
■ The Unmet Psychosocial Development Needs of the High-Achieving, Low-Income Student

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The purpose of this exploratory, qualitative study of the lived experiences of low-income college freshmen (as they relate to their needs and decisions about continuing their enrollment in college) addresses the problem college administrators and faculty members have with determining how best to help high-achieving, low-income students meet their needs. Participants' experiences were explored using 30 open-ended interview questions aligned with this study's three research questions. The research questions were centered around (a) exploring high-achieving, low-income (HALI) freshman community college students' beliefs about their needs (individual and contextual) for continuing their enrollment in higher education, (b) exploring these students' decisions about continuing their higher education experiences and how they may be influenced by their individual and contextual needs, and (c) exploring these students' views of the projected fulfillment or lack of fulfillment of their needs and how they affect their continued enrollment decisions. Findings and implications are discussed, including the emergence of dominant psychosocial needs and concerns about the future related to meeting those needs. A potential outcome is the utilization of findings to improve student support programs and interventions, with the goal of achieving higher retention rates.

The study focused on low-income college student participants who received a Take Stock in Children scholarship and who were enrolled as freshmen at higher education institution sites. The main study (Wilson, 2014) was conducted to document and describe high-achieving, low-income community college freshmen's lived experiences related to their needs and decisions

about continuing their enrollment in higher education. Subsequently, a comparative study of other low-income college freshman groups was conducted to better understand the extent to which need differences exist among various low-income community college freshmen groups.

The purpose of this study was to document and describe the lived experiences of low-income community college freshmen as they related to their needs and decisions about continuing their higher education. The researcher explored the possible differentiation of high-achieving, low-income (HALI) freshman community college students from other low-income community college freshmen groups: average-achieving, low-income students from the same institution (community college) and high-achieving, low-income students from a different institution type (four-year university). The target population was low-income participants who received a Take Stock in Children scholarship and enrolled at the selected higher education institutions located in the southeastern United States.

An interview instrument consisting of 30 open-ended questions was used to elicit responses aligned to the research questions: (a) what are the college freshman students' beliefs about their needs (individual and contextual) for continuing their enrollment in higher education; (b) what decisions about continuing their higher education experiences may be influenced by their individual and contextual needs; and (c) how do the students' views of the projected fulfillment or lack of fulfillment of their needs (individual and contextual) affect their continued enrollment decisions. Research into the needs and consequential need-influenced decisions of HALI students will prove valuable to administrators and faculty serving members of this unique and important population at community colleges as well as those at four-year universities.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Student retention rates in higher education have captured the interest of researchers. Some of the variables examined include precollege characteristics and background traits, such as demographics (gender, race, ethnicity); socioeconomic background (family income, highest level of parental education); academic achievement (high school grades and test scores); and self-confidence (motivation and self-assessment of ability; Finkelstein, 2002; Flowers, 2006; Folger, Carter, & Chase, 2004; Howey, 1999; Reason, Terenzini, & Domingo, 2006). The data reveals a shortfall in student retention rates among high-achieving, low-income students. This lack of success is even more profound at community colleges (Deil-Amen, 2011; Feldman & Zimbler, 2011; Wyner, Bridgeland, & Dilulio,

2007; National Center for Education Statistics, 2017; Zisel, 2018). Research demonstrates that the first year of college and the transition from the first year of college to the next year are especially vulnerable periods for high-achieving, low-income students (Deil-Amen, 2011; Duran, 2016; Feldman & Zimbler, 2011; Hossler, Kuh, & Olsen, 2001; McLoughlin, 2011; Schmertz, 2010). The research has failed to show the link between student experiences, needs, and the influences of these needs on students' enrollment decisions.

Tinto's Model of College Student Departure

Students' needs may generate both actual and imagined fears that in turn influence their decisions about attending and continuing enrollment in higher education. Tinto's (1993) Model of College Student Departure identifies three major sources of student departure: (a) "academic difficulties," (b) "inability of individuals to resolve their educational and occupational goals," and (c) "failure to become or remain incorporated in the intellectual and social life of the institution" (Tinto, 1993, p. 114). An examination of each of the major sources is pertinent and served as a methodical guide to the study.

Tinto (1997) also examined social interaction within the classroom in a community college setting. Tinto suggested that students who commute to college have multiple obligations. These students experience the classroom as the only environment in which academic and social interactions combine (Tinto, 1997). These classroom interactions and experiences may prove critical to retention and intention to leave.

Astin's I-E-O Model

To continue conceptualizing high-achieving, low-income students and their needs to be successful in higher education, the theoretical framework extends beyond Tinto's model. The theory proposed by Astin (1993) also is useful. Astin sought to improve upon Tinto's ideas. Particularly, Astin developed the Input-Environment-Outcome (I-E-O) model as a guiding framework for assessments in higher education (Astin, 1993).

Tinto's (1993) reasons for student departures can be understood as being a byproduct of the I-E-O interaction. It is drawn from systems theory that includes input, process, and outcome. Systems theory dates back to the 1950s and before (Laszlo & Krippner, 1998). It is important to understand that input, environment, and outcomes are interrelated. Keup (2006) stated, "Characteristics that students possess prior to attending

college ('inputs') can, and do, simultaneously affect students' selection of particular institutional environments and their experiences in those settings as well as the 'outcomes' of those particular environments" (p. 31). An examination of each of the elements is pertinent, and it served as a methodical guide to the study.

Tentative Theory of the Phenomena

Six groupings have been devised as a means to categorize the multiple factors. Four of the six component groups consist of external influences: (a) *Complementary School to College Curriculum* associated with academic expectations and rigor during high school experiences and college (Chhen Stewart, 2012); (b) *Pre-College and Bridge Programs* associated with precollege experiences (Schmertz, 2010); (c) *Academic Advisement and Support* associated with early encouragement of degree aspirations (Deafenbaugh, 2007); (d) *Sense of Community* associated with social engagement with instructors and peers (Feldman & Zimbler, 2011; Wirt, 2010); this includes academic and social integration experiences on campus (Flowers, 2006).

Two of the groups comprise individual/internal influences factors: (a) *Adequate Financial Resources* including budgeting and/or employment (Deafenbaugh, 2007; McLoughlin, 2011); and, (b) *Psychosocial Development* with an extensive list of associated psychosocial factors. These psychosocial factors include the following: conscientiousness, self-esteem, social support, and life experiences (Napoli & Wortman, 1998; Schmertz, 2010); social and emotional support from parents/family (Deafenbaugh, 2007); on-campus supports to match the social and emotional support of family and precollege friends (Bergerson, 2007; Chhen Stewart, 2012; Deafenbaugh, 2007); sense of adjustment, comfort, belonging, and competence (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005; Deil-Amen, 2011); sense of self-efficacy (Flowers, 2006; McLoughlin, 2011; Schmertz, 2010); success strategies such as time management, goal focus, writing abilities, test taking, and self-advocacy (Byrd & MacDonald, 2005; Feldman & Zimbler, 2011); isolation from day-to-day demands of family, friends, and work (Napoli & Wortman, 1998); background factors and life experiences such as parental and family responsibilities as well as experiential learning experiences (Flowers, 2006); self-regulated learning (Black, 2008); student's educational expectancies (Diemer & Li, 2012); and social and cultural capital (McLoughlin, 2011).

The literature on factors that fall under the psychosocial development group contributed to the tentative theory of the phenomenon of this study: low-income college freshmen may need psychosocial development,

particularly those enrolled in community colleges, to positively affect their rate of persistence in higher education.

Methodology

The population for this study was low-income college student participants who received a Take Stock in Children scholarship and who were enrolled as freshmen at higher education institution sites. The main study (Wilson, 2014) was conducted to document and describe high-achieving, low-income freshman community college students' lived experiences related to their needs and decisions about continuing their enrollment in higher education. Subsequently, a comparative study of other low-income community college freshmen groups was conducted to better understand the extent to which need differences exist among various low-income community college freshmen groups. The researcher employed a phenomenological research design to guide the data collection and analysis in trying to understand the students' realities about their needs for continuing their enrollment in higher education.

Research Design

The quantitative paradigm is mostly concerned with the analysis of numerical data related to previously identified variables. Lacking identified variables, the quantitative research was not valid. Qualitative research is used to generate possible leads and ideas for formulating a realistic and testable hypothesis. For this purpose, the qualitative methodology was most appropriate.

Four major qualitative research designs were considered for the study: the case study, ethnographic, grounded theory, and phenomenological research designs. The phenomenological research design is typically used to “develop an understanding of a subject’s or subjects’ *reality* however he, she, or they so perceive” (Leedy, 1997, p. 161). This study’s intent was to document and describe the needs and first-year experiences of HALI students as well as students who represent other segments of the freshman student population. The phenomenological design supported the intent of this study.

Furthermore, two of the variations of phenomenology were considered—transcendental and hermeneutic. Transcendental phenomenology carries the presumption that the meanings of the world exist separate from human beings. On the contrary, hermeneutic phenomenology carries the presumption that the meanings of the world exist, but are not

separate from human beings. The explanation here is that human beings create the meanings by and through their interaction with the world. For this study, the philosophical perspective of hermeneutic phenomenology was most appropriate to derive meanings from the perspective, time, and history of the participants.

Context of the Study

The study context includes a K12 study site with a scholarship and mentoring program and the higher education institutions. The K12 study site was a large, high-poverty school district as indicated by the Florida Department of Education (2011) as serving 194,353 students, of which 56% were low-income. The scholarship and mentoring program, Take Stock in Children (TSIC), is a precollege and scholarship program whose leaders have collaborated with the school district to respond to identified students' needs. TSIC (2013) describes itself as "a non-profit organization in Florida that provides a unique opportunity for deserving low-income youth/students, many from minority families, to escape the cycle of poverty through education" ("What We Do" section, para. 1). TSIC provides mentoring services to select students through high school graduation and awards college scholarship opportunities.

Two higher education institutions (HEIs), both located in the southeastern United States, served as study sites. The first, a medium-sized, open admissions community college with an enrollment of more than 47,000 students annually (HEI study site #1, 2011) that serves a diverse student population, including nontraditional, part-time, and low-income students, by way of five campuses and a central administrative office. The second, a large-sized, four-year public university system that enrolls more than 50,000 students annually (HEI study site #2, 2017), serving a diverse student population by way of undergraduate, graduate, specialist, and doctoral level degree offerings within its main campus. First-year students are required to live on campus unless they commute from one of several nearby counties with some exemptions.

Target Population and Sample

The target population (main and comparative studies) included three low-income college freshmen groups: (a) high achievers at the community college study site, (b) average achievers at the community college study site, and (c) high achievers at the four-year university study site. The common denominator among all three groups is their low-income socioeconomic

background as defined as a student who meets federal low-income eligibility criteria.

Students who met the high test score or high GPA criteria, along with the low-income criteria, are considered high-achieving, low-income. More specifically, a high-achieving student is defined as a student who has a best-combined score of 1280 or higher on the SAT, best-composite score of 28 or higher on the ACT, honors-level scores of 100 or higher in mathematics and 100 or higher in reading on the CPT, honors-level scores of 123 or higher in mathematics and 120 or higher in reading on the PERT, or a 3.5 or higher weighted high school GPA (Florida Bright Futures Scholarship Program, 2013; St. Petersburg College, n.d.).

Students who fall within the average test score or GPA range, along with low-income criteria, are considered average-achieving, low-income. An average-achieving student is defined as a student who has a best-combined score between 1080 and 1279 on the SAT, best-composite score between 20 and 27 on the ACT, honors-level scores between 84 and 89 in mathematics and between 84 and 89 in reading on the CPT, honors-level scores between 114 and 122 in mathematics and between 106 and 119 in reading on the PERT, or between a 2.5 and 3.4 weighted high school GPA.

Materials and Instrument

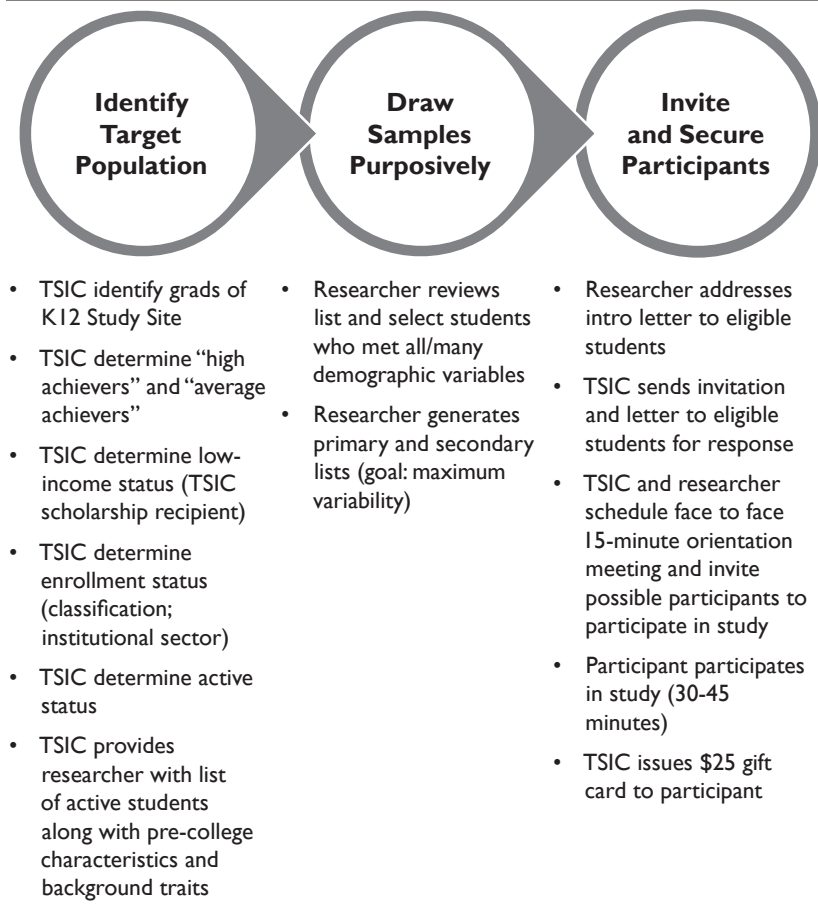
An interview instrument modified for this study (in alignment with research questions and constructs) was used to conduct interviews. Students discussed their college experiences and beliefs about their projected needs for continuing their enrollment in higher education. The instrument included a list of 30 open-ended questions. Open-ended questions allowed a more flexible response. On the contrary, close-ended questions would have limited the response to a list of answer choices. An interview question constructed as “When did you first start thinking about attending college?” (Deafenbaugh, 2007) offered a better opportunity for data collection and understanding the phenomenon than an interview question constructed as “Did you first start thinking about attending college during high school?”

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

In collaboration with TSIC program staff, a three-phase process occurred (as referred to in Table 1, Three-Phase Participant Selection Process). The

three phases provided the opportunity to drill down from the target population to a selected sample of participants.

Table I. Three-Phase Participant Selection Process



The researcher interviewed students enrolled at the higher education institution sites. An open-ended 30-question interview instrument, the primary collection device, prompted student discussion of their college experiences and beliefs about their projected needs for continuing their enrollment in higher education. The 20 main study participants and the 20 comparative study participants completed in-person interviews. Each interview was held in reserved space at the TSIC administrative office; each lasted between 20 minutes and 50 minutes.

The researcher manually transcribed the interview tapes listening to the recordings and noting the literal statements and, as much as possible, noting significant nonverbal and paralinguistic communications. The re-

researcher's analysis of the students' responses included notes from the researcher's reflexive interview journal. The researcher maintained in this reflexive journal identification of student personal experiences and how these might be related to student perceptions and beliefs. The transcription text was bracketed to represent a participant's direct thoughts; these include a single sentence or several if the sentences revolve around the same theme. The units of text that represent individual thought became individual units of data that were tagged with an ID to track the data across interview participants. After units of data were identified, categories were created for similar units of data. Once the units were categorized, the researcher saw that some of the categories could be clustered together to represent broader themes. Data collected from students at the community college and the four-year university were analyzed separately. In-depth interviewing produced rich, personal granular data upon which to construct larger themes and well-supported theories.

Four elements the researcher did not have control over which constitute limitations within this study include: (a) access to the educational information of students who already graduated from the K12 study site (without the collaboration of the Take Stock in Children program), in respect to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA); (b) control of own voice, interpretations, and use thereof because of reliable experiences; (c) control of the representation of variables within the student sample, despite the researcher's attempt to select participants to interview that represented all or as many of the demographic variables that appeared to exist among the entire population; and, (d) generalization of the conclusions to other populations.

Key Findings

The data analysis yielded a number of themes demonstrating the need for psychosocial development. Subsequently, a comparative study was conducted to understand the extent to which need differences exist among high-achieving, low-income community college freshmen students and other low-income community college freshmen groups. Data collected from three subgroups were evaluated: (a) high-achieving, low-income freshmen at the community college, (b) average-achieving, low-income freshmen at the community college and (c) high-achieving, low-income freshmen at the four-year university. The findings of both studies (main and comparative) relate to previous findings using the "Psychosocial Development" categorization label.

Research Question 1 Findings

The first research asked college freshmen students about their needs (individual and contextual) for continuing their enrollment in higher education. As depicted in Table 2, Research Question 1, three major themes of students' beliefs about their individual and contextual needs emerged from the analysis of the interview data. These themes included the need for psychosocial development; the need to balance time, work, and/or money; and the need for advising.

Students' need for psychosocial development. Four categories emerged from the data analysis of the main study that contributed support for the major theme of the need for psychosocial development. The four categories included the need to (a) be conscientious, (b) improve self-esteem, (c) address spirituality, and (d) become socially engaged with instructors and peers.

The first of the categories, the need to be conscientious, was demonstrated by students' comments on five topics: the need for organizational skills; the need to address the tendency to procrastinate; and the need for self-discipline, self-motivation, and focus. Student responses reflected their belief that they need psychosocial development, specifically conscientiousness, to persist in enrollment. The student perceptions of the need for self-esteem improvement supported the psychosocial development theme. Self-esteem as a construct is defined as feelings of courage and self-confidence. Students demonstrated their perception of psychosocial development in the area of self-esteem as a support for continued enrollment. The need to address spirituality was indicated by students' comments on two topics: the need for a sense of purpose/self-actualization and the need for faith. Student responses indicate that participants believed they need psychosocial development, specifically spirituality, as a means for continuing success in postsecondary education. Students additionally perceived a need to become socially engaged: (a) the need to connect with college professors, (b) the need to connect with other students on campus, and (c) the need to get involved on campus.

Overall, high-achieving, low-income freshman participants at the community college believed they need psychosocial development to successfully continue their enrollment in the following areas: conscientiousness; self-esteem; spirituality; and social engagement with instructors and peers. In addition to these four categories (the need to: be conscientious, improve self-esteem, address spirituality, and become socially engaged with instructors and peers), an important fifth category emerged from the study in regard to average-achieving, low-income students at the commu-

nity college. This category is the need to receive moral support, encouragement, and motivation from others. Examples of student comments from the interview transcripts are presented in this section to allow the students to speak for themselves in their own voices and to demonstrate the thoughtful reflections elicited from the interviews.

Table 2. Research Question 1

The Need for Psychosocial Development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need to be conscientious • The need to improve self-esteem • The need to address spirituality • The need to become socially engaged with instructors and peers
The Need to Balance Time, Work, and/or Money	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need to balance academic, personal, and social constraints on time • The need to balance work • The need to balance money
The Need for Advising	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The need for academic advising • The need for financial aid advising

In regard to issues that students believed needed to be personally addressed to continue enrollment without interruption, Lola commented, “Well there’s always support that you need to have...like just that moral support of having people there for you telling you that you can do it, you just have to put more work into it , , . it’s almost like tough love.” Selena described the beliefs and hopes that keep her going in school when things get rough or tough. Selena stated, “I want to better myself and like everything I do. I have goals and , , , I do it for myself and for the people that encourage me and told me they know I can do it. So, yeah that’s it.”




Responses from other low-income community college freshmen groups. In regard to HALI students at the university, two of the four categories emerged from the student responses: the need to be conscientious and the need to address spirituality. Two categories, self-esteem and social engagement with instructors and peers, did not arise. An interesting new category emerged from students’ comments: the need to engage in experiential learning. Mae, a student who was inspired to pursue a career in marketing upon participating in a hands-on, work-readiness program during high school, commented, “I would like to get involved with business programs for networking and skills to help me improve like the American Marketing Association...it’s kind of hard building your resume up...finding ways...like actually getting involved.” Similarly, Van commented, “Any other outside things to help make my college experience...I guess valuable, basically. Like within the advertising field if I want to do an internship, go abroad, travel the world, network, those kind of things.”

The students insightfully mention the need for experiential learning as they attempt to articulate the disconnect of college learning from career readiness and preparation.

Research Question 2 Findings

Research Question 2 inquired into college freshmen’s decisions, related to continuing their higher education experiences, which may be influenced by their individual and contextual needs. As referred to in Table 3, Research Question 2, students’ decisions included whether to leave or give up college education. Many of these decisions appeared to be influenced by their beliefs and perceptions about their individual and contextual needs including the need for psychosocial development; the need for balancing time, work, and/or money; and the need for advising.

Table 3. Research Question 2

The Need for Psychosocial Development		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The decision to alter study habits• The decision to interact with peers• The decision to interact with instructors
The Need to Balance Time, Work, and/or Money		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The decisions about how to deal with work/school obligations
The Need for Advising		<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The decisions about how to respond to academic and financial challenges

Students’ decisions and thoughts that appeared to be influenced by their need for psychosocial development. Decisions and thoughts about leaving or giving up college or continuing college may be influenced by students’ psychosocial development needs. The decisions that appeared to be influenced by their psychosocial development needs included the decision to alter study habits, the decision to interact with peers, and the decision to interact with instructors. Several examples of students’ decisions that appeared to be influenced by this need are presented in this section.

The decision to alter study habits. Lionel was an example of a HALI freshman community college student who decided not to alter his study habits from high school to college. Lionel decided not to alter his study habits from high school to college, “My study habits are the same. I study like a week before the test, but mainly the test day.” Lionel further commented about aspects of his college experience that made him think about giving up or leaving college. He articulated:

I guess when it gets frustrating and hard or a big test comes up and you feel unprepared. When I feel overwhelmed, I think maybe this [attending college] isn't a good idea now. You have so many things to do; you are like...why did I do this? (Lionel)

He seems unaware that his reliance on high school study habits to meet college challenges may have contributed to his frustration. Conversely, Paula, a HALI freshman community college student who decided to adapt her high school study habits to meet college expectations, explained:

When I got to college, I had to figure out a new way to study. In high school, it was very simple. In college, it [the instruction] was very much into the material. We had to go deep into learning everything and make sure I knew it. I put more time into studying. I record notes in class and when I got my financial aid, I bought an iPad and started taking notes on the iPad. I started figuring out better ways. That's how it's been better. (Paula)

Comments by HALI freshmen at the university consistently revealed that they decided to alter their study habits from high school to college. For example, Valeria responded:

I start studying ahead of time because I realized that in college the studying is not more of like passing the test...it's more of you need to know this information for the next year and the next year and for the rest of your life. You need to know these things. So, I study to learn and not to just pass anymore. (Valeria)

Conversely, Mercedes commented:

I have to continue to fix my study habits. Yeah, that's something else that's also different from high school that I...in high school, I never really had to study a lot. I never had to sit down and like wrack my brain so hard as I have like this past semester. But, I definitely think I still need a lot. I need to, fix my study habits a lot more and be more...I don't know, be more active in my studying. (Mercedes)

Overall, the experiences of the students from the three subgroups were similar. Their responses support their decision to alter study habits based on the apprehension of their psychosocial development needs.

The decision to interact with peers. Deciding to interact with peers on campus is another choice made by HALI students that, according to student attrition and retention theory, may support the student's determination to maintain enrollment. Lori is an example of a HALI fresh-

man community college student who chose not to interact with peers on campus. When Lori was asked about how well she thought she fit in with the other students at the college, she responded, “I don’t think I fit in. I’m pretty shy, so I really don’t talk to nobody. There’s kids there that I know from high school, so I will talk to them every now and then.” Lori further commented about aspects of her college experience that made her think about giving up or leaving college. Lori’s response was reflective of the lack of social fit she described previously. She said, “It’s the fact that I’m not used to being around people if it’s not my family. So, it scares me. And they’re like..we haven’t seen you, and I’ll make up excuses. I think that’s the part that makes me want to leave.” Lori’s responses express her tenuous resolve to stay in college. In contrast, Olivia interacts with peers on campus and when asked about how well she thought she fit in with the other students at the college, her response highlighted her involvement with a specific peer academic group. She commented:

I feel like I fit in. I mean there are differences between me and some people, but there’s always going to be a difference no matter who you’re with. I mean we’re all college students, so we have lots of things in common. In the honors program...I am mostly around them. Most of them are just college driven and hardworking and they have big dreams and big goals.

Comments by freshmen at the community college consistently reveal that they elect not to interact with their peers. For example, Jada responded:

I feel like I can do better for myself and be in a better position. You know, the people...they’re nice but, I mean it’s...it’s definitely diverse. You have older people and younger...there’s so many different kinds of people here I don’t even know where I would fit in. In high school, it’s kind of easier to see who you can hang out with and stuff, but now it’s just like too many different people. (Jada)

Similarly, Katherine, a high-achieving, low-income freshman at the four-year university, responded:

I think the only problem I honestly have right now is I don’t communicate a lot with other students except probably one student in each class I think it’s important to have at least one student that you know in the class. Just in case that something happens, you could like email them or call them and ask them what happened in class. (Katherine)

Overall, the findings related to peer interaction seem to align with prior retention theory in that students' comments about their peer interaction behaviors demonstrate that their behaviors are influenced by their psychosocial development needs.

The decision to interact with instructors. Amy is an example of a HALI freshman community college student who decided not to interact with instructors: "Some of them, I wasn't happy with the way they taught, so I don't put myself out to talk to them because some of them have...you get the professors that have an attitude like I really don't want to be here anyway." Amy pinpoints an aspect of her college experience that makes her think about giving up or leaving college: "The professors that don't care are definitely one of them. The ones that really aren't happy with the job they are doing." Marta, a HALI freshman community college student, decided to interact with an instructor and had a positive experience. Marta commented:

She [the professor] honestly helped me with my confidence as a student because I was horrible at math. She told me, "Okay you are sitting in the back; why don't you try sitting in the front?" And that helped. My grades went way up when I did that. And taking her advice, and like hearing her actually tell me that made me feel like I can talk to her about really how I feel in the classroom. If it wasn't for that, I would still have been in the back and not have the grades. Thanks to her doing that, I got way better grades. (Marta)

However, most students reported that they've only interacted with instructors via online platforms and email or immediately after class if needed. Overall, low-income community college freshmen's comments reflect that their decisions concerning interaction with instructors are influenced by their psychosocial development rather than academic need.

Research Question 3 Findings

Research Question 3 inquires into college freshmen's views of how their projected fulfillment or lack of fulfillment of their needs affect their continued enrollment decisions. Interview questions about the future resulted in few comments related to the projected fulfillment of their needs, but the questions inspired many comments about what might happen related to their education endeavors if their specific needs were unmet. As depicted in Table 4, Research Question 3, three major themes emerged as an influence of students' decisions. These included quitting or giving up their college experiences, taking action or seeking options or alternatives

if some of their needs could not be met, and being uncertain or confused about what to do or what might happen if their needs were unmet.

Table 4. Research Question 3

The Need for Psychosocial Development	{	• Quitting or giving up their college experiences if specific needs were unmet
The Need to Balance Time, Work, and/or Money	{	• Being uncertain or confused about what to do or to what might happen if specific needs were unmet
The Need for Advising	{	• Taking action or seeking options or alternatives if specific needs were unmet

Students' views of how their projected fulfillment or lack of fulfillment of their psychosocial needs affect their continued enrollment decisions. When the projected lack of fulfillment of their psychosocial development needs was considered, the HALI freshmen at the community college thought about quitting or giving up their college experiences. For example, one participant, Lori, self-described as “pretty shy” and stated that she lacks confidence with the college experience. She recognized the need to improve self-esteem, specifically courage and self-confidence. In addition, she recognized the need to become socially engaged in terms of the need to connect with other students on campus. However, when she looked ahead she saw her continuing lack of self-esteem and social engagement; this shaped negative thoughts about continuing her enrollment. As quoted in part previously,

I'm trying to change it [level of self-esteem and social engagement] because I know I need to be there every day, but it's the fact that I'm not used to being around people if it's not my family. So, it scares me. They're [other students] like...we haven't seen you, and I'll make up excuses. I think that's the part that makes me want to leave. (Lori)

Ciara, a first-generation college student, wanted to make her mother proud by completing her college education and pursuing a career in the field of human resources. She recognized the need to be conscientious, specifically the need for self-motivation. However, when she looked ahead and projected that her future self may not have the self-motivation she requires, she said that it could affect her enrollment decisions. Ciara commented, “I will need to stay motivated. If I don't have this, it would discourage me from keep moving forward because if you're not doing it for yourself, you won't be successful.” Another first-generation college

student, Mia, recognized the need for self-motivation as well. She mentioned that her high school mentor motivated her and helped her get into college. However, she is concerned about staying motivated. She commented, “I will need to stay motivated to keep at this [getting through classes]. If not, it would be very difficult for me to stay in school. I always look for motivation to get through tough classes.”

Responses from other low-income community college freshmen groups. When asked to talk about aspects of the college experience that make them think about giving up, Lola, an average-achieving, low-income community college freshman, responded, “I didn’t really have any moments to where I wanted to quit or give up because it’s life. It’s what people go through whether they like it or not.” Other students had similar responses. For example, Grady reacted, “Definitely not, because I know that in the end it’s all going to be worth it. Every career I would even consider requires a bachelor’s degree. I know that I can’t give up.” Some students talked about not fitting in at the community college, which was discouraging for them and made them wish they had made different college preparation and college choice decisions; however, they were not thinking about giving up.

A high-achieving, low-income freshman at the four-year university, Mercedes, reflected, “I don’t think I’ve really faced anything now that has made me want to give up.” Although some students were discouraged and thought about giving up when faced with challenging situations, they sought ways to overcome them. For example, Scott brought up the cost of class supplies as a challenge. Belinda talked about initially not understanding how college could help with her career choice. She explained, “Why am I even going to college, because I want to be a salon owner... how [is] my degree...even going to help me [with] the job that most people don’t go to college to do.” This struggle seems to reflect an unclear comprehension of her school to career pathway and a need for further advising. She discussed how she overcame this situation. She stated, “I talked to a lot of people, and they were helping me realize that...it is going to help me, and it is going to help me stand out as an entrepreneur.” In addition, Belinda talked about not feeling a sense of belonging:

The roommate that I had...we had like absolutely no relationship whatsoever. We were complete opposites. And, you know, I struggled with feeling like I was, you know, not welcomed to even like... be there. Now I’ll be living with my grandma until August, and then I’ll be in the campus apartment after that. Yeah, I struggled a

lot with it and I just decided that I'm the type of person that needs to be in their own room and their own space. (Belinda)

Overall, the data revealed that HALI freshmen at the community college viewed quitting or giving up as one means of dealing with unmet needs if they could not see them being resolved in the future. However, findings differed for average-achieving, low-income community college freshmen's and HALI freshman college students at the four-year university. As a group, the four-year university students did not consider giving up an option.

Conclusions and Implications

Low-income community college freshmen students across all subgroups believed they needed psychosocial development. Their psychosocial development needs included the need to be conscientious, to improve self-esteem, to address spirituality, to become socially engaged with instructors and peers, to receive moral support, encouragement, and motivation from others, and/or to engage in experiential learning experiences. These findings align with the large body of research on student engagement, as reported by the Center for Community College Student Engagement, supporting the importance of student engagement, highlighting student-faculty interactions and the need for social interaction with peers (CCSSE, 2013).

Concerning the need to connect with college professors, the notion that some professors do not care was a recurring statement from students across interview conversations. The need to connect with other students on campus also appeared as a topic that supported the need to become socially engaged with instructors and peers. Some students felt it was hard to make friends on campus while other students felt it was easy to make friends on campus. These students believed it was easy because of their personal initiative to speak to or get to know other people. Additionally, getting involved on campus supported the thematic category of the need to become socially engaged with instructors and peers. Many of the students interviewed were not involved in on-campus activities, organizations, or social groups. Some students admitted they have not opened themselves up to being involved. Other students admitted that they did not have the time to be involved. One factor mentioned by student participants (mostly students at the community college) was that of work as a time limiting factor. Students who did not have to work while attending college, on the other hand, were unique. They were either currently involved on campus or anticipated doing so in the near future.

Participants also described perceptions that the community college did not provide many opportunities to be involved. Students in both studies expressed the belief that they need psychosocial development, specifically to become socially engaged, as a support for continuing their enrollment.

Students made some decisions about ways to address their psychosocial needs, but they also thought about leaving or giving up their college experiences when they considered their projected lack of fulfillment of their psychosocial development needs. The findings of the students' psychosocial needs are directly related to the Psychosocial Development component group derived from previous studies (Napoli & Wortman, 1998; Schmertz, 2010). However, the need to become socially engaged with instructors and peers appears to reflect more of the previous findings that appear in the Sense of Community component group.

The data from low-income community college freshmen students appear to be similar to that derived from previous studies of college freshman students' needs, but the apparent strength of the six overall themes identified in the main and comparative studies suggest that a major source students' departure from college may be their failure to become or remain assimilated in the intellectual and social life of the institution. In response to their needs, the students' decisions, such as the decision to alter their study habits or to interact with faculty and peers, are important variables to consider as institutions implement supports to help low-income community college freshmen students meet their psychosocial development needs.

HALI freshman students, perhaps because they represented one segment of the broad population of college students, did not appear to be thinking about leaving or dropping out because of academic difficulties. Likewise, they were not thinking about leaving or dropping out because of the inability to resolve educational and occupational goals. Interestingly, therefore, the remaining two reasons Tinto (1993) identified for student departure (academic difficulties and the inability of individuals to resolve their educational and occupational goals) were not reflected by HALI freshmen as prominent reasons for terminating their continued enrollment in higher education.

In the findings of this study, the emergence of dominant psychosocial needs and concerns about the future related to meeting those needs appears to support the tentative theory of the phenomenon. This theory suggests (Napoli & Wortman, 1998; Schmertz, 2010) that low-income college freshman students might need strong support for psychosocial development. These students, especially HALI students at the commu-

nity college, may be discontinuing their enrollment in higher education because their psychosocial needs are not being met. If this is true for the broader population of low-income college freshman students, then the implication that higher education institutions must focus on ways to support these students' needs for social engagement becomes clear. Flowers (2006) states:

Although it can be argued that student effort and academic motivation [which were examined in this study] may impact academic and social integration, it can also be argued that the academic and social culture of the institutional environment at 2-year and 4-year institutions may also play a prominent role (p. 282).

HALI community college (2-year institution) freshman students' enrollment continuation needs can be differentiated in some ways from those of other student populations. For example, this unique group tends to focus more on meeting their psychosocial needs in their freshman year. They attempt to address their needs by making decisions that appeared to be influenced by their unmet needs. In addition, they may consider dropping out because of their inability to satisfy their psychosocial needs. The extent of advice and the level of support for the HALI students in high school are not viewed by these students as being the same in college. HALI students in this study felt that they are on their own in college and must figure things out for themselves. As college students, they seek alternatives when their academic and financial aid advising needs are not being met. Concomitantly, HALI students are trying to find a balance between school and life, especially since working to earn money is a necessity for most members of this population. Within this mix of competing demands and real or perceived lack of support, many students are left with feelings of uncertainty of purpose, frustration, and diminished self-efficacy.

The findings from this study may help college administrators and faculty members improve the design of their support systems and interventions for this unique population. The shortfall in student retention rates among high-achieving, low-income students, particularly at community colleges, corroborate that improved support systems and interventions are vital for student success.

Recommendations

Community colleges may want to focus on adding college academic and social experiences. This may involve designing opportunities to accom-

modate diverse student needs, including those of HALI students. Additionally, community colleges may want to provide opportunities for students to be placed in cohorts or teams and work together during their freshman year.

Four-year universities may want to focus on creating opportunities for students to connect with other students, reframe their circumstances and experiences, and engage in existing college academic and social experiences. This may involve *pairing* them with upperclassmen who have similar majors or interests.

The lack of research concerning HALI community college freshman students and their enrollment continuation needs compels further research. While this study helps to define the variables of needs, decisions, and concerns, it did not include ways to discover the relationships between the variables. Because this study was exploratory in nature, it was not designed to provide data from which to generalize results. Further study might include correlational studies to determine the specific relationships among the variables of HALI freshman community college students' needs, their decisions about addressing those needs, and their personal projection of what may happen if their needs are not met. Whereas academic achievement prior to college entry and socioeconomic background were examined, further precollege information and data, such as family and student characteristics, past and expected engagement, and other variables may be useful. Ultimately, and most practically, a study is needed to examine the effectiveness of promising strategies that address the HALI community college freshman students' psychosocial needs. Systematic interventions need to be implemented and evaluated over time to determine their short- and long-range effects.

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Appendix

Table AI. Participant Descriptions: Main Study and Comparative Study

	Code	Pseudonym	Race	Gender	High School	HA GPA	Test Score	Date of Orientation
MAIN STUDY High-achieving, low-income students at the community college	M1	Amy	W	F	C	4.86	-	03.13.2014
	M2	Lori	B	F	D	3.5	-	03.14.2014
	M3	Marta	H	F	E	4.68	-	03.25.2014
	M4	Lionel	B	M	F	4.49	-	03.26.2014
	M5	Debbie	W	F	G	3.8	-	04.14.2014
	M6	Maria	H	F	E	4.23	-	04.14.2014
	M7	Angela	B	F	H	3.84	-	04.14.2014
	M8	Cynthia	B	F	B	3.78	-	04.17.2014
	M9	Giovanna	H	F	I	3.8	-	04.18.2014
	M10	Jose	H	M	J	5.3	-	04.18.2014
	M11	Olivia	M	F	H	5.15	-	04.18.2014
	M12	Ana	H	F	F	4.89	-	04.21.2014
	M13	Brian	B	M	B	4	-	04.21.2014
	M14	Patricia	B	F	D	3.93	-	04.21.2014
	M15	Paula	H	F	K	4.54	-	04.22.2014
	M16	Mia	H	F	L	4.85	-	04.22.2014
	M17	Juan	H	M	M	5.27	-	04.23.2014
	M18	Julia	H	F	H	3.66	-	04.23.2014
	M19	Ciara	M	F	C	4.98	-	04.23.2014
	M20	Victor	H	M	J	4.28	-	04.23.2014

		Code	Pseudonym	Race	Gender	High School	HA GPA	Test Score	Date of Orientation
		COMPARATIVE STUDY Average-achieving, low-income students at the community college		C1	Samuel	M	M	R	3.38
C2	Lola			B	F	S	3.06	-	10.20.2017
C3	Maxwell			H	M	Z	-	SAT 1100	10.26.2017
C4	Grady			B	M	B	3.36	-	11.03.2017
C5	Nate			W	M	P	-	SAT 1090	11.03.2017
C6	Selena			B	F	S	2.66	-	11.03.2017
C7	Joshua			H	M	T	-	SAT 1190	11.03.2017
C8	Christopher			H	M	A	3.3	-	11.30.2017
C9	Jada			H	F	Z	-	ACT 21	12.01.2017
C10	David			H	M	T	-	SAT 1180	12.08.2017
COMPARATIVE STUDY High-achieving, low-income students at the four-year university		C11	Katherine	B	F	T	3.69	-	11.13.2017
		C12	Mae	H	F	K	6.62	-	11.13.2017
		C13	Van	A	M	J	6.29	-	11.13.2017
		C14	Scott	I	M	F	4.81	-	11.13.2017
		C15	Valeria	B	F	A	6.3	-	11.13.2017
		C16	Mercedes	H	F	U	6.34	-	11.30.2017
		C17	Tiara	B	F	G	5.2	-	12.08.2017
		C18	Alana	H	F	L	6.67	-	12.01.2017
		C19	Pamela	H	F	G	3.92	-	12.08.2017
		C20	Belinda	H	F	G	4.73	-	12.08.2017

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