason for moving to a big city...I moved to a bigger city to find community and also, I like it because you can totally just be yourself. There is just a lot less judgment. (Sarah, maintenance)

### **Summary of “Impact of Homophobia”**

Experience with and/or concerns about homophobia influenced career development in three main ways; impact of the coming out process, foreclosure on desired, sometimes unexplored options, and seeking affirming environments.

The sub-category “Coming out Process” included three themes; “Career Delay”, “Self-Acceptance” and “Resilience and Empathy from Adversity.” Career delay resulted from competing demands of sexual identity development and issues related to it, as well as because of career misdirection; embarking on unsuitable careers out of felt necessity or pressure from others. A positive outcome of the coming out process was self-acceptance, which helped participants to clarify career options, feel more confident and have greater empathy for others.

The sub-category “Foreclosure” included two themes; “Safety as Primary Concern” and “Influence of Stereotypes.” Within the latter sub-category, some participants moved away from careers deemed stereotypically “gay,” while others opted to embark on them, as they

represented relatively “safe” options. Closely related to the desire for safety was the sub-category “Seeking Affirming Environments,” in which participants described making career decisions based on a desire to work and live in environments there they would feel safe and accepted as sexual minority persons, and wherein they would have a sense of community with other sexual minority persons. When participants did not feel their school/work environment was affirming, they were likely to closet.

### **Summary**

The first stage of analysis for this study revealed that participants were in the phases of career development as would be predicted by Super’s (1990) life-span theory, but for two exceptions; one middle-aged woman had never left the exploration phase, and one woman in the maintenance phase was considerably younger than the theory would predict, and who was considering re-entry into the exploration phase. Both cited experience with homophobia as partly responsible for disruption of career development.

The second stage of analysis revealed two major categories; “Experience of Homophobia” and “Impact of Homophobia.” The former was further subdivided into three themes that dealt with direct, anticipated and on-going experience of homophobia. All but one participant fell into one or more of these sub-categories, making the experience of homophobia pervasive among these participants.

The major category, “Impact of Homophobia,” was sub divided into three sub-categories; “Coming out Process” and “Foreclosure,” and “Seeking Affirming Environments.” Participants experienced delayed career development as a result of the coming out process, as well as because of career misdirection. However, coming to terms with sexual orientation also had the effect of clarifying career direction, increasing confidence, resilience and empathy for

others, both within the work place, and without. This latter outcome was reflected in the career decision and behaviour for those so affected in this study.

Participants described eliminating options for two main reasons; the primacy of safety over other factors and the influence of stereotypes about sexual minorities in the workplace. Additionally, the majority counterbalanced homophobia in society and the workplace by seeking out or creating affirming environments in which to work and live. Safety was such a pressing issue for most, that they described closeting at some point in their careers so as to protect themselves from homophobia and discrimination in the workplace, often to their own personal and professional detriment.



## DISCUSSION

### **The Process Of Navigating the Impact of Sexual Minority Identity on Career**

#### **Development**

To understand the influence of sexual orientation on life and career is to bear witness to heterosexism and homophobia as every day facts of life; facts that inform important decisions, such as where to work, where to live, and even who to befriend and love. The present study is testament to this reality, particularly as it applies to the experience of sexual minorities in the workplace. However, participants' stories revealed a process by which they navigate this harsh reality in their working lives. They do this by minimizing exposure to homophobia and maximizing exposure to affirming environments, all the while capitalizing on strengths gained from the adversity inherent in their social context.

Participants altered career decision and trajectory to protect themselves from potential homophobia by foreclosing on career options that were desired. Sometimes they would do this prior to fully exploring their options. Many participants chose options for reasons of safety rather than because these options were ones for which they had skills, interests or abilities. This finding supports the contention of several researchers who posit that, when sexual minorities anticipate homophobia in the work place, foreclosure becomes more likely (Croteau, 1996; Fassinger, 1996; Haslin et al., 2012). Indeed, the present study supports research by House (2004), who found that participants in her study reported foregoing desired options in favour of those they felt were "safer" for sexual minorities.

The participants in the present study also minimized the influence of homophobia by closeting, a common strategy among sexual minorities in the workplace (Chung, 2009), and this finding echoes those of a number of other researchers. For instance, participants chose to

closet in response to past discrimination and negative commentary about sexual minorities by colleagues, a strategy also reported in a study by Wright et al. (2006). Similarly, when they knew or suspected employers of being homophobic, some were more likely to be secretive about their sexual orientation, a finding also reported by Bowleg et al. (2008) and Griffith and Hebl (2002). Further, even those participants who had not actually experienced homophobia in the workplace took measures to guard against it by concealing their identity at some point along their career path, an outcome which supports the research of Parnell et al., (2012), whose participants expected their sexual orientation would be the cause of poor treatment in the workplace, whether or not they had actually experienced it. As has been argued by several researchers, the decision of participants in this study to protect themselves by concealing their sexual orientation can be viewed as a healthy resistance to oppression -- a mature and appropriate response to the social realities of sexual minorities (Langdrige, 2008; McCarn & Fassinger, 1996).

While minimizing the threat of homophobia helped participants in this study to protect their career development efforts, they also sought out and created supportive and affirming environments, both within and without the workplace, and this had the effect of counterbalancing the negative impact of homophobia, as proposed by Kwon (2013). Within the workplace, participants described gravitating toward, and wanting to remain in careers wherein they felt acceptance as sexual minorities, and this is consistent with a number of studies suggesting that sexual minorities fare better both professionally and personally when their work environments and peers are affirming (Adams, 2005; Henrickson & Neville, 2012; Riggle et al., 2008). Indeed, many reported that they would be more open about their sexual orientation in such environments, a finding consistent with the Griffith and Hebl's (2012) study

in which participants were more likely to disclose their identity as sexual minorities within organizations with affirming employment practices. Additionally, a number of participants in the present study specifically wanted to work in environments wherein there would be sexual minority peers and role models, and this finding was consistent with a study by Adams (1997), who found that gay men in his study deliberately chose to work in environments in which they expected there would be other gay men (i.e., in jobs stereotyped as “gay jobs”), and they indicated that doing so allowed them to integrate their work and cultural identities. Such findings underscore the importance of organizational commitment to diversity and equity in general, and for sexual minorities in particular, as noted by Li and Nagar (2013).

In addition to seeking affirming work environments, the vast majority of participants in the present study also discussed plans to live or remain in large cities, even in cases where this was not a personal preference. This finding was consonant with that of Black et al. (2000), who found that sexual minorities tend to “cluster” in cities. For participants in the present study, urban locales suggested the potential for community as well as freedom to be “out,” a finding which echoes the work of Riggle et al., (2008), who found a desire for access to sexual minority community was of critical importance to lesbian women and gay men they surveyed. As suggested by the research of McCarn and Fassinger (1996) and Schneider (2001), habitation in urban centres may be an important part of identity development for some sexual minorities, as it can satisfy that part of identity development requiring access to, and community with other sexual minorities.

The process of sexual minority identity development - the coming out process – runs parallel to the process of career development, and is necessitated by the virtually unavoidable presence of homophobia in our society. However, the very adversity that is the basis of this

process served to forge resilience, strength, and even empathy for others as participants in this study navigated the coming out process. This dynamic echoes several previous studies, such as that of Rosario et al. (2011) who found that self-worth and resilience increased as sexual minorities move through the coming out process. Similarly, Henrickson and Neville (2012) found that skills for coping with adversity increased with self-acceptance for participants in their study.

That participants' experience of adversity during the coming out process encouraged greater empathy for others had implications for career trajectory among participants in this study, with many citing a desire to work in a helping/advocacy capacity around issues of oppression. This finding is consistent with the most pronounced finding in Riggle et al.'s (2008) study, namely, the tendency of their lesbian and gay participants to relay a sense of greater empathy for others, and particularly oppressed others, because of their own difficult experience. As suggested by Henrickson and Neville's (2012), this increased empathy appears to engender a self-image of one who cares for others in need, and this self-image was in turn manifest in career planning among many participants in the current study.

Although homophobia created formidable barriers to career development for participants in the present study, it evidently acted as "resistance training" of sorts, and encouraged resilience, empathy, and even career direction for some. Evidence for resilience among these participants may be seen in the particular process by which they protected and supported their career development efforts. By minimizing exposure to homophobia and maximizing access to affirming professional and personal supports, these participants were able to move through Super's (1990) phases of career development in much the same way as the non-minoritized populations upon which these phases were predicated.

## **Life-Span, Life-Space Theory and Sexual Minority Career Development**

The career development of participants in the present study was consistent with what Super's (1990) life-span theory would predict. However, because there were no maintenance-aged women in the maintenance phase, alternative possibilities to Super's theory are cautiously mooted here. Further, only the situational determinants of life-space theory were examined in this study, and implications of this are discussed here.

### **Life-Span**

Looked at from one perspective, participants in this study were in phases of career development that were consistent with Super's (1990) life-span theory. Alternatively, it is possible that other factors related to sexual orientation, sexism, and generational differences interfered with career development, as predicted by this theory, for several participants.

**Evidence for theory consistency.** Super's (1990) life-span theory appears to account for each participant's phase of career development in the present study. With few exceptions, most participants were in the phase of career development associated with average age-ranges for the phase in question. One exception was the three maintenance-aged women who were recycling through the exploration phase after having been in the maintenance phase.

According to this theory, however, it is not uncommon for people in their middle years to assess their life and career to date, and make an active decision to explore new options should their current career path no longer suit them.

Two other participants were in phases that were not consistent with their age, including a fourth maintenance-aged woman who had never moved beyond the exploration phase, and the sole woman in the maintenance phase who was considerably younger than would be

expected for that phase. This latter participant felt “stunted” in the holding task of the maintenance phase, and was considering re-entry into the exploration phase. Both of these participants described their career choices to date as reactions to homophobic experience and environments rather than as choices made free of duress. It is possible, then, that neither was able to successfully engage with the tasks of career development necessary to stabilize in their respective work lives. This outcome is consistent with Super’s (1990) notion of career maturity, which posits that, if individuals are unable to successfully complete tasks inherent in each phase of development, career dissatisfaction and disruption become more likely.

**Alternative possibilities.** It is noteworthy that there were no maintenance-aged women in the maintenance phase, so with caution, I suggest that lesbian identity development, generational differences, and sexism, may also play a role in the absence of middle-aged women in that phase. This is consistent with past research findings indicating that lesbian women report their career development as “lagging behind” that of their heterosexual counterparts (Boatwright et al., 1996; Hook & Bowman, 2008). Relatedly, Morgan and Brown (1991) have proposed that lesbian women who identify as such early in life (i.e., prior to leaving high school) are more likely to make better informed career choices than are those who identify later in life. They contend that those who are out may have more access to career–decision resources (e.g., lesbian role models), and can therefore make better-informed choices from a place of relative security. With respect to the present study, then, it may be that middle-aged women currently re-exploring career options were unable to avail themselves of resources which would allow them to fully flesh out a complete menu of career options and strategies for career development when they were younger. This explanation seems all the more plausible given that these women came of age at a time when being out was a far more risky venture

than it is today (Groves et al., 2006; Riley, 2010), due to there having been few or no legal protections for sexual minority workers.

Indeed, sexual orientation is not the only barrier lesbian women face in the workplace; the mere fact of being female can also impede the realization of one's full career potential, and thus lead to premature disengagement and disruption. For example, Fels (2004) and Reardon, (as cited in Peltier, 2010) surveyed stereotypes about women in the workplace and found the following descriptors to be disturbingly common: women are not committed to their careers; women are not good leaders; if a woman is assertive, she will also be too difficult to work with; women are not as ambitious as men. Lesbian women, then, may face the double jeopardy of discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender (Fassinger, 1996). Additionally, middle-aged/senior lesbian women may also have experienced impediments to career development related to coming-of-age at a time when there were few – if any – protections for sexual minority workers. Although there is insufficient data to determine whether such factors are at play with maintenance-aged women in this study, further exploration of this possibility may be indicated.

**Perception of career delay.** Although participants' career phase was arguably consistent with what life-span theory would predict, the majority of participants had the perception that their career development was delayed, and the span of time constituting each phase (about 10 years for exploration and 20 years each for establishment and maintenance), may have explanatory value here. Although most participants were within the average age-range for each phase, it is conceivable that their perception of "lagging behind" was based upon comparison with heterosexual peers. For instance, and in addition to factors such as career misdirection and premature foreclosure, many participants described feeling their career

development was delayed as a result the competing demands of career development and the coming out process. Participants described external and internalized homophobia, traumatic experience, and self-destructive behaviour as complications of coming out that left them with few resources to dedicate to career development for a time. This finding is consistent with previous research which found that the competing demands of sexual minority identity development and career development can derail the progress of one or the other (Adams et al., 2005; Boatwright et al., 1996). Not only was the tension between the two kinds of development a challenge for some, but lack of social support from family and friends presented another layer of difficulty, which is consistent with the work of Schmidt & Nilsson (2006), who found that this combination of determinants resulted in career indecision, and therefore delay, for youth in their study.

It has also been proposed that sexual minorities may engage in dual processes of identity development, that is, developing as an individual and also as a member of a minority group (McCarn & Fassinger, 1996), making resources available for career development that much more constrained. Given the importance placed on sourcing and becoming part of a community of other sexual minorities in this study, such a possibility seems plausible.

### **Life-Space and the Impact of Homophobia**

The present study looked at the influence of sexual orientation on the social context portion of life-space theory, as it is represented by the situational determinants of Super's (1990) archway model. As indicated in the previous sections of this discussion, all situational aspects in question, including society in general, community, peers, family, school, social policy, and employment practices, were influenced by heterosexism and homophobia. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that the social context within which



sexual minority workers explore, select, and pursue careers is systemically homophobic, and presents chronic challenges to successful career development (Heslin et al., 2012; Parnell et al., 2012; Rosario et al., 2001).

Although life-space theory effectively delineates the various life domains that come to bear on career development, it does not speak to the quality of those “spaces” in a person’s life. In the case of sexual minorities, as with other marginalized groups, systemic oppression and discrimination inform the quality of all situational aspects of life-space, and this fact exerts a powerful influence on career decision and development. Acknowledgment of the over-arching influence of oppressive forces, such as homophobia and discrimination, on the life-space of sexual minorities, would greatly add to the utility of life-space theory with this population.

### **Conclusion**

The present study found that sexual minority identity and systemic homophobia influenced all aspects of career development under examination. For instance, although participants’ phases of career development were essentially aligned with what Super’s life-span theory would predict, homophobia influenced the way these people maneuvered within these phases. More specifically: participants’ stories revealed a process by which they mediated the effects of sexual orientation and homophobia on career development by minimizing exposure to homophobia and maximizing access to personal and professional supports, while capitalizing on strength and resilience gained through engagement in the effortful coming out process.

The present study also looked at the influence of sexual orientation on the situational determinants portion of Super’s life-space theory, and found that homophobia influenced all situational aspects of life-space under examination. Although this influential theory touches on

many important life domains that have an impact on career choice and development, it does not address the over-arching influence of oppressive forces, such as homophobia, on the life-space of sexual minority workers. I therefore suggest that the oppressive social context within which sexual minorities live and work needs to be acknowledged in life-space theory.

### **Limitations**

All participants in this study were either in university or had attended college or university, and had obtained professional designations, making this group not dissimilar to those upon whom Super's life-span, life-space theory was developed. This outcome suggests both that caution should be exercised regarding the generalizability of results to the larger lesbian and gay population, as well as the need for recruitment techniques that attract participants from a wider range of educational and social realities in future research of this nature. Similarly, lesbian and gay identity and its influence on career development was the main focus of this study. However, it should be acknowledged that a number of other non-dominant identities (e.g. women, ethnic minorities) may have also intersected with sexual orientation to influence the career development of a number of participants.

Another limitation of the current study arose from the "point-in-time" nature of the project. Participants ranged in age from 18 to 57 years, and it is plausible that generational differences exist. Although all participants in this study shared the experience of difficulty emanating from the fact of their sexual orientation, several of the older participants noted that they came of age at a time when the legal, political and social realities of sexual minorities were starkly different from those of younger participants. Although it was beyond the scope of this particular project to examine the influence of generational differences, the possibility

of such differences should be acknowledged as potentially influential to this study's outcomes.

Finally, I acknowledge that this study focused only on lesbian women and gay men. For brevity, I have referred to the participants throughout as "sexual minorities," but of course it must be recognized that there are other sorts of sexual minority identity, for example, bisexual and transgendered. I respectfully acknowledge that career development concerns and challenges of other sexual minorities are equally as pressing and important as those of lesbian women and gay men.

### **Future Research**

As Kwon (2013) and Schneider and Dimito (2010) point out, when it comes to career development, researchers need to be open to the positive aspects of sexual minority identity. As Savin-Williams (2008) poignantly states, it has been the custom of researchers to dedicate "...irresistible and overpowering attention to the problematic nature of same-sex oriented populations rather than...focus on their capacities to adjust, thrive, and lead exceptionally ordinary lives" (p. 137). As if to punctuate this statement, participants in the present study were striking in their capacity to tool difficult, sometimes traumatic, experience into more secure and promising futures for themselves. Future research should continue to explore the sources of such resilience in the face of adversity, as well as protective factors related to such positive outcomes.

With respect to Super's theory, the current study tentatively suggests the potential for sexual orientation and gender differences in the way lesbian women and gay men progress through Super's phases of career development. Further research on this potential would be clarifying, as would exploration of generational differences and their impact on the life-span

and life-space of sexual minority persons.

Finally, exploration of the connection between sexual minority identity development and self-concept development could further enhance our understanding of how these tandem developmental processes influence the career development of sexual minorities.

### **Implications for Practice**

As has been the case with research, there may be a tendency to train the focus of counselling interventions with sexual minority persons toward deficits and dysfunction. This study highlights the importance of strengths/resilience-based approaches to conceptualizing career and other counselling work with sexual minority persons. In the words of Kwon (2013): "...the psychological helping professions would benefit by being more captivated by the flourishing and strength evident in the LGB population" (p. 379).

The present study also highlights the importance of conducting career counselling with sexual minority persons from a holistic perspective. More specifically, this study brings to the fore the imperative to guide sexual minority clients from an understanding of sexual minority identity development, the social context within which sexual minorities develop, and the impact these have on career development. To do such work, it is crucial to prioritize a working alliance, as well as honest reflection on one's own biases and assumptions and their potential impact on the client (Collins & Arthur, 2010).

Finally, the current study highlighted the almost overwhelming presence of homophobia, discrimination and resultant hardship/trauma that many sexual minorities face, as a matter of course, in their lives. Similarly, career counsellors should be aware of and prepared to challenge stereotypes – both those that are arguably negative as well as those which seemingly have positive face-value, as both may serve to limit an individual's

perceptions of career choice. Given the likelihood that sexual minority clients have or will face such regrettably common experiences, knowledge of relevant therapeutic strategies may help to mitigate the negative effects of these difficult experiences, in the service of helping sexual minority clients toward an empowered sense of self and potential for satisfying and rewarding experiences in the workplace.

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## **Lesbian and Gay Experience of Career Development**

### **Call for Participants**

**My name is Lisa White, and I'm a doctoral candidate in the Adult Education and Counselling Psychology department at the University of Toronto. Along with my supervisor, Professor Margaret Schneider, I am conducting a study about career experiences of lesbian women and gay men.**

**I am currently looking for lesbian women and gay men between the ages of 25 - 65 to participate in a study about sexual minorities and career development.**

**This study will consist of a brief interview (one hour or less) about how you decided what kind of work you wanted to do, and what kinds of things influenced you. The goal of this research is to promote better understanding of how being a sexual minority influences career choice and development.**

**If you are interested in participating, please contact me at:**

**[lisa.white@utoronto.ca](mailto:lisa.white@utoronto.ca)**

**Please feel free to pass this information along to anyone you feel may be interested in participating in this study**

## Appendix B

### Email Contact

Dear (name of contact);

During a recent conversation, you mentioned that you or someone you know might be interested in participating in a study I am conducting on the topic of lesbian and gay experience of career development. I am now seeking people to participate in this study, and have attached a flyer that introduces the study and includes my contact information. Please feel to get in touch if you are interested in participating, or pass the flyer on to anyone you feel may be interested in participating.

Thank you so much,

Lisa White

## Appendix C

### **Lesbian and Gay Experience and Career Development**

Thank you so much for taking the time to share information with us about your career/life experience as someone who is lesbian or gay. This study is being conducted by Lisa White, as part of the requirements for the completion of PhD studies in the faculty of Counselling Psychology at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (University of Toronto), and her supervisor, Dr. Margaret Schneider, a Counselling Psychology faculty member. This form will outline this study and your potential involvement in it.

The purpose of this study is to try to better understand if and how sexual minority status influences career development. More specifically, it seeks to add to a small body of knowledge about how well a popular career theory explains sexual minority experience of career development. A benefit of your participation in this study is that it can help to raise awareness about the realities of sexual minority workers in Canada today, and such information may be helpful for educating people such as helping professionals (counsellors, psychologists), teachers, researchers and other sexual minority persons, like you. We hope to publish the results in professional journals and present the results at conference(s).

The interview should take no longer than one hour. Your responses to this interview will then be transcribed and returned to you, so that you may assess your commentary for accuracy. At that time, you may also wish to add more information to your commentary. To thank you for your participation in this study, you will be paid an honorarium of \$10.

Your participation is completely voluntary. You can skip any questions you don't want to answer and can withdraw from the interview at any time. You can also withdraw your data up until the point that the data analysis is complete.

Please be assured that we will take steps to maintain confidentiality. Your real name and other information that might identify you will not be used at any time in connection with the information you give us, and your interview transcripts will be securely stored during the course of the study. Please be aware that we have a duty to report if you indicate that a child may be at risk, or if you tell us that you are at risk of harming yourself or others.

In the event that you are participating remotely from outside of Ontario, the interview will be conducted via video-conference or phone so that an audio recording of our discussion can be made for transcription. Please note that, as with any electronic communication, confidentiality cannot be absolutely guaranteed when using this media. However, the researcher will take all measures possible to ensure that confidentiality is maintained, inasmuch as it is possible to do so.

People often find it enjoyable and even helpful to talk about their life experiences, and for some, it even helps them to consolidate those experiences. However, some people may also experience some level of discomfort when talking about more difficult circumstances. If this should happen, we can provide you with a list of support services, should you wish to take advantage of them.

Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions, and again, thank you so much for considering participating in this study.

Lisa White, PhD Candidate  
[lisa.white@utoronto.ca](mailto:lisa.white@utoronto.ca)

Dr. Margaret Schneider  
[margaret.schneider@utoronto.ca](mailto:margaret.schneider@utoronto.ca)  
416-978-0684

You can also contact the Office of Research Ethics if you have any questions about your rights as a research participant: <http://www.research.utoronto.ca/for-researchers-administrators/ethics/>

Appendix D

**Participant Consent Form**

I have read the attached information letter and agree to participate in the study entitled; **“Life-Span Theory: Lesbian and Gay Experience of Exploration, Establishment and Maintenance Phases of Career Development.”**

\_\_\_\_\_ Please check here if you would like to receive a summary of the results.

If you would like a summary of results, please include preferred mailing address below:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Participant \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Appendix E

**Participant Information**

How old are you? \_\_\_\_\_

Sex:

Male \_\_\_\_\_

Female \_\_\_\_\_

Do you identify as:

Lesbian \_\_\_\_\_

Gay \_\_\_\_\_

Do you use another term to describe your sexual orientation? \_\_\_\_\_

At what age did you identify as lesbian or gay

To self: \_\_\_\_\_

To others: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you a member of a visible minority? \_\_\_\_\_

If so, how do you identify? \_\_\_\_\_

Level of education:

High school \_\_\_\_\_

College \_\_\_\_\_

University \_\_\_\_\_ (Undergraduate degree \_\_\_\_\_; Graduate degree \_\_\_\_\_)

Other \_\_\_\_\_

Your Current Occupation?: \_\_\_\_\_.

How long have you been in this occupation?: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you "out" in your place of work?: \_\_\_\_\_

Are you "out" to family and friends?: \_\_\_\_\_

Do you currently live:

in a town? \_\_\_\_\_

in a city? \_\_\_\_\_

In which Province do you live? \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix F

### **Phases of Career Development\***

#### **Exploration**

Eventually, (generally) around the beginning of adolescence, the exploration phase generally commences, and occupational considerations narrow to options which the individual considers viable in a task known as crystallization, a marker of the commencement of vocational identity development. The task of crystallization is followed by that of specification, wherein the individual directs the occupational-self into educational and vocational choices that are aligned with his or her environmental context and goals. Ultimately, the individual moves into the tasks associated with implementation by seeking out relevant training and job opportunities.

#### **Establishment**

Between the ages of 26 and 45, Super proposed that most people work through tasks associated with the establishment phase of their careers, and these tasks include stabilizing, consolidating and advancing. In the first instance, the individual enters her or his chosen training or work environment, and attempts to stabilize within the environment and the position occupied. She or he also puts effort into consolidating work habits and cultivating organizational and professional work relationships. As the individual becomes more established in her or his career path of choice, there is often a striving to advance within his or her chosen environment and/or field, and steps are taken to do so.

#### **Maintenance**

Once the tasks of establishment are mastered, the individual enters the maintenance phase of career development, generally between the ages of 46 and 65 years. During this phase, the individual engages in the tasks of holding, maintaining and innovating. At the outset of this phase, many people question whether they want to continue along their current path until retirement. If the decision is to discontinue, they re-enter the exploration phase once again, recycling through the phases until a path more congruent with their current identity and/or situation is manifest. However, should the person decide to continue along the same career trajectory, he or she proceeds to work through the tasks associated with this phase by determining what it is necessary to do in order to maintain, or hold onto, one's position in one's career or place of employment. This may involve updating skills or knowledge pertinent to one's career, as well as developing innovative means of meeting career challenges so as to remain current in one's field.

\*Super, D.E. (1990). A life-span, life-space approach to career development. In D. Brown, L. Brooks, & Associates (Eds.), *Career choice and development* (pp. 197-261). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.



## Appendix G

### Semi-Structured Interview Questions

1. What do you do for a living?
2. How did you arrive at this career?
3. Tell me about your process when you began thinking about career options as a youth.
4. When you were younger, did coming to terms with your sexual orientation influence your career path? If it did, in what ways did it influence your decisions?\*
5. Has your sexual orientation had any positive impact/influence on your career choice or path?
6. Which of the three phases of career development most accurately describes where you are right now?
7. Does being lesbian/gay influence your career at this stage? If so, how?\*
8. Is there anything further you would like to add?

\* If participant indicates negative impact, probe for examples/evidence of homophobia.

## Appendix H

### **Individual Participant Profiles by Phase of Career Development**

#### **Exploration age-typical participants**

“Sheila,” a 23 year-old woman, described becoming aware of same-sex attraction at about 11 years of age, and came out to those around her at 18. She was a third year undergraduate student studying in the area of humanities in a large urban setting at the time of her interview. Sheila described being “mostly” out at school/work and also with family and friends. She described having a “traumatic” experience of coming to terms with and coming out as a lesbian and also the ways in which her difficulties informed her education and career direction. At the time of her interview, Sheila was planning pursue a degree in the helping professions, and ascribed this decision largely to her experiences as a member of a minoritized and oppressed group.

”Imogen,” a 25 year-old student, was in her fourth year of an undergraduate degree when she was interviewed. She transferred into a degree in the helping professions from business-related studies for reasons related to sexual orientation. An important part of this decision was a desire to work with oppressed populations generally, and sexual minority persons in particular. Concerns about being safely “out” in the workplace were key in making this decision. Imogen described being “out” at school, and “mostly out” with family and friends, and had identified as lesbian to herself at around the age of 10, and to select others when she was 20 years-of-age. She was living in a large urban centre at the time of her interview.

“Lindsay,” a 23 year-old lesbian-identified woman was in her fifth year of an undergraduate degree in the social sciences. She described being “out” to both family and

friends and had been since the age of 20, four years after identifying as lesbian to herself. Lindsay planned to direct her studies and subsequent career toward social justice initiatives, and her experiences as a sexual minority was influential in her choice of study and career decision. At the time of her interview, Lindsay was studying in a large urban centre.

“Maxine,” a woman of 21, identified as lesbian to herself at the age of 14, and to those around her at about 18 years-of-age. She described being “mostly out” to friends and at school/work, and fully “out” to her family. At the time of her interview, she was in her first year of a degree in the humanities in a large urban centre. A key factor in Maxine’s educational and career plans was connection with and growth within environments she identified as highly “queer-positive.”

“Lori,” aged 21, identified as lesbian between the ages of 13 & 14, and “came out” to others as such between 17 & 18 years-of-age. She was a third-year undergraduate student in the humanities in a large city at the time she was interviewed. She described being “out” to family and friends, and chose her particular educational path because it permitted her to be likewise out among her peers. Lori described her early experiences with identifying and “coming out” as lesbian as particularly fraught in a number of ways, and found her experiences to be influential in terms of educational and career choice. She planned to incorporate her experience as a sexual minority into subsequent professional endeavours.

“Andy,” an 18 year-old first-year undergraduate student in the humanities, identified as gay at the age of 13 and “came out” to others at 15. As of his interview, he was completely “out” at school/work as well as among family and friends. At the time of his interview, Andy was living in a large urban centre, and planned to incorporate social justice/action into his

career plans post-graduation. He attributed this decision, in part, to issues related to difficult experience as a gay man.

“Isaac,” 22 year-old third-year undergraduate student in the faculty of Arts and Sciences at a university in a large city identified as gay at the age of 11, and came out to others between 15 and 16 years of age. At the time of his interview, he was completely “out” to friends and family and was somewhat “out” at school. Isaac described a desire to work with sexual minority youth once his studies were complete, and indicated comfort with and feelings of safety around this population as influential in making that choice.

“Paul,” a 20 year-old arts and science student, was in his first year of an undergraduate program in a large city. He described being “mostly out” to family, friends and amongst those in his program. Paul identified as gay between the ages of 12 and 13, and came out to select others around the age of 17 years. For him, the process of coming out influenced educational and career choices, as he noted that as a time of awareness about issues important to young lesbian and gay persons.

“Mark,” a 19 year-old, first-year undergraduate student in an arts and science program, identified to himself as gay at the age of 8, and to others when he was 12. At the time of his interview, Mark described being “mostly out” at school/work and completely “out” amongst family and friends. He described a tumultuous process of coming to terms with his sexual orientation, and felt this both delayed his ability to make career decisions and eventually informed them, particularly in terms seeking opportunities in contexts wherein he would feel safe as a sexual minority.

“Shawn” was a 23 year-old undergraduate student in his second year of a science degree at a university in a large city. He identified as gay around 7 or 8 years of age, and felt he came

to accept himself as such at around 19. Shawn described being out to those at school, but not to family and friends. Shawn planned to eventually find work in an environment wherein he could be openly gay and feel safe as such. This had become an important factor because of homophobia he had experienced in the workplace.

**Maintenance-aged participants in the exploration phase.** “Donna,” a 50 year-old woman, identified as lesbian, both to herself and others, when she was 20-21 years of age. She stated that she had been fully “out” to all around her from that time. She was living in a medium-sized city and was unemployed at the time of her interview, and had been for 3 years. Donna described feeling that she had never moved past the exploration phase of career development. Rather, she had pursued several advanced degrees but had never established in any of the areas she trained for. Although she did not report unduly harsh circumstances around coming to terms with her sexual orientation, she did note that the academic environment felt more equitable for her as a lesbian, and attributed repeated re-entry into educational milieus, in part, to this fact.

“Nancy,” a 57 year-old woman, described feeling attracted to the same sex from her earliest memory, but only came out to select others at 30. She was out to all around her at the time of her interview. Nancy was in the maintenance phase of a career as an administrative professional until seven months prior to participation in this study. Though she had worked in this job her entire adult life, after obtaining a general bachelor’s degree as a youth, she described feeling that she had not so much chosen the work as she had “happened” into it because of family affiliations. Nancy was closeted professionally throughout most of her career and described great dissatisfaction as a result. At the time of her interview, Nancy was searching for new career options in a large urban centre.

“Maggie,” a 51 year-old woman living in a large city, stated she “always knew” she was lesbian, and came out to others at 16. From that time, she had been “out” to all around her in both personal and professional contexts. Until 9 months before her interview, Maggie had been employed in retail for about 15 years. She left this position to explore new career options. Maggie had received some college training in fine arts in her youth, and had established herself as a freelance artist, while also working in retail. She eventually discontinued her artistic endeavours and continued working in the retail sector. Maggie described relying heavily on connections in the lesbian and gay community for work throughout her life. At the time of her interview, Maggie was planning to work with lesbian and gay seniors in an entrepreneurial capacity, and was again utilizing connections within the sexual minority community with which she was affiliated. At least in part, Maggie identified her past and present career choices as connected with her physical presentation, which she indicated was evidentiary of her sexual orientation.

“Judy,” a 49 year-old corporate senior executive in the maintenance phase of her career, had chosen to negotiate a settlement package less than one year prior to her interview, and was still unemployed at that time. She identified as lesbian, both to herself and others, at the age of 22. Judy had always been “out” at work and in her personal life and described having never experienced hardship as a result. Judy did not report any difficulties related to professional life and sexual orientation, but did indicate that, as she engaged in career exploration once again, she felt the need to be cognizant of potential discrimination on the part of prospective employers.

### **Establishment**

All 10 participants in the establishment phase were within the age-range typical for people in this phase of career development.

“Allison” was a 35 year-old woman who had identified as lesbian to herself at the age of 18, and to others by the time she was 20. She described being “out” in both personal and professional contexts. Trained as an educator, she had been established in her current position for nine years, and had been a teacher for a total of 11 years. Prior to her current appointment, Allison had experienced significant homophobia and discrimination in the workplace, and had taken time away from her work as an early career educator to consider whether she would continue in her field or explore other options. She eventually settled on the former, and as of her interview, was enjoying success as an out lesbian in a medium-sized urban setting.

“Phillip,” a 27 year-old IT professional, described always knowing he was gay, and identified as such to another at 19 years-of-age. As of his interview, he was closeted at work, and was “out” only to select friends, most of whom were also gay. During the exploration phase of his career, Phillip eliminated a previously planned career as a laborer, directing his efforts instead to a professional environment, as he felt he would be subjected to less homophobia in a corporate milieu. Phillip also pursued what he identified as an unpaid career as an athlete and subsequently as a coach. Although he described considerable success in this field, he also believed he was somewhat “stunted” as a result of a felt need to remain closeted because he was working with youth. For the purposes of this study, only the career for which Phillip was paid was included in the data analysis. Phillip resided in a small city at the time of his interview.

“Jonathan,” a 33 year-old hairstylist/business owner, first identified as gay to himself at 10 years of age, and to others at 16. He described himself as “very out” in both professional

and personal contexts. Jonathan, a member of his profession for 14 years, described his early career exploration as influenced by his sexual orientation insofar as he looked mostly toward options wherein he could feel safety and acceptance as an “out” gay man. He described settling on a career in hairdressing as a result of enjoyment of the pursuit as well as his perception of it as consonant with his sexual identity. As of his interview, Jonathan was living in a small city.

“Madison” was a 31 year-old helping professional who had recently completed a doctoral work in her field. She described herself by the terms “lesbian” and “queer” and had done so since the age of 16, but had told others she was lesbian at the age of 10, as a political statement against homophobia. Madison’s choice of careers was informed both by her position as a member of a minoritized group as well as by her political ideology, but not strictly by her identity as a sexual minority per se. As of her interview, she was working toward establishing herself in her field and was finding sexual orientation to be increasingly influential in terms of the importance of geographical location and access to work conditions equitable for a sexual minority person, both of which influenced her decision to live in a large city rather than a preferred rural location.

“Stephen,” a 34 year-old early-career service industry professional living in a large city, identified as gay to himself at 8 years of age, and to others at 18. He described being currently “out” in both personal and professional contexts. Stephen described a lengthy delay in career development as a result of thwarted career aspirations during his youth. Finding an industry wherein he could feel accepted and safe as a gay man was an important factor in past and present career choice for Stephen.



“Victor,” an early career service industry professional living in a rural community, was unable to recall at what age he identified to himself as gay, but did remember “coming out” to others between 15-16 years of age. At the time of his interview, Victor was fully “out” in both personal and professional contexts. He described sexual orientation as a key factor in his career development, particularly in terms of feeling limited to jobs stereotypically identified with gay males (e.g., hairdressing) during early career exploration. Seeking a community of other sexual minorities and environments that were accepting were also important factors in Victor’s career decision process. At the time of his interview, Victor resided in a small town.

“Lydia,” a 41 year-old entrepreneur in a large city, identified as lesbian at the age of 19, “came out” to friends at 21 and family at 25. As of the time of her interview, Lydia was out in both personal and professional contexts. After obtaining a college education, she established herself in a career as a public personality earlier in life, and achieved considerable success in her field. However, she had significant difficulties with homophobia and concerns about discrimination within her industry which, in part, led to her re-entering the exploration phase and choosing a new career as a small business owner during her 30s.

“Morgan,” a 32 year-old actress, identified as lesbian to both herself and others at the age of 21, and described being currently out to family and friends and “mostly out” to professional contacts. Morgan earned a university degree in her field, and has worked as an actress in several cities since. Throughout her career, Morgan has had a contentious relationship with her industry because of her sexuality, and she continues to struggle with concerns about homophobia. However, Morgan also used the fact of her sexuality as a means of determining the quality of professional relationships with others as well as whether a given environment was one which would afford her freedom to be “out” and open about her life. This had become

particularly important in recent years as Morgan was preparing to start a family as of the time of her interview.

“Nora,” a 45 year-old entrepreneur who was in the early stages of establishing herself as a personal coach/spiritual guide, came out to herself and others at the age of 15, and has been mostly out in personal and professional contexts as an adult. During her twenties, Nora was establishing herself in a corporate career as an IT professional after obtaining an advanced degree in computer science. She left this position, and also the workforce, for an extended period, due to what she described as the traumatizing effects of discrimination. Nora eventually retrained as a helping professional, and as a result of her difficult experience in her previous profession, she has directed her career in such a way as to maintain supportive professional connections with other sexual minorities.

“James” was a 45 year-old man who described having always known he was gay. He came out to others, including his family, at the age of 21. Professionally, he described being “mostly out.” James experienced considerable rejection as a youth as a result of his sexual orientation, and left prior to completing high school. He worked in human care services for a number of years, and though he found the experience mostly positive in that it satisfied a self-identified desire to nurture others, he also experienced considerable discrimination at work. James eventually chose another profession (Yoga instructor), and has had considerable success establishing himself in this field. James has lived in a large city throughout his adult life, and credits access to more accepting environments within this context as partly responsible for his success.

## **Maintenance**

Of the five participants in this group, four were within the age-range typical for people maintaining in their careers, while one was younger (a 33 year-old woman).

“Max,” a 48 year-old manager in a large corporation, identified as gay at the age of 12 years, and to others around 21 years-of-age. As of his interview, Max was fully “out” in both professional and work environments. When he was in the exploration phase of career development, Max foreclosed on a career in education due to concerns about homophobia and discrimination he witnessed with others in that field, and this resulted in a shift to another area of study (humanities) in which he felt more safety as a sexual minority. Max described regret over having to make this shift, and subsequent work and career choices, because of concerns for security over passion. As of his interview, Max was beginning to consider exploration of new career options he hoped would be more fulfilling. Max was living in a small city, and felt he had hit the “glass ceiling” in his organization, in part - he thought – because of his sexual orientation. Max also relayed a sense that, had he moved to a larger centre when he was younger, he may have increased opportunities for professional satisfaction and success.

“Darren,” a 54 year-old educator of 23 years, was aware that he was gay since the age of 6 and “came out” to select others at about 16 years-of-age. His initial career exploration activities focused on performing arts, an area he felt was both satisfying and accepting of sexual minorities. Darren initially wanted to train as an educator, but foreclosed on this option due to perceptions that it was not a safe environment for a gay man, citing lack of human rights legislation as a primary reason for not pursuing this option. After working a number of different jobs during his 20s, Darren eventually obtained a degree in education and became a teacher, and has found this career fulfilling. Darren credits much of his success as an educator to issues related to sexual orientation and freedom gained from feeling safe within his work

environment. Darren resides in a large city; a move he made as a younger man, due to a sense that he would have limited success as a gay man were he to remain in his small home town.

“Greg,” a 45 year-old trainer in a large corporate environment, identified as gay to himself at the age of 6, to friends at 18 and to his family at 20. After obtaining a bachelor’s degree in the humanities, he worked in a number of jobs before settling into his current position, where he has been for close to 10 years. Greg described always having been “out” in personal and professional contexts. He reported frequent moves to and from variously-sized urban environments when he was younger, stating a desire to find a “comfortable” community as a sexual minority person as well as more professional opportunity.

“Scott,” a 40 year-old educational administrator for the better part of a decade, became aware of primary same-sex attraction at the age of 13, and identified this way to select others at about 23 years-of-age. At the time of his interview, Scott was “out” with family and friends, but not in his work environment. As an early career educator, Scott described never feeling “safe” at work, but found that, once promoted to his current position, he felt more confident in the face of potential homophobia and discrimination.

Establishment-aged participant in the maintenance phase. “Sarah,” a 33 year-old helping professional within the elementary school system in a large city, identified to herself as lesbian at the age of 17, and was “outed” to others at the age of 18. She felt forced to leave home at that time, citing rejection by family and friends as the reason. Sarah described this experience as highly traumatic, and resulting in career choices based on necessity rather than true desire and ability. She eventually moved to a large city and established herself in her current career. Sarah described a sense that there is no longer opportunity to advance in her field, and so felt she was “maintaining” as of the time of her interview. Additionally, although she was “out” in

her personal sphere, Sarah described her status at work as guided by a “don’t ask, don’t tell” ethos. As of the time of her interview, Sarah was considering entering the exploration phase once again to search for options she would find more fulfilling as well as within which she could feel safe as an “out” lesbian.

## Appendix I

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