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**A STUDY TO ASSESS MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS IN PURSUING HIGHER  
EDUCATION: A MULTICULTURAL PERSPECTIVE**

by  
**Reta R. Ramos-Rios**

**A Thesis**

**Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Arts Degree in School Psychology  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University  
May 1, 2004**

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_  
Professor

Date Approved 5/4/04

## **ABSTRACT**

**Reta R. Rios**

### **A STUDY TO ASSESS MOTIVATIONAL FACTORS IN PURSUING HIGHER EDUCATION: A MULTICULTURAL PERSPECTIVE**

**2003/04**

**Master of Arts in School Psychology**

**The purpose of this investigation was to (a) determine the motivational factors of students attending Camden County College in Blackwood and to (b) determine if their cultural background played a part in them choosing collective or individualistic reasons to attend. One hundred students were surveyed. Each student was given a survey of 16 questions, eight questions measured individualism and eight measured collectivism. A one-way MANOVA found that the students from Camden County College demonstrated individualistic characteristics regardless of race. The average responses for going to college were more individualistic than hypothesized. However, Latinos and African Americans still scored higher on collectivist traits. Other significant factors such as, parental level of education are discussed. This study backs up findings that most students who attend community college are first generation college students. These students face additional barriers that others may not. This study will address ways to handle these barriers and discuss the importance of having the right support system.**

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## Chapter I

### Need

This study investigated the motivational factors involved in Camden County College students deciding to pursue higher education and will look at it from a cultural perspective. It also reviews other studies that have supported the idea that culture plays a part in learning and motivation. Culture defines the environment in which a student lives. This environment reflects how the student develops self-esteem and self-efficacy which is a key element in learning and motivation. It will examine how culture plays a part in encouraging minorities to pursue higher education. With the increasing number of minorities in this country there is a need for educators and researchers to understand the thoughts and perceptions of this growing population in order to find the appropriate ways to meet their educational needs. Encouraging and supporting high school students to continue their education is both beneficial for the individual and their contribution to society. It is also important to see education as a valued element in creating a smarter Nation.

When educators have a better understanding of the needs of certain ethnic groups, they can incorporate motivational elements in the classroom that will help in directing students to pursue higher education. Family, social groups and individual goals are all responsible for encouraging the pursuit of college. The key to success is having the students understand the impact of these elements and directing the students to become more involved in their learning. These steps include setting the students up with positive peer groups and instructing them on how to set realistic and attainable goals.

## **Purpose**

**This study focused on the motivational factors that have encouraged students at Camden County College in Blackwood, NJ to enroll in classes. The data will differentiate motivational elements dependent on race and parental educational level.**

## **Hypothesis**

**The hypothesis is that different races will require different approaches to motivation. Students may share some of the same characteristics of motivation; however certain students may require a different approach in order to promote motivation to pursue higher education. It is hypothesized that students from a collectivist background will be motivated by group influences. This includes family obligation and familial support. Individual processes such as reward, achievement, and parental expectations will motivate Caucasian students.**

## **Theory**

**Environmental factors affect the way a person thinks and behaves. There is a reciprocal interaction between the person, their environment, and their behavior. From a cultural perspective it is easy to understand why some individuals do and think certain ways. Each culture adds to the environment unique sets of morals and standards that may vary between cultures. Social Cognitive Theory accounts for biological personal factors, such as sex, ethnicity, temperament and genetic predisposition and the influences that they have on behavior (“Social Cognitive Theory,” 2003). When trying to determine the motivational factors involved in students choosing to pursue a college education the students’ background can be a key determinant in what path they take.**



**Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory explains how environment can impact motivation. Unlike other theories that only incorporate stimulus/response, Bandura incorporates cognition as a mediator between stimulus and response. Rewards and punishments influence the likelihood that a person will perform a particular behavior. If a student is reinforced with good grades or punished for bad marks this can have an influence as to whether they choose to go to college or not. Grades help build a student's efficacy and if they feel they are capable of doing the work they will feel confident about succeeding in college. Many minority families are single parent homes where the parent works long hours to provide for their children. If the parent is not at home to encourage the child to do their work and help with building self-regulation strategies it will be hard for the student to feel that they can do the work. The neighborhood is also a factor in self-efficacy beliefs. If the members of the environment are not encouraging then there is really no push to achieve. Parents who monitor their child's work can help them to improve any weaknesses in learning by encouraging their child to study harder or even explain to them what successful study habits are.**

**People can learn vicariously as well. A student can become more motivated to go to college if they see the benefits that other students have in attending. Individuals are also likely to model behavior observed by others they identify with. If students associate themselves with people who are not interested in attending college, they may model this same attitude and think of it as an unattainable goal for themselves. Not having parental or peer encouragement can deter students from feeling that they can go to college. A person's expectations and beliefs are gathered from the environment around them ("Social Cognitive Theory," 2003). This is not the only factor to consider in determining**

motivation. The way an individual synthesizes their environment and their cognitive evaluation of themselves is also important. Forethought and self-regulation allow the student to motivate themselves by setting goals that are both realistic and attainable. Racial stereotypes can hinder an individual's motivation if they believe that they are limited by their race.

Motivation can be both externally driven with such things as monetary reward and/or internally driven by self-pride and feeling good about accomplishments ("Social Cognitive Theory," 2003). Self-efficacy can affect motivation. Students will see themselves as capable if they have had experiences in which they were successful at accomplishing something or have seen people like themselves succeed. Peers, parents, and teachers are important because they provide feedback to the student as to whether or not a goal is realistic and feasible. This allows the student to develop skills such as self-regulation. Self-regulation allows students to choose tasks that are moderately difficult to keep them challenged. Students pursue goals that are associated with certain behaviors and beliefs ("Goal Theory," 2003).

Mastery oriented students will pursue goals that will help increase their knowledge and competence. These students are frequently intrinsically motivated. Other students may set performance goals and are only interested in showing their ability to achieve an "A" by cramming the night before and not absorbing the context of the lesson. These students make more negative self-statements decreasing self-efficacy and attributing their success to outside factors such as luck ("Goal Theory," 2003). This is why it is important for educators to help students develop mastery goals so they feel competent about going to college.

People's beliefs about their efficacy can be developed by four main sources. These sources are mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, modeling influences, and social persuasion. When you look at these factors from a cultural perspective you can see how a person can form negative feelings about themselves. If a minority student has family members who have not attended college or high school the student may not see high school or college as a feasible goal for himself or herself either. This is due to the affects of modeling and vicarious learning. If that same student has parents that push them to finish school then they would need someone to provide feedback in order for that student to know if they are mastering the skills needed. If that student has low self-efficacy they may choose to associate with others who hate or dislike school but if their self-efficacy is high they may choose to hang around others who want to pursue the same goals. If students are not receiving feedback from home, they can associate themselves with others who can help them with learning strategies. Most human motivation is cognitively generated. Students form beliefs about what they can do and anticipate outcomes of prospective actions. They set goals dependent on the positive outcomes they feel they are capable of achieving.

#### Definitions

**Attributional Beliefs-** Explanations for success or failure.

**Collectivist-** Working to satisfy the needs of the group.

**Extrinsic Motivation-** Engaging in a task for reasons such as rewards and recognition.

**First Generation-** First member of their family to attend college.

**Forethought-** Capability to motivate oneself and guide one's actions anticipatorily.

**Higher Education-** This study will use a Community College.

**Individualist-** Working to satisfy one's own needs.

**Intrinsic Motivation-** Engaging in a task for no obvious reward except for the activity itself (the activity is the means and the end).

**Learner Centered Model-** Placing more responsibility in the hands of the students, and requiring the instructor to serve as the "presenter or facilitator of knowledge," rather than the traditional "source of all knowledge."

**Learning Orientation-** Interested in learning, challenges, persistence, and exhibiting a high level of self-regulation.

**Loss of Face Syndrome-** Learning by obligation of the group and not for personal interest.

**Mastery Learning-** A systematic instructional plan that has as its objective students demonstrating high achievement and that includes the components of defining mastery, planning for mastery, teaching for mastery, and grading for mastery.

**Minorities-** Latino or African descent.

**Motivation-** Activation to action. Level of motivation is reflected in choice of courses of action, and in the intensity and persistence of effort.

**Performance Goals-** Just interested in showing ability. Ability is the cause of success or failure.

**Performance-Oriented Goals-** Interested in the way one is perceived. I.e. "looking" really smart.

**Reciprocal Interaction-** Causal relations among behaviors, environmental variables, and cognitions and other personal factors.

**Self-Efficacy-** Personal beliefs concerning one's capabilities to organize and implement actions necessary to perform behaviors at designated levels.

**Self-Regulation-** The process whereby students personally activate and sustain behaviors, cognitions, and affects, which are systematically oriented toward the attainment of learning goals.

**Social Cognitive Theory-** Bandura stresses the idea that much human learning occurs in a social environment. People acquire knowledge, rules, skills, strategies, beliefs, and attitudes by observing others.

**Task Analysis-** Drawing on past experiences and knowledge to determine the best strategy when confronting similar situations.

**Vicarious Learning-** Learning that occurs without overt performance, such as by observing live or symbolic models.

#### **Assumptions**

The researcher assumed that Camden County College is an accurate sample of most community colleges. Camden County College has a good mixture of cultures and various socio-economic backgrounds. Its location will provide a sampling of Southern New Jersey students from various surrounding counties.

The survey will investigate motivational factors that support the hypothesis. It is assumed that students will answer all the questions honestly and will not inflate their responses. Their responses will reflect an accurate sample in accordance with their cultural backgrounds and parental support structures. All surveys will remain confidential and no names are being collected or published. The classes that will receive the surveys are assumed to be a random sample of college students at Camden County College.

## Limitations

Some limitations of this study are that students may not respond to the questions honestly. Only Caucasian, Latino, and African American students' surveys will be collected. The majority of students at Camden County College are Caucasian so the Latino and African American population may not be reflected accurately because of a smaller sample.

This study only looked at students that are enrolled in credit courses. Many students who are from poor environmental support systems will begin college at a remedial level and this study did not look into the motivational factors behind trying to keep these college students motivated until they were eligible for credit classes.

Lastly, this study did not distinguish students who were receiving financial aid. These students may have initially become motivated because college is not a financial burden. However, the study looked into other motivational factors that have pushed these students to pursue higher education.

## Summary

Chapter two will look at the learner-centered model. It will discuss the pros and cons of this approach in regards to cultural influences. Some cultures emphasize the importance of listening to rules and following directions and others push toward individualism and self-direction. For cultures that require an inactive approach to learning the learner-centered model may be difficult to use successfully. It is good to understand the learning styles and background of each student. Each different background needs to be considered when applying knowledge in an environmental context.

Another area that will be discussed is self-efficacy and self-regulation. Self-efficacy is important in a student staying motivated. Research has shown various issues that affect the way a person feels about themselves and learning. Personal beliefs in one's capabilities allow the student to set goals and regulate themselves on their path to achieving them. Racial ideologies can hinder a student's view of themselves if they believe that they have barriers that cannot be overcome.

Other barriers in motivation are those encountered by first generation college students. These students do not have the support that they need to transition to college. They may become overwhelmed and frustrated. Parents who have attended college can help with financial aid forms, references, and course selection. They can also explain to their child the expectations of college and the differences from high school. This allows their child to be a better prepared student. The upcoming section will also explain the differences in cultural backgrounds and learning factors. It will also discuss the obligations that some cultures have to their family and the strain that this may cause on their academic life.

## Chapter II

In order to understand motivation, we must look at other areas to see what factors influence motivation. Self-efficacy is a key component in understanding how students stay motivated. If a student does not feel capable of going to college, then they will not think of it as a feasible goal for themselves. Self-regulation is also important in learning and staying motivated. Students must pick up learning and study habits that will allow them to learn the material and feel competent. This is a very individual process. When a student feels competent they begin to set goals that increase the value of the learning task. The student also needs to feel that they have a choice. Allowing the student to have a choice in their education also increases the task value. Even though learning is an individual process, the student looks to their families, friends, and peers for different learning strategies. Each group being studied has different family obligations, family systems, and neighborhood influences. These differences will help in determining why an individual decides to pursue college.

### Learner Centered Model

Amongst the new models of education in universities, is the learner-centered model. This model is built on the assumption that learning is more likely to occur when students play an active role in the learning process. Some of the principles of this model are that it requires frequent faculty-student contact and intellectual engagement. It is also beneficial to students who do not have support at home because it allows for collaborative inquiry in which learning and problem solving is done in a group settings. Group settings are important because it helps with modeling learning styles from other students. Active learning, cooperation, diversity, high expectations, interaction, and



responsibility are all necessary elements in supporting academic excellence. This model places the emphasis on the students, but allows the student to get directions from the teacher. The teacher is the presenter or facilitator of knowledge rather than being the source of all knowledge.

Learning is about making meaning for each individual learner by establishing and reworking patterns, relationships and connections. The learner-centered model incorporates such activities as active learning, self-directed learning, autonomous learning and learning through the Internet. This model focuses on the needs and interests of each student and is based on a close relationship between teacher and student. It also places the responsibility on the student for his or her own learning with guidance from the teacher. This allows students from various backgrounds to draw on their own experiences and articulating them into the real world.

In a study done by Phyllay and Boulton-Lewis they compared students in a learner-centered program to students who were employed full time and were part time students (Phyllay, 2002). Student's who worked and attended school part time perceived knowledge as being practical and helped in self-development because of its application in the real world. This is especially beneficial for minority students who are working part time and do not have family support in the home. This allows the student to draw on real world experience and provided them with a means to apply their knowledge allowing it to have more meaning. Full time students focused on obtaining grades and doing what was necessary to get through the degree program. They saw learning as a means to an end and did not retain much of the material. Saljo agrees with this by stating, "...learning does not exist as a general phenomenon. To learn is to act within human-made institutions and to

adapt to the particular definitions of learning that are valid in the educational environment in which one finds oneself (Phillay, 2002).” The educational environment however, needs to be one that is flexible enough to include various learning styles. Material that is learned needs to be applied to things that are concrete or real life in order for it to be valued. This has to be considered from a multicultural perspective. What may be relevant to one group may not be for another. Phillay (2002) states that, “If students see their intention in learning a task as a means to an end, then their engagement may be different from those who see learning as a lifelong continuous process”. The different learning styles need to include group and peer learning along with teacher and student relations. It also needs to take into account various social and cultural conventions with respect to what counts as learning.

Learner centered education does not take into account dispositions due to a societal and individual obligation to learn, which is referred to as the loss of face syndrome (Phillay, 2002). It is seen as instilling the responsibility on the individual for themselves and their community. This can form a problem for students who view education from a collectivist perspective. These students are raised into conformity by accepting the rules of the group, obedience in respectfully carrying out instructions, and persisting in the face of boredom. American students know the value of individualism and understand the competitiveness that goes along with this perspective. Not everyone prefers the self-directed approach to learning and some actually do better with structure and direction. Students from various backgrounds need to learn how to apply their knowledge in a social and individual context. If a student does not have the familial support that is necessary to reinforce the educational values at home then the self-directed

approach would be very difficult. The student needs a guide or model to help answer questions that may arise and may need assistance in becoming a self-regulated learner.

### **Self-Efficacy and Self-Regulation**

Research has shown that student's self-efficacy beliefs are related to their level of self-regulation (Horner, 2002). Bandura defines self-efficacy as an individual's confidence in their ability to organize and execute a given course of action to solve a problem or accomplish a task. People form beliefs as to what they can do dependent on their social surroundings. Individuals' efficacy expectations are the major determinant of goal setting and persistence (Eccles and Wigfield, 2002). Students learn through their own experiences or experiences of people similar to themselves as to what they can do. If students believe the ideologies of their race, it may hinder their belief in themselves. This is especially true for parents who discuss with their child the realities of growing up as a minority without giving them the encouragement to overcome these barriers. Bandura (1994) believed that self-beliefs of efficacy play a major part in the self-regulation of motivation. A student needs to feel confident in order to be able to engage in learning. Butler (2002) agrees that an important element in a students' engagement in learning is their level of self-efficacy. Low perceptions of self-efficacy undermine students' willingness to invest their effort in tasks that would improve their learning skills. For students to be academically successful they need to have both the "will" and the "skill" (Alfassi, 2003).

The explanations students give for their successes and failures are known as their attributional beliefs. These beliefs are related to a students' perception of self-efficacy. They use their knowledge, skills, and efficacy beliefs in order to pursue intrinsic interests.

Efficacy beliefs influence how people think, feel, act, and motivate themselves to learn (Horner, 2002). Unsuccessful attributional patterns reflect a disposition of low self-perception over the control they have over different outcomes. For example, attributing failure to low ability and success to luck leads students to become less engaged in active learning (Butler, 2002). This is a hurdle for first generation college students as most have a lower sense of self-efficacy and lower self-esteem than students whose parents attended college (Inman, 1999).

A majority of minorities are first generation college students. Minorities have a lower self-efficacy belief in coping with perceived career related barriers (Luzzo and McWhirter, 2001). White students have a higher career decision making self-efficacy and a lower trait anxiety, ethnic identity, and other group orientation (Gloria and Hird, 1999). Blacks and Hispanics are aware of the barriers they face being a minority and because they are aware of these barriers, they may see certain goals as unattainable. In a study done by Coleman (1992) on ethnic minorities, he found that the more a minority student was affiliated with Anglo culture the better it was for their adjustment to college. Ethnic minorities cite barriers associated with financial and childcare concerns and barriers associated with their ethnicity (Luzzo and McWhirter, 2001). Contextual factors also influence a student's perception of the opportunity structure within which career plans are developed and implemented. Students need to feel that they are capable of achieving their goals in order to remain motivated in college. Horner (2002) believes that the self-regulation process, personal beliefs, and motivation are all interrelated and reciprocal.

## **Task Value, Goal Setting and Self-Regulation**

**Task value is another important element that affects the level of self-regulation (Horner, 2002). In task analysis, students draw on past experiences and knowledge to determine the best strategy when confronting similar situations. Their knowledge and experiences are drawn from a social and culture perspective so depending on the amount of exposure they have toward a specific task will determine their level of success in choosing the right approach. Some environments do not allow much latitude in choice of activities or approaches. Eccles and Wigfield (2002) stated that Zimmerman believed lack of choice made self-regulation more difficult. Choice is a factor contributing to task value, motivation and self-regulation. Horner (2002) believed that in order to increase the value of a task students needed to be given some choice in choosing their tasks and their own goals. If students attend college for the mere reason of pleasing their parents then learning in college has less task value because it needs to be the choice and goal of the students as well. Allowing the students to make the choices increases the task value, which helps lead to engaged, self-regulated learning (Horner, 2002). In families with low socioeconomic status, students may feel that they do not have a choice of going to college. They may not have the self-efficacy needed to even finish high school. The key is to inform them of funding options that will help make it possible for them to go to college along with helping the students become motivated enough to increase their efficacy to the point were they feel they are capable enough to go to college.**

**Learning is a social, not just individual process so it is important for the student to receive encouragement from parents, friends, or teachers that allow them to feel capable enough to make the decision of going to college. Students learn from their social and**

cultural beliefs about what is useful in a learning task and how it will benefit them in the future (Phillay, 2002). Teachers, parents, or mentors can help students become self-regulated through modeling, coaching, scaffolding, reflection, and exploration (Horner, 2002). Teachers and parents should invite the student to pose and solve their own problems. If the student gets stuck or ready to give up the teacher or parent should intervene to give them some type of guidance in recognizing the problem and brainstorming with the student to form possible problem solving techniques. In a study done with academically at risk youth, a review of different alternative programs indicates that schools can actively help students overcome their failings (Alfassi, 2003).

Two major models of Alfassi's study encompassed self-governance and parental involvement with some important differences. The first is creating a positive interpersonal climate to promote educational growth and the second deals with ongoing monitoring of students' academic progress. Zimmerman described self-regulated students as being metacognitively, motivationally, and behaviorally active in their own learning process and in achieving their goals (Eccles and Wigfield, 2002). It is important that teachers and counselors become aware of the students expectations in high school and educate them on other funding options that will allow them the choice of going to college if they so choose.

Horner (2002) identified two forms of motivational goals. The first type is learning oriented and the second is performance oriented. When students have a learning orientation then they are interested in learning, challenging themselves, persisting, and exhibiting a high level of self-regulation. When students choose their own goals they increase their learning orientation. On the other hand, if the student is more interested in

performance-oriented goals they are more interested in the way that others perceive them. They are interested in getting the correct answers for the sake of looking like they are really smart. These students display a low level of self-regulation. Horner (2002) stated that increasing self-efficacy, emphasizing the value or reason for particular goals, and allowing the student to choose their own goals will increase learning-oriented motivation and self-regulated behaviors.

### Social Learning and Self-Regulation

Sociocultural learning theories emphasize how students' self-regulation is influenced by the cultural contexts in which they learn (Butler, 2002). Human behavior is strongly influenced by our perceptions of the task at hand and our knowledge of the learning process. This is observed and modeled by our social and familial experiences. Selective peer association can help with self-efficacy except in the case of disrupted or impoverished peer relations (Bandura, 1994). If students decide to surround themselves with others who are successful in school then they will tend to assume the same type of motives and goals. If however, they decide to surround themselves with others who do not have the same goals in common then they may not get the support or guidance that they need to succeed. These relationships can adversely affect personal self-efficacy beliefs. Students learn from their experiences of success and failures and by watching others who they view as similar to themselves. Students of color felt that multiple types of mentoring are important for them in attending community colleges (Pope, 2002). For example, if an African American student surrounds themselves with other successful African American students then they will not see pursuing college as such an unlikely task.

Human development is influenced by the interactions within various microsystems, such as family and school (Newman, 2000). Teachers and mentors need to build from the students' existing knowledge and skills. This helps the students identify elements that can be applied to other areas of their lives. Most important to students is a model, with self regulated learning skills, that allows the student to observe and acquire the knowledge, beliefs, and skills that they need to become successful in school (Butler, 2002). In a study done by Pope (2002) on the perceptions of minority students regarding the mentoring process at their community college, students felt that mentoring was an important success mechanism for them. They believed that their success depended on their integration into the college environment. Since a majority of these students are first generation college students, they need some type of direction in order to get accustomed to college. This is especially important for students who come from high schools that did not offer college preparatory classes. They may also need help in becoming accustomed to the course work required for college. Mentors can help the student get involved in study groups and set them up with other students who have fulfilled some of the requirements of their major. Matching minority students with other students can help them become self-regulated learners.

#### **First Generation College Students**

A majority of the minority students enrolled in college are first generation college students. These students are intimidated by the idea of entering college with no concept of higher education (Reeves, 2003). First generation college students may not get the support of their parents or the financial backing to pay for college. Inman (1999) found that first generation college students reported less family support. Students whose parents



attended college benefit from their parents' knowledge of registration, financial aid, secondary school reference forms, prerequisites, and grade reports. This allows them to feel more comfortable in their transition to college. A majority of minority students are first generation college students so without their parents help they may not feel as confident in the application and registration process. Minority students also carry burdens composed of cultural dislocation. Just the act of leaving their families is culturally inappropriate. Many of them face economic hardship making them feel compelled to work while in college to contribute to the family income. They may feel isolated because they can not turn to relatives for guidance about campus life. Parents, who attended college, know about the college culture and can help their child adapt.

In a study done by Bui (2002) he examined first generation college students' background to determine their reasons for pursuing higher education. He found that first generation college students were more likely to come from a lower socioeconomic background. Most of these students reported that they were pursuing higher education to help their families out financially. For individuals who have an extrinsic orientation, social concern was an important motivational factor in going to college (Hwang, 2002). Financial and familial obligations help shape the choices about postsecondary education in these first generation college students. Hwang (2002) pointed out that even when the student was receiving financial aid or a scholarship, they still wanted to contribute somehow to their family. Inman (1999) found that first generation college students come from a unique socioeconomic background, and were motivated by a different set of goals. He stresses the importance of community colleges addressing the barriers faced by these students because they are typically first generation college students. They typically enroll

in a two-year college first because of financial limitations. Inman (1999) also stresses that first generation college students are often less prepared academically and psychologically for college.

The US Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that first generation college students tended to have lower incomes, had dependents, and were enrolled part-time. It also reported the reasons for first generation students attending Community College as receiving the amount of financial aid they needed, being able to live at home, and being able to work while attending school. They also reported that students whose parents had a high-school diploma but not a college degree were almost twice as likely to drop out of college as those whose parents had a college degree (Reisberg, 1999).

When considering the innovations in education, which support the learner-centered model, one must be conscious of the emerging issues such as the learner's beliefs and values about learning and the nature of knowledge (Phillay, 2002). As discussed earlier, self-efficacy is important in a student's belief about attending college and reports have found that first generation college students have a lower self-image of their academic ability than those who come from families with college experience. Students' construction of knowledge is shaped and constrained by the language and tools available in their social and cultural surroundings (Butler, 2002). Ideologies are picked up through family, social, and cultural influences. Students who do not have any other members who have attended college may find that the push toward the pursuit of higher education is not as important as going to work to help bring in more income to support the family immediately after high school.

## **Individualist and Collectivist Cultures**

**In Western or individualist culture, individuals are expected to make their own wishes known and work to satisfy their own needs. People believe that they are responsible for their own success and have few obligations beyond their immediate families. In contrast, collectivist societies achieve their ends by aligning themselves with a larger social group and rely on the group to attend to their needs. In Daly's (2003) study she differentiates the groups by stating that Latin American countries rank higher on collectivism than on individualism and African Americans exhibit a combination of individualistic and collective values. This combination is caused by assimilating the favored traits from individualistic culture in regards to education while continuing to observe the obligation to their family.**

**American educational institutions offer an individualistic framework for learning and engaging in school. The emphasis is on the individualistic belief that a student needs to work hard in order to succeed in this competitive market. American culture emphasizes the importance of achievement through self-regulated learning. This approach does not take into consideration the differences within other cultures. Students' backgrounds create a framework of ideas and beliefs about whether they are performing a task for themselves or to better serve the members of a group. Students from collectivist cultures may find it more difficult to become self-regulated because of their heavy dependence on group activity. It may be easier for a student who is from an individualist society to become self directed and self initiating. This needs to be considered from an educational perspective because students may need extra attention in areas that promote self direction if they are not accustomed to this type of approach.**

Parenting style influences the way a child views certain characteristics that will allow them to become successful in school. Individualistic parents promote their child's assertion of their own will and value disobedience when it is a reflection of their asserting their individuality (Rudy, Grusec and Wolfe, 1999). In collectivist culture self-assertion is thought of as negative, whereas self-restraint is more valued. This type of value system may inhibit students from participating in class or asking questions that would help in their learning. Children from collectivist cultures are motivated to co-operate and meet the needs of others because these activities promote a sense of self-worth (Rudy et al., 1999).

Students from a collectivist background explained their motivation as having an other-orientation, whereas students from an individualist background typically have motives that are self-oriented (Barrett, Wosinska, Butner, Petrova, Gornik-Durose, and Cialdini, 2003). Student's motivation to pursue college can be influenced by the way they engage in learning during high school, so it is important to investigate how students become self-regulated learners. A student may need more help with their academics if they are not raised to be self directing which is important in self-regulation. It is also important to focus on high school academics because it is at this time that the decision will be made as to what to do after graduation. The student may enter high school thinking that they are not able to go to college, but with the right support system and encouragement they may come to a decision of pursuing college after all.

Self-regulation is dependent on how students acquire the skills necessary to learn in school. Things like neighborhood influence, family support structures and other outside support structures can help to influence or deter students in pursuing higher

education. If the student comes from a collectivist culture then an individualistic approach may not be as successful in helping motivate the student. As discussed earlier, having the student pursue a goal that is more focused on the groups goal may not give the student enough of a choice. This would not provide them with the motivation that they need to go college and complete it successfully.

### **Cultural Differences**

There are different areas of culture that influence a student's disposition toward education. There are cultural differences in the home and family life, cultural differences in neighborhood and community life, and cultural differences in school experience and in motivation (Havighurst, 2003). In Coffman's (2001) ethnic comparisons, she revealed a significant difference between Caucasian and Latino students. Latino students have a collectivist obligation to help the home. This cultural group has specific gender roles. Females are expected to help in the home and males are expected to help with the family's income. In a review of Latino students and their parents, one student stated that her mother still expected her to come home every weekend to help with the housework (Reisburg, 1999). Another student stated, "I have changed...I realize that when I go home or when my family comes and visits me. How am I supposed to act? Who am I supposed to be for these people?" These students are burdened by their duties at school and their duties at home. Students face the confusing reality of existing in a bicultural environment. The more a minority student is affiliated with Anglo culture the better their college adjustment and academic performance (Coleman, 1992). This study supported Coleman's (1999) hypothesis that academic success is a function of the individuation process. Socio-cultural structures that peers and

parents place on the student can cause more burdens for the students, adding it to the already existent burdens of academic life. In Coffman's (2001) study she found that Caucasian students showed a higher level of intrinsic motivation than did Latino Americans. Latino students rely more on extrinsic motivation to help them with goal setting and achievement.

In another ethnographic study, this one done on African American students it showed that relating extrinsic factors to positive future goals also helped to keep African American students more engaged in school and receive better grades (Hwang, 2002). Extrinsic orientations relate to students' social reasons for going to school such as social approval and social concerns. Hwang (2002) also examined the motivational modes of 60 African American college students. Three themes were identified in this study. Opportunity and self-fulfillment were almost equally divided with only 5% of the students saying that money had any influence on their decision to go to college. Approximately 90% of the opportunity category responses mentioned an extrinsic education value in terms of positive future goal orientations.

In another study done by Weissman (1998), he supports the theory that minority students have a more extrinsic motive for getting a degree such as improving income, and providing opportunity for advancement. Black and Hispanic students wanted to set examples for others by being the first in their family to go to college. Different cultures have different variables that can influence an individual's educational goals. Individuals have cultural influences that motivate them to pursue college in the first place. Also mentioned in Weissman's (1998) study were the goals of the students in college. Caucasian students were more likely to mention getting an Associate's degree and then

transferring to obtain a B.A., M.A., or professional degree. A great majority of Hispanic students mentioned their goals as obtaining an Associate's degree and some mentioned wanting to pursue a Master's. African American students' goals were different. Their goals were to take a few courses for either a certificate or for an Associate's degree. Three of the 22 Black students surveyed wanted to pursue a master's degree.

The transition to college can be very challenging but can be eased by the support of families, friends, and colleagues. All groups can benefit by this type of support, but each group places a different emphasis as to its importance in helping them decide to go to college. Weissman (1998) helps to identify these importances in her study of White, Black, and Hispanic students' transition to a Community College. Hispanic students were more likely to mention their parents as a major influence in their decision to go to college. They wanted to create a better life for themselves and wanted to create one that was better than what their parents had. Black students emphasized the importance of succeeding for themselves, but they were committed to setting an example to their family, their race and serving as role models. Caucasian students were more likely to report that they held an independent self-construal (Coffman, 2001).

There can be a striking difference in the transition process for White, Black, and Latino students. African American students face additional burdens compared to Caucasians in their first year of college. Black students have feelings of incongruence and isolation because they continue to remain devalued in American schools and must continue to face and fight stereotypes related to their intellectual ability (Weissman, 1998). Racial and ethnic tensions are also faced by Hispanic students and can affect students' personal and social satisfaction.

Students from African American and Latino backgrounds have a high probability of being first generation college students. Some have suggested that school and home cultures are incompatible. Communal values are found in African American and Latino households while individualistic values are found in schools. Schools place their emphasis on competition and individual achievement (Newman, 2000). African American and Latino households have close family ties because of the shared sense of identity through their history, language, religion, and traditions. Students need to rely on their family for a better sense of where they came from. Family values regarding religiosity and ethnic identity contribute to how a child deals with stress and the demands of life (Newman, 2000). African American and Latino households hold their own sense of culture because they observe different rules, moral codes, and traditions than those from the American culture. Caucasian students can come from various geographic backgrounds so there is no real sense of a true culture other than that of American societal norms.

American society emphasizes the need to be an individual and succeed as an individual. American students have no language barriers because the primary language is English. It may be difficult to get the parents involved in their child's work if the students' parents speak a different language than what is taught at school. It is difficult for them to help their child with homework written in English, attending PTA meetings, or parent teacher conferences where their child's weaknesses can be discussed. This type of separation between the family and school can cause a conflict for the student in getting the help and support that they need.



In a study that examines the relationship between academic performance and family functioning among African American and Caucasian college students, parents that expressed beliefs in their child's competence and shared their interests and concerns had children with higher GPA's (Walker, 2002). African American students can turn to African American student organizations or peers for social support if they are not supported at home. It is important that they receive encouragement from their peers who can help overcome their same doubts and fears. Research shows that peer support and neighborhood variables had a more significant impact on academic performance than family status in African Americans (Walker, 2002). Parental support plays such an integral role in the student's academic performance. If the child does not have parental support at home then they should look for alternative ways to get encouragement and support.

Children in single parent homes are more likely to drop out of school, have fewer years of education, and earn poorer grades because there is little support at home (Walker, 2002). The economy today makes it very difficult for a single parent to afford the cost of living alone. Dual incomes are often necessary to remain afloat forcing single parents to work longer hours or second jobs. These long hours away from home leaves them with less time to focus on their child's education. Parental influence at home helps the child become disciplined in doing their schoolwork and required material. Parents are unable to stay involved in what their child is doing at school and helping them overcome any obstacles they feel they have preventing them from achieving. Economic stressors can affect African American parents, impacting their warmth, psychological availability, and control (Newman, 2000). All of these factors influence the well-being and academic

achievement of their children. Economic conditions, nature of the neighborhood, family and extended family relationships, and the school environment all influence a child's academic motivation and achievement. Low-income minority youth are vulnerable to declines in academic motivation and performance (Newman, 2000). Caucasian parent's grade expectations were related to student's actual grade achievement whereas African American parents had unrealistically high expectations for their children (Walker, 2002).

Although the number of Hispanics and African Americans attending college has increased, studies show that they are not entering the careers that would provide them with the greatest opportunity (Daly, 2003). The fields that would offer more financial rewards are business, engineering, and science. These fields are limiting in the number of Hispanics and African American pursuing these types of careers. Disparities such as these limit the career opportunities and earning of minorities. Daly (2003) attributes this social and economic stratification to the fact that minorities can not make this type of money outside of these fields. This stratification in income continues to feed the beliefs that minorities can not succeed in the professional world.

### Summary

Research has supported the idea that motivational factors involved in attending college will vary in regards to race, and parental educational level. The purpose of this study is to help determine which direction educators need to go in order to encourage more minority enrollment. Research has indicated that familial, peer, and teacher support are all necessary in ensuring the success of students in college. This study helped in elaborating the students' needs and desires in attending Camden County College in Blackwood, NJ.

## Chapter III

### Sample

The sample consisted of freshman and sophomore students enrolled in an introductory Psychology program at Camden County College during the spring 2004 session. Their ages ranged from 18-35 years old. These students were either part-time or full-time students. No remedial or special education classes were surveyed. African American, Caucasian, and Latino students were the primary focus of this study.

### Operational Measures

The device used to measure the motivational factors of each student was a survey, which determined the priority and significance of reasons they chose to attend college. The first section of the survey reviews background information such as member group, highest level of education of mother, highest level of education of father, highest level of education student is interested in getting and current enrollment status. The directions asked the students to indicate the importance of 16 different factors in their decision to go to college. Their answers were scored on a 1-5 Likert Scale where a 1 indicated no importance and a 5 indicated most important. The 16 different factors were tested for inter-rater reliability. The factors were divided in half to test for individualism and collectivism and were randomly scattered throughout the survey. All questions that were tested and failed to prove either individualism or collectivism were disregarded. These factors determined whether they were attending college for individual (self) reasons or collective (others, group) reasons. A copy of the survey used is listed in the appendix.

## Design

The design of this study consists of testing three groups of participants. African American, Caucasian, and Latino students will be tested according to two orientations (individual vs. collective). These orientations are represented in a survey of 16 factors divided equally. Ratings on a 1-5 Likert scale were analyzed to see if there was a correlation between member group and orientation to pursue higher education. A rating of 40 indicates a high orientation where a rating of 8 indicates a low orientation of each factor.

## Hypothesis

The null hypothesis of this study is that there are no motivational differences among African American, Caucasian, and Latino students in pursuing higher education. Individualism and collectivism will make no difference amongst groups.

The alternate hypothesis is that various cultural groups show differences in motivational factors that will correspond to their individualist or collectivist orientation. Latino students will choose more collectivist factors while Caucasians will choose more individualist factors. African Americans will choose some individualistic traits and some collectivist traits.

## Analysis

The data in this survey is descriptively presented and analyzed. It reviews the number of responses that corresponds to each group's orientation. It lists the most important factors and the least important factors in pursuing higher education. A one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted to determine the effect of

the 3 member groups on two dependent variables, the individualism and collectivism scores.

### **Summary**

By surveying students at Camden County College it was possible to determine the reasons why students chose to enroll in college. The survey also reviewed the ranking of these reasons in regards to individualistic tendencies and collectivist tendencies. It helps in determining if each group being surveyed requires different motivational techniques to encourage them to pursue higher education. This is an important element when working with students and their families in understanding cultural influences and barriers in reaching educational goals.

## Chapter IV

### Report of Survey

In this chapter a report will be presented which will analyze the Camden County College student's responses to 16 questions. These questions are on the survey listed in the appendix. The hypothesis given in chapters 1 & 3 stated there would be differences in the way students responded to the survey. These responses were dependent upon their cultural background. The results are given in written form and as a graphic presentation.

A total of 143 students were given the survey in an introductory Psychology class on a testing day to ensure maximum participation. Of those who participated, only 50 Caucasian students' surveys could be used, along with 25 African American surveys and 25 Latino American surveys. Forty-three of the surveys had to be eliminated either because the participant exceeded the age being investigated or were members of other groups.

The following table (Table 4.1) is a summary of the mean individualistic and collectivist scores. A ranking of 40 indicates a very high orientation were as a ranking of 8 indicates a very low orientation. All scores were totaled and a mean for each factor was calculated.

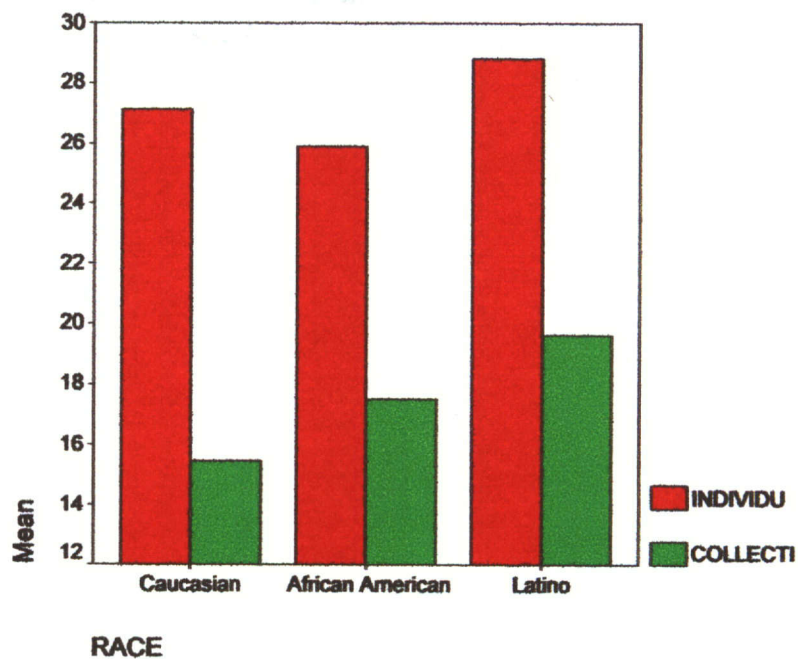
Table 4.1

RACE	MEAN INDIVIDUALISTIC	MEAN COLLECTIVIST
Caucasian	27.14	15.48
African American	25.92	17.52
Latino	28.80	19.64

From the table above you can see that there is really no substantial difference between race and orientation. A one-way multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted and no significant differences were found among the three races on the

dependent measures. Wilk's Lamda equaled .850 and because this number is closer to one than zero the means are close to the same. This has led the researcher to fail to reject the null hypothesis that there are no motivational differences among African American, Caucasian, and Latino students in pursuing higher education. All groups answered the questions with more of an individualistic orientation. However, it can be seen in Graph 4.1 that Latino and African American students scored higher overall on collectivist traits.

Graph 4.1

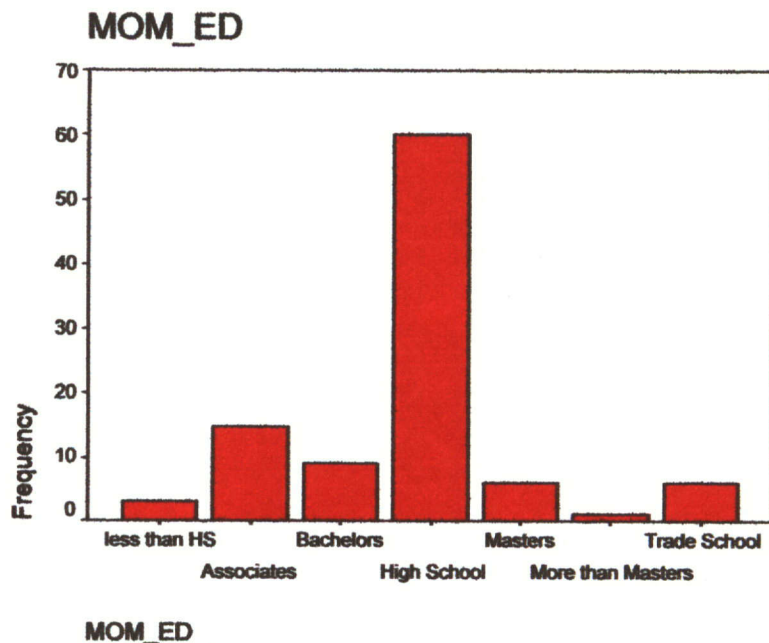


A reason for the discrepancy between the hypotheses and the results can be as mentioned by Daly (2003). She states that Latino Americans and African Americans exhibit a combination of individualistic and collectivist traits. These individuals assimilate the favored traits from the individualistic culture in regards to education, while continuing to observe the obligations to their family. Coleman (1992) also found that the more a minority student affiliated with Anglo culture the better the adjustment in college.

Some of the students may be of Latino descent and may have parents who are Hispanic but were born here. This may cause them to assimilate the individualistic traits of the American society.

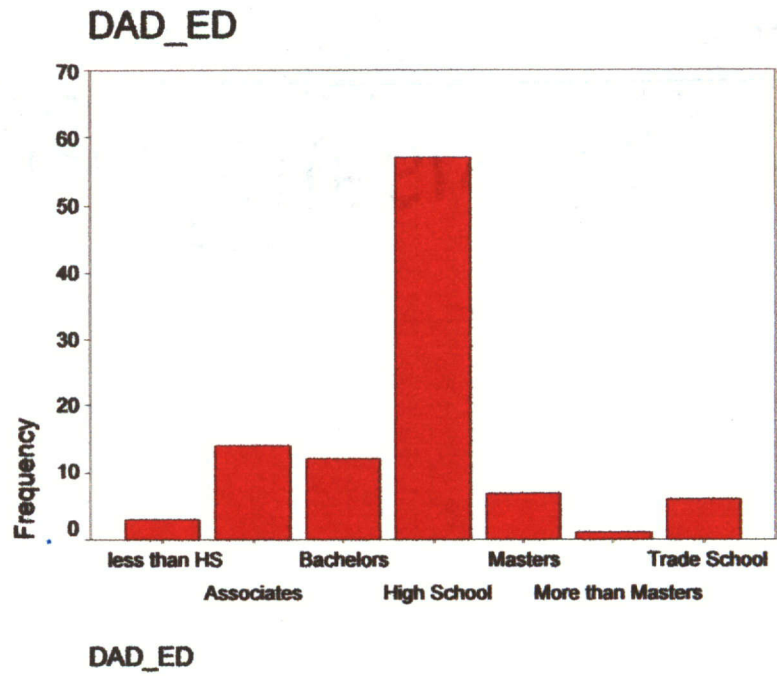
Graph 4.2 and 4.3 show the educational level of the mothers and fathers of the students who participated in the survey. It shows that a majority of the students who are attending Camden County College are first generation college students. Knowing this can help educators focus on helping students at the college adapt themselves to college life. As mentioned in Chapter 2, minorities were more likely to be first generation college students. This study determined that race was not a factor in determining if the student was a first generation college student.

Graph 4.2





Graph 4.3



## Chapter V

### Summary

This survey study reviewed the nature of why students at Camden County College decided to attend an institute of higher learning. The survey was administered to determine if the students used individualistic or collectivist reasons for attending Camden County College. These surveys were handed out to an introductory psychology class during an exam day. Most students chose an individualistic approach but Latinos and African Americans still scored higher on collectivist tendencies.

Cultural background is an important issue to consider when motivating students to attend college. As mentioned in chapter two, self-efficacy is important in helping a student stay motivated. By understanding the barriers that individual cultures face with language, history, and learning orientation, educators can focus on trying to help the student feel capable of attending college. Self-regulation is also important in a student's success and staying motivated. Students maintain motivation by knowing they can achieve the goal of attending college, even if their parents did not attend college before them. First generation college students may also need guidance with the application, financial aid forms and course selection.

Some of the limitations of this study were the low enrollments of minorities in the introductory psychology class. This caused a low number of surveys collected from these two groups. The sample consisted of 50 Caucasians and only 25 Latinos and African Americans. Also, two of the Latinos surveyed had Latino and Caucasian selected so the labeling of "member group" may have been confusing for some participants. The survey

should have asked for ethnicity instead of member group to reduce the confusion and get a more accurate representation.

This study does not accurately answer the question of whether people of different ethnic backgrounds need different motivational factors. However, the background information given in chapter two suggests that because of the variables involved in motivation and the effects of the environment on motivational factors, student's ethnicity needs to be considered in helping them pursue college. This is due primarily to lack of support in the home and the fact that most students attending a community college are first generation college students. Further research should be done to try to identify issues that need to be addressed.

### Conclusion

This research demonstrated that there was no difference in motivational factors of students at Camden County College dependent on race. It did show however that Latinos and African Americans still held higher collectivist tendencies. These traits should be considered when trying to motivate these individuals to pursue college. Helping the student with self-regulation and increasing self-efficacy will increase their chances of going to college. The study also showed that a majority of the students were first generation college students. This situation brings with it its own set of barriers which need to be addressed when helping to motivate the students.

### Discussion

First generation college students have a unique set of needs. These students have a lower sense of self-efficacy and a lower self esteem. Additional barriers are faced by first generation ethnic minorities. They site barriers associated with financial and childcare

concerns and barriers associated with their ethnicity. Since learning is a social process, it is important to have support from parents, friends, and teachers. As discussed by Pope (2002), students of color felt that multiple types of mentoring were important in their attending college. Mentoring was an important success mechanism for these students. This is important in helping the student feel capable enough to go to college.

Consequently, in a similar study done on first generation college students Inman (1999) found that these students reported less family support. This emphasizes the importance of providing support to students whose parents did not go to college. Inman also found that first generation college students come from a unique socioeconomic background, and were motivated by a different set of goals. These students were less prepared academically and psychologically for college. This study raises concerns over the amount of first generation college students attending Camden County College. The US Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics reported that students whose parents had a high school diploma but no college degree were almost twice as likely to drop out of college than those whose parents had a college degree.

Programs need to be created to help with the transition and demands of college. Assistance with the college application, financial aid, and course selection should be provided to students at a high school level. This is to help the student better prepare for college. Parents are a main influence, but they may not provide enough confidence for the student to pursue it on their own. Mentors and teachers are important in helping direct the student to alternative options after high school. Coffman (2001) found that Hispanic students were more likely to mention their parent's as a major influence in their decision to go to college. While Black students emphasized the importance of being an example to

their race and serving as a role model themselves. Caucasian students were more likely to report that they held an independent self-construal. This research may have failed to reject the hypothesis, but other research has shown that race does play a part in how a student learns and is motivated.

### **Implications for Future Research**

Future research should investigate the needs of minorities and first generation college students. Surveys should be administered requesting the student's ethnicity instead of membership group. Other studies should target the needs of high school students to help them feel they are more prepared for college and are more successful in their classes. Other research should investigate why students are deciding not to go to college. This study only focused on those who had already decided to go to college, so finding out the reasons why students are choosing not to go to college can give a bigger picture of issues that need to be addressed.

It is important for minorities to get an education. As mentioned in chapter two, there is stratification in the economy because there are not enough minorities going into the fields that hold the most growth potential and that pay well. These positions require an education and a personality that reflects confidence and determination. These are the values that are reflected in an individualistic orientation. Environment is an important determinant and if the family can not provide that for the student then educators and mentors need to set the stage for these young individuals.

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## APPENDIX



