Theory Reflection Paper

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Introduction

College students are often categorized and subcategorized into various gender roles, sexual orientation, races, and religious beliefs. Throughout this class we have learned that students develop differently based on these individual categories. However, I believe that students mostly develop similarly through gender experiences and college experiences at large. The development theories that parallel my theory of how students develop are Jim O'Neil's Male Identity Theory, Cross's Feminist Identity Theory, and Arthur Chickering's Seven Vectors. This paper will summarize these theories to serve as a base for my student development theory. Within my own theory, the aforementioned theories will be kept broad and generic in order to encompass more students and their development. The purpose of this paper will identify how students develop individually through their specific gender roles and collectively through being a college student.

Review of Theories

Male Identity Development

Male identity development is largely founded on the principles of how males see themselves within "the context of the restraints, constraints, and expectations of male gender roles" (Scher, 1990, p. 325). Males will accept gender roles given to them by society, despite conflicts on how they feel, out of fear of acting outside of socially constructed norms. Jim O'Neil refers to an inner struggle with males known as gender role conflict. Certain patterns of positive and negative consequences can arise through gender role conflicts in men. Gender role conflicts states males may have to restrain emotion and not fully express their feelings and as a result the man will isolate and detach themselves from certain relationships. A fear of
femininity, restricted expression, and restricted affectionate behavior were most prevalent within O'Neil's gender role conflicts study.

Women's Identity Development

Development of women will happen in various stages throughout a female's lifetime, this theory can be summarized though the Feminist Identity model (Cross, 1971). The feminist identity model is broken into five different stages, the first stage deals with passive acceptance. This stage, women have accepted the traditional gender roles placed on them by society. Through these gender roles, women believe that the roles placed before them are beneficial while society assumes males are the superior sex. The second stage for women is revelation, where females begin to become aware of the inequality. Often, this will result in a sequence of events, resulting in self reflection and identifying men in a negative view.

The third stage is embeddedness - emanation, which is characterized by a group of fellow women, seeking support and looking for affirmation. This helps women identify themselves as being strong and independent, resulting in guarded interactions with males. The fourth stage is synthesis, when women begin to develop a positive and genuine feminist identity. They become more trusting of men and begin to evaluate them on an individual basis. The last stage is active commitment, a reinforcement of women's strong feminist identity will carry throughout this stage. They commit themselves to be active in their community and will contribute to a meaningful cause. Actions moving forward will be calculated, individual, and have a purpose. They also begin to bridge the gap between their male counterpart, seeing them as equal but not the same as women.
Psychosocial Identity Development

Arthur Chickering created a theory known as the Seven Vectors, a development theory based around college student development. The first vector known as developing competence deals with the overall competence of a college student, from intellectual competence, physical and manual skills, and interpersonal competence. Second, managing emotion, is a student's natural reactions to attending a class or dealing with the stresses of college life. Every student is different and it is the responsibility of the student affairs professional to be able to identify their emotions and react appropriately. Moving through autonomy toward interdependence is the third vector and can be summarized through a student's progression into adulthood. They often will take responsibility for their actions, goals, and chosen life path. While on their path through autonomy students will improve their relationships with friends and family on their way toward interdependence.

Developing mature interpersonal relationships, the fourth vector, is when a student can recognize the importance of true friendships and the ability for intimacy to grow in relationships. Through this stage of development, the student will engage in intellectual conversations and be less clingy while committing to long-lasting relationships. The fifth vector is when students establish identity, usually this will involve an evolution of emotional and intellectual maturity. Chickering refers to this stage as a puzzle, the pieces are all laid out and the student starts to piece them together to formulate the bigger picture. Students will begin to identify their sexual identity, be more aware of personal appearance, and reflect on the past.

Next, developing purpose is where students have the drive to go to class and complete their education, but they are unsure of the future. Students understand they want to graduate and
be successful, however they want to be fulfilled in their career or vocation even if they are not being paid for their time. The last vector is developing integrity, which is when a student is able to distinguish their own personal views, beliefs, and guidelines to suit themselves and suit the condition of their lives. Younger students will usually enter college with an assortment of assumptions on what is right and wrong, good and bad, and true and false; usually these assumptions are made through the influence of their parents, faith, or media. However, as students develop and grow intellectually they are able to minimize their internal debate. They understand the consequences once a decision has been made, and will usually make decisions without debate.

**My Student Development Theory**

Reading through most of the theories, they seem to be isolated and extreme. While I believe that students do develop somewhat based on gender differences, most students’ psychosocial development outweighs their gender development. Relating my own experience to the seven vectors of development, I progressed from my freshmen year to graduation day. For me, the development stages were gradual and built one upon another as I advanced my collegiate career. My intellectual knowledge grew immensely through the rigorous course work and challenging lectures. Throughout my collegiate career I also grew in maturity. I was forced to make lifelong decisions that could mold my future. I had to pay bills and moved away from home. I also grew my grammar and speech, being able to adapt from talking to professors to fellow classmates.

Based off of the three previously mentioned theories and how I developed as a student, my student development theory takes the approach that students develop somewhat through male
and female identity development but focuses on the seven vectors. When a student first enters college, they see themselves as society depicts students. This is similar to the constraints that males feel through their societal perceptions. It is only through their college journey that they realize they are more than just a male or more than just a student, throwing off the constraints placed on those identifiers by society. Additionally, the first few steps of the feminist identity and seven vectors models identify the student as being competent and being aware of their surroundings and identifying themselves as being a college student in a male/female body. It is how they act and react to specific situations that determines which stage they are a part of. I do agree managing emotion and developing competence are key elements to a student's success within the university; however, these two steps should really almost become one step. If students do not have the mental capacity to control their emotion for a product they have purchased, such as their college education, they should not be a part of the institution. Students should have an innate ability to be prepared for college both emotionally and intellectually, prior to attending classes. This first step in my eyes, is almost like a prerequisite for the seven vectors.

Most millennial students rely heavily on their parents, thus an inner struggle to develop autonomously while removed from their parents, faith, and media influences occurs. During this stage students will surround themselves with fellow classmates, roommates, and colleagues to see who they have similar interests with. The first few years of college is a learning process, students will soon value friendships and relationships based on similar interests. My theory is loosely based off of the third vector and third feminist stage, where students move through autonomy toward interdependence and women embeddedness - emanation. Essentially, this is the support system students will surround themselves with.
The last portion of my theory deals with students finding their way through their collegiate courses and figuring out their chosen career path. Most students have dreams of what they want to be when they grow up, but few have an idea on how they will achieve it. Some students will get their degree and move right into the work force, while others will continue with school to receive a terminal degree. Students will find causes and forms of activism in college, that will help find purpose in life and build a foundation for the rest of their lives. These theories are similar to the sixth vector, developing purpose and the fifth step of the feminist model of active commitment.

Students have great intentions that they will change the world and make it a better place. But when they arrive to college, they have no idea of how they will achieve their dreams and aspirations. Students do not realize that they need to be granular with their goals; make them achievable and attainable by setting deadlines and holding themselves accountable. Students will see their goals come and go throughout their college career, but will grow and develop along their journey. Most of the theories discussed in the text will progress throughout time and development of the individual, the same can be said about the development of a college student. Understanding these student development theories can help me as a student affairs professional better educate and mentor the future. I understand now that I cannot move to the third or fourth step, if a student is only at step one.
References
