

## Patterns of Career and Identity Interference for Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Young Adults

HEATHER Z. LYONS, PhD

*Department of Psychology, Loyola University Maryland, Baltimore, Maryland, USA*

BRADLEY R. BRENNER, PhD

*District Psychotherapy Associates, Washington, DC, USA*

JENNIFER LIPMAN

*Loyola University Maryland, Baltimore, Maryland, USA*

*Researchers have hypothesized about the potentially competing demands of sexual identity development and career development (e.g., Chen, Stracuzzi, & Ruckdeschel, 2004; Fassinger, 1996; Morrow, 1997; Schmidt, 2004). In the present study, we explored these hypotheses focusing specifically on career decision making. Using cluster analysis, we identified three groups of lesbian, gay, and bisexual young adults who differed in terms of the conflict experienced between sexual identity and career development: career conflict group ( $n = 11$ ), sexual identity conflict group ( $n = 45$ ), and those who experienced low levels of conflict between the two domains ( $n = 71$ ). Differences were found between the clusters in levels of career decision making supports, career decision making barriers, and career decision making self-efficacy. Results tentatively suggest the importance of considering within-group differences when using Social Cognitive Career Theory to understand the career decision making of this population.*

**KEYWORDS** *career development, sexual identity, career identity, Social Cognitive Career Theory, career self-efficacy*

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Address correspondence to Heather Z. Lyons, Department of Psychology, 4501 N. Charles St., Loyola University, Baltimore, MD 21210, USA. E-mail: hzlyons@loyola.edu

Lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) young adults are at heightened risk for lack of vocational preparation (McFarland, 1998) perhaps because of the potentially unique experiences faced by this population in developing a vocational identity and choosing a career (e.g., Chung, 1995; Fassinger, 1996; Lent & Worthington, 2000; Morrow, 1997). Most notably, researchers hypothesized about the potentially competing demands of sexual identity development and career choice (e.g., Chen, Stracuzzi, & Ruckdeschel, 2004; Fassinger, 1996; Morrow, 1997; Schmidt, 2004). In this study, we explore potential patterns of career and sexual identity conflict and examine how career decision-making variables conceptualized using Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994) may vary based on these patterns. Despite the fact that SCCT is usually used to understand career choice content rather than global occupational functioning, we have chosen to focus on career decision making, identified as a global occupational process variable (Lent & Brown, 2006). Our focus on career decision making is influenced by many factors, including: (a) the relation of this variable to indicators of adjustment such as job satisfaction (e.g., O'Brien, 2003) and mental health (Herr, 1988; Spokane, 1989); (b) the relative lack of research on this population that makes difficult a greater level of specificity; and (c) the evidenced difference in career decidedness between LGB and heterosexual populations (Chung, 1995; Etringer, Hillerbrand, & Hetherington, 1990; Fassinger, 1995), which begs further inquiry.

## SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND CAREER DEVELOPMENT

Experts in the process of LGB sexual orientation identity development (e.g., D'Augelli, 1996; Fassinger, 1995; Hetrick & Martin, 1987) have suggested that the culturally stigmatized nature of a lesbian, gay, or bisexual sexual orientation has transformed LGB identity development into the "primary developmental task" (Hetrick & Martin, 1987, p. 25) for young lesbians, gay men, and bisexuals. It is believed that many major developmental tasks related to the sexual identity development of some lesbians, gay men and bisexuals are delayed until late adolescence and young adulthood because of cultural stigma and lack of modeling and social support (Garnets & Kimmel, 1993; Mohr & Fassinger, 2000).

However, late adolescence through early adulthood is also recognized as a time when identity develops across other domains, including vocational identity (e.g., Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994; Super, 1957). It has been speculated that because sexual identity development and vocational identity development are active during the same phase of life, these processes might exert influence on one another (Chen et al., 2004; Fassinger, 1996; Morrow, 1997). Therefore, the simultaneous processes of identity development have caused some scholars to hypothesize that the process

of vocational identity development might occur along a different trajectory when compared to heterosexual youth (Morrow, Gore, & Campbell, 1996; Fassinger, 1996). D'Augelli (1996) stated that "the late adolescent and early adulthood years are the most important years for identity exploration for lesbian, gay, and bisexual youth. The normative expectations of identity exploration (e.g., career or relationships) are more complex for these youth as they must simultaneously confront the processes of lesbian or gay identity development" (p. 280). Therefore, it seems that these scholars have proposed a "competing demands model" or what Hetherington (1991) entitled the "bottleneck effect," where the energy utilized for one developmental process (e.g., sexual identity development) may not be available for the other developmental processes (e.g., career decision making; Chen et al., 2004; Schmidt, 2004).

Moreover, LGB individuals constitute the only group of people who face legalized discrimination at work (e.g., lack of same-sex partner benefits, lack of workplace and/or state policies prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation; Biaggio, Orchard, Larson, Petrino, & Mihara, 2003). For some, discrimination within particular jobs or occupational categories might mean that career and sexual identity will conflict. Failure to pass the Employment Nondiscrimination Act provides an example of the conflict that may exist for those wishing to integrate their career and sexual identities (e.g., being out at work when that workplace is not a safe environment; Pope et al., 2004).

Considering this research on the potential conflict between sexual orientation and career identities, we hypothesize that four clusters will result among the sample of young LGB participant in our study: (a) a sexual identity conflict cluster who will report that their sexual identity conflicts with career development tasks; (b) a career conflict cluster who will report that engagement in career-related tasks disrupts exploration of sexual identity; (c) a high conflict cluster who will report both types of conflict; and (d) a low conflict cluster who will report low levels of both types of conflict.

## SOCIAL COGNITIVE CAREER THEORY

In addition to exploring whether different clusters of LGB young adults exist as defined by sexual identity and career conflict, we were also interested in exploring whether those individuals in these clusters would vary in their career decision-making experiences. Therefore, we considered career decision-making variables outlined in SCCT (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). SCCT grew, in part, out of the attempts of Hackett and Betz (1981) to use self-efficacy, individuals' context-specific beliefs about their ability (Bandura, 1986), to explain women's career development (see Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1996). Besides self-efficacy, SCCT theorists incorporated other

social cognitive variables (e.g., outcome expectations, interests, goals) to describe three elements of career and academic development: interests, choice, and performance.

Most striking about this SCCT is the consideration of the dynamic interplay between person, behavior, and environment; that is, the theory recognizes the ability of individuals to be active agents within their environments while considering the impact of environmental supports for and barriers to individuals' behaviors and beliefs. Because of this, there are many possibilities for interventions based on SCCT research, particularly for those populations for whom supports and barriers might be particularly relevant in the context of vocational identity development and career decision-making (Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994, 1996).

From SCCT's first inception, the authors considered its relevance to diverse populations, namely, women and people of color (e.g., Lent & Worthington, 2000). Therefore, it is not surprising that efforts to validate SCCT with diverse populations have provided multicultural support for the theory. SCCT has been used successfully to explain various aspects of career development for people of color (e.g., Fouad & Smith, 1996; Gainor & Lent, 1998; Tang, Fouad, & Smith, 1999) and women (e.g., Nauta, Epperson, & Kahn, 1998). Validation of this theory with LGB populations has been slower to follow. While conceptual pieces have been important in outlining the possible relevance of SCCT to LGB individuals, only one empirical study, a dissertation focused on bisexual men and women, could be located (Mancuso, 2005), which will be discussed below. One of our goals then was to help future researchers utilizing SCCT understand potential within-group differences in the career decision-making experiences of LGB young adults.

### Social Cognitive Career Theory and Lesbian, Gay, and Bisexual Individuals

Researchers in the area of LGB career development have used SCCT to formulate tentative hypotheses about the unique developmental experiences of LGB individuals as they relate to career development (Morrow, 1997; Morrow et al., 1996). We will utilize this general conceptual literature to make hypotheses about career decision making specifically. Morrow both individually and with colleagues pointed to the need for comprehensive investigations of the SCCT model with LGB samples because of the potential for this research to yield results that diverge from previous SCCT research with samples that are presumed to be predominately heterosexual. When assertions are made about potential differences that might emerge when testing this model with an LGB sample, experts highlight the relevance of potentially population-specific barriers (e.g., Keeton, 2002), generic as well as unique supports (e.g., Nauta, Saucier, & Woodard, 2001), self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and interests to a lesser degree. While

in the present study we are not able to determine whether differences exist between LGB and heterosexual individuals, we hope to help other researchers and clinicians understand potential within-group differences that might exist for LGB individuals in terms of various SCCT career decision-making variables. We review existing research with LGB individuals using the SCCT.

#### SUPPORTS AND BARRIERS

The career-related supports and barriers experienced by LGB individuals have probably received more attention than other variables within the SCCT model. In terms of barriers, researchers have suggested that this social cognitive variable is relevant to this population because of the high recognition of barriers in LGB people's work experiences (Keeton, 2002; Van Puymbroeck, 2002). Keeton noted that 76% of the gay men and 87% of the lesbians in her sample reported experiencing career-related barriers. Sexual orientation barriers (e.g., having a boss or supervisor who is biased against gay men or lesbians) ranked second in terms of experience barriers. Other barriers included multiple role conflict, sex discrimination, inadequate preparation, and lack of confidence. Keeton named career dissatisfaction as the highest ranked barrier for gay men and lesbians. Career dissatisfaction is not traditionally conceptualized as a barrier in the SCCT model but rather as an indicator of work adjustment. However, career dissatisfaction might be evidence of the barriers that may exist for this population.

Other research on workplace discrimination has demonstrated the relevance of barriers in the work experiences of LGB men and women. In fact, Croteau's (1996) review of research on the work experiences of LGB employees revealed that between 25% and 66% of LGB employees reported discrimination at work based on their sexual orientation. However, this estimate might be low because of biased samples that draw predominantly from states that prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation and because of the fact that many lesbians and gay men choose not to reveal their sexual orientation at work (Ragins & Cornwell, 2001). In fact, Fassinger (1995) summarized research indicating that two-thirds of lesbians had come out to their employers and only one-third of lesbians had come out to their coworkers suggesting knowledge of barriers or the potential conflict between sexual and career identities.

In terms of the real impact of workplace heterosexism on the work experiences of LGB employees, a relationship between workplace heterosexism and various workplace outcome variables including job satisfaction, psychological distress, organizational commitment, and occupational choice has been reported (Chung, 2001; Lyons, Brenner, & Fassinger, 2005; Ragins & Cornwell, 2001; Waldo, 1999). This research, particularly the research

on those LGB workers who withhold their sexual orientation at work and research suggesting that some experience negative consequences as a result of being perceived as gay at work, suggests that differences in perceived barriers might vary by cluster. We hypothesize that those who are experiencing a high degree of conflict posed by their sexual orientation in developing a career identity, those in the high conflict and sexual identity conflict cluster, will report the highest levels of career decision-making barriers.

While the presence of barriers undoubtedly is worth investigation with LGB young adults, the presence or absence of supports is also another important variable to consider. As Betz (1989) suggested when conceptualizing the phenomenon of the null environment hypothesis, the lack of support for career and academic aspirations in the face of societal disadvantages must be addressed as well. Research pointed to the significance of protective factors or supports in the academic and career decision making of LGB students (Nauta et al., 2001). More specifically, LGB youth reported the importance of LGB role models (i.e., supports) when making academic and career-related decisions, and, while LGB students perceived having more role models, they perceived others in their environment as less supportive than indicated by their heterosexual peers. By way of an integrating or normalizing function, from the foregoing, we would expect that those who experience adequate levels of support would likely be those who also report low levels of conflict between their career development and sexual orientation identity development. We hypothesize that those participants in the low conflict cluster will report the highest level of career decision-making supports.

#### SELF-EFFICACY AND OUTCOME EXPECTATIONS

Research on the self-efficacy and outcome expectations of LGB individuals is sparse. Mancuso's (2005) dissertation confirmed the hypothesized relation between self-efficacy and outcome expectations for this population. However, self-efficacy alone displayed a relatively weak relation to interests and choice intentions compared with outcome expectations. Mancuso also found that these results were relative to the occupational category under investigation; that is, lesbians and gay men reported greater self-efficacy and outcome expectations for opposite sex-typed careers than for same-sex typed careers compared with heterosexual men and women. These differences between LGB individuals and their heterosexual peers may portend variability within the LGB population.

In terms of mean levels of self-efficacy, Morrow and colleagues (1996) suggested that because lesbian and gay children might be more likely to become interested in opposite sex-typed careers from a young age than heterosexual children, they would receive negative messages and a lack of

modeling, which would support the development of self-efficacy in these careers. Therefore, they implied that LGB individuals might display lower levels of self-efficacy than their heterosexual peers. We hypothesized that this might particularly be the case for those who experience their sexual identity as a source of conflict with their career. Specifically, we hypothesize that those in the high conflict and sexual identity conflict clusters, those clusters that are most aware of the conflict that sexual identity might create for the development of their career identity, might report the lowest levels of career decision-making self-efficacy.

Other than the results offered by Mancuso (2005) no empirical work exists that can offer guidance in terms of the role of outcome expectations in SCCT model for LGB individuals. However, Morrow et al. (1996) offered some propositions. Specifically, they suggested that the outcome expectations of LGB individuals might be particularly vulnerable to depression in the presence of perceived discrimination. Furthermore, they predicted that outcome expectations might be even more important in the prediction of interests than self-efficacy in the face of discrimination because the question for these LGB individuals becomes not “Can I do it?” but “What will happen if I do?” (p. 141). Therefore, we hypothesized that those in our sample who are more aware of the possible conflict posed by their sexual identity (i.e., those in the high conflict and sexual identity conflict clusters) might report the lowest levels of career decision-making outcome expectations.

#### INTERESTS

Mancuso's (2005) dissertation confirmed the hypothesized relation between self-efficacy and outcome expectations and the ability of these two variables to predict interests. Furthermore, these variables, self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and interests each directly predicted choice intentions for LGB individuals. In terms of making predictions about mean differences among our hypothesized clusters, the propositions of Morrow et al. (1996) cited above provide guidance. That is, because of the proposed influences on self-efficacy and outcome expectations we hypothesize that conflict salience might indirectly influence career decision-making interests through the impact on self-efficacy and outcome expectations. Specifically, we hypothesize those who report high levels of conflict (i.e., high conflict, sexual identity conflict, career conflict clusters) will report lower levels of career decision-making interest than those in the low conflict cluster.

#### DECIDEDNESS

In terms of career development, a critical point of inquiry for this population is their level of career decidedness. Empirical and conceptual literatures indicate that differences exist in the levels of career indecision between LGB and heterosexual populations (Chung, 1995; Etringer et al., 1990; Fassinger,

1995). This research found that gay men tended to have the highest levels of career indecision, heterosexual women followed, and lesbians tended to have the lowest levels. Furthermore, heterosexual women, followed by gay men reported the highest levels of career-choice dissatisfaction (Etringer et al., 199). While this research provided needed baseline data on the relative levels of career indecision, within-group research, as planned in the proposed study, can begin to identify why between-group differences exist as well as provide clinicians and researchers with a more nuanced understanding of the career decision making of LGB individuals. We hypothesize that those experiencing conflict (i.e., sexual identity conflict, career conflict, high conflict clusters) might report the lowest level of career decision-making decidedness and those in the low conflict group will report the highest levels of decidedness because of the previous explanations of competing demands.

## METHOD

### Participants

We surveyed 184 individuals who identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual from 27 states. Fifty-four cases were deleted because of incomplete data or repeat submissions of data, resulting in a final sample of 127 participants. Additionally, because of our interest in exploring the identity processes of young adults, we deleted three remaining cases because they were over the age of 30. Participants in the final sample ranged in age from 17 to 29 years ( $M = 22.43$ ,  $SD = 2.63$ ). Women ( $n = 82$ ) comprised 64.6% of the sample, men ( $n = 40$ ) were 31.5% of the sample and those who identified as transgender ( $n = 5$ ) were 3.9% of the sample. The sample was made up of those who identified as gay ( $n = 41$ , 32.3%), lesbian ( $n = 34$ , 26.8%), and bisexual ( $n = 27$ , 21.3%). Twenty-five participants (19.7%) selected "other" as their sexual orientation with most of those participants ( $n = 17$ ) identifying "queer" as their preferred designation. When asked to indicate their highest level of education completed, most participants indicated some four-year college ( $n = 48$ , 37.8%), some graduate school ( $n = 28$ , 22%), four-year college degree ( $n = 26$ , 20.5%), or high school ( $n = 11$ , 8.7%). Most of our participants were employed ( $n = 106$ , 83.5%) and were working part-time ( $n = 58$ , 45.7%). Most of our sample were also full-time students ( $n = 85$ , 66.9%). Participants were given the option of selecting more than one racial-ethnic category. An overwhelming percentage of the sample identified as White (88.2%;  $n = 112$ ). Participants also identified as Latino/a ( $n = 8$ , 6.3%), Native American/Native Alaskan ( $n = 8$ , 6.3%), Black/African descended ( $n = 7$ , 5.5%), multiracial ( $n = 6$ , 4.7%), Asian American/Pacific Islander ( $n = 4$ , 3.1%), other ( $n = 3$ , 2.4%), and Middle Eastern ( $n = 1$ , .8%).



## Measures

This study necessitated the creation of some domain-specific measures or modification of previously published measures. Previously established measures also were utilized in this study. When measures were newly constructed or modified, we relied on relevant literature to create items. As evidenced below, all of the measures utilized in this study displayed internal consistency. Validity was established with the resulting theoretically consistent correlations. Finally, experts in LGB psychology and SCCT reviewed and provided feedback on the measures. Such actions have been taken previously in SCCT research because of the need for domain-specific measures (see Fouad, Smith, & Enochs, 1997; Hansen, 1997).

### CAREER DECISION-MAKING BARRIERS

Career decision-making barriers were measured with nine items from a modified sexual orientation discrimination job/career scale (Keeton, 2002). Items were modified, where appropriate, to assess barriers to one's career decision-making process. Respondents rated their level of agreement with statements on a 5-point Likert scale. A sample item reads, "Feel as though my choices of careers are limited because of my sexual orientation." Keeton reported adequate levels of internal consistency ( $\alpha = .88$ ). Internal consistency for the modified measure in the present study was adequate ( $\alpha = .80$ ).

### CAREER DECISION-MAKING SUPPORTS

Perceptions of career decision-making supports was assessed using nine items from an adapted measure of contextual career supports (Lent, Brown, Schmidt, et al., 2003). The original measure of contextual supports assessed university students' level of perceived environmental support (e.g., support from family, friends, institutions, etc.) for pursuing an engineering degree. It was modified for use with the current population and with the target behavior of career decision making. Participants indicated the likelihood of experiencing support on a 5-point scale (1 = *not at all likely*; 5 = *extremely likely*). A sample item asks participants to indicate how likely it is for them to receive "Support for a career decision from important people in your life." The original measure demonstrated adequate levels of internal consistency ( $\alpha = .92$ ) and theory consistent relationships with self-efficacy and career barriers (Lent, Brown, Schmidt, et al., 2003). In the present study, the internal consistency reliability of the modified scale was .79.

### CAREER DECISION-TO-LGB IDENTITY INTERFERENCE

Career decision-to-LGB identity conflict was measured using six items from a newly constructed scale. Item development followed conventions established in the interrole (e.g., work-family) conflict literature (Netemeyer,

Boles, & McMurrian, 1996; O'Driscoll, Ilgen, & Hildreth, 1992). Thus, a scale was constructed so that respondents would report their level of agreement with statements that indicate that the demands of developing a career choice interfered with developing a gay, lesbian, or bisexual identity. Sample items read, "Establishing my career plans has meant that I have little time to think about my gay/lesbian/bisexual identity" and "My career has been more important than my sexual orientation identity." Respondents indicated their level of agreement on a 5-point Likert scale. Internal consistency reliability in the present study was  $\alpha = .88$ .

#### LGB IDENTITY-TO-CAREER DECISION INTERFERENCE

In a fashion similar to the previous interrole conflict scale, the LGB identity-to-career decision interference construct was reflected by six items from a newly construct scale. This scale was constructed so that respondents would indicate their level of agreement with statements that indicate that the demands of developing a gay, lesbian, or bisexual identity interfered with developing a career choice. Sample items read, "My sexual orientation identity has been more important than selecting a career" and "I've put selecting a career on hold (for example, not really thinking much about my future career) while I develop as a gay, lesbian or bisexual person." Respondents indicated their level of agreement on a 5-point Likert Scale. Internal consistency reliability for this scale was adequate ( $\alpha = .81$ ).

#### CAREER DECISION-MAKING SELF-EFFICACY

Betz, Klein, and Taylor's (1996) Career Decision-Making Self-Efficacy Scale-Short Form was used to measure career decision-making self-efficacy. Respondents were asked to indicate their level of confidence in their ability to complete career decision-related tasks. For example, respondents were asked to rate their level of confidence to "decide what you value most in an occupation." As recommended by Betz and Taylor (2001), respondents indicated their confidence on a scale from 1 (*no confidence*) to 5 (*complete confidence*). It should be noted that higher levels of internal consistency have been reported with a 5-point response continuum as compared to the original 10-point response continuum, and has demonstrated theory consistent relationships with career indecision and certainty (Betz & Taylor, 2001). The total scale was used in the present study ( $\alpha = .93$ ).

#### CAREER DECISION-MAKING OUTCOME EXPECTATIONS

Outcome expectations were evaluated using 11 items from a modified outcome expectations measure. The original measure was used to assess college students' positive expectations that they held about graduating with a degree in engineering (Lent, Brown, Schmidt, et al., 2003). The current measure

modified items to assess participants' beliefs about the positive outcomes of having come to a career decision. For instance, participants rated their level of agreement with the item "Choosing a career likely will allow me to get respect from other people." Level of agreement was indicated on a 10-point scale (0 = *strongly disagree*, 9 = *strongly agree*). The original scale demonstrated adequate level of internal consistency ( $\alpha = .91$ ) and theory consistent significant correlations to self-efficacy and interest (Lent, Brown, Schmidt, et al., 2003). In the present study adequate internal consistency reliability also was achieved ( $\alpha = .88$ ).

#### CAREER DECISION-MAKING INTEREST

Interest in making a career decision was measured using six items from a newly constructed scale. The measure was designed to tap participants' level of interest in a series of career decision-making activities. For example, potential respondents were asked to rate their level of interest in "exploring my career options." They will indicate their level of interest on a 5-point scale (1 = *very low interest*; 5 = *very high interest*). The Cronbach's alpha coefficient was .88.

#### CAREER DECISION-MAKING GOAL ATTAINMENT

The decidedness subscale of the Career Decision Profile (Jones, 1989) was used to measure career decision. Respondents rated their level of agreement on two items using an 8-point scale (1 = *strongly disagree*, 8 = *strong agree*). The two items are "I have an occupational field in mind that I want to work in (for example, medicine, agriculture, management, or the performing arts)," and "I have decided on the occupation that I want to enter (for example, electrical engineer, nurse, cook)." The decidedness subscale has demonstrated adequate levels of internal consistency ( $\alpha = .85$ ), and theory consistent relationships with other measures of career decidedness and career salience (Jones, 1989). Internal consistency reliability in the present study was  $\alpha = .81$ .

#### Procedure

Data for this study were collected online from a volunteer sample of gay, lesbian, and bisexual participants. Participants were recruited through requests for participation from 18- to 25-year-old young adults who identified as gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Participation was solicited via electronic listservs with a gay and lesbian community focus (e.g., Yahoo groups), by word of mouth, or advertisements on Web sites with a predominantly gay and lesbian audience. The data collection Web site was constructed so that participants first viewed a welcome page with general information about the study. After the welcome page they were directed to an informed

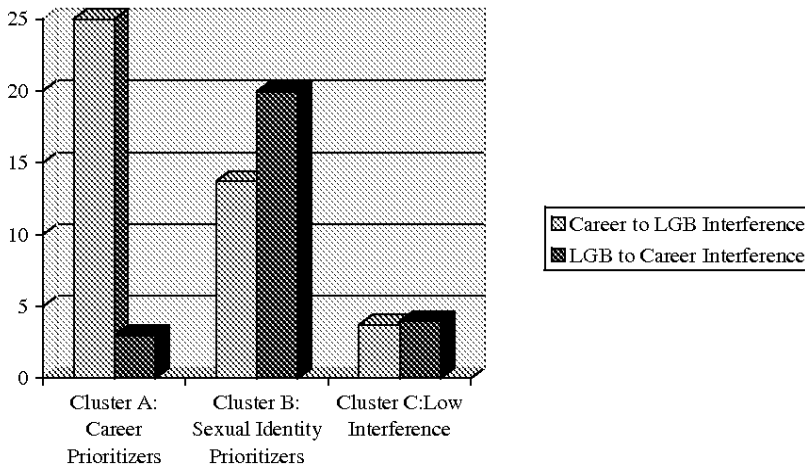
consent page. If they agreed to participate, they were taken to a page that included the previously described questionnaires. Participant responses were sent via the internet to the Web hosting computer as data packets and backup email. Only the authors had access to the password protected data. Participation was estimated to take 30 minutes. We screened participants' IP (internet protocol) addresses, deleting reoccurring IP addresses to attempt to eliminate duplicate responses.

## RESULTS

See Table 1 for means, standard deviations, ranges, and intercorrelations of the study variables. Cluster analysis was employed to test our first hypothesis, in which we predicted that four clusters would emerge in the patterning of LGB young adults' experience of conflict between career and sexual identities. As suggested by Gordon (1999), we identified the number of clusters through a hierarchical cluster analysis before running a K-means cluster analysis. Initially, the sexual identity conflict and career conflict scores were entered into a hierarchical cluster analysis, specifying Ward's (1963) method and the squared Euclidian distance measure in SPSS 11. Ward's (1963) method was identified by Borgen & Barnett (1987) as "...one of the more effective methods for recovering underlying structure..." (p. 465). Examination of the agglomeration schedule indicated that retention of a four-cluster (as hypothesized), three- or two-cluster solution was appropriate. Next, a nonhierarchical K-means cluster analysis was run specifying a four-cluster solution, again in SPSS 11.0. However, results of this analysis suggested that two of the clusters were small ( $n < 10$ ) and the resulting clusters were not readily interpretable in light of previous research. A K-means cluster analysis was also run with a two-cluster solution. This solution resulted in adequate sizes (with 38 and 89 participants each).<sup>1</sup> However, the resulting clusters were not conceptually consistent with the preceding literature. Moreover, further reduction of the number of clusters from three to two runs the risk of obscuring potentially important within-group distinctions. Because the three-cluster solution was closer in rationale to the literature and allowed for retention of potentially meaningful within-group differences, we used this solution in our final analyses. Therefore, a K-means cluster analysis also was run inputting a three-cluster solution. A solution converged in four iterations, resulting in 11 participants in Cluster A (8.66%), 45 participants in Cluster B (35.43%), and 71 participants in Cluster C (55.91%). These clusters are described below and depicted in Figure 1.

### Cluster A: Career Conflict

This group reported high levels of career-to-sexual identity interference (2.62 standard deviations above the mean score of the total sample) and low levels



**FIGURE 1** K-means cluster group career-sexual identity conflict patterns.

of sexual identity-to-career interference (2.37 standard deviations below the total sample mean score).

### Cluster B: Sexual Identity Conflict

Cluster B reported that their sexual identity development interfered with their career planning. Their levels of sexual identity-to-career interference were high (2.10 standard deviations above the mean score of the total sample) and they reported moderate levels of career-to-sexual identity interference (.23 standard deviations above the mean score of the total sample).

### Cluster C: Low Conflict

Our largest group reported low levels of each type of interference. In terms of career-to-sexual identity interference this group was 1.77 standard deviations below the mean of the total sample. This group’s sexual identity-to-career interference score was 2.15 standard deviations below the total sample’s mean score.

## Comparison of Cluster Profiles

### DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES

We compared the clusters for differences in demographic variables using chi-square analyses and ANOVAs. Differences did not arise by sex ( $\chi^2(4, N = 127) = 2.65, p = .62$ ), age ( $F(2, 124) = 1.22, p = .30$ ), level of education

**TABLE 1** Means, Standard Deviations, Ranges, and Intercorrelations for Study Variables

	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	Actual Range	2	3	4	5	6	7	8
1. Decidedness	12.12	3.13	3–16	.22*	.42**	.34**	.25**	.01	-.20*	.03
2. Interest	23.87	4.23	11–30	—	.33**	.38**	.25**	-.02	.12	-.25**
3. Self-efficacy	85.17	13.12	44–110	—	—	.58**	.46**	-.12	-.08	-.32**
4. Outcome expectations	77.36	10.73	32–99	—	—	—	.47**	.02	.04	-.26**
5. Supports	27.09	4.84	12–35	—	—	—	—	-.22*	-.18*	-.22*
6. Barriers	19.49	6.26	9–37	—	—	—	—	—	.09	.37**
7. Career to LGB interference	12.49	5.42	6–29	—	—	—	—	—	—	-.03
8. LGB to career interference	11.98	3.80	6–23	—	—	—	—	—	—	—

Note. \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ .

( $F(2,123) = 1.73, p = .18$ , employment status ( $\chi^2(4, N = 127) = 3.27, p = .54$ ), or student status ( $\chi^2(4, N = 127) = 4.09, p = .36$ ).

#### SOCIAL COGNITIVE CAREER VARIABLES

We used ANOVAs to assess potential differences in career decision-making variables by cluster (Table 2). Significant differences emerged by cluster on the following variables: career decision-making supports ( $F(2, 124) = 3.98, p = .02$ ), career decision-making barriers ( $F(2, 124) = 3.71, p < .03$ ), and career decision-making self-efficacy ( $F(2, 1124) = 5.35, p < .01$ ). Bonferroni post hoc comparisons revealed that Cluster A, the career conflict cluster and Cluster B, the sexual identity cluster, reported significantly lower levels of supports than Cluster C, the low conflict cluster. Significant differences among mean scores also existed in terms of barriers between Cluster B and Cluster C, with Cluster C reporting significantly lower levels of barriers. Clusters A and B reported significantly lower levels of self-efficacy than Cluster C.

**TABLE 2** Cluster Group Means and Standard Deviations on Social Cognitive Career Variables

SCCT variable	Cluster A: career conflict ( $n = 11$ )		Cluster B: sexual identity conflict ( $n = 45$ )		Cluster C: low conflict ( $n = 71$ )		$F(2, 124)$	Bonferroni post hoc tests ( $p < .05$ )
	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>		
Decidedness	12.64	2.46	11.24	3.32	12.59	3.01	2.78	
Interest	25.18	3.06	23.16	3.95	24.11	4.51	1.30	
Self-efficacy	78.36	9.80	80.24	13.68	87.06	11.87	5.35**	A,B<C
Outcome expectations	77.73	14.48	76.13	9.41	78.08	10.96	.46	
Supports	25.00	4.71	25.98	5.69	28.11	4.01	3.98*	A,B<C
Barriers	19.82	6.78	21.40	5.22	18.23	6.55	3.71*	C<B

Note. \*\* $p < .01$ , \* $p < .05$ .

Significant differences among the means did not emerge by cluster for outcome expectations related to career decision making ( $F(2, 124) = .46$ ,  $p = .63$ ), career decision-making interest ( $F(2, 124) = 1.30$ ,  $p = .28$ ), nor career decidedness ( $F(2, 124) = 2.79$ ,  $p = .07$ ).

## DISCUSSION

The present study explored the potentially competing significance of sexual and career identities for LGB young adults and highlights the need to understand within-group differences among SCCT career decision-making variables. Using cluster analysis, three clusters were identified that differed vis-à-vis the degree of conflict experienced between sexual and career identities. One cluster, the career conflict group, experienced a high level of career conflict. They indicated that career-related tasks left little energy for exploring their sexual identity. They experienced low levels of sexual identity conflict. The sexual identity conflict group reported that exploration of their sexual identity interrupted their engagement in career development. They reported moderate levels of career conflict. The final and largest cluster, the low conflict group, experienced low levels of both types of conflict.

These results are partial support of our originally hypothesized four groups. More importantly, the results are suggestive that for some LGB youth, conflict exists between developing a career and developing a sexual orientation identity. These are the first empirical evidence that support the contention of many theorists (e.g., Chen et al., 2004; Fassinger, 1996; Morrow, 1997; Schmidt, 2004) that conflict exists among these developmental milestones. For some, career development takes precedence, for others it is one's sexual orientation identity. Interestingly, the existence of a high conflict cluster (e.g., career and sexual orientation identity both exert) was absent from our findings. While this may be an artifact of our sample characteristics or size, it may also be the case that conflict among these developmental milestones is more or less mutually exclusive. If these results were to be replicated, it is indicative of a pattern in which LGB young adults may "lead" with one type of conflict as a predominant style of negotiating these milestones.

That most of our sample reported low levels of conflict between their sexual and career identities runs contrary to the LGB young adult career development literature's hypotheses about the potential interface between sexual and career identities (Chen et al., 2004; Fassinger, 1996; Morrow, 1997). It would seem that, although for some LGB youth conflict between sexual and career identities do exist, it is not the norm, at least as reflected in the current sample. It was more common for our study's participants to indicate that among these two variables, there is a type of equilibrium, or lack of competition between these developmental processes. This may be reflective of changing cultural and society stigmas associated with a

minority sexual orientation, thereby reducing, to some degree, the psychological resources required for navigating one's LGB identity. It may also be indicative of changing attitudes related to the timing of developing a defined vocational identity.

Recent studies have shown that arriving at a vocational identity does not exert much psychological press on individuals until later in their 20s (Arnett, 2004). This state of affairs would minimize career and sexual orientation identity conflict since earlier acceptance of sexual orientation identity and later development of a stable vocational identity might mean that these processes might not temporally overlap for most LGB young adults.

However, for those who did experience conflict in one form or the other, important differences emerged. Those who were in the low conflict cluster reported more career decision-making self-efficacy and supports than those in the sexual identity and career conflict clusters. These patterns of mean differences on important SCCT career decision-making variables among the clusters point to the importance of self-efficacy and the presence of support as potentially protective factors. From these results it would seem justifiable to suspect that for LGB young adults for whom career is more important than developing a positive sexual orientation identity, deficits of self-efficacy beliefs and supports may be present.

Considered from another perspective, perhaps this suggests a group who is attending to their careers to such a high degree because they are experiencing career difficulties. It may be suggestive of a compensatory or psychologically defensive strategy not working at optimal levels. Over focusing on career (to the detriment of other aspects of one's self) may be related to devaluation of one's career decision abilities given the exceedingly high hoped for benefits of paying it such high attention. In essence, it may be the case that holding one's career above another important aspect of one's life may be linked to perceptions of incompetence, and a sense that one has fewer available supportive resources.

Furthermore, those in the low conflict cluster reported fewer barriers than those in the sexual identity conflict group. These results indicate the potential impact of vocational barriers for LGB young adults. Although our study cannot speak directly to causative factors, it is striking that for those in conflict over their sexual orientation identities there also exists a relatively higher presence of perceived barriers, as compared to their low conflict peers. We speculate that the perception of barriers may influence vocational or sexual orientation development in such a way as to incite a sense of competing demands, and that the presence of barriers may lead some to adopt a strategy of valuing sexual orientation over career as a way to best utilize resources to overcome barriers.

In summary, our findings suggest the adjustment of those in the low conflict cluster. Experiencing low levels of conflict between sexual and career identities suggests that LGB young adults will also experience relatively low levels of career-decision making barriers as well as high levels



of career decision making supports and self-efficacy. The impact of these mean level differences might be further researched in studies that examine the relation between these variables in the context of SCCT.

Contrary to the predictions of Morrow et al. (1996), our study suggested that career decision-making self-efficacy was more likely to vary as a result of conflict between sexual and career identity than career decision-making outcome expectations. Although when considering our results, we cannot make conclusions about the differential ability of self-efficacy and outcome expectations to predict interests, our findings suggested that self-efficacy, as compared to outcome expectations, were more sensitive to the salience of conflict between these two life spheres. Therefore, future research should continue to attend to differences between "Can I do it?" and "What will happen if I do?"

### Directions for Future Research

Future research should be conducted that examines the extent to which sexual and career identities might facilitate each other. For example, it is possible that attention to one's sexual identity might facilitate career identity as one engages in the LGB community, finding role models and building a network of employment contacts. For example, Adams (1997) reported that for some gay men the decision to become a flight attendant allowed access to a critical mass of other gay men, assisted with acculturation in the gay community, and led to increased self-esteem. Relatedly, reflection on one's career identity might occur in the context of greater self-exploration including the integration of one's sexual identity.

The possible relevance of sexual identity and career identity conflict to other aspects of career development (other than decision making) might be an interesting point of inquiry for future researcher. Job satisfaction might be impacted for those who must subvert one identity in favor of the other (e.g., those who must be closeted to remain in a job they enjoy). Similarly, job search and workplace entry behaviors might be impact by the interface of career and sexual identities. Also, LGB young adults' interest in particular careers might be impacted by the way and the extent to which career and sexual identities interface.

Finally, the stability of the cluster solution in this sample should be addressed in future research by validating this cluster solution with a separate sample.

### Limitations

With regard to limitations of this study, the composition of the sample lessens generalizability. The sample in the present study was biased in terms of educational attainment. This sample was well-educated compared with the national average and, therefore, may not represent the workplace attitudes and experiences of LGB young adults more generally. In the future,

attempts to survey LGB young adults representing a greater range of education levels should be attained. Alternatively, research can focus on LGB individuals obtaining lower levels of education.

The present study also was limited in its inclusion of LGB employees who were also people of color. Future researchers should aim to recruit larger numbers of people of color in their samples so that determination of racial/ethnic category effects can be estimated. This is particularly important because of research suggesting that the effects of various identities (e.g., race and sexual orientation) are interactive rather than just additive (Van Puymbroeck, 2002).

Additionally, participants in the present study self-selected into the study (i.e., they were sent an email announcement or saw an advertisement on a LGB-specific listserv and chose to participate). As with all data collection methods that do not employ random sampling, we risked introducing bias into our results because of the possibility that data gathered reflects the responses of those who have particularly strong feelings toward career decidedness and sexual and career identities conflicts. However, examination of the resulting ranges of study variables suggested adequate variability was obtained.

A final limitation in terms of our sample is that in terms of the research cited on career and sexual identity conflict, adolescence is recognized by career (e.g., Super, 1957) and sexual identity theorists (e.g., D'Augelli, 1996) as pivotal period in identity development along these two trajectories. The range in age of the present study was broader with only 24.6% of our sample below the age of 20. Therefore, it is possible that, in the present study, we failed to capture the point at which conflict between the two identities might be most salient and able to exert an influence on various aspects of career development.

A final general limitation is the recognition that many of our measures were adapted or constructed without rigorous tests of reliability and validity. Although there is precedence in SCCT research (e.g., Fouad et al., 1997; Hansen, 1997), it does lessen our ability to definitively make conclusions about the results occurring in this research. Fortunately, in the present study, preliminary evidence suggests adequate reliability and validity as evidenced by coefficient alphas and theory consistent relations between variables. However, ideally, these psychometric properties would be established prior to use in hypothesis testing (Lent & Brown, 2006).

## NOTE

1. In the two-cluster solution, the first cluster members indicated high levels of career-to-sexual identity interference (1.28 standard deviations above the total sample mean) and moderate levels of sexual identity-to-career interference (.09 standard deviations above the total sample mean). The second

cluster members reported moderately low levels of career-to-sexual identity interference ( $-.54$  standard deviations below the total sample mean) and moderate levels of sexual identity-to-career interference ( $-.04$  standard deviations below the total sample mean).

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