

Chapter 19

Application of Social Cognitive Theory in the Mentoring of African American Males

Regina D. Berry

Roosevelt University, USA

Joanne Howard

Illinois Institute of Technology, USA

ABSTRACT

The primary purpose of this qualitative review was to examine the benefits of the Sigma Beta Club mentoring program on the educational experiences of African American male participants and to explore the perceptions and challenges mentors incurred while working with young men of color in the Sigma Beta Club mentoring program. The secondary purpose was to provide understanding regarding the utilization of SCT by the Sigma Beta Club mentoring program. The effects of systemic racism and discrimination have resulted in African American young men developing a distrust for lawmakers and their agents. A reconnection and an establishment of trust needs to take place.

INTRODUCTION

In America, there is a desperate need for intervention to positively influence the lives of young men of color. African American males are reared in concentrated poverty and are systematically discriminated against at a disproportionate rate. Despite multiple advances, young men of color in the aggregate still face several roadblocks to success. Significant disparities in living conditions, access to education, and due process in the criminal justice system persist between African American young men and Caucasian young men.

Education in its purest form is a gateway to knowledge and understanding. It is the building block to inform society of its rights and responsibilities, as well as an igniter of dreams and abilities. However, inadequate education primarily exists in communities that suffer from socioeconomic deprivation or

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concentrated poverty (Annie E. Casey, 2017). When concentrated poverty and inadequate education combine, it often impairs academic completion and ultimately leads students to drop out.

Concentrated poverty is defined as a neighborhood where the poverty rate exceeds 30% (Annie E. Casey, 2017). More African American young men reside in areas of concentrated poverty than their Caucasian counterparts. According to the U.S. Census Bureau (2017), 40% of African American young men live in areas of concentrated poverty, compared to 14% of Caucasian young men. The U.S. currently has 48.8 million people below the poverty line; of that number, 30.8% of them are high school dropouts (Annie E. Casey, 2017). According to the National Center of Education Statistics (NCES; 2017), every year, 3 million high school students withdraw from the educational arena; that equates to a little more than 8,000 per day or 1 student every second. The NCES reports the dropout rate for African American young men in grades 7 through 12 is 13.9%, while Caucasians of the same grades total 5.0%. It is important to identify the factors that influence dropping out, considering that the lack of high school completion limits economic growth and reduces access to higher education and financial opportunity. The Annie E. Casey Foundation, using U.S. Census Bureau (2015) data, projects an individual who graduates from high school can potentially earn \$260,000 more during his or her lifetime than someone who drops out. The condition of poverty combined with inadequate education alone does not cause the dropout occurrence. However, it is the base of the culminating dynamics in the process. The rest can be attributed to systemic racism in legal policies that ultimately seal the fate of education.

In 1994, a major piece of legislation had negative consequences on young men attempting to pursue an education while residing in poverty. The legislative act was the Gunfree Schools Act (1994), which came to be the Zero-Tolerance Policy (H.R. 987). African American young men from impoverished communities suffered de facto discrimination with the Zero-Tolerance Policy. The escalation of poverty has become the burden of those forced to live in it, despite not being the cause of it. The Zero-Tolerance Policy was intended for students whose immediate behavior caused impending concern about the probability of gun violence on the school's premises. Zero tolerance was to demonstrate that such gateway behaviors were unacceptable and would be dealt with severely. Unfortunately, young men of color suffered the greatest consequences despite having the lowest record of gun incidents on school premises (Civil Rights Data Collection, 2012). The students most often criminalized using the Zero-Tolerance Policy were minority students from disadvantaged communities, which often caused them to fall behind and be at risk of failing.

African American students have suffered academic injury due to the misappropriation of legislative policies, especially African American young men. In 2013, only 18% of all African American fourth-graders were proficient in reading, and only 19% of that same group demonstrated proficiency in mathematics. In that same year, only 16% of African American eighth-graders scored proficiently in reading and 13% in mathematics (National Center for Education Statistics, 2014). The effects of systemic racism and discrimination have resulted in African American young men developing a distrust for lawmakers and their agents. A reconnection and an establishment of trust needed to take place.

My Brother's Keeper Program

In 2014, President Barack Obama launched the My Brother's Keeper (MBK) initiative and commissioned a task force (Obama, 2014; U.S. White House, 2014). The purpose of the initiative was to address opportunity gaps impeding young men of color. The president's goal was to help these young men reach

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