QUÁ TRÌNH RA QUYẾT ĐỊNH NGHỀ NGHIỆP CỦA SINH VIÊN LGB MỚI RA TRƯỜNG TẠI VIỆT NAM

Trịnh Đình Kiên[1]

Sinh viên K60 Kinh doanh quốc tế theo mô hình tiên tiến Nhật Bản JIB

Trường Đại học Ngoại thương, Hà Nội

Lê Thùy Dương, Nguyễn Thị Thanh Huyền

Sinh viên K58 Tiếng Anh thương mại

Trường Đại học Ngoại thương, Hà Nội

Phương Tố Tâm

Giảng viên khoa Tiếng Anh thương mại

Trường Đại học Ngoại thương, Hà Nội

Tóm tắt

Nghiên cứu định tính này đi sâu vào cách các yếu tố khác nhau hình thành nên việc ra quyết định nghề nghiệp của sinh viên mới tốt nghiệp và là đồng tính nữ, đồng tính nam và lưỡng tính thuộc cộng đồng LGB. Nghiên cứu này sử dụng phương pháp nghiên cứu hiện tượng học, và dữ liệu phỏng vấn được thu thập từ sinh viên LGB mới ra trường đang làm việc tại các đô thị lớn ở Việt Nam. Nghiên cứu đã phát hiện ra hai lĩnh vực ảnh hưởng chính tới quá trình ra quyết định nghề nghiệp của sinh viên LGB mới ra trường: môi trường làm việc (bao gồm các chuẩn mực xã hội, giá trị, động lực giữa các cá nhân và lợi ích việc làm) và nhận thức cá nhân (bao gồm quan điểm và nguyện vọng nghề nghiệp của cá nhân). Thông qua việc khám phá mối liên hệ và tương tác phức tạp giữa các yếu tố bên trong và bên ngoài quyết định lựa chọn nghề nghiệp của đối tượng nghiên cứu, nghiên cứu đã chỉ ra được bốn xu hướng chính trong việc ra quyết định nghề nghiệp giữa các cá nhân LGB. Hơn nữa, nghiên cứu này đưa ra những đóng góp về chính sách và thực tiễn, cũng như những gợi ý cho các nghiên cứu trong tương lai có thể đào sâu hơn và phát triển lý thuyết trong bối cảnh học thuật và thực tiễn.

Từ khoá: LGB, tốt nghiệp, ra quyết định nghề nghiệp, lựa chọn nghề nghiệp, Việt Nam

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[1] Tác giả liên hệ, Email: k60.2112520036@ftu.edu.vn

OCCUPATIONAL DECISION-MAKING OF FRESH GRADUATE IDENTIFYING AS LESBIAN, GAY, OR BISEXUAL (LGB) IN VIETNAM

Abstract

This qualitative exploration delves into how various factors shape occupational decision-making among lesbian, gay, and bisexual (LGB) fresh graduates. Employing a phenomenological methodology, interview data gathered from LGB individuals employed in a major urban center in Vietnam were analyzed. The study uncovered two primary domains of influence: the work environment (including social norms, values, interpersonal dynamics, and employment benefits) and personal perceptions (encompassing individual's viewpoint and career aspirations). Through the exploration of the intricate interplay among these internal and external factors, four principal trends in occupational decision-making among LGB individuals emerged. Furthermore, the study offers implications for policy and practice, as well as suggestions for further research and theoretical development within academic and practical contexts.

Introduction

From the decade of the 1990s until now, many studies brought insightful findings regarding the prejudice and discrimination suffered by LGBT individuals, thus necessitating more attention and care for support toward the minor communities, including LGBT (see Dispenza et al., 2016; Schneider & Dimito, 2010; Winderman et al., 2018). The majority of scholars working on LGBT issues mentioned unique and distinctive challenges experienced by LGBT youth, explained by their disadvantaged status and minor identity (see Rose Ragins, 2004; Meyer, 2015; Winderman et al., 2018). However, today's globalization is allowing greater freedom of expression for the community. In Vietnam, this is evident in the phenomenon of blending traditional Vietnamese values, lifestyles, cuisines, etc with Western ones. Still, researchers witnessed a gap between LGBT youth and the society as a whole in many contexts, such as home, school, work, and community (Higa et al., 2014; ISEE & UNDP, 2016).

Occupation is one of the most crucial concerns for youth, including career orientation and decision-making, especially recent student graduates who must keep up with corporate needs and demands on one's capabilities to remain competitive in the intense labor market. For LGB graduates, such concern uncovered distinctive experiences accompanied with sexual orientations (Schneider & Dimito, 2010; Winderman et al., 2018). Studies revealed discrimination, lack of support, concerns about identity, personal values, social networks, institutional climate, and self-perceived skills regarding the experiences of this minority group were factors affecting the life experiences of such minority groups (Schneider & Dimito, 2010; Doud, 2017). However, career development of LGBT youth and workplace issues in an international scale was said to need further exploration (see Chen & Zhou, 2021; Gedro, 2009; Hancock, 2019). In addition, according to Sachdeva et al., (2021), most researches were geographically focused in North America and Europe and thus, research should be shifting their focus to other socio-cultural contexts, especially developing countries. To contribute to the gap, this study will concentrate on Vietnam in which non-binary ideas in marriage and

relationships were strongly denied. The main subject to explore would be factors affecting the career decision-making of Vietnamese LGB graduates.

This study would adopt a qualitative, phenomenological research approach to explore the experiences of 11 Vietnamese LGB graduates. The findings offer great contributions to the literature. Firstly, the study contributes to resolve research gap in international and local literature in terms of career choices of LGB community. Secondly, the study supports theories used in research on career development, including the Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA), and discusses its applicability in understanding the career issues of LGB individuals. Thirdly, from the evidence of the research, the authors suggest policies and implications for various actors, including call for the need of the improvement of legislative enforcement and statutory refinements in Vietnam. Finally, the authors offer recommendations for future research in new or underexplored areas, in order to bring rich insights and understanding on LGB career concerns in Vietnam.

Literature review

This literature review summarizes studies on LGB individuals' professional considerations and decision-making processes. It is organized to offer understanding on key concepts, global viewpoints, Vietnam's unique context, and areas where further research is needed.

A considerable portion of the research on LGB topics has lacked a precise definition of the demographic. It's crucial to mention that many individuals within the LGB community self-identify based on their recognition of romantic feelings, physical attraction, related behaviors, or biological characteristics (Greene et al., 2015; McClelland et al., 2016). Therefore, in this study, LGB encompasses individuals who identify themselves as lesbian, gay, or bisexual. Occupational decision-making has been a subject of exploration for many scholars, encompassing aspects such as the manifestation of one's self-concept in vocational terms (Super, 1953), or the process of comparing career options and selecting the most suitable one (Kaldor & Zytowski, 1969; Gati, 1993; Zakay & Barak, 1984). The term *occu*pational decision-making is at times used interchangeably with *career decision-making,* indicating factors that influence career choices or decision-making (Querido et al., 2016), or as an area of study to delve into the elements affecting career choices (Rivera et al., 2007). Therefore, the term *occu*pational decision-making in this study refers to the variables, such as personal interests, preferred locations, employment prospects, etc., that affect career decision-making. Consequently, occupational decision-making in this study is defined as the process or experience of evaluating multiple career options based on certain factors or considerations, and selecting one option accordingly.

Academic inquiries into this subject have highlighted the distinct hurdles LGB individuals face in their occupational progression and decision-making processes, largely due to widespread societal discrimination (Prince, 2013). The notion of heterosexism and exposure to minority stressors play a crucial role in comprehending how these factors negatively impact the mental health and job contentment of LGB individuals (Velez et al., 2021). Importantly, scholarly literature has recognized the possibility for discrimination to nurture resilience, thus promoting favorable career decision-making outcomes (Schmidt et al., 2011).

Vietnamese Context

The experiences of Vietnamese LGB individuals need to be examined within the framework of the country's social and political evolution. In Vietnam, LGB individuals confront obstacles stemming from traditional Confucian family values that prioritize heterosexual norms, impacting gender roles, employment, career paths, and capabilities, thereby marginalizing those who deviate from these norms (Oosterhoff & Hoang, 2018). Economic reforms in 1986 exacerbated discrimination, exacerbated by the influence of social media and public shaming, leading to detrimental effects on the mental well-being of those marginalized (Goldberg et al., 2021; Oosterhoff & Hoang, 2018). Additionally, laws prohibiting same-sex marriage indirectly impacted the lives of LGB individuals in Vietnam (Mai et al., 2021). Moreover, the Vietnamese government's emphasis on "moral virtues" to maintain social order has contributed to heightened discrimination.

Recently, values associated with globalization, such as individualism and personal freedom, have begun to intertwine with traditional Vietnamese customs and behaviors (Truong et al., 2017). For instance, LGB activism has played a significant role in advancing the rights and status of LGB individuals in Vietnamese society (UNDP, 2014). Consequently, these blended values may also influence the choices made by LGB individuals, transcending the prescribed roles of the past. Further research is essential to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences and psychological changes within this group, thereby enhancing our comprehension of their career decision-making processes.

Research Objective and Questions

The primary aim of this study was to investigate the determinants influencing decision-making processes to decide occupational choices among fresh LGB graduates in Vietnam. The study was guided by the following inquiries: (1) What are the factors shaping the occupation decision-making process of LGB fresh graduates in Vietnam? (2) How do these factors influence their career choices? By concentrating on the LGB community, this research provides valuable insights into their career trajectories, offering implications for individuals within this group, as well as educators, employers, policymakers at all levels, society, and academic researchers aiming to advocate for the distinctiveness and equality of minority and marginalized groups.

Research Approach and Methods

The section will introduce the research approach used in the study and the data collection and analysis method.

Research approach

To answer the research questions, phenomenological research design would be applied, which is a common qualitative research methodology in the social sciences (Dos Santos, 2020). This approach aims to understand and interpret the life experiences of people by deriving the essence of the meaning people give to it (Merriam, 2015; Mohajan, 2018; Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Moreover, it assists research to explore multiple perspectives of one experience happening in a distinct context and view of each individual to interpret the collective experience that helps explain one's concerns or phenomenon (Charmaz, 2006; Lincoln et al., 2011; Creswell & Creswell 2017).

Given our objective to explore the career decision-making of LGB graduates from university and factors affecting occupational choices decision-making, it is important to capture the essential insights of LGB graduate's experiences and views to resolve the research question. Therefore, phenomenological research was the most effective approach.

Data collection

Personal contacts and school networks were completed through snowball sampling. We contacted 30 potential participants who was subjected to three criteria (1) perceived themselves as LGB, (2) graduated from university within the last two years, and (3) worked full time for any organization. Eventually, 21 individuals were willing to answer our eligibility screening questions. Among those, 11 participants agreed to participate in this study. The following table provides a summary of the participants involved in this research.

Table 1. Participants' Profiles

Participants	Gender	Major at University	Year(s) of experience	Field of work
P1	Gay	International Business	2	Logistics
P2	Gay	Business Administration	1	Customer relations
P3	Bisexual	Marketing	2	Marketing
P4	Gay	Public and Communication	1	Bartender
P5	Gay	International Business	2	Sales
P6	Gay	Marketing	3	Fashion
P7	Gay	Accounting	2	Accounting
P8	Lesbian	International Law	1	Law
P9	Gay	Filming and Protography	2	Customer support
P10	Bixesual	English Language	2	Public Relations
P11	Gay	Business English	1	Graphic designer

This study choosed and conducted semi-structured interview, one-on-one interviews as its primary data collection method. By consulting existing research, experts, and pilot interviews, the interview protocol was refined and finalized. Suggested by Goldberg et al., (2022), the protocol consisted of open-ended questions organized into 03 sections: opening, key, and closing queries. The opening questions were constructed to capture general information of participants, including their demographics. The key questions solely aimed to gain participant's insights on occupational choices and factors affecting such by seeing the journey of academic

study and into professional career. The closing section seeks advice and implications from participants, based on their own perceptions and backgrounds. In order to fully and clearly capture the insights, probing prompts were used, such as "Can you provide me an example?" "Can you please clarify what you mean by …?" "Could you elaborate further on …?". This helps the authors to enrich and deepen the data and eliminate bias among interviewees and interviewers.

Two out of three authors had close relationships to the participants. These authors would be in charge of in-depth interviews with participants, which lasted from 45 to 120 minutes. Prior to the interviews, participants would be introduced to the research. Consent of participation would be done and authors would ask for participant's permission to record the interview. Upon completion and agreements of both sides, the interview shall be started. Due to LGB identity, online platforms (Zoom) would be used for interviews, and participants were not required to open a camera as requested, in order to secure comfortability.

Data analysis

After recording, transcription proceeded. Smith (2011) offered interpretive phenomenological analysis technique (IPA) as an useful data analysis tool for phenomenological research. First, after transcription of the first three interviews, all researchers familiarized themselves with the data by re-readings the transcripts in order to generate engagement, active response and attention to the data. Secondly, the authors performed *initial noting*, in which the authors record the interviews and first capture participant's insights by highlighting, note taking. This aided the author's ability to generate ideas and explore the meaning of the data. The third step involved *developing emergent sub-themes,* the authors coded the transcripts by deriving essence or central piece of content in the second step. In the fourth step, as a result, a draft list of emerged sub-themes was formed, and authors were required to explore connections between subthemes. Fifth, by moving on the further interviews while continuing generating sub-themes and themes, the authors attempted to realize the uniqueness of each interview and maintain an opening mind that new insights could be found. Finally, the authors seek potential patterns across cases to develop themes by identifying common characteristics among cases.
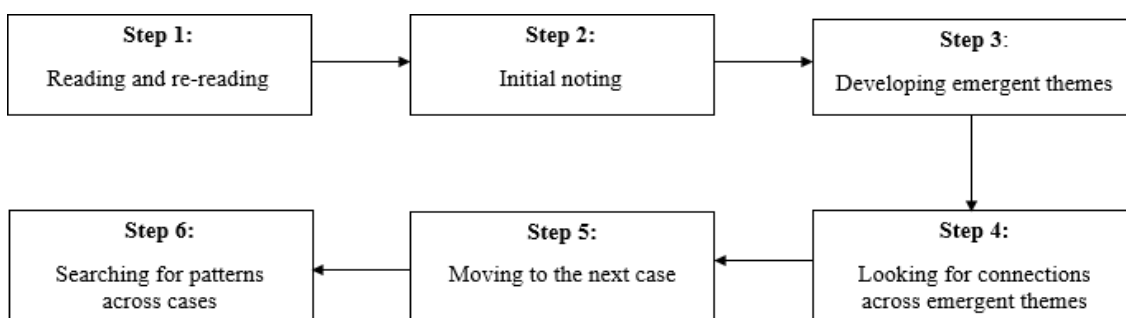

Figure 1. Data analysis through steps based on phenomenological analysis technique (IPA)

In order to ensure trustworthiness of the research, we adopt strategies suggested by Lincoln and Guba (1985). First, by *member checking*, we shared transcripts and categories with participants for feedback and made adjustments accordingly. Second, in *peer debriefing*, we discussed challenging aspects potentially arise during the research process with an expert and conducted pilot interviews with peers. We also seeked feedback on emerging categories from faculty members who were often exposed to qualitative research and students' career choices.

Finally, we kept a *reflexive journal* to record observations, impressions, decision-making, and reflections throughout the study.

Findings

This portion delves into the findings of the study concerning the primary themes and their associated sub-themes gleaned from the interviews. Table 3 showcases a compilation of themes, sub-themes, and codes derived from the interview data, which underwent a comprehensive six-step analysis aimed at responding to the research inquiries. Addressing the initial query, this section explores the foundational factors intertwined with environmental contexts and individual perspectives that shape the career contemplations and decisions of Vietnamese LGB graduates. Subsequently, a nuanced exploration of these factors is presented, incorporating direct quotations from participating LGB individuals.

Table 2. Themes, Sub-themes, and Codes

Theme	Sub-theme	Code
Environmental influences	Social norms and cultural values	Discrimination as a hindering factor
		Acceptance as a supportive factor
	A supportive and inclusive organizational culture	Career development opportunities for employees
		Inclusivity towards LGB employees
	Benefits	Wage
		Remuneration
Individual viewpoints	Individual's self-perception of their personality traits	Reserved
		Outgoing
	Professional aspirations	Congruence
		Ideals
		Global working opportunities

Environmental factors

Social norms and cultural values

Social norms and cultural values played a crucial role in shaping the career decisions of LGB graduates. Specifically, norms and values relating to discrimination and acceptance emerged as the most impactful inhibiting and supporting factors, respectively. These factors were subsequently examined to elucidate their impact on career decision-making.

Discrimination as a hindering factor. The majority of participants indicated that their career decisions were greatly affected by encounters with discrimination. These experiences took various forms, such as societal and familial rejection, discriminatory comments, labeling based

on their LGB status, childhood bullying, and biased treatment at work. These factors often led to a fear of not fitting in or being seen as different, which had complex effects on their mental well-being. Coping strategies included becoming more aware of discrimination, hiding their identity when applying for jobs, conforming to societal norms, avoiding behaviors or speech considered inappropriate at work, and actively working to overcome discrimination for personal and professional growth. One participant shared a story illustrating their experience with discrimination.

When I began my new job, some of my colleagues who were a few years older seemed really interested in my gender and bombarded me with questions the first time we met. It made me feel uneasy, like they were probing into my personal life. (Participant 5)

The adverse impacts encountered by participants due to gender discrimination were heightened by exposure to the life experiences of fellow individuals within the LGB community. Participant 5 exemplified this by sharing a friend's story, highlighting how gender discrimination and the enforcement of gender norms can hinder their ability to embrace their authentic identity, both within their household and in wider society.

I noticed one of my friends, who had different career goals, working in the public sector. Unfortunately, when he couldn't land a job at the Hanoi Department of Taxation, his family pressured him to return to his hometown, settle down, start a family, and give up on pursuing his own path in life.

Acceptance as a supportive factor. Some participants recognized that receiving acceptance from those around them contributed to a supportive social environment. These individuals expressed feeling at ease expressing themselves openly among friends and colleagues. Interestingly, females appeared to demonstrate greater acceptance of others' sexual orientations, resulting in less discrimination towards LGB individuals compared to males. Participants also noted that international companies may foster a more inclusive atmosphere and provide better treatment than local institutions. Consequently, they viewed acceptance in their daily lives and work environments as a supportive factor enabling their inclusion in society. Participant 10 recounted their personal experience in this regard:

At my current job in a multinational corporation, I've observed a significant contrast in how gender diversity is embraced compared to my previous internship at a local firm. Here, there's a noticeable atmosphere of inclusivity and acceptance, extending beyond just female colleagues to everyone. This supportive environment has encouraged me to be more open and self-assured in my professional interactions, greatly enhancing my feeling of belonging both at work and in society. (Participant 10)

People-oriented climate

The second significant factor shaping the environment that LGB individuals carefully weigh when selecting a career is a people-centric atmosphere within the workplace. As per the participants, such a work climate manifests in two key aspects: a structured development trajectory for employees and a welcoming attitude towards the LGB community.

Career development opportunities for employees. Most participants emphasized the importance of growth and advancement in shaping their career choices. They preferred dynamic

and inclusive environments that offer opportunities for growth, both professionally and personally, as well as avenues for self-expression. Such environments were seen as conducive to effective development, particularly when compared to traditional, inflexible, and homogeneous work environments. Importantly, the development paths pursued by participants served various purposes, including empowering the LGB community (often driven by challenging experiences) and contributing to family prosperity. Participant 2 provided insight into their positive environment:

In an environment predominantly comprised of individuals born in the 1990s, the ambiance is relaxed and conducive to open interaction, facilitating enhanced networking and collaboration on my part. This has not only encouraged me to become more outgoing but has also enabled me to freely exchange personal anecdotes and ideas. Such comfort and engagement among colleagues have directly propelled my career advancement. Being in a space that appreciates my personality and viewpoints has empowered me to shoulder greater responsibilities, exhibit my skills, and pursue expanded opportunities for professional growth within my field.

Participants also regarded environments marked by competitiveness and discipline, devoid of impulsiveness, as crucial for advancing along their development trajectory towards "maturity." They viewed freely provided feedback, a competitive atmosphere, and particularly conscientious leadership as vital for personal growth. Failure to meet these criteria could prompt participants to seek alternative employment opportunities. Participant 3 reflected on his work experience:

There was a time when being yelled at made me cry, but now I've grown accustomed to it. When my boss gives me feedback on my performance, even if it's harsh, I see it as motivation to improve. What's important is striving for a better future. Additionally, my boss teaches me valuable skills like editing, managing fashion events, and photoshoots. Despite the below-average pay, I've stayed in this supportive environment for about a year because I've learned so much.

Inclusivity towards LGB employees. Numerous participants stressed the significance of workplaces being LGB-friendly in influencing their career choices. Typically, they gauged this friendliness through channels such as social media, word-of-mouth, and their own perceptions. Given their heightened sensitivity, most participants favored environments openly supportive of LGB individuals, aiming to minimize potential harm to their mental well-being, based on their own individual threshold. Alternatively, they actively sought out environments that aligned with specific criteria. Participant 5, who identified as gay, recounted facing inhospitable work environments, prompting them to pursue a master's degree in a more inclusive setting abroad:

Since my secondary school days, I've dealt with discrimination, which led me to switch to a different high school environment. As I entered the workforce, I continued to encounter discrimination, prompting me to seek out more international settings. This drove my decision to pursue a master's degree abroad. It was only when confronted with these challenges that I felt compelled to make a change.

Nonetheless, this scenario does not universally apply. A majority of participants indicated that the workplace atmosphere was not a primary concern for them, as they had devised their own methods to navigate potential harm stemming from LGB discrimination. These strategies

varied from compartmentalizing their professional and personal spheres, viewing the work environment as something they must adapt to, and acknowledging certain shortcomings as inevitable trade-offs. As they elucidated these strategies, it became evident that individual personality traits significantly influenced their approaches. Participant 4 underscored this aspect in his viewpoint on the workplace atmosphere and its impact on his career choice:

I often feel like I'm leading a double life, with different sets of values governing my personal and professional spheres. This duality may actually offer me a unique perspective in my work. While it would be easier to simply be myself, there's still a need to maintain a certain level of professionalism to safeguard our interests in the workplace—a requirement for everyone.

Benefits

The majority of participants underscored the importance of salary as the primary factor influencing their career choices, a sentiment commonly echoed among job seekers. They explained that the salary they received not only served as a reflection of their competence and qualifications but also played a crucial role in their job satisfaction, motivation, and career advancement. In addition to salary, some participants highlighted bonuses and other forms of compensation as important considerations under the umbrella of benefits when evaluating job opportunities. This suggests that while salary holds primary importance, individuals also take into account the overall work environment and supplementary perks in their career decision-making process. For instance, there was a consensus among participants that salary and benefits offered by the company were the foremost factors considered when evaluating job opportunities (Participants 2, 3, 5, 6, etc.). Participant 4 elaborated: "In addition to gaining more work experience, salary is an important consideration for me as I need to ensure it covers my personal living expenses, like anyone else" (Participant 4). Participant 7 provided further insights into the various forms of benefits he took into account when assessing a job offer:

When I'm considering a job, the salary isn't the only factor I weigh; I also consider other benefits like health insurance, flexible vacation policies, and the reward system. This allows me to find a work environment that aligns with my preferences.

Individual viewpoints

The career decisions of the LGB individuals involved were influenced by factors stemming from both their environment and personal experiences. While the previous section delved into environmental factors, the subsequent section delves into the importance of personal perceptions as a pivotal factor shaping participants' career choices. These personal perceptions include the individual's comprehension of their own personality and their career-related aspirations.

Individual's self-perception of their personality traits

Participating LGB individuals perceived themselves through various lenses, categorized here as either reserved or outgoing.

Reserved. Three participants indicated that their career choices were shaped by their inclination towards introversion. An introverted nature often involves a preference for solitude or limited social interaction, leading these individuals to select career paths that accommodate this trait. Many participants voiced a preference for roles that minimized direct interaction with others, reflecting their aversion to extensive interpersonal contact. It's conceivable that their

introverted tendencies heightened their sensitivity to potential discrimination. As one participant noted: "I tend to be more introverted, and that has definitely influenced my career thinking" (Participant 10). Another participant remarked:

Given my personality, I lean towards a role that involves working on the computer in an office setting. I prefer to avoid tasks that necessitate extensive collaboration with numerous partners. This alignment between my job and my personality is pivotal for me, as it directly impacts the quality of my work.

Outgoing. Four participants disclosed that their extroverted demeanor influenced their career decisions. From their perspective, an extroverted personality entails characteristics such as sociability, energy, and enjoyment of social interactions. Consequently, these individuals sought careers that aligned with their extroverted nature, rendering their chosen paths more appealing. They strongly believed that such roles would enable them to thrive, stimulate their creativity, and foster a sense of belonging. Thus, they prioritized jobs and careers that complemented their extroverted traits. It's plausible that their LGB identity further amplified this preference, given their extroverted disposition. Some participants articulated this alignment through their narratives. For example, one participant expressed: "Being outgoing and energetic drives me to seek a work environment that reflects those qualities...thus, finding a job that suits my extroverted nature is my top priority" (Participant 2). Participant 3 offered his perspective on his preferred roles:

Given my outgoing and proactive nature, I believe a sales environment would be an ideal fit for me. I thrive in settings where I can express myself freely and comfortably. Alternatively, if I were to opt for a dynamic role, marketing—known for its vibrant energy and alignment with my creativity—would be my top choice whenever an opportunity presents itself.

Professional aspirations

Participants articulated that comprehending their internal career aspirations was crucial for decision-making, as these desires often mirror their short-term expectations and long-term professional prospects in their chosen field. In this study, the career aspirations of LGB individuals encompassed four main components: congruence, ideals, impacts, and a focus on global opportunities.

Congruence. Some participants demonstrated a tendency to identify specific factors they deemed essential when evaluating the suitability of a job or career. These factors varied, with notable examples including colleagues, job characteristics, competencies, and academic knowledge. It's likely that these factors served as a comprehensive framework for assessing the overall suitability of a particular job or career, aiding them in determining compatibility. One participant noted the necessity of having clear orientation and criteria when choosing a job (Participant 5). Another participant mentioned: "I found technical careers unappealing because they seemed monotonous; instead, I opted for economics, selecting a career where I felt more skilled" (Participant 6). Participant 4 elucidated his own set of criteria for evaluating job suitability, further enhancing our understanding of how these individuals utilized congruence-related factors in their career decision-making:

When it comes to choosing a job, I have certain criteria in mind. Roughly half of my consideration revolves around the colleagues I'll be working with, while the other half is

dedicated to job-related factors, ensuring the role aligns with my preferences and abilities. While some aspects may be appealing, I carefully assess them against any drawbacks. It's all about setting priorities to determine whether the job is the right fit for me.

Ideals. Approximately half of the participants strongly advocated for their career choices to align with their ideals, which encompassed their abilities, skills, and preferences honed through experience, education, and practice. These were seen as rendering them well- suited for a specific job or desired occupation, while also enabling them to contribute to the LGB community. Some participants extended this consideration to include factors such as income, work schedule, and other elements perceived to align with personal preferences. Motivated by their ideals, participants prioritized pursuing careers that they genuinely enjoyed. For instance, several participants unanimously agreed that personal preference was the foremost consideration when contemplating a career (Participants 2, 6, and 10). They also emphasized how satisfaction with their ideals was crucial for overall job and career fulfillment, potentially impacting job retention. Participant 2 elaborated:

I selected a job that aligns with my interests, one that I envision myself pursuing for the long term. While I'm uncertain if my sexual orientation played a role in this decision, I refuse to let potential judgment based on my gender sway me. Rather than walking away, I'm committed to adapting and finding my place within that environment, as long as it resonates with my aspirations.

A minority of participants explicitly expressed that making a societal impact for the LGB community was one of their career motivations. Two participants demonstrated a direct link between their career aspirations and the goal of creating social change. They outlined several strategies for making a positive impact for the LGB community, including spearheading media campaigns to raise awareness, conducting research on LGB-related topics, fundraising for minority groups, and organizing career development programs for LGB individuals. These participants emphasized that gender orientation played a significant role in their future career planning (Participants 1 and 2). Participant 1 shared:

I witnessed numerous young LGBT individuals dropping out of school due to the discomfort caused by discrimination in their environment. Motivated by this, I endeavored to secure a scholarship for a master's degree to gain foundational knowledge for fundraising. My goal is to support students who aspire to pursue higher education, particularly master's degrees, in order to provide them with the necessary resources to safeguard their mental well-being.

Global working opportunities. The majority of participants expressed a preference for careers that allowed them to interact within a global context. They described a global environment as one characterized by interconnectedness, diversity, technological influences, exposure to standardized global practices, and fluid dynamics. Among the myriad reasons for pursuing such aspirations—such as exposure to diverse cultures, working conditions, innovations, and increased career development opportunities—it was innovation that garnered the most attention. For instance, a common sentiment was that an international, multilingual environment, regardless of its geographical location, provided greater exposure to new information (Participants 6, 7, 9, and 10). Participant 6 shared the following regarding their study abroad experience:

Being in a foreign environment exposed me to numerous innovations in techniques, skills, and knowledge, along with a more inclusive and secure atmosphere. I deliberately charted my own course to increase my chances of securing a position in a multinational corporation. I sought to immerse myself in a setting where I could encounter diverse individuals, perspectives, and cultures while feeling more at ease.

In summary, the analysis of data gathered from interviews with participating LGB individuals addressed the two research questions concerning the factors influencing LGB graduates' career decisions and the mechanisms through which they do so. The findings were substantiated by explanations and direct quotations from participants. Additionally, we conducted further analysis to discern patterns across the cases. Four major patterns concerning the influence of environmental factors and individual perceptions on the career decisions of LGB individuals were identified, as depicted in Figure 4. Broadly speaking, internal personal perceptions played a role in career decisions across all four patterns, while external environmental factors were evident in three patterns.
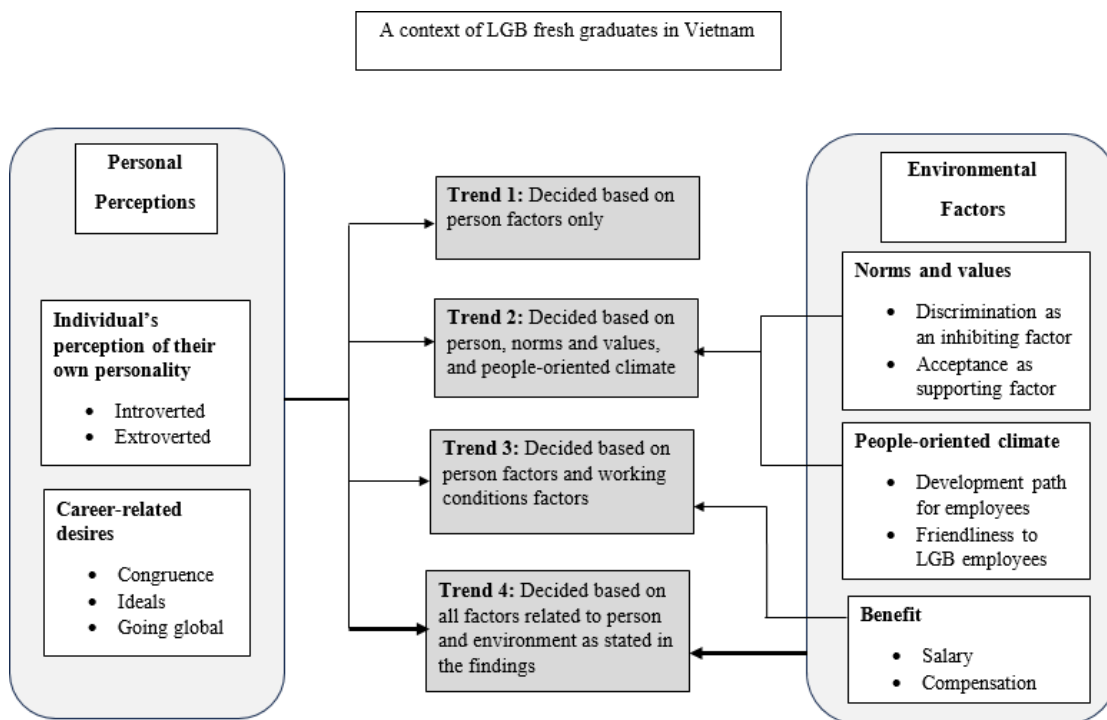

Figure 2. Trends in career consideration and decision-making among Vietnamese LGB respondents

Among Vietnamese LGB respondents, distinct trends emerge in their career consideration and decision-making processes. Trend 1 reveals recent graduates concentrating solely on internal factors like personality and career desires, neglecting external influences. This suggests robust self-perception and adaptability. Trend 2 involves prioritizing societal values and a human-centric work environment over specific job conditions. Conversely, Trend 3 individuals base decisions primarily on personal factors and work conditions, with heightened sensitivity to LGB-related external factors. Trend 4 integrates self-perception, career aspirations, societal norms, and work-related considerations, reflecting a comprehensive approach to decision-making. These trends illustrate the multifaceted nature of career decisions among Vietnamese LGB respondents, showcasing varied responses to internal and external influences.

Discussion

The four observed patterns in the study of occupation decision-making process among fresh LGB graduates align with the Theory of Work Adjustment (TWA) (Dawis, 2002, 2005; Lofquist & Dawis, 1984). As per the TWA, career selection and advancement involve a process of adjustment where individuals seek environments that cater to their needs, while environments seek individuals who meet their requirements (Lofquist & Dawis, 1984). This theory sheds light on the interaction between individuals (P) and environments (E) in career decision-making, particularly evident in Trend 4, where LGB individuals thoroughly considered factors from both P and E in their career choices. In contrast, Trend 1 diverges from the P to E interaction, with individuals solely focusing on internal factors, possibly indicating overconfidence, emphasis on LGB-related issues, or strong career aspirations. This discovery extends the TWA by suggesting that minimal adjustment occurs between P and E among this cohort of LGB graduates in their career decision-making process.

The findings also underscore several supporting factors influencing the career decisions of LGB graduates, echoing previous research outcomes. Specifically, the results concerning the acceptance of LGB individuals and a welcoming workplace environment in Vietnam correspond with international reports and studies. For instance, Deloitte's research in 2023 revealed that job seekers tended to favor workplaces that were more inclusive of the LGBT+ community. Winderman et al. (2018) emphasized the significance of social support in career decision-making processes. Moreover, this study enriches our understanding of the aspiration to "go global" among recent LGB graduates, aligning with prior research highlighting the broader ambitions of Vietnamese youth, including those within the LGBT community, to integrate into the global workforce (Nguyen et al., 2017). In contrast to Nguyen et al. (2017), this study unveils the perception of limited inclusivity in government institutions as a notable factor compelling respondents to seek employment in more inclusive sectors like NGOs and multinational corporations (Ferri, 2015). The negative perception of government employment as unwelcoming to LGB individuals reflects societal biases present in Vietnam, consistent with broader research on societal attitudes towards the LGBTQ+ community in the country (Smith, 2018). Consequently, this study offers insights into the influence of organizational culture and policies on career preferences among this demographic.

The lack of workplace inclusivity has been reported as a prevalent issue in Vietnam, although significant improvements have been observed in recent decades (USAID & UNDP, 2014). Reports indicate the presence of "stigma and discrimination" and a "hostile and unfriendly environment" against LGBT individuals in Vietnamese workplaces. While many Fortune 500 companies globally have acknowledged and valued the contributions of LGBTQ+ employees, the issue of inclusion remains a subject of ongoing debate across various sectors, including the workplace (Gedro, 2009). Despite the significant role played by global corporations in advancing LGBTQ+ rights, challenges persist, with limited translation of the expanding business case for inclusion into tangible advancements for the LGBTQ+ community (Elisworth et al., nd; Crehan et al., 2021). This underscores the need for further efforts to authentically integrate LGBTQ+ individuals into the workplace on a global scale (see Deloitte, 2023; Hodson et al., 2018), with Vietnam requiring substantial time and effort to address this

issue. This perspective adds complexity to the factors influencing the career priorities of LGBTQ+ individuals in Vietnam, highlighting the ongoing struggle for workplace inclusivity. This study uncovered a strong desire among fresh LGB graduates in Vietnam to be acknowledged for their skills and abilities, rather than solely defined by their sexual orientation. This aspiration for normalization resonates with and reflects the principles advocated by the contemporary LGBTQ+ rights movement, echoing the universal demand for fair treatment. Examples such as the Bostock v. Clayton County (2020) case in the United States have reverberated globally, emphasizing the pursuit of equal treatment under the law and in various social settings. Therefore, this longing for normalization underscores the intricate interplay between internal and external pressures experienced by LGBTQ+ individuals in Vietnam, as well as the imperative for a cultural shift towards acceptance and comprehension.

Implications

Theoretical implications

This study provides two major theoretical contributions to the academic literature on occupational decision-making in general and for particular Vietnamese LGB fresh graduates.

Firstly, this study contributes further insights in Meyer's (1995, 2003) gender minority stress theory (GMST) regarding its impact on the mental well-being of individuals in minority communities, such as lesbian, gay, or bisexual (LGB). GMST offered scholars two major areas to research on minority stressors: distal stressors and proximal stressors, causing an increasing burden onto sexual and gender minority people being subject to negative health outcomes compared with cisgender straight people (Meyer, 2003; Frost & Meyer, 2023). In this study, on the proximal stressor's impact, we found insignificant evidence of negative physical and mental impact of negative experiences such as bullying, discrimination. In fact, such experiences acted as a motivator for individuals to not only deploy strategies to reduce negative impact, but also for their own personal goal. Thus, the study provided significant evidence of the positive impact suggested by GMST. Moreover, a significant insight derived was that most individuals wanted to be perceived and act as "normal person". As a result, this could imply a new phenomenon of perceived discrimination or a strategy to cope with discrimination by participants. Future research should further analyze new insights, experiences that may be different amongst different cultures, institutions, laws or distal stressors in order to further contribute to the GMST.

Secondly, this study reinforces the theory of work adjustment (TWA) and Person-Environment (P-E) fit theory (Dawis, 2005; Dawis & Lofquist, 1984; Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, & Johnson, 2005). Many studies on literature review of TWA and P-E fit theory both advocated that people tried to seek out or create an environment that would be best suited to their traits to be manifested. Previously, the study indicated four major trends in career considerations and decision-making among Vietnamese LGB graduates. These variations might represent that tastes, preferences and desires in one career, which is unique amongst Vietnamese LGB graduates, could differ from one to another. Therefore, this study further concretes TWA and P-E fit theory by providing evidence of P-E fit in Vietnamese LGB graduate career decision-making. In addition, the study also uncovered social values and norms as factors affecting career choice and potential factors to be considered in P-E fit theory. Thus, future research could consider the mediating or moderating role of social values, cultures, ideology in one's career

trajectory and decision-making.

Practical implications

This study highlights the significant impact of experience sharing as expressed by participating LGB individuals with regards to their occupational choices process. Recommendations are provided below for policy makers, practitioners (educators and businesses and organizations), LGBTQ+ individuals, and researchers, based on the study's findings. First, it is strongly recommended that the uniqueness of the LGBTQ+ community be integrated into law and policy development, with an emphasis on policy implementation manuals and guidance; this will improve the rights of LGBTQ+ people and prohibit discrimination and violence (USAID & UNDP, 2014). It is also important to include research-based evidence and involve the LGBTQ+ community in the legal reform and implementation process, ensuring that changes are rooted in rigorous research and practical experience.

Second, for educators, addressing the unique challenges faced by LGBTQ+ students is crucial, especially in terms of implementing mentorship and career counseling programs tailored to their needs. These initiatives should combine formal and informal support to reduce minority stress and equip LGBTQ+ students with the skills necessary for their future careers. Third, in Vietnamese businesses and organizations, more inclusive workplaces should be created, and particularly STEM files with proactive measures against discrimination. This approach will not only support LGBTQ+ employees' well-being but also enrich the organizational culture through diversity and inclusivity. Finally, LGBTQ+ individuals are encouraged to be aware of improving societal attitudes and actively seek support through resources like career mentorship and LGBTQ+ networks to help navigate minority stress and make informed career decisions. Understanding and utilizing these support mechanisms is vital for managing successful career trajectories in diverse professional environments.

Limitations and implications for future research

The study primarily engaged with homosexual and bisexual individuals due to difficulties in accessing a varied representation of LGB students. Additionally, a majority of the participants resided in urban areas, attributed to the researchers' limited social connections in rural locales and the prevailing social stigma therein. Subsequent research endeavors in Vietnam should delve into the career considerations of individuals with diverse sexual orientations to furnish a more holistic insight into their career decision-making processes. Addressing these constraints is imperative for refining the research methodology and bolstering the study's validity within the specified urban context. Moreover, the study relied on virtual interviews, constraining the researchers' ability to fully discern participants' nonverbal cues and affective states. Future investigations should contemplate conducting face-to-face interviews to facilitate a more comprehensive exploration of the participants' lived experiences.

Conclusion

This study delved into the live experience of occupation decision-making among Vietnamese LGB graduate students integrated as an important part of career development. Moreover, the research determined factors affecting the career decisions of LGB graduate

students and their career decision-making process. According to the findings, growth opportunities and inclusive work environment were illustrated as significant drivers of LGB graduates in their career decisions. In addition, the findings would provide insightful information of career choices and considerations of LGB graduates for various stakeholders, particularly policy-makers, universities, scholars and LGBTQ+ communities themselves in providing appropriate support for Vietnamese LGBTQ+ individuals in their careers. Giving considerable impact of one career to the mental being of an LGB individual, entities, and institutions should be aware of the unique perspectives of LGBT people in many contexts. Thus, measures, changes in social attitudes, legislation and law enforcement may be necessary to create supportive atmosphere and serve diverse and reasonable needs of LGB communities.

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