Examining Individualism in College Student Retention Theory and Practice: Transitioning from Student Integration to Institutional Adjustment

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College student retention and completion rates correlate with the production of societal benefits such as community engagement, human capital, diverse campus communities, and social mobility. While ideas vary, most contemporary retention practices and strategies rely on foundational studies that focus on individualism, the student-institution relationship, and inhibiting factors to student integration into a collegiate environment. This meta-synthesis examines the individualistic nature of foundational historic and contemporary retention theories and practices as well as recommends a collectivist, culturally-responsive alternative paradigm for retention theory and strategy development moving forward.

Though not all admissions processes are similarly designed, "butts-in-seats" enrollment models – based wholly on the assumption that a larger incoming class will inevitably translate to more revenue – have preoccupied the attention of college administrators for the greater part of the twentieth century and into the present. However, many college admissions offices have recently pivoted from broad mass marketing strategies to more targeted marketing strategies that appeal more to the personal interests and unique needs of prospective students (Castleman, 2015; Lewison & Hawes, 2007). Messaging from admissions teams to prospective students have become strategically narrowed, emphasizing general elements of the institution (one-on-one admissions and financial aid counseling, small classes, community-styled residence halls, faculty availability) that appeal to the individual interests or characteristics of a single student or student group. Generally speaking, institutional advertisements from college recruiters to prospective students are based in fact, but students – once enrolled – must be reasonably self-reliant and willing to actively engage in the experiences advertised.

Ahead of college admissions, research and theory development concerning the experiences of enrolled college students embraced similar personalized and individualistic tactics. During the post-World War II era, interest in the development of retention theory might have hinged upon a progressive view that the role of higher education in society was to produce a highly educated workforce, advance the common good, and serve as a vehicle for social mobility and equity (St. John et al., 2018). However, shifts in public and political opinion on the role of higher education in the late 1970s ushered in a newer market-oriented, individualistic mindset for higher education demanding higher selectivity, industry competition, and self-reliance and accountability for both the student and institution (St. John et al., 2018). During the same time period, much of the research informing institutional practices for college student retention began to reflect a broader individualistic societal values system, viewing students as independent, autonomous, self-reliant, and loosely coupled with their peers (Farber et al., 2020; Love, 2018).

However, despite an abundance of retention research, theory development, and theory-based practitioner recommendations, American colleges and universities continue to underperform in graduating college students today. The National Student Clearinghouse (NSC; 2019) reported that the national average retention rate among first-year, full-time college students was only 61.7%. Retention rates for the 2017 cohort, when broken down by race and ethnicity, revealed even more concerning numbers among underrepresented students. Asian students were retained at a rate of 72%, and White students were retained at a rate of 62.2%. Hispanic and Black college students experienced more dramatic drop-offs, being retained at rates of 59.5% and 52.1%, respectively. Students who are the first in their family to attend college have also been found, unique to their experiences as first-generation college students, to face retention challenges (D'Amico & Dika, 2013). Similarly, low-income students are less likely to be retained by their first institution of enrollment than middle-income and high-income students (St. John & Musoba, 2011). Lagging national retention rates in recent years give reason to question whether the retention strategies being employed by colleges and universities appropriately address the complexity of factors driving the early departure of college students, especially among underrepresented and underserved student groups.

When individualistic values are embedded into a community, members of that community are autonomous, self-reliant, competitive, and show minimal interest in the well-being of one another (Farber et al., 2020; Love, 2018). Therefore, it is possible that an embrace of individualistic values in theory-based retention strategies employed by higher education institutions are ineffective in addressing the needs of underserved diverse student groups. Determining whether the previous statement is true would require a mixed methodological experiment testing alternative, non-individualistic retention theories and practices against individualistic theories, confirmed to be the foundation of contemporary retention practices. That is not the purpose of the current study. The purpose of this meta-synthesis is to set up future retention research by first determining whether foundational retention theories emphasize individualistic values, and whether those theories inform contemporary retention practices and strategies. Secondly, this study aims to offer a paradigmatic alternative for retention theory and practice development, so that retention strategies employed by higher education leaders might be more collectivist and culturally responsive. This collectivist alternative will allow future researchers to test the impact of social and cultural identity on retention.

The following section provides a conceptual framework for the study that presents college student retention as a topic of societal interest and a generator of collective benefits, shifting the improvement of retention theory and practice from an individual responsibility to a collective responsibility. The researcher then will outline the methodological steps taken to collect the literature included in this meta-synthesis. Findings of this study will include a review of foundational retention theories and practices, as well as current retention strategies that reflect individualistic ideology. Lastly, the researcher will discuss the findings and propose a collectivist, culturally paradigmatic alternative for college student retention theory and strategy development.

Conceptual Framework: Collective Benefits of College Student Retention

Before examining existing historic and contemporary retention theories and proposing a shift away from individualism, it is helpful to re-envision college student retention in a more collectivist (rather than individualist) societal context. Farber et al. (2020) describe collective cultures as those that "perceive individual people as fundamental components of a cohesive community and emphasize interdependence, cooperation, and

group harmony" (p. 247). The conceptual framework for this meta-synthesis highlights some of the collective societal benefits of college student retention, signaling a shift from individual responsibility and benefit to collective responsibility and benefit (Lambert Snodgrass & Acheson-Clair, 2020). The benefits described in this section (community engagement, the generation of human capital, culturally-enhanced campus communities, and social mobility) emphasize collective societal gain from college student retention, thus moving away from individualistic ideology and rendering an individualistic approach to retention theory no longer appropriate.

Community Engagement

Colleges and universities often collaborate with their surrounding communities in ways that encourage mutuality and reciprocity (Driscoll, 2009). Such instances of collaboration often develop as exchanges of social or economic resources. Most commonly, institutions demonstrate community engagement by either encouraging or mandating social or economic exchanges between representatives of the institution (students, faculty, administration, etc.) and local community groups, neighborhoods, organizations, and businesses. Examples include students volunteering at local community learning centers or being paired with local companies for professional internships. Students are often viewed to be an impactful and sustainable resource that an institution of higher education can provide to neighboring communities (Bell & Carlson, 2009; Karasik, 2019). In turn, neighboring communities provide a fertile landscape for experiential learning to institutions of higher education (Coyer et al., 2019; Greenberg, 1978).

When an institution prematurely loses its students, that institution's capacity for reciprocal engagement with neighboring communities decreases. If fewer students are enrolled at the institution, then fewer students are available to positively impact the socioeconomic landscape of the neighboring communities. Similarly, the American higher education model assumes that a student likely improves their individual potential for societal contribution with every additional year of education (Long, 2018); thus, it is a collective loss for community engagement when students exit higher education prematurely.

Human Capital

Savvides and Stengos (2009) described human capital as "...encompassing the quality of education, the general state of health of the working population, and the general form of training such as on-the-job training or informal education" (p. 4). Keeley (2007) defined human capital as "...the knowledge, skills, competencies and attributes that allow people to contribute to their personal and social well-being, as well as that of their countries" (p. 3). Cooperatively, to help guide the purpose of this section, human capital refers to the intangible contributive qualities of humans as resourceful assets within an improving society; often taking the form of technological or industrial innovations, economic stimulation, or socially progressive movements toward a more equitable society. Essentially, the idea is that as humans either individually or collectively flourish, so does the world around them; and education plays a large part in this phenomenon (Cloninger, 2010).

The American higher education model assumes that an individual's potential to make societal contributions grows with each additional year of education (Brabeck, 1983; Walker & Finney, 1999). Therefore, the successful retention of college students is essential for the continuous improvement of society. Every additional learning experience presents another opportunity for an individual to further develop innovative ideas which in turn could spur technological, industrial, economic, or social advancements. Colleges and universities must devote resources to retaining students from year-to-year, because each year of education raises the potential for societal advancement. This is especially true for first- and second-year college students, because

of the dramatic elevation in academic rigor and learning opportunities from secondary education to post-secondary education (Sterling, 2018).

Culturally-Responsive Campus Communities

Each student is a unique individual bringing distinctive cultural and personal values, as well as a separate set of social and ethnic perspectives, to campus communities (Muthuswamy et al., 2006). This is an invaluable component of collegiate learning that admissions offices try to ensure by recruiting diverse populations. However, higher education institutions cannot create such interculturality on their own; it must organically happen in classrooms, residence halls, student clubs, on-and-off campus activities and retreats, and day-to-day student interactions (Gurin et al., 2002). Optimal learning takes place in spaces that are void of cultural or social ambiguity. Josh Moody (2020) writes that "the interaction between students with different worldviews can help change minds or shape ideas."

Campus diversity becomes a topic of retention when the work of admissions offices in recruiting multicultural first-year classes does not translate to sustainable campus-wide diversity for the next four to six years. Racially and ethnically minoritized groups, low-income/Pell grant-eligible students, and first-generation students are retained by their original institutions at lower rates than their White, wealthier, and continuing generation peers, respectively (Cataldi et al., 2018; Kelchen, 2017; Nichols, 2015; Pratt et al., 2019; Wright-Kim et al., 2019). It is problematic when the diverse voices of students with unique multicultural perspectives are involved in on-campus conversations regarding diversity for the least amount of time. Inadequately retaining diverse student groups negatively impacts all students' intercultural learning experiences (Gurin et al., 2002; Muthuswamy et al., 2006; Riley & Bogue, 2014). Additionally, without sufficient retention of diverse student groups, college campus communities are subject to a reiteration of similar ideas and global perspectives.

Social Mobility

Higher education has historically been viewed as a vehicle for social mobility. Education, in general, presents an opportunity for self-improvement by way of comprehensive skill development and growth of knowledge. Holistic self-improvement in this fashion raises our professional marketability for consideration for higher levels of employment and salary. For the purpose of this section, social mobility is the progression of an individual or community toward a place of socioeconomic equity and well-being; often made possible through increased access to financial, educational, or social resources. This definition does not, of course, assume that all people or groups naturally experience socioeconomic equity and well-being. Rutgers University in New Jersey is an example of a higher education institution which fully understands how educational opportunity can provide a path away from cyclical poverty. Rutgers reserves 10% of its first-year undergraduate admission slots for low-income students, in an effort to provide increased opportunity and access to marginalized students (McAnuff & Ambrose, 2010). Rutgers University also remains deeply involved in social mobility initiatives within the state of New Jersey; including a university-sponsored program that is designed to develop middle school students culturally, intellectually, and socially. Although the students are direct beneficiaries of the resources provided by Rutgers University, the public benefit of such initiatives cannot be ignored. As more individuals and communities in New Jersey socially mobilize, the overall citizenry of New Jersey will be enhanced culturally, intellectually, and economically (McAnuff & Ambrose, 2010).

Savvides and Stengos (2009) found that each additional year of higher learning increases the likelihood of students' social mobilization. This relationship between education and social mobility does not consider the

impact of other socially oppressive phenomena, e.g. gender pay gaps or racial prejudice in employment (Wells, 2008). However, the American job market has become increasingly competitive, as more jobs are requiring that candidates have some level of college education. The National Center for Educational Statistics (2018) reported that the national employment rate in the United States was highest among those who had earned a bachelor's degree or higher at 89%. The second highest was among those who had completed some college, but no degree at 79%, followed by no college at 72%. According to this data, the obvious goal of higher education institutions should be to retain students as long as possible, preferably through to degree completion. In fact, according to the U.S. Census Bureau (2016), those who completed at least some college earned on average about 9% more than those who had not completed any college. Even more significant a difference was found in the average earnings of those who'd completed some college and those who'd earned a bachelor's degree. On average, those who'd completed college earned about 51% more than those who had only completed some college.

Methods

A great extent of research exists on college student retention and retention theory. The author chose to limit datasets and literature included in this meta-synthesis to works on college student retention that referenced the individualistic terms such as "self-efficacy," "autonomy," and "independence." Additional key terms that were searched in online databases, libraries, journals, and lectures included the following: college student retention, college student persistence, retention models, retention theory, retention practices, higher education. Literature collected were disaggregated according to thematic correlation – foundational theory, theory-to-practice, and contemporary practices. Data were also grouped according to quantitative or qualitative application to the conceptual framework. Quantitative data collected included national statistical data on college student retention, persistence, and financial aid. Qualitative data collected included published theoretical literature, scholarly articles, essays, book chapters, white paper reports, and definitions of terms. Data collected included national student information reports (n = 5) and 59 articles, essays, book chapters, or reports published in scholarly journals and libraries (n = 59). Literature and data referencing correlations between financial aid received by college students and retention rates (n = 1) were excluded from this study. The author focused only on retention theories and practices in which academic and social engagement are considered to be influential in retention patterns. Also excluded from the study were literature and data related to student retention at community colleges or specific academic programs (n = 6), as the author only searched retention models and theories pertinent to traditional, multi-gendered, four-year higher education institutions.

Findings

Individualism in Foundational Retention Theory

Works considered to be foundational for contemporary retention practices (n = 5) were found to reflect individualist ideology. Among the most notable contributions to individualistic retention research, Vincent Tinto's (1975, 1993) work focused on the levels of student engagement and student individuality, and how the two influence retention patterns. According to Tinto (1975), the most effective retention models acknowledge how important unique interactions between a student and institution are. Tinto's 1975 model evolved to a more in-depth 1993 variation, allowing for more examination of a student's unique "retention influencers" such their personality and attitude, flexibility, and personal drive to achieve goals. Although Tinto's 1993 amendment called for more attention from practitioners to the influence of students' identities in campus integration, the crux of

student retention remained on how well students adjusted to academic and social campus environments, not vice versa. Further, a core element of Tinto's 1975 theory and the 1993 reiteration is "self-efficacy," reinforcing the individualistic values of autonomy and self-reliance.

Tinto drew from Durkheim's theory on suicide as a theoretical framework to explain the integrative challenges faced by first-year college students, in both the social and academic arenas. Tinto's (1975) references to Durkheim suggests that often in cases of suicide, victims have opted to voluntarily exit society upon feeling insufficiently integrated with the cultural norms, values, or ways of living. Tinto found that if the collegiate environment is viewed as a social system, similar to society, then dropping out of college is "analogous to that of suicide in the wider society" (Tinto, 1975, p. 91). Tinto further described the process of a student dropping out of college as a longitudinal insufficient integrative experience for the student within both social and academic systems. Adding academics to the integrative student experience acknowledged again that retention is not one-dimensional, but rather multidimensional (Fowler & Boylan, 2010; Tinto, 1975, 1993). Tinto acknowledged that it is possible for a student to be sufficiently integrated in one area but not the other, and consequently still drop out. Two assertions regarding student behavior emerge from Tinto's theory: (a) should a student feel disconnected from an institution socially but thrive academically, their voluntary exit from the college is still likely; (b) should a student be sufficiently integrated socially but underperforming academically, their academic dismissal from the institution is more likely. Both assertions follow individualistic ideology by attributing the student's early exit to their abilities or inabilities to successfully integrate into an environment, whether academic or social, that appears structurally and culturally inflexible.

Spady (1971) also drew inspiration from Durkheim's theory of suicide. Spady hypothesized that viewing colleges and universities as social systems in which students must sufficiently be integrated could help prevent voluntary premature departure. This study sought to determine the weight of influence that each of the following personalized social and academic factors had on a student's decision to drop out of college: friendship support, intellectual development, grade performance, social integration, satisfaction, and institutional commitment. Spady found that in order to persist or "survive," students needed to perform well within formal academic and social systems in the collegiate environment. What is reflective of individualism in Spady's explanation of his findings is that students' responses to formal academic and social systems – whether negative or positive – are reflective of their inherent qualities rather than the systems themselves.

Kamens (1971) comes the closest to presenting a historical theory for retention that signals flexibility on part of the student and institution, describing the marriage between the student and the institution as a socialized reciprocating relationship; one in which there is equal buy-in by the institution (Meyer, 1970). Kamens' sociological study on the effects of college size and major choice on retention also viewed colleges and universities as socializing organizations. Kamens differed from Tinto (1993) and Spady (1971) in believing that larger institutions are poised, in particular cases, to retain students at a higher rate than smaller institutions. Kamens' premise was that depending on a student's academic major, career path, and occupational outcomes following graduation, a larger, more prestigious institution might be a better fit than a smaller institution offering fewer professionally focused academic programs. For example, students seeking a career in business might be better served at a large public institution with a prestigious business school rather than at a smaller, though more personalized, liberal arts institution which only offers a general business program. Kamens believed that, should a professionally motivated student attend a larger, more prestigious university, the student would be likely to develop a strong affinity toward the institution and alumni network. Such a strong affinity is followed by an increased likelihood that the student would be retained through to program completion.

Each of the foundational retention theories reviewed in this section highlight different student characteristics as potential factors in their ability or inability to integrate and persist in a collegiate environment. These models reflect individualism by implying that retention is balanced on the autonomous student's ability or inability to overcome inherent qualities and to integrate into a collegiate environment, rather than the collegiate environment adjusting to the student's inherent qualities. In the next section of findings, the researcher will examine models and current examples for moving individualistic retention theory to practice.

Theory to Practice: Individualism in Contemporary Retention Strategy

Bringing theory to practice is a process which very few higher education institutions have managed to do successfully (Astin, 1985; Tinto, 2006). However, Tinto (2006) provided three essential guidelines for institutions to "move theory to action." The guidelines described by Tinto are institutional commitment, educational commitment, and social and intellectual community (pg. 146). Institutional commitment addresses the day-to-day behaviors of campus community members and leadership, affirming institutional commitment to students. Tinto suggested that these behaviors are not "programmatic" but are demonstrated by the natural living-out of the institution's mission values. Educational commitment addresses the level of engagement of faculty, staff, and students in academic activities on campus. The final principle, social and intellectual community, addresses groups and cohorts which work to foster a welcoming campus community. These guidelines follow Tinto's earlier models for student integration, parsing out operational calls to action for institutional leaders to ease the integration of students into collegiate academic and social systems.

Shortly following Tinto's (2006) research-to-practice guidelines, Braxton et al. (2007) offered seven day-to-day principles that retention practitioners may follow. These principles too drew from some of the individualistic retention theories and introduced additional guidelines for institutional action toward improving student retention.

1. *Individuals who advise or teach undergraduate college students should embrace abiding concern for career development of the students they serve.*
2. *Demonstrate respect for students as individuals by being appropriately sensitive to their needs and concerns.*
3. *Develop and foster a culture of enforced student success.*
4. *Involve faculty members in programs and activities designed to reduce student departure. Stress also the important role faculty play in facilitating student retention through their teaching, their research, and their relationship with students.*
5. *Practice institutional integrity by assuring the congruence of institutional actions with the goals and values.*
6. *Foster the development of student affinity groups and student friendships.*
7. *Select and implement, as appropriate, retention interventions described in the literature (Braxton et al., 2007).*

The seven principles presented by Braxton et al. described a multidimensional commitment by institutions to individualistically engage students throughout their academic and social collegiate experiences, leaning heavily on institutional action.

Colleges and universities have drawn from the recommendations of Tinto (2006) and Braxton et al. (2007) in designing institutional college retention programs and strategies. South Texas College followed Tinto's recommendation to engage faculty, staff, and students in academic activities by designing and advising

programs that support students in lower-level math courses (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). In the "Beacon Mentors" program, staff of the college visit lower-level and remedial courses periodically to inform students of academic support services available at the college. Similar to South Texas College, Albion College focuses its retention efforts on a group of students who appear to be more at-risk than their peers; students on terminal academic probation. Students that participate in Albion College's Academic Success Program take a course that includes scheduled study sessions and individual academic coaching. The Beacon Mentors and ASP programs also align with the recommendation by Braxton et al. that institutions should foster a culture of student success. Trinity Washington University's (TWU) learning community also aims to foster a culture of student success to prevent attrition, but in a more social and intellectual way (Tinto, 2006). All first-year students at TWU take a course with a faculty member that also serves as their advisor during their first semester (U.S. Department of Education, 2020). The retention programs described in this section are representative of a great wealth of retention programs that exist at institutions across the nation (e.g. Buffalo State College, California State University at Long Beach, Florida State University), all following components of the recommendations made by Tinto (2006) and Braxton et al. (2007).

Discussion

The purpose of this meta-synthesis was to determine whether foundational retention theories reflected values of individualism, and whether those same values of student independence, autonomy, and self-reliance informed the design of contemporary retention strategy employed by colleges and universities. The findings revealed that the foundational retention models of Tinto (1975, 1993) and Spady (1971) rely heavily on students' abilities to integrate into the academic and social systems of a collegiate environment. Both reference student characteristics and traits as factors in whether students chose to drop out of college. Further, current retention strategies and practices of colleges and universities follow the models and recommendations of individualistic models. It is worth noting before continuing, it is not the intent of the researcher to cast a negative light on the foundational works of Tinto and Spady. In fact, their contributions to college student retention have revolutionized the way that higher education leaders might view the college student experience in academic and social systems. It is, however, the intent of the researcher to offer a collectivist alternative to the way that retention theory and practice might be developed moving forward.

In a contemporary, complex, ever-diversifying world of higher education, it seems most efficient to install theoretically-designed programming that is more reflective or and responsive to the social identities of students (Astin, 1985; Knaggs et al., 2013; Wao et al., 2010). It is possible that individualistic retention strategies rely too heavily on providing standardized resources, though on a personal level, to students and expecting them to carry the responsibility of appropriately applying those resources to fit their unique worldview. It's important to note that although the college student experience has changed considerably within the past century, it has not deviated much structurally or culturally from its original design for a homogeneous (White, middle-to-upper class, legacy) student population (Bess & Dee, 2012; Guiffrida et al., 2012). The researcher believes that an overemphasis on individualism in college student retention theory and practice creates devastating cultural blind-spots in retention strategies which consequently become a significant factor in the retention of more diverse student populations.

Proposing a Paradigmatic Shift

The next generational wave of college-aged students will be more diverse than ever, representing a wide variety of singular or multiple social identities (Grawe, 2018). Most alarming about this new wave of diverse

students is that they will represent identity groups that have historically underperformed in college enrollment and completion. When referring to the projected demographic shifts in college-aged students, Grawe (2018) explains that "these changes adversely shift the population away from traditionally strong markets toward those with lower rates of educational acquisition." These demographic changes are a cause for concern to higher education professionals because higher education institutions might not be structurally nor culturally prepared to appropriately serve a significantly more diverse student population.

Although much progress has been made, higher education as a whole has had difficulty shifting away from non-inclusive original design (Hutcheson, 2019). Even the earliest accounts of non-White, non-male groups (i.e. indigenous people and women) participating in higher education emerged from attempts to socialize these groups into their societal roles as defined by wealthier, White men (Hutcheson, 2019). Large enrollment waves of non-traditional students throughout American higher education history have been marked as periods of major reform in the field, such as the enrollment of women, students of color, and veterans. While the enrollment of these student groups signaled great progress in the field, many students holding membership to these social identities (as well as others previously mentioned) continue to experience hardship in degree completion (Barry et al., 2014; D'Amico & Dika, 2013; Patterson Silver Wolf et al., 2019; St. John & Musoba, 2011; Taylor et al., 2010). The researcher attributes the ongoing challenges in retention faced by diverse student groups primarily to a structural and cultural inflexibility in individualistic retention strategies employed by higher education institutions.

Up until this point, retention theories have been heavily individualistic, emphasizing student self-efficacy and implying that student retention is balanced on a student's inability to overcome their inherent qualities in order to integrate in a collegiate environment, not vice versa. Individualistic retention theory tends to overlook the need for structural and cultural change in higher education. However, the research suggests that significant structural and cultural change is indeed needed in higher education to respond to the demographic shift in college-age students as well as the growing diversity in students' social identities.

Thus, the researcher proposes a new collectivist, culturally-responsive paradigm for retention theory and practice, one guided by intersectionality – the philosophy that individuals' overlapping social identities such as race, class, gender, capability, and sexual orientation guide the way they interpret lived experience (Crenshaw, 1989; Cuellar & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2019). Social identities are multiple, each bringing unique personal characteristics that can lower or elevate risks in any given setting. When considering educational equity and access it is important to recognize that students carry multifaceted, intersecting social identities which influence how they experience higher education (i.e. low-income, first-generation college students; Cuellar & Johnson-Ahorlu, 2019; Delgado et al., 2017 Intersectionality section). Intersectionality, though not perfect in its operationalization, offers a lens that appropriately conceptualizes the complexities of diverse perspectives in society.

Successfully shifting retention strategy away from individualism to the proposed collectivist, culturally-responsive paradigm would require that institutional leaders redesign core elements of the collegiate environment to respond to and reflect students' inherent qualities and intersecting identities. Further, students' inherent qualities and intersecting identities should guide how institutional leaders design what the researcher believes to be the three core elements of the collegiate student experience that, according to the literature, directly impact college student retention: academics, socialties, and finances (Spady, 1971; Swail, 2014; Tinto, 2006; Van Duser & Tanabe, 2018). The researcher defines academics by the following subcategories: curricula and course delivery; advising and academic support services; and faculty availability, instruction, and

assessment. Examples of redesigning academics to be more culturally responsive might involve diversifying course content by including the works of more authors of color or offering flexible delivery modalities for every course to ensure all students of various capabilities can equally participate in any course. The researcher defines socialties by the following subcategories: new student orientation and transition; resident and non-resident community and student activities, student psychological and emotional counseling services. Examples of redesigning socialties to be more culturally responsive might involve implementing gender-neutral residence halls and living policies, or standardizing orientation content to include terminology easily understood by first-generation college students. The researcher defines finances by the following subcategories: pre-start financial resources (financial aid, scholarships and billing), post-start financial wellness and literacy (billing, debt management, financial planning). Examples of redesigning finances to be more culturally responsive might involve transitioning away from a merit-based scholarship model to need-based model or developing culturally-responsive financial literacy programming according to diverse international perspectives. Each of the three elements of the collegiate student experience are essential retention factors that could be redesigned, using the proposed collectivist, culturally-responsive paradigm, to create a collegiate environment more prepared and supportive of diverse student groups.

Lastly, the researcher suggests that under this new collectivist, culturally-responsive retention paradigm, it would no longer be the responsibility of the student to overcome systemic barriers historically associated with their social identities in order to sufficiently integrate into the collegiate environment. Instead, it is the responsibility of higher education institutions to cultivate a collegiate environment that supports the success of a complexly diverse student body. Individualism and self-efficacy in retention theory and practice are both incrementally appropriate, although a risk of individualism is that it sometimes rejects the impact that our social identities can have on our pursuit of opportunities (Diangelo, 2018).

Conclusion

The profiles of college-age students are diversifying, and the next wave of college enrollees are projected to represent multiple overlapping social identities, many of which have historically experienced lower retention rates than their peers with dominant identities. To appropriately prepare to support this new diverse student population toward degree completion, significant reform is needed in retention strategies employed by higher education leaders. Evident in the national retention data, individualistic retention practices which rely on student autonomy and integration have not sufficiently supported students from diverse populations. Intersectionality provides a helpful lens for understanding the way that individuals with multiple social identities interpret lived experiences. The research proposed a new collectivist, culturally-responsive paradigm, which is guided by intersectionality, for retention theory and strategy development. This collectivist, culturally-responsive paradigm could help in redesigning academic, social, and financial college student experiences to be more responsive and reflective of the social identities of diverse students. Future research related to the topic includes testing the effectiveness of the collectivist, culturally-responsive retention paradigm by using it as a guide to redesign one or multiple academic, social, or financial subcategories to reflect students' social identities.

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