Equality-Aware Career Conversations

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Workshop Overview

- The challenges
- Practitioner (and student) engagement with equality and diversity issues: theory into practice
- Bringing positive action techniques into guidance practice
- Raising issues of equality and inclusion with clients

In the discussion around the slides we will cover:
- Career guidance and its compatibility with contemporary equality and diversity targets
- Practitioners’ ability to bring about social change
Equality and diversity in our practice can be neither static nor simple...

- The social world changes
- New challenges all the time
- Best practice changes
- Language changes

...but we can all continue to learn and do more to support and take positive action
Disclaimer: my approach and research

Research Areas:
- Career development theory
- Equality of opportunity in career choice
- Inclusive practice in career guidance

PhD:
- Gendered career decision making
- Contribution to theoretical and practical approaches to mitigating gender bias in career choice
- Gender tolerances and broader inclusivity of career development theory
Engaging with equality and diversity

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<th>Knowledge</th>
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<td>Interpretation of career development / career-decision-making theory and</td>
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Theory: a challenge in itself?

• Can a career development / career decision-making theory explain the decisions of the many while simultaneously propose that all decision processes are unique (i.e. homogeneity and heterogeneity)?

• Specific career development theories exist for specific groups, usually those under-represented in the labour market based for example on gender, race and ethnicity.
The problem(?) with bespoke theories

- Separate theories over-emphasise differences
- Moderate approaches are merely “aware”
- Both extremes will omit some psychological or sociological influences on career choice
- Can be time-bound

- What “norm” are the theories comparing to?
- Implications for “rational” and “pragmatic” career decisions
- Limited room for intersectionality
- Provide leverage
- Provide justification for advocacy

Bimrose’s work on gender highlights the challenges. If a separate theory is needed to effectively explain women’s career decision making then separate theories may be needed for all under-represented groups (Bimrose, 2001, p.91) yet delivery of career support needs to be tailored to women to “meet their individual needs” (Bimrose, 2014, p.86).
Interpreting theory

• It’s about what we take from theory and how we interpret it in practice
• The interpretation of and ensuing practical application of these theories could lead to challenges for equality
• Operationally impact assessing all that we do
• Delivery models based on the theories could be ‘rigged’ – be that intentionally or unintentionally, to maintain the status quo
• Theory itself cannot stand alone to explain issues of equality and diversity
Examples

Holland’s RIASEC typologies
Criticism of the person-environment fit theory relates to evidence of women scoring higher in the social and artistic personality types and to RIASEC types appropriating a stronger structural fit to men than women (Proyera and Häusler, 2007), supporting the assertion that theoretical models are designed by men, for men. The theory also doesn’t account for the fact that while individuals (of any background) may be suited to a specific work area, social and cultural barriers may prevent them from entering it.

Trait and factor historical dominance
In practice, early evidence was been found of gender bias in the delivery of career guidance rooted in trait and factor theories, with male and female clients being given different interest inventory forms, containing gendered job titles (Sharf, 2006). Jobs where physiology is the deciding factor are few, and it is often at job role rather than occupational descriptor that this presents (for example, a “male support worker” in the context of close personal care). While this was early in the development of our discipline, the theories that emerged from trait and factor are still used today.

Cognitive Career Theories (e.g. Social Cognitive Career Theory)
The focus being on perception creates space in which an individual or practitioner can attempt to challenge societal norms and structures; an individual could be coached to have higher goals, aspirations, resilience and improved self-efficacy. Yet what of the day when they are faced with recruitment bias in the workplace, for example, a proven structural barrier rather than a perceived challenge? The burden of responsibility for change is passed on to the client, allowing the theory to reinforce gender norms.
Your practice

Your ability to engage with issues of equity and diversity is rooted in a core professional competency: understanding unconscious and implicit bias.
The Risks of Unconscious Bias

Unconscious biases can impact on our instinctive reactions, or the split second assumptions and decisions we make.

- unconscious thoughts often happen instantly and quicker than conscious thoughts
- unconscious thoughts can remain even after conscious thoughts have had a chance to catch up
- the way we perceive people can continue to be based on assumptions and stereotypes which we unconsciously associate with them

As careers professionals, our unconscious biases may influence us in a variety of situations, for example:

- who we listen to most intently and how we listen to them
- who we disregard most easily
- how good we think a client may be at their job choice and/or how good we think someone would be at a role for which they are applying
- how encouraging or discouraging our body language is towards people
- how suitable we think a client is is for a particular career
- how well we think a client will perform
- how much effort we perceive a client to be making
Unconscious or implicit?

• Unconscious bias refers to a bias that we are unaware of, and which happens outside of our control.
• Implicit bias refers to the same area, but questions the level to which these biases are unconscious especially as we are being made increasingly aware of them.
• Once we know that biases are not always explicit, we are responsible for them.
• We all need to recognise and acknowledge our biases and find ways to mitigate their impact on our behaviour and decision making.

An awareness of implicit/unconscious biases is essential when delivering professional and inter-professional person-centred, career information, advice and guidance.
Bias and professionalism

We all have unconscious biases and we are all affected by bias
   – As professionals, it is our responsibility to acknowledge and understand our biases

We can take action to manage the impact on our behaviour and decision making
   – However, it is up to individuals to decide what action to take

To understand more about Unconscious Bias and find further sources of information, you can review the Equality Challenge Unit (ECU) publication, a Literature Review: Unconscious bias in higher education and the ECU resource Unconscious bias in colleges and higher education: training pack.
Both are available on the ECU website and can be used free of charge for higher education institutions in the UK (and colleges in Scotland).
What we are doing at UWS

- We believe practitioners want practical resources and guides
- Partnership with Improving Gender Balance Scotland (Institute of Physics/Education Scotland/Skills Development Scotland) to produce an Unconscious Bias for Career Development Professionals resource
- Currently being tested in the sector

Plus a stronger focus on Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in our core Reflective Guidance Practice module.
Equality-aware practice is ethical practice

• Ethical practice is equalities-focused

• Alongside conducting yourself appropriately in line with policy and legislation, ethical codes, organisational codes and employer codes, proactive ethical practice includes:
  – questioning and looking beyond baseline legislation
    • An individual in the ‘worst’ area, with the poorest projected outcomes can succeed
    • An individual from the ‘right’ home can face challenges that create career development barriers
  – being able to exercise rational judgement when making moral distinctions between what is ‘right’ and ‘wrong’
Identifying equality target groups

Certain groups are underrepresented in or may have difficulty accessing education, training and employment (and therefore careers) due to:

• Protected characteristics
• Bias within society
• Social opportunities / disadvantage and issues related to ‘class’
• ‘Local’ opportunities
• ‘Fairness’
• New challenges

The following slides consider some of the challenges faced by just two specific underrepresented groups and the action you can take to mitigate their experiences of disadvantage and barriers as a career development professional.
Asylum seekers, refugees and migrants

Example challenges:
• n.b. directly linked to race and ethnicity
• Lack of understanding of the differences between the groups
• Perception that economic migrants “steal opportunities”

What you can do as a career development professional

Understand the key definitions

Refugee: “A person who owing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality and is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country; or who, not having a nationality and being outside the country of his former habitual residence as a result of such events, is unable or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to return to it.” From: The 1951 United Nations Convention Relating to the Status of Refugees

In the UK, a person is officially a refugee when they have their claim for asylum accepted by the government.

Asylum Seeker: A person who has left their country of origin and formally applied for asylum in another country but whose application has not yet been concluded.

Refused asylum seeker: A person whose asylum application has been unsuccessful and who has no other claim for protection awaiting a decision. Some refused asylum seekers voluntarily return home, others are forcibly returned and for some it is not safe or practical for them to return until conditions in their country change.

Economic Migrant: Someone who has moved to another country to work. Refugees are not economic migrants.

Source: The Refugee Council
https://www.refugeecouncil.org.uk/policy_research/the_truth_about_asylum/the_facts_about_asylum

Familiarise yourself with the legislation relating to asylum seekers, refugees and work:

UK government guidance: https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/working-while-an-asylum-claim-is-considered/working-in-the-uk-while-an-asylum-case-is-considered

Familiarise yourself with the legislation relating to whether economic migrants can work in the UK, claim benefits, work whilst studying:

UK government quick check https://www.gov.uk/legal-right-work-uk

Note: different aspects of this this will be important e.g. working with the public or when working in a HE careers service
Care leavers / care experienced young people

Example challenges:
Perception that care leavers’ lives are chaotic and they will be unreliable
Increased likelihood of leaving school with few formal qualifications

What you can do as a career development professional

Learn more about this group:
Review key legislation and information to understand the terminology such as the Scottish Government information on Looked After Children: [https://beta.gov.scot/policies/looked-after-children/](https://beta.gov.scot/policies/looked-after-children/)

Visit the websites of relevant organisations:
- Centre for excellent for looked after children in Scotland: [https://www.celcis.org/](https://www.celcis.org/)
- Staf: [http://www.staf.scot](http://www.staf.scot)
- Who Cares? Scotland [https://www.whocaresscotland.org/](https://www.whocaresscotland.org/)
- And engage with organisation who can advocate for care leavers to organise work trials, work placements

Advocate for clients
- Understand that this group may need extra support to transition and be willing to help them access the support they need on starting education, work and training

Be aware of specific funding support for care leavers
- E.g. employer recruitment initiatives, Open Doors Consortium
Working with equality groups: key points

• Large under-represented groups vary regionally and nationally
• Our clients are all individuals
• Do we really believe “anyone can do anything” in 2017?
  – About enabling clients, whilst raising awareness that they may face barriers
  – Challenging someone because of their protected characteristics is not against the law! You may often be the first person who raises the point that someone from their background might face challenges. It is better that you do this, rather than they don’t encounter it until they are in education, training or employment
References

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