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The Intersection between Chickering's Theory and Generation Z Student of Color Activism

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Student activism is an ever-developing trend on college campuses. The current generation, Generation Z, started college in 2013. Analyzing literature on student development and how it intersects with the student activist identity reveals what institutions can do to further serve students in a generational context. When characteristics of students from Generation Z are given proper attention, campus administrators can better understand student activism as an identity. As current and new generations matriculate through college, institutions need to continuously challenge their processes and recreate equitable and inclusive spaces for their students.

Student development theory is the foundational basis of the praxis of student affairs. Current literature supports and challenges the relevance of student development theory to Generation Z, especially folx[1] of color who identify with this generation. This article seeks to analyze core traits of students of color within Generation Z, the seven vectors of Chickering's (2007) identity development theory, and how both factors intersect with student activism. Kimberlé Crenshaw (1989) coined the term intersectionality to explain how systems contribute to the oppression and continued marginalization of people who hold multiple identities that are not recognized as dominant. Each vector and trait will be analyzed with an intersectional lens to provide evidence of how Chickering's theory contributes to student activism, with regard to serving students of color in Generation Z. As Millennial scholar-practitioners, we seek to provide more insight into the current generation attending college. We acknowledge this article may seem to perpetuate ageism due to how much power is given to the social construct of generational designations. However, based on the context of this article, we strive to explicitly name factors that impact a particular generation, who happen to make up majority of the undergraduate students we serve on a college campus. Furthermore, we seek to acknowledge the characteristics of this overlooked population and recognize their commitment to advocacy toward equity and inclusion.

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[1] *'Folx' is used intentionally to show solidarity with unrecognized individuals. We draw upon Tori Ann Porter (2016), and Danielle Torrez and Princess Reese's (2017) research who identifies 'folx' to emphasize a gender binary system is a product of colonization and oppression of Indigenous peoples. The same reasoning applies in regards to the use of 'womxn'*

Generation Z

Generation Z is commonly defined as anyone born between the years of 1995 and 2010; however, other scholars indicate Generation Z was born starting as early as 1994, and as late as 2000 (Dimock, 2018). Generation Z has received nicknames such as iGen, the Delta Generation, and the Digital Natives Generation, to showcase their innovative spirit and strong purpose to enact change (Rouse, 2016; Sanburn, 2015). Other nicknames include the Post-Millennial Generation and the Forgotten Generation to bring attention to how society's obsession with the Millennial generation contrasts with the relative lack of consideration regarding the presence of Generation Z. Seemiller and Grace (2015) indicated Generation Z has the following traits:

> • Concerned with education, employment, and racial equality
> • Aware of troubles and traumas happening in the lives of family members, friends, and communities around the world.
> • Eager to engage in service that has a tangible and lasting impact on systematic and structural problems.
> • Motivated by a desire to help and please others, and to advocate and work on behalf of something they believe in.

Furthermore, students of color from this generation identify as activists to intentionally resist problematic policies and events on college campuses, and seek to rebuild institutions organizationally. Student activism has increased as repetitive incidents of discrimination, prejudice, and violence have occurred on college campuses.

Student Activism

On April 16, 2007, a shooting occurred at Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University involving 33 fatalities and 23 injuries (Campus Safety Staff, 2018). From the time until April of 2018, 122 people were killed and 198 people were injured due to gun violence in the United States (Campus Safety Staff, 2018; Jones, 2018). In 2001, there were 2,200 reports of sexual assault on college campuses in the United States and in 2014, there were 6,700 reports (Rape, Abuse,

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and Incest National Network [RAINN], n.d.; Crocker, 2017). In 2012, there were 970 hate crimes reported on college campuses and in 2016, 1,250 hate crimes were reported (Bauman, 2018). Generation Z has been exposed to traumatic events since the genesis of their college attendance in 2013.

Additional factors impacting this student population have also involved issues with campus personnel. Students of color in Generation Z have expressed concern about the lack of staff and faculty of color (Matthew, 2016), the exploitation of students of color to showcase institutional diversity, and the lack of training and onboarding processes on inclusion, equity, and social justice for all new and current employees (Primm, 2018). Many institutions have failed to respond adequately to these concerns. Student activism may have an association with civil disobedience, but "activist" remains a salient identity for many college students in Generation Z. Students engaged in student activism develop a stronger social consciousness and responsibility to their community (Stewart, Settles, & Winter, 1998). Student activism challenges institutions to understand how its students perceive it and to refine its approach in addressing students' concerns (Barnhardt & Reyes, 2016). This understanding benefits campus and institutional leaders as they learn about students' experiences and create solutions to create institutional change. Lastly, activism informs campus stakeholders and helps them develop an understanding to create initiatives thatf align with an equitable and inclusive campus culture (Biddix, Somers, & Polman, 2009). Although many student populations have participated in student activism, students of color have been at the forefront and have demanded institutional accountability. The actions of Generation Z students of color stem from their personal development, much of which is implicitly rooted in the vectors of Chickering's (2007) theory.

Chickering's Theory: Developing Competence

Chickering (2007) proposed seven vectors as pathways for students to holistically define themselves. In general, developing competence is comprised of three parts: intellectual competence, physical and manual skills, and interpersonal competence (Chickering, 2007). Developing intellectual competence involves the extensive use of the mind to obtain an understanding of content, developing sophistication, and building a knowledge base to analyze and synthesize multiple concepts. Physical and manual competence emphasizes athletic and artistic achievement through the development of self-discipline, strength, and competition. Lastly, interpersonal competence entails the act of processing and responding to another's thoughts and ideas.

Seemiller and Grace (2017) indicate students from Generation Z "believe they have the power to change the world" (para. 7), even as they are frustrated with the continued injustices in society. Generation Z has a willingness and desire

to reframe the narrative around current issues, and rebuild the broken systems that continue to oppress marginalized populations. Generation Z strives to advocate for equal human rights; they seek to address social justice issues such as legalization of same-sex marriage, the Black Lives Matter movement, and they engage with policy debates on womxn's rights, immigration, and transgender rights (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). Generation Z utilizes social media to gain an understanding of the issues in society and to communicate with others with similar values. Through leadership, self-advocacy, and the ability to manage their emotions due to intentional vulnerability, Generation Z has a niche for developing competency on how to engage in their communities and how to fulfill their career aspirations.

Managing Emotions

Emotions "have the power to derail the educational process when they become excessive and overwhelming" (Chickering, 2007, p. 1). Our emotions need efficient management for us to be successful and navigate through difficult situations. This vector was designed to provide an opportunity for students to understand the root of their emotions and feelings, and create effective ways to holistically harness those emotions. However, emotions are difficult to manage for some people, especially college students. Students come to college feeling stressed, and in result become overwhelmed, stressed, or depressed, and engage in risky behavior such as excessive drinking and assault (Strauss & Howe, 1991). When discussing student activists of color, they build resilience to push toward rebuilding institutional structures. Student activists of color are generally at the forefront of doing emotionally laborious work, and it is important for them to be self-aware of their mental health to prevent exhaustion and burnout.

Due to the overwhelming amount of pressure from college, many students of color from this generation find it difficult to effectively manage their emotions. Additionally, it is also important to acknowledge when assessing emotions, racially coded language is used against people of color who are considered overemotional, aggressive, or problematic (Talaska, Fisk, & Chaiken 2008). Leaders within higher education should stop misconstruing the mixed emotions of Generation Z students of color and start acknowledging the importance of their work when collaborating with this generation and developing interdependence.

Moving through Autonomy toward Interdependence

This vector allows a student to understand their connection with themselves and others (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, & Renn, 2009). Chickering (2007) indicated this vector requires emotional and instrumental independence to develop an appreciation for interdependence. Emotional independence requires a

release from needs for affection, reassurance, or approval. Through this release, students risk losing friends or status in order to pursue their interests or remain consistent with their convictions (Chickering, 2007). Instrumental independence requires critical thinking, navigation with limited direction, and willingness to search for information that fulfills the desires of the student. Interdependence is the process of developing balance when tending to the needs of yourself along with another person.

Through this vector, Generation Z student of color activists develop an understanding of sacrifice, initiative, and adaptability. Previous generations have been documented as needing constant reassurance and affirmation to build resilience; Generation Z builds resilience by focusing their energy on what is beneficial for the collective, not specifically themselves (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). While Generation Z understands having social capital and influence contributes to successful student activist movements, they are not afraid to lose people from their communities (Seemiller, & Grace, 2017). Their individual actions are intended to benefit large communities, but they lose sight of how their decisions are detrimental to themselves. Due to the ebbs and flows of social connection, Generation Z has been called one of the loneliest generations in history (Trinko, 2018). Although lonely, Generation Z students are action-oriented and seek to initiate change. They can navigate through various spaces, and are gifted with the ability to develop strong relationships as quickly as they lose them (Seemiller & Grace, 2017).

Developing Relationships and Establishing Identity

This vectors involves intercultural and interpersonal competency in order to develop intimate relationships (Evans et. al, 2009). Chickering (2007) stated having this kind of competency can reduce bias and broaden one's mindset to difference (p. 3). This vector supports the trait of being strong observers and having a strong consciousness of context as Generation Z student activists of color are inclined to understand how the concepts they are learning have broader applicability (Mcdonald, 2018). It also shows their desire to build coalitions with folx from different identities to work toward a common goal; coalition building can serve as an effective tool when working with institutional leadership. In order for institutional change to happen, campus administrators need to further address their legitimate lack of satisfaction with processes on college campuses that betray the ideals of inclusion and equity.

Seemiller and Grace (2017) indicated Generation Z has a social change mentality, which serves as a motivator for them to become involved with civic engagement and social justice. As Generation Z students of color activists continue to partake in activism, they develop an activist identity and become social change agents.

Some students have this activist identity prior to attending college (Seemiller & Grace, 2017), and therefore, are more likely to have a change agent mentality than their predecessors. Additionally, Generation Z students' identity formation is strongly influenced by their experiences. Due to how much exposure Generation Z has had to issues of race, gender, gun violence, and sexual assault, this generation has a perceived notion these issues can only be resolved by them (Seemiller & Grace, 2017), hence the strong presence of resilience and resistance. The level of resilience and resistance Generation Z students of color possess took time to develop, and contributes to a part of their purpose.

Developing Purpose and Integrity

This vector strongly ties to developing reasonable commitments and establishing clear boundaries. Generation Z values happiness and enjoyment in their careers, even at the expense of earning less money (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). For many college students, the purpose of college is to qualify them for a good job and a comfortable lifestyle (Chickering, 2007). Due to Generation Z's activist nature, they want to ensure what they are learning inside and outside of the classroom contributes to their future endeavors (McDonald, 2018). They achieve this by engaging in meaningful work through community engagement, internships, or volunteering. Integrating work and passion can provide a clearer understanding of one's purpose (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). Generation Z is aware of how higher education perpetuates systemic oppression and strives to create institutional change in their universities, and the hope is for them to transfer this energy and momentum to their communities and workspaces when they graduate.

Integrity is an individual's ability to articulate one's values and self-affirmation through humanizing values, personalizing values, and developing harmony with people around them (Chickering, 2007). Generation Z students of color strongly believe it is necessary for them to fix any institutional problems which administrators have yet to acknowledge, and which Millennials failed to address during their college years (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). They do not have faith or trust in their campus administration. If campus administrators truly want to reshape and reframe the state of higher education, they need to develop relationships with Generation Z, establish trust, and perform applicable action with the utmost transparency and integrity.

Recommendations

When working with Generation Z students of color, it is important to understand their needs to best serve them. Generation Z student activists of color seek actual change from their institutions. As professionals, it is essential to create and foster an authentic and intentional relationship to understand their needs.

Student of color activists from Generation Z will pursue their passions and interests, and it is crucial for professionals to create different opportunities for leadership and community engagement align with social justice and social change. Faculty should also create learning environments capitalize on Generation Z's interests and strengths and integrate co-curricular learning (Seemiller & Grace, 2015). Institutions should continuously revisit their policies and procedures to create a socially just environment. This creates an equitably accessible environment to enhance the student experience and meet their needs. As professionals continue to serve Generation Z students of color, consistent research is required to provide the best services for these students. We recommend further research be conducted which combines generational studies with a deep consideration of the influence of race, class, and gender. Acknowledging these identities provides additional context on how to best serve a specific generation when they enter and navigate through college.

Limitations

There is a dearth of literature on this subject adequately addresses the influence of race, gender, and time on Generation Z's development. The umbrella characteristics presented here may not represent the actual experiences and tendencies of specific people or sub-communities within the specific generation. We realized in our research process there is a lack of research on student activists of color within Generation Z. Therefore, we recognize our paper may not be fully representative of all members of Generation Z. Lastly, the existing literature is inconsistent in defining the time range of Generation Z. Generation Z is assumed to have started at four different times by scholars; this generation is not the only generation to have inconsistent timeframes. Due to the lack of literature on this topic, it is necessary for professionals to develop additional research and scholarship on how to empower and advance students of color from this generation. Institutions cannot operate as they currently do and wait for this generation to fully matriculate through college. Practitioners, scholars, and administrative leaders need to acknowledge all factors contribute to the makeup of the students they should be serving. With the attributes in students of color activists from Generation Z, institutions need to look for initiatives where they can develop their current student population into rising scholars of tomorrow and better advocates of today.

Conclusion

Upon viewing Chickering's (2007) theory through the lens of one generation, we identified benefits and drawbacks regarding how it aligns with or diverges from the development of today's students. While Chickering's (2007) theory is applicable to current student populations, it is not effective when capturing the essence

of other identities. When using an intersectional lens, students of color activists navigate differently through their development than their counterparts who do not claim "activist" as part of their identity. Soon, these students will matriculate out of college, but it is important for campus administrators to acknowledge the changing needs of students of color. While Generation Z is perceived as the generation who will solve current issues, current practitioners, scholars, and policymakers should work with Generation Z students of color and navigate in a better direction when reframing the purpose of a system was not designed to advance them.

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