

# Cultural Advancement of Tinto's Theory

Two salient theories of human motivation: self-determination theory (SDT) (Deci & Ryan, 1991) and job involvement theory (JIT) (Kanungo, 1982). I then integrate key components of each theory to create a framework for explaining how cultural norms and motivational orientation impact college student academic achievement and persistence. The viability of the proposed changes is supported by research that has examined the relationships among motivational orientation, cultural orientation, and academic achievement and persistence.

## Self-Determination Theory (SDT)

Self-determination theory is one of the most referenced, researched, and validated theories for understanding how socio-cultural conditions interact with people's inherent psychological needs to shape their behaviors (Reeve, 2002). According to SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1991), people are motivated to behave, or, in the case of educational motivation, to learn, by one of two motivational orientations: (a) intrinsic motivation, or learning because one finds the content interesting; or (b) extrinsic motivation, or learning as a means to an end (i.e., grades, praise, pay). SDT posits that the absence of intrinsic or extrinsic motivation results in lack of motivation to learn, a condition which Deci and Ryan refer to as "amotivation." SDT is primarily based on the premise that the fulfillment of intrinsic needs is more important to personal growth and learning than the fulfillment of extrinsic needs. Therefore, the theory posits that the most meaningful and successful learning occurs when students are motivated intrinsically (Reeve, Deci, & Ryan, 2004).

### Intrinsic and Extrinsic Learning Motivations

According to SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1991), intrinsic motivation for learning has three primary components. The first component is the need for autonomy, which occurs when students choose, on their own, to become engaged in learning because the subject and activities are closely aligned to students' interests and values (Reeve, Deci, & Ryan, 2004). The second component requisite to intrinsic motivation is competence, or "the need to be effective in interactions with the environment" (Reeve, Deci, & Ryan, 2004, p. 34). In addition to asserting one's effectiveness, competence also recognizes the learner's need to test, challenge, and develop in new ways. The third requirement is relatedness, or the need to establish close, secure relationships with others.

SDT also delineates three forms of extrinsic motivation (Reeve, Deci, & Ryan, 2004). The least effective form of extrinsic motivation is external regulation, which occurs when students are motivated purely by rewards and punishments from outside sources. A second form of extrinsic motivation, introjected regulation, occurs when students who are motivated by rewards and punishments begin to partially internalize this external pressure to learn. Identified regulation, the third type, occurs when the student internalizes the externalized pressure to learn. While research has indicated that both external and introjected regulation negatively impact learning, identified regulation can have a positive impact on learning, especially when the learner considers the material important but uninteresting (Reeve, Deci, & Ryan, 2004).

Another important SDT element is the recognition of how external events support or hinder intrinsic motivation. Reeve, Deci, and Ryan (2004) cited extensive research concluding that controlling behaviors

on the part of teachers or parents, such as surveillance, threats of punishment, imposed goals, competition, and evaluation, all serve to undermine students' intrinsic motivation toward learning. This line of research has also found that parents and teachers who provide students with choices, opportunities for self-direction, rationales, acknowledgement of feelings, and positive feedback increase students' intrinsic motivation toward learning.

### **Cross-Cultural Considerations of SDT**

While SDT has been validated in numerous employment and educational settings (Deci & Ryan, 2002), like other theories of motivation it has been criticized for its applicability to diverse groups. Cross-cultural psychologists have argued that many social psychology theories, including theories of motivation, are culturally bound and not universal (Berman, 1989; Gaines et al., 1997; Triandis, 1999). Therefore, it is important to review cross-cultural psychological literature to identify dimensions of cultural variation and to understand how such variations are reflected in college student motivation.

One of the most important behavioral distinctions observed among various cultures of the world is the differences between collectivism and individualism (Triandis, Chen, & Chan, 1998). Individualist societies tend to value independence, competition, and emotional detachment from one's in-group (i.e., family, tribe, etc.); they also place personal goals over the goals of the in-group (Phinney, 1996). Collectivist societies value interdependence, group harmony, and emotional attachment within the in-group, especially between parent and child. A value is the subordination of individual goals to the goals of the collective (Triandis, Chen, & Chun, 1998). Psychologists and anthropologists have long observed that Western cultures, especially those of the United States, Great Britain, and British-influenced countries such as Australia and Canada, tend to be individualist while many non-Western cultures, including those of Africa, Latin America, and Asia, demonstrate cultural orientations that are more collectivist (Beattie, 1980; Fiske et al., 1998; Mead, 1967; Triandis, McCusker, & Hui, 1990). Several cross-cultural psychologists (Marin & Marin, 1991; Phinney, 1996) have maintained that collectivist values continue to influence African American, Latino American, Native American, and Asian American cultures, not only as a continuation of indigenous values, but also as a way to help members of these groups deal with racial oppression and socio-economic challenges (Staples & Mirandé, 1980).

While research supports the tendency for minority Americans to espouse collectivist values (Asante, 1994; Gaines, 1994; O'Brian & Fugita, 1991; Oyserman, Gant, & Ayer, 1995; Sung, 1985; White & Parham, 1990; Valenzuela & Dornbusch, 1984; Xi, 1994), other studies have been less conclusive in identifying correlations among ethnicity and collectivism/individualism values (e.g., Cross, 1995; Freeberg & Stein, 1996; Gaines et al., 1997; Gudykunst et al., 1996; Oyserman, Coon, & Kemmelmeier, 2002; Singelis & Sharkey, 1995). This lack of consensus in the research has led several cross-cultural psychologists to conclude that, while minority Americans may be more predisposed to collectivist values than White Americans, the terms should not be used categorically (Phinney, 1996; Markus & Kitayama, 1991). In fact, researchers have recognized that heterogeneity exists among minority Americans, due in part to varying degrees of blending with mainstream U.S. culture. These findings have caused leading cross-cultural psychologists to conclude that individualism and collectivism, while salient to understanding antecedents of motivation and human behavior, are not necessarily dichotomous constructs, but rather orthogonal elements that necessarily coexist, to varying degrees, in all humans (Gaines et al., 1997; Triandis, 1989a).

Cross-cultural psychology provides a foundation for a critical examination of how SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1991) can be used to advance Tinto's (1993) foundational theory. While SDT provides great potential for refining the theory so that it recognizes student motivational orientation, the literature that addresses differences between individualism and collectivism points to a potential cross-cultural limitation regarding SDT's conceptualization of autonomy, a key component to intrinsic motivation. SDT asserts that the basic psychological conditions (i.e., autonomy, competence, relatedness) are "a natural aspect of human beings that apply to all people, regardless of gender, group, or culture" (SDT Website, p. 1). However, cross-cultural studies have led some researchers to question whether autonomy is a necessary requisite to well-being in collectivist societies (Bond, 1988; Carver & Schneier, 2002; Iyengar & Lepper, 1999; Miller, 1997; Oishi, 2000). This limitation, which is crucial to recognize when attempting a multicultural advancement of Tinto's theory, may be particularly vital for applying the theory to students who maintain collectivist orientations.

Cross-cultural research clearly demonstrates the need to consider individualist and collectivist cultural norms when assessing motivational orientation. Furthermore, while the research cautions us to consider the effects of cultural blending and to not broadly categorize all minority students as collectivist and all White students as individualist, the studies suggest that, because of prior socialization, minority students may be more likely than White students to maintain collectivist values. While SDT provides an important foundation for enhancing our understanding of student commitment, to truly advance Tinto's theory in a culturally sensitive manner, it is useful to examine a second motivational model that recognizes the impact of varying cultural norms on motivational orientation.

## **Job Involvement Theory (JIT)**

Although not focused on motivation toward academics and learning, Kanungo's (1982) motivational approach to involvement and alienation in the workforce offers a complementary motivational framework that recognizes differences in the motivational orientations of people from collectivist and individualist societies. Like SDT (Deci & Ryan, 1991), Job Involvement Theory (JIT) asserts that intrinsic and extrinsic forces motivate all human behavior. However, Kanungo challenged the assumption held by many organizational theorists that job involvement, or one's psychological identification with a job, hinges upon the job's ability to fulfill the worker's intrinsic needs. Citing his own pan-cultural research investigating job involvement, Kanungo argues that job involvement depends on the job's ability to fulfill the worker's most salient needs, whether intrinsic or extrinsic.

Kanungo (1982) theorized that workers' salient needs were shaped by past socialization experiences, including the degree to which workers internalized their societal/cultural norms; these needs were continually modified by present job conditions. The result was that different workers, depending on how they were socialized, developed different need-saliency patterns. For example, Kanungo pointed out that workers who value Western individualist norms often believe that work is central to satisfying salient intrinsic needs for autonomy and competence and salient extrinsic needs for pay, promotion, and personal recognition. Employees socialized in collectivist cultures are more likely to view work as a means for satisfying salient intrinsic needs for relatedness, societal improvement, equity, and harmony, even at the expense of other intrinsic needs such as autonomy or extrinsic rewards such as personal recognition or financial gains.

Kanungo (1981) conducted a study of business managers that illustrated the significance of recognizing workers' salient needs. Contrary to the dominant view of motivation at the time, he found that managers motivated by extrinsic needs, such as pay and promotion, tended to be more involved with their jobs. Employees whose salient needs were more intrinsic were less involved in their jobs. He attributed this finding to the rewards structure inherent in much of the corporate world, which is based on satisfying extrinsic needs through pay, prestige, and promotion. Although JIT has yet to be applied directly to learning or educational persistence, Kanungo (1982) has suggested that the model could be used to understand involvement in systems outside the work environment, including involvement patterns within families and communities. Therefore, JIT may be useful for discerning the impact of cultural norms on the need-saliency patterns of underrepresented minority college students.