Chapter 4

The Influence of Self-Determination Theory on African American Males' Motivation

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors provide an overview of the research investigating academic resiliency and factors that impact motivation among African American males. Research identifies factors that improve academic achievement and motivation for African American males: mentoring and role modeling; encouraging positive self-identification; school, community, and church involvement; teacher expectations and instructional quality; teacher quality and preparedness; real-life applications of their experiences; and African American male teachers as role models.

INTRODUCTION

A burning issue that continues to warrant the attention of educators in the 21st century is equity in learning among students from diverse backgrounds, specifically African American males. Based on the types of opportunities afforded to these

students, some of them excel and some remain complacent, allowing obstacles in their environment to slow down their efforts to improve.

Students are often motivated by external factors such as reward systems, grades, evaluations, or the opinions they fear others might have of them. On the other hand, some students are motivated from within, by interests, curiosity, care, or abiding values. These intrinsic motivations are not necessarily outwardly rewarded or supported, but even so, they can withstand passions, creativity, and efforts. The interchange between the extrinsic influences acting on students and the intrinsic drives and desires inherent in human nature is the domain of Self-Determination Theory (Sheldon, 2003).

BACKGROUND

Self-Determination Theory (SDT) represents a broad context for the study of human motivation and personality (Ryan & Deci, 2000). SDT expresses a meta-theory for framing motivational studies, a formal theory that defines intrinsic and varied extrinsic sources of motivation, and a description of the respective roles of intrinsic and types of extrinsic motivation in cognitive and social development and in individual differences (Bryan-Sheard, Stabile, Guillory, & Wold, 2014). SDT components also focus on how social and cultural factors enable or weaken people's sense of desire and initiative, in addition to their well-being and the quality of their performance (Beaulieu, Best, Seta, & Wood, 2013).

According to SDT researchers, motivation can be defined as energizing individuals' drive to get them moving, directing individuals in a precise direction, or acting upon something that keeps them going while sustaining their behavior (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2012; Ormrod, Anderman, & Anderman, 2017). As previously stated, motivation can be one of two areas; intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation is based on one's own internal belief system. Moreover, Ormrod, Anderman, and Anderman (2017) stated, "Intrinsically motivated learners may engage in an activity because it gives them pleasure and a sense of fulfillment or seems to be the ethically or morally right thing to do" (p. 361). In contrast, the second area being extrinsic motivation which is based on the external reward system or the avoidance of punishment (Deci & Ryan, 1985, 2012; Ormrod, Anderman, & Anderman, 2017). Similarly:

Extrinsic motivated learners perform a task as a means to an end--perhaps the good grades, money, or recognition that particular activities and accomplishments bring-rather than as an end in itself. (Ormrod, Anderman, & Anderman, 2017, p. 361)

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