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# Self-Determination Theory and Student Motivation in Social Studies in an Urban Broward County Public High School

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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Miami, Florida

SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY AND STUDENT MOTIVATION IN SOCIAL  
STUDIES IN AN URBAN BROWARD COUNTY PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

AFRICAN AND AFRICAN DIASPORA STUDIES

by

Roberto Fernández III

2011

To: Dean Kenneth Furton  
College of Arts and Sciences

This thesis, written by Roberto Fernández III, and entitled Self-Determination Theory and Student Motivation in Social Studies in an Urban Broward County Public High School, having been approved in respect to style and intellectual content, is referred to you for judgment.

We have read this thesis and recommend that it be approved.

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Alexandra Cornelius-Diallo

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Linda Spears-Bunton

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Hilary Landorf, Major Professor

Date of Defense: March 23, 2011

The thesis of Roberto Fernández III is approved.

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Dean Kenneth Furton  
College of Arts and Sciences

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Interim Dean Kevin O'Shea  
University Graduate School

Florida International University, 2011

## DEDICATION

Dedico esta tesis a mi familia. Han sido su lucha y su cariño los que me han permitido seguir mis sueños.

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ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS

SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY AND STUDENT MOTIVATION IN SOCIAL  
STUDIES IN AN URBAN BROWARD COUNTY PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL

by

Roberto Fernández III

Florida International University, 2011

Miami, Florida

Professor Hilary Landorf, Major Professor

This study investigated how students perceived their motivation in high school social studies classes in school and to determine if a correlation exists between students' grade level, race, gender, and their motivation. The sample included 337 high school students in Broward County, Florida.

To assess students' perceptions on their motivation the academic self-regulation questionnaire was utilized. Results indicate that social studies students show high levels of external regulation, with a mean score at 22.31 on a scale of 36 points. The results show a mean score of 24 on a scale of 28 points for identified regulation among social studies students.

Findings revealed that student motivation could be gauged. No statistical significance was found between high school students' grade level, race, gender, and their motivation in social studies classes. The findings of this study have shown that students at Boyd H. Anderson High School want to learn social studies.

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## CHAPTER I.

### INTRODUCTION

#### Background to the Study

After the No Child Left Behind legislation was signed into law by President George W. Bush in January 2002, social studies curriculum was reduced as school districts across the country focused their attention on reading and mathematics. A study conducted by Nicols and Berliner (2008, 15) found that “as a result of the overvaluing of test results, the curriculum has narrowed.” Tina Beveridge (2009, 5) concurs when she states that “The long-term effects of NCLB are not yet evident, but the short-term effects have been detrimental to all non tested subjects.” In 42 states, the subjects that comprise social studies - history, economics, geography, political science, sociology, anthropology, archaeology and psychology – are not tested. Most American high school students view the subjects that comprise social studies as being irrelevant to their lives (Chiodo and Byford, 2004; Turk, Klein and Dickstein, 2007). Sam Wineburg (2001, ix) states that history is “a tool for changing how we think, promoting a literacy...of discernment, judgment and caution.” With a lack of interest among students in social studies and the federal government focusing on math and reading, how will students learn these skills?

Many studies have been conducted during the last half-century on the factors of student motivation. Chiodo and Byford (2004) point out that for “fifty years, teachers and researchers have tried to understand why students like or dislike social studies” (p. 16). However, these studies have been unable to gauge “what kind of motivation is being exhibited at any given time” (Ryan and Deci, 2000, p. 71).

## Statement of the Problem

The problem examined was student motivation in high school social studies classes (Chiodo and Byford, 2004; Turk, Klein and Dickstein, 2007) in an urban Broward County public high school.

## Assumptions

The basic assumption of this study is that the students who participated in my study answered the questions conscientiously.

## Research Questions

The primary research question that guided this study was: How do students in one Broward County High School perceive their motivation in social studies classes? The secondary research question for this study was: What is the correlation between high school students' grade level, race, gender, and their motivation in social studies classes?

## Significance of the Study

Current educational research has shown that there are several factors that affect student motivation in school. These include: student perception of teacher caring (Gay, 1986; Hale, 2003; Corbett & Wilson, 2002), parental involvement (Korkmaz, 2007; Strommen & Mates, 2004), student sense of community/school belonging (Booker, 2006; Youst & Egan, 2006), and students' perceived value of their education (Chiodo and Byford, 2004). The literature addresses the issue of motivation in specific subjects areas like Science (Kirk, 2000; Latchman, 2000), English (Neilson, 2002) and Social Studies (Chiodo and Byford, 2004; Turk, Klein and Dickstein, 2007).

Margaret Theobald (2006, p. 1) states, "there are two types of motivation, extrinsic and intrinsic." Intrinsic motivation is the drive within oneself to succeed or

accomplish a task, while extrinsic motivation is dependent on external encouragement. The current study is significant because it allows motivation in social studies to be studied in detail by using an adapted version of the academic self-regulation questionnaire for social studies students. The academic self-regulation questionnaire allows for the classification of extrinsic motivation to be broken into four categories: external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation and integrated regulations. Understanding student motivation is important because research has shown that improved “intrinsic motivation and autonomous types of extrinsic motivation relate positively to important academic outcomes” (Niemic and Ryan, 2009, p. 141).

#### Delimitations of the Study

1. The study will not have a homogeneous group in respect to cultural backgrounds.
2. The study will be done in one high school within the boundaries of Broward County in the South Florida area, which may not be representative of other schools in the county, or other parts of the state, or the country.

#### Definition of Terms

For the purpose of this study, the following terms convey the meaning as set out below. Other terms will be explained as they are introduced.

External regulation - Extrinsic regulation pertains to activities that are done, because of outside influence, in order to attain some praise or reward (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

Extrinsic Motivation – Activities that are performed solely in anticipation of a reward at the completion of the activity are considered to be extrinsically motivated (Biehler, 1974).

Identified Regulation – Identified regulation is when the person has identified with the personal importance of a behavior and has thus accepted its regulation as his or her own (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

Intrinsic Motivation - Motivation is intrinsic when a person does something because they get a reward directly from doing the activity as opposed to performing an activity solely for a reward that comes when the activity is completed (Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura, 1989).

Integrated Regulation - Integration occurs when identified regulations have been fully assimilated to the self. This occurs through self-examination and bringing new regulations into congruence with one's other values and needs (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

Introjected Regulation – Introjection describes a type of internal regulation that is still quite controlling because people perform such actions with the feeling of pressure in order to avoid guilt or anxiety or to attain ego-enhancements or pride (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

Motivation - The state of an individual that is both temporary and reversible (Beck, 2005). Motivational factors tend to trigger or stimulate the individual's behavior.

Self-Determination Theory - is a macro-theory of human motivation that investigates human growth tendencies for self-motivation and personality integration (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

#### Overview of the Study

This study is presented in five chapters. Chapter I has served to introduce the study as well as establish the basic purpose and processes of the study. Chapter II includes a review of the related literature. Chapter III describes the research design

including the subjects, sampling and treatment procedures. The data analysis and findings of the study will be presented in Chapter IV. Chapter V will include a discussion of the findings, conclusions drawn from the study, and recommendations for future research.

## CHAPTER II.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

In the 1930's, John Dewey observed that many students, having been "conditioned" by a traditional educational system, "associated the learning process with ennui and boredom," found what they were learning "foreign to the situation of life outside of school" and associated "books with dull drudgery" (Dewey, 1938). Paulo Freire (1970) referred to traditional education as a "banking system" in which students play the role of passive receivers of knowledge and instructors play the bankers, who transmit this knowledge. Freire (1970) states, "banking theory and practice fail to acknowledge men and women as historical beings" (p. 84). As a result of the recent "No Child Left Behind" legislation with its focus on high-stakes testing and the measurement of student-learning gains fits the banking model of education, as teachers are encouraged focus their efforts on getting their students to pass standardized tests, moving them away from educational practices which challenge and motivate students (Beveridge, 2009; Nicols and Berliner, 2008). Carole Ames (1992) states that "considerable research is now focused on describing how different goals [in the classroom'] elicit qualitatively different motivational patterns" (p. 261).

This literature review was conducted using two different approaches. The first approach consisted of electronic searches of key terms on Web Luis and WilsonWeb. The terms used in the electronic searches included: "student motivation", "social studies", "motivating students", "self-determination theory", "self regulated learning", "urban students", "high school motivation", "parents and student motivation", "sports and motivation", and "teachers and motivation". In the second approach, several different

texts representing expert opinions, articles in refereed journals, and briefings published by agencies such as the National Center on Education and the Economy were examined to gather further information regarding the research questions.

The literature included in the review is relevant to the research questions discussed in chapter one. Because much of the literature is rhetorical in nature, the work was included if the view of the author was consistent with other writers in the field. It was also included if the writer followed a logical chain of reasoning to formulate their conclusions. After relevance, consistency, and logical reasoning, the specific criteria for selecting texts include the following elements: a) the type of student motivation problem or issue addressed; b) social studies content problem or issue addressed; c) theoretical framework; d) methods of inquiry; e) data sources; f) conclusions and interpretations.

This review of the literature includes several distinct areas related to the investigation of student motivation in social studies classes. The first section consists of previous research on student motivation in social studies classes. The second section includes the factors of motivation that have been found in studies on student motivation in school. The third section consists of research on self-determination theory, which serves as a theoretical framework for the investigation of student motivation in school.

#### Social Studies Research

Research conducted over the last half-century has examined student attitudes towards social studies curriculum (Martin, 2005; Wineburg and Wilson, 1991; Fraser, 1981). “Throughout the last fifty years, teachers and researchers have tried to understand why students like or dislike social studies” (Chiodo and Byford, 2004, p. 16). Attitude reflects a student’s general feeling toward school and general motivation for succeeding

in school while motivation is the state of an individual that is both temporary and reversible (Beck, 2005). Motivational factors tend to trigger or stimulate the individual's behavior. Fernandez, Massey and Dornbush (1975; 1976) conducted one of the earliest surveys regarding student attitudes towards social studies in San Francisco Public Schools. Their research found that ninth through twelfth grade students rated social studies last in importance in comparison to other subjects. Shaughnessy and Haladyna (1985) interviewed middle and high school students and found that "it is the teacher who is key for what social studies will be for the student...and social studies does not inspire students to learn" (p. 694). Numerous articles have been published in the last fifteen years which provide teachers with content specific lesson plans, and best practices, yet research has shown that students are not positive about social studies and find it irrelevant for their future (Chiodo and Byford 2004, Schug, Todd and Beery, 1982).

A recent study conducted by Russell and Waters (2010) looked at what aspects of social studies middle school students specifically disliked as well as how they like to learn social studies content. They found that lecture, rote memorization, work sheets, "busy work" and textbook assignments were the most disliked activities in a social studies classroom. This study also found that students like to learn social studies content using certain learning methods including cooperative learning activities, graphic organizers and technology. Because of the scarcity of research on student motivation in social studies classes one must look at what factors influence student motivation in an attempt to create a survey instrument to gauge student motivation in social studies classes.



## Factors of Motivation

Current educational research has shown that there are several factors that affect student motivation in school. These include: students' perceived value of their education, student perception of teacher caring, literacy, parental involvement, student sense of community/school belonging, student gender, teaching methods and socio-economic status.

The value students place on their education is important because it places the responsibility of learning on the student. A student who values education and learning is better able to draw connections between what they are learning and their daily lives. In the classroom, teachers often hear students ask "how is this going to help me" or "why do I need to learn this?" (Vavilis and Vavilis, 2004, p. 282). Chiodo and Byford (2004) state that "historically, when elementary and high school students were surveyed, the most dominant negative perception was that social studies was boring and had little relevance to their lives" (p. 16).

Student awareness of teacher caring is another factor affecting motivation in the classroom. Corbet and Wilson (2000) describe several important characteristics that urban students attribute to good teachers: "Good teachers made sure that students did their work, controlled the classroom, were willing to help students whenever and however the students wanted help, explained assignments and content clearly, varied the classroom routine, and took the time to get to know the students and their circumstances" (p. 22). These attributes incorporate a wide range of teaching philosophies, methods, and practices, which accelerate and motivate students to learn in the classroom. What these attributes have in common is a caring attitude on the part of the teacher towards their

students. Furthermore, research indicates that teachers who exhibit these attributes have a tendency to motivate students in the classroom (Chance,2008; Stronge, 2007).

Literacy is a significant component in student learning; this is particularly important in content areas. Currently, many students are reading under grade level, which leads to problems reading content area literature (Turk, Klien, & Dickstein, 2007; Sejnost & Thiese, 2007; Meltzer & Okashige, 2001). Content areas include subjects like social studies and science in which teachers introduce students to content specific skills in reading charts, graphs and maps, using content specific vocabulary as well as expecting that students will incorporate their prior knowledge in the classroom. These expectations are based upon a high level of reading comprehension of a large amount of information that must be covered in a short amount of time. This comprehension includes a student's ability to make meaning of the words and the graphs on the page, connect the words to the graphs on the page, and determine the significance of the material being assessed. Once comprehension is achieved, students and teachers can use the reading materials to develop deeper understanding and develop student consciousness.

Strommen & Mates (2004) agree with previous research, which has “shown that the home environment and support from a parent may be essential in encouraging literacy development” (p.188). Parental involvement is important because it encourages students to do well. Teachers can often distinguish students who are being pushed by parents and those who are not, through classroom interaction. Thus, teachers often blame parents for student apathy towards education or lack of scholastic achievement (Korkmaz, 2007). Understanding parental involvement in student learning is important when understanding student motivation.

Above it was discussed how important it was for students to feel that their teachers cared about them. The relationship between a student and their teacher is relevant when understanding a student's sense of school belonging; however, it also requires students to feel like they can succeed in school. An important component of this is that students have a sense of school spirit or school pride. School spirit and pride are dependent on the activities that schools do like homecoming, prom, spirit days, pep rallies etc. These events build cohesion and community because students are exposed to the various activities and sports that the school sanctions. These school-sponsored events allow students who participate in extracurricular activities to showcase their abilities in dance, music, and performance, which foster student affiliation with their school and aid their desire to learn (Booker, 2006; Youst & Egan, 2006; Tucker et al, 2002).

In addition to the aforementioned topics found during the literature review, other themes addressed include best practices and methods for teaching social studies in ways that allow students to draw connections to what they leaning and to be motivated to learn the content. Several authors also discuss that the current structure of the educational system, geared to creating successful employees and consumers, is not adequate for the needs of today's students (Bangser, 2008; Carpenter, 2007; National Center on Education and the Economy, 2006; Kyosaki, 2000; Sizer, 1997; Ogbu, 1987).

The factors of students' perceived value of their education, student perception of teacher caring, literacy, parental involvement, student sense of community/school belonging, student gender, teaching methods and socio-economic status are all related to student motivation in school. These factors are related to a student's intrinsic motivation

and some of them bring into question students' self-determination in school. The section that follows reviews self-determination theory and its impact on student motivation.

### Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory (SDT; Deci and Ryan, 1985; Ryan and Deci, 2000; Deci and Ryan, 2002) is a macro-theory of human motivation that investigates human growth tendencies for self-motivation and personality integration. Self-determination theory assumes that all individuals have a natural constructive tendency towards developing the self and identifies specifiable factors that both support and hinder intrinsic motivations. Self-determination theory proposes that a person's intrinsic motivation is driven by three psychological needs, which are autonomy, competence and relatedness. Autonomy refers to a person's need for independence and the belief that they are in control of actions. The idea of competence is when a person likes that they are good at the activity in question. Relatedness addresses the need that a person wants what they are doing to be connected with their own goals or that it connects them to other people. Thus, within SDT, learning is an active process that functions optimally when students' motivation is autonomous (vs. controlled) for engaging in learning activities, when they feel that they are competent in the activity being performed and feel that what they are doing is related to their own goals or ambitions. An experiment conducted by Gronlick and Ryan (quoted in Deci and Ryan, 1985, p. 259 ) of social studies students found that students who were externally motivated "were inferior to other groups on conceptual learning." In the experiment, students were asked to read an age-appropriate social studies passage under one of three conditions. One groups was told that they would be tested and receive a grade. The second group was asked to read the passage and see what

they could learn from it. The third group was only asked to read the passage with no other guidance. Groups one and two exhibited higher rote recall than group three. However students in the third group did not learn facts, but rather gained a conceptual understanding of material that interested them.

One of the mini-theories of SDT is Organismic Integrations Theory (OIT), which posits that motivation can be viewed as a continuum with amotivation at the lowest end of the continuum and intrinsic motivation at the top. Organismic integrations theory posits that the more an individual internalizes a form of regulation, the more it becomes part of the integrated self. Thus OIT “proposes a taxonomy of types of regulation for extrinsic motivation which differ in the degree to which they represent autonomy” (Deci and Ryan, 2000b, 72 ). All motivation can then be viewed as a graduation between amotivation and intrinsic motivation, in which an individual can transition from one extreme to another, based on environmental or external factors. Organismic integrations theory classifies extrinsic motivation into four categories; external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation and integrated regulations, which can be measured using the academic self-regulation questionnaire. External regulation, involves behaviors, which are enacted to obtain a reward or to avoid a punishment. Introjected regulation, involves behaviors that are enacted to satisfy internal contingencies, such as self-aggrandizement or the avoidance of self-derogation. Identified regulation occurs when the person has identified with the personal importance of a behavior and has thus accepted its regulation as his or her own. Integrated regulation occurs through self-examination and bringing new regulations into congruence with one’s other values and needs (Ryan and Cornell, 1987; Ryan and Deci 1987; Ryan and Deci, 2000).

To illustrate the continuum of motivation, let's take a student who only attends school because of compulsory education requirements. This student might exhibit higher levels of external regulation. As he begins to accept responsibility for his education, this student's motivation changes and becomes introjected. When the student finds a value for his education such as going to college or moving away from home his motivation becomes identified. When the student learns for learning's sake he becomes intrinsically motivated.

Research conducted using the concepts of self-determination theory and organismic integration theory allows researchers to directly study the levels of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in the classroom among pupils. Research that utilized SDT and OIT versus the previously discussed research, which only looked at the variables that influence motivation, actually involves the student and their motivational attitudes in the classroom. Thus, self-determination theory and organismic integration theory allow researchers to gauge motivation in a classroom.

### Summary

This chapter presented a review of related literature. It began by reviewing the previous research on student motivation in social studies classes. The chapter continued with a review of the factors of motivation that have been found by previous studies on student motivation in school. The third section examined Self-determination theory and Organismic Integration Theory, which serve as the theoretical framework for this investigation on student motivation in social studies classes.

Although an exhaustive search for both traditional and computer-based resources was conducted, none of the research found related directly to gauging student motivation in social studies classes. The research methodology will be presented in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER III.

### METHOD

This chapter describes the research method used in this study. It includes: the research design, instrument development procedures to answer the research questions, the dependent and independent variables, description of the sample, data collection, statistical treatment, and the limitations of the study. “The selection of a research design is based on the nature of the research problem or issue being addressed, the researcher’s personal experiences, and the audiences for the study” (Creswell, 2008, p. 3). The present study did not develop an instrument, but rather it modified the academic self-regulation questionnaire created by Ryan and Cornell (1989) to measure student motivation in social studies.

#### Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to investigate how students perceived their motivation in social studies classes using a modified version of the academic self-regulation questionnaire (Ryan and Cornell, 1989). The self-regulation questionnaire was selected because it allows researchers to assess and differentiate how students perceive and regulate their motivation and the degree to which they are autonomous. I modified the questionnaire for social studies because the questionnaire allowed the researcher to understand “what kind of motivation is being exhibited at any given time” (Ryan and Deci, 2000, p. 69). Understanding student motivation is important because research has shown that improved “intrinsic motivation and autonomous types of extrinsic motivation relate positively to important academic outcomes” (Niemic and Ryan, 2009, p. 141).



The present study utilized factor analysis to analyze the data gleaned from a questionnaire.

#### Primary Research Question

The primary research question that guided this study was: How do students in one Broward County public high school perceive their motivation in social studies classes?

#### Secondary Research Question

What is the correlation between high school students' grade level, race, age, gender, social studies teacher and their motivation in social studies classes?

#### Research Method

I used a quantitative method to analyze the interrelationship among a large number of variables under study. In particular, a Likert scale questionnaire was given, and was analyzed using factor analysis because the results describe how the variables are related. There are four steps required for a factor analysis: data collection, extraction of initial factor solution, rotation and interpretation, and construction of tables for further analysis (Thapalia, 2010). Data are collected in the first step. The second step involves computing a k-by-k intercorrelation matrix to extract an initial factor solution. Step three requires the rotation of factors in order to clarify the factor pattern, which allows the best interpretation of the nature of the factors. In the fourth step, a factor score is computed for each subject on each factor and tables are constructed for further analysis.

Creswell (2002) defines a variable “as an attribute of an individual or an organization that can be measured or observed and that varies among people or organization being studied” (p. 93). For this study, the dependent variables were Ryan and Deci’s (2000) perceived locus of causality: Internal motivation, external regulation,

introjected regulation, identified regulation and integrated regulation. Intrinsic motivation is the prototype of autonomous activity; when people are intrinsically motivated, they are by definition self-determined. Extrinsically motivated activity, in contrast, is often more controlled (i.e., less autonomous). Introjection refers to taking in a regulation but not accepting it as one's own; identification refers to accepting the value of the activity as personally important, and integration refers to integrating that identification with other aspects of one's self. External and introjected regulation are considered relatively controlled forms of extrinsic motivation, whereas identified and integrated regulation are considered relatively autonomous.

A t-test and an analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedure were used to compare the sample means to see if there was sufficient evidence to infer that the means of the corresponding population distributions differed. The ANOVA can compare many distributions, or means, at the same time, where a t-test can only compare two distributions. In this study, there were 5 independent variables, therefore a Multiple Analysis of Co-Variance (MANCOVA) was done to determine if there were significant differences in the scores of the SDT dimensions within any of the 5 grouping of independent variables: age, race, gender, grade level, and teacher.

Using SPSS, a MANCOVA was used to analyze the four dependent variables, the dimensions of SDT and the five independent variables. Though each of the independent variables may have many levels, the various levels were not analyzed as separate variables. For example, the independent variable race is one variable that has many levels: African-Americans, Caucasian, Hispanic, Asian, and Multiracial. The use of covariates in analysis is useful when one knows that a relationship exists between the

covariate variables the ANCOVA then accounts for the differences outside of the covariate-variables.

### Description of the Sample

Participants in this study were high school students from Boyd H. Anderson High School in Broward County, Florida. The Broward County Public School District is the sixth largest school system in the nation (<http://www.browardschools.com>). During the 2007- 2008 school year, the district had a graduation rate of 69.7% and a dropout rate of 2%. The school district received an A grade after the 2009 administration of the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT). Boyd Anderson High School opened its doors in 1973 and in 1985 it became an International Baccalaureate magnet school. The school population consists of 90% Black non-Hispanic students, 5% Hispanic, and 5% of other ethnic groups. Fifty-five percent of the students who attend Boyd Anderson High receive free or reduced price lunches.

A stratified random sample of 337 social studies students was selected from among the 17 social studies classes to obtain sufficient statistical power to detect significant trends. Stratified sampling was utilized because it assured that all the subgroups of students would be represented in the statistics. All 9<sup>th</sup> through 12<sup>th</sup> grade students who were enrolled in a social studies class were considered for the sample group. The class rolls were then used to select the sample group randomly. A letter explaining the nature of the study, and detailing the commitment on the part of the school, teachers and students, if they chose to participate, was mailed to Boyd Anderson High School. The primary investigator sent home a parental consent form with the selected students two weeks before the surveys were administered. The primary

investigator collected the parental consent forms and read the “consent to participate” statement verbally to students who were asked to provide consent. Students were then given the survey and asked to complete it.

## Instrumentation

### *Stage 1 – Selection of instrument*

The survey used was a modification of the academic self-regulation questionnaire developed by Ryan and Connell (1989). The questionnaire asks four questions about why students do various school related behaviors. Each question is followed by eight sub-questions that gauge the motivational dimensions of self-determination theory. The survey was modified by changing the language from stating “in school” to “in social studies class.” The responses to each item are on a 4-point Likert scale and are: very true, sort of true, not very true and not at all true. Likert-scale questions were used because they allowed for the “measuring [of] internal states of people” (Bernard, 2002, p. 308). Validation of this scale is presented in Ryan and Connell (1989). The surveys were modified to include the term social studies in the questions, in order to assess and differentiate how students perceived and regulated their motivation in social studies classes.

### *Stage 2 – Review by experts*

There were five experts who were contacted in the United States and Canada to establish content validity. They were: the senior social studies curriculum specialist for the School Board of Broward County; a professor of Psychology and Gowen Professor in the Social Sciences at the University of Rochester who is one of the co-developers of self-determination theory; a professor of Psychology, Psychiatry, & Education at the

University of Rochester who is the other co-developer of self-determination theory; and a researcher for the Department of Psychology at the University of Quebec at Montreal. Responses were received within a week and provided constructive feedback, which included suggestions for additional subscales and clarification of directions for participants. The directions were modified following the suggestions of the reviewers; however, the addition of an amotivation subscale was not added because it would have required significant changes to the questionnaire that was utilized for this research.

#### Procedures for Survey Administration

Written approvals from the Institutional Review Boards of Florida International University and the School Board of Broward County were secured. A formal letter explaining the significance and relevance of the study to the current educational environment was sent to the principal of the Boyd Anderson High School in Broward County. The letter also contained details on the administration of the survey, the format of the survey, the time limit for the survey, and the supervision for the administration of the survey. A copy of the student consent form was also mailed along with the formal letter. A brief meeting with the principal was setup to discuss the research. A meeting was arranged with the data processing coordinator to obtain the class rolls of all the social studies teachers. The class rolls were then used to select the sample group randomly. Participating teachers were informed in advance via e-mail about the event, and students were called out of class for the administration of the survey. The survey was administered during regular school hours and had a minimal impact on classroom activities. The researcher administered the questionnaires to ensure the proper administration of the survey. The surveys were administered and collected in a timely and non-disruptive

manner. A formal letter thanking the principal, teachers and students for cooperating in this endeavor was mailed shortly thereafter.

### Data Analysis

Data Analysis for this research was done using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) to obtain descriptive statistics. Because there were several dependent variables in this study a multivariate analysis of covariance (MANCOVA) was conducted to test significance. Post hoc tests were conducted to find which factors accounted for the significance in the overall test. Pearson correlation was also calculated to determine the relationship between the independent and dependent variables.

### Limitations of the Sampling

The limitations of the study are that 10% of the sample participants did not complete the questionnaire. The incompleteness of surveys occurred for several reasons, some students had transferred out of the school, and according to teachers some students “never come to class” Another limitation is that 21% of the respondents failed to complete the surveys correctly. The Incomplete questionnaires were eliminated from the analysis.

### Summary

The chapter detailed the research design followed by a discussion of the variables relevant to the research questions. The instrument design framework was used to delineate the steps taken in the modification of the instrument. The choice of the sample and how it was selected was described along with the procedures for survey administrations. The chapter ended with the limitations of this sampling

## CHAPTER IV.

### RESULTS

Chapter four is divided into three sections. The first section presents the descriptive statistics. The second section presents the descriptive statistics from the analysis of covariance. The third section presents the results for intrinsic, extrinsic, identified and introjected motivation.

#### Descriptive Statistics

This study set out to determine how students in one Broward County public high school perceived their motivation in social studies classes. A total of 337 SRQ-A surveys were collected from 17 distinct social studies classes. Two hundred and seventy two surveys were complete and used for the data analysis (N=337, n=272). Using SPSS the descriptive statistics were obtained. The gender of the participants was: 129 (47.4%) male students, 143 (52.6%) female students. Of those students, 224 (82.4%) students declared themselves black, 17(6.3%) declared themselves Hispanic, 6 (2.2%) declared themselves white, 2 (0.7%) students declared themselves Native American, 6 (2.2%) declared themselves Asian/Pacific Islander, and 17 (6.3%) declared themselves multiracial. Of those students, 17.6 % were freshmen, 28.3% were sophomores, 20.2% were juniors, and 33.8% were seniors. Students between 13 and 16 years old accounted for 56.6% of the sample. While 24.6% of students were 17 years old, 16.5% were 18 years old and 2.2% were 19 years old of age. The descriptive data show that the majority of the students are minorities, female and the majority of students are between the ages of 13-17 years old, with the mean, median and mode age being 16 years old. Please see tables 1-2.

## Descriptive Statistics Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA)

An ANCOVA was run to test the significance of group differences between two or more groups. The covariates accounted for were grade, age, gender and race. The ANCOVA showed that there was no statistical significance between groups ( $p \geq .05$ ), therefore no further analysis was conducted. The results of the ANCOVA revealed student trends in the following dimensions: External Regulation, Introjected Regulation, Identified Regulation, and Intrinsic Motivation.

**External Regulation Results.** External regulation involves activities performed solely in anticipation of a reward at the completion of the activity, which are considered to be extrinsically motivated (Biehler, 1974). Students' mean score for external regulation was 22.31 with a standard error mean of  $\pm .306$ . There was no statistical significance between groups but the trends revealed that White students scored 16.21, below the mean in comparison to the five other ethnic groups. Female students scored lower than the males on external regulation but not lower than the mean score.

**Introjected Regulation Results.** Introjected regulation describes a type of internal regulation in which people perform certain actions because of a feeling of external pressure in order to avoid guilt or anxiety or to attain ego-enhancements or pride (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Students' mean score for introjected regulation was 22.05 with a standard error mean of  $\pm .305$ . There was no statistical significance between groups but the trends revealed that White and Asian/Pacific Islander students scored 17.72 and 20.25, below the mean in comparison to the other ethnic groups. Female and male students scored above the mean for introjected regulation.



**Identified Regulation Results.** Identified regulation is when the person has identified with the personal importance of a behavior and has thus accepted its regulation as his or her own (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Students' mean score for Identified regulation was 24.00 with a standard error mean of  $\pm .212$ . There was no statistical significance between groups but the trends revealed that students in the following ethnic groups scored lower than the mean score: White, Native American, Asian/Pacific Islanders and Multiracial. The scores were 23.32, 23.00, 22.50 and 21.65 respectively, below the mean in comparison to the other ethnic groups. Male students scored lower than the females on identified regulation and scored lower than the mean score.

**Intrinsic Motivation Results.** Intrinsic motivation is when a person does something because they get a reward directly from doing the activity as opposed to performing an activity solely for a reward that comes when the activity is completed (Csikszentmihalyi and Nakamura, 1989). Students' mean score for Intrinsic Motivation was 14.41 with a standard error mean of  $\pm .274$ . There was no statistical significance between groups but the trends revealed that students in the following ethnic groups scored lower than the mean score: Asian/Pacific Islanders and Multiracial. The scores were 10.79, and 12.68 respectively below the mean in comparison to the other ethnic groups. Male students scored lower than the females on intrinsic motivation and scored lower than the mean score.

The ANCOVA showed that there was no statistical significance between groups. However, the results of the data analysis indicated that motivation can be viewed as a continuum with external regulation at one end and intrinsic motivation at the other end. The results allow us to gauge student motivation in social studies classes. The highest

score, which indicates high degrees of external influence, for extrinsic motivation and introjected regulation assuming every question was answered “very true” would have been thirty-six. The lowest score, indicating lower degrees of external influence, for extrinsic motivation and introjected regulation assuming every question was answered, “Not at all true” would have been nine. The highest score, which indicates high degrees of external influence, for identified regulation and intrinsic motivation assuming every question was answered “very true” would have been twenty-eight. The lowest score, indicating lower degrees of external influence, for identified regulation and intrinsic motivation assuming every question was answered “Not at all true” would have been seven.

The results indicate that majority of social studies students show high levels of external regulation, with a mean score at 22.31 percent. White students are the only ethnic group that shows the smallest possible amount of external regulation. The majority of social studies students display Identified regulation in social studies classes as the results show a student mean score of twenty-four. This indicates that the students are motivated by something outside of themselves.

These results also found that students have a genuine interest and desire in learning social studies content. Several survey questions revealed student interest in learning social studies content. When students were asked, “why do you work on your social studies homework?” 91.6% of students responded, very true or sort of true, “Because I want to understand the subject.” When asked, “why do you try to answer hard questions in social studies class?” 91.5% of students responded, “to find out if I’m right or wrong.” In another section students were asked, “Why do you work on your social

studies classwork?” 95.3% of students responded, very true or sort of true, “Because I want to learn new things.”

Dimensions Tables

Table 1. Total Students by Gender

	Frequency	Percent
Male	129	47.4
Female	143	52.6
Total	272	100.0

Table 2. Total Students by Race/Ethnicity

	Frequency	Percent
Black	224	82.4
Hispanic	17	6.3
White	6	2.2
Native American	2	.7
Asian/Pacific Islander	6	2.2
Multi-racial	17	6.3
Total	272	100.0

Figure 1

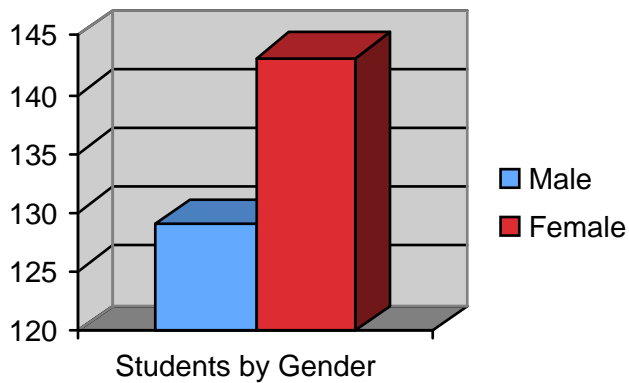


Figure 2

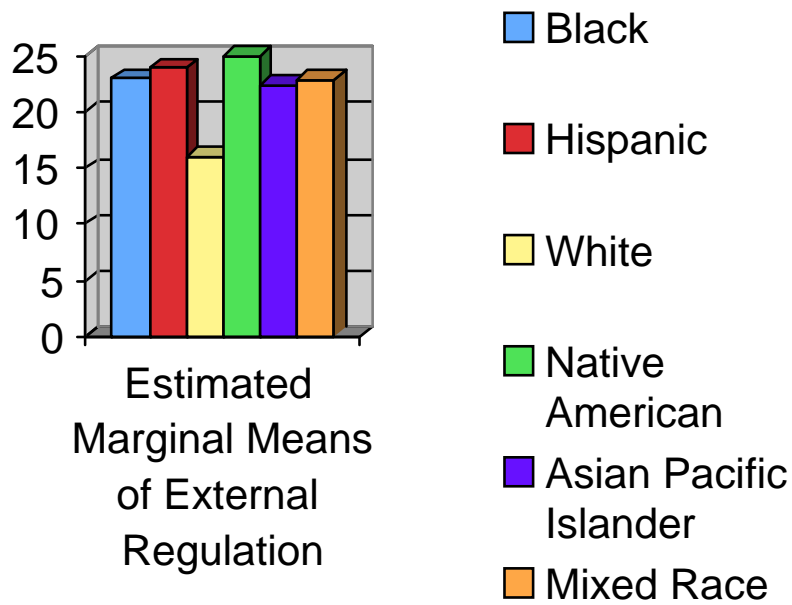


Figure 3

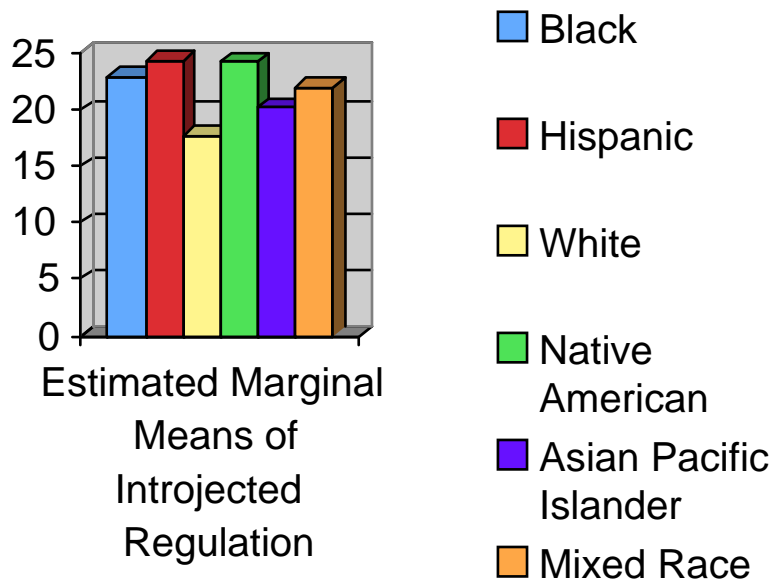


Figure 4

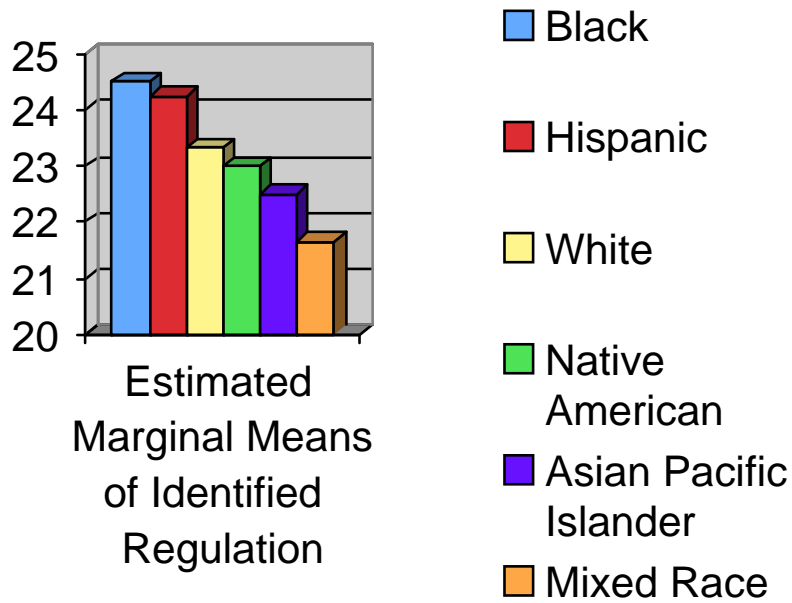
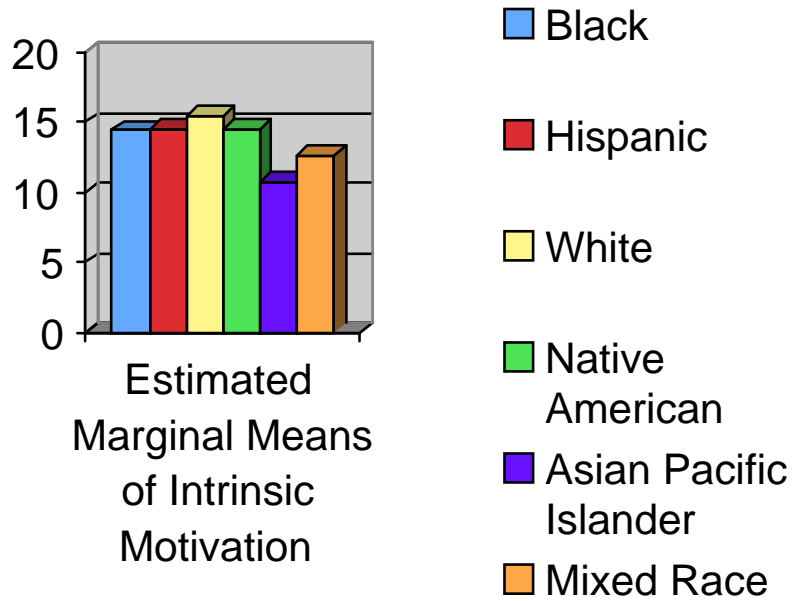


Figure 5



## Summary

The data analysis revealed that student motivation in social studies classes could be gauged and indicated that motivation can be viewed as a continuum with external regulation at one end and intrinsic motivation at the other end. No statistical significance was found between high school students' grade level, race, gender, and their motivation in social studies classes. Results also indicate that majority of social studies students show high levels of external regulation, with a mean score at 22.31. White students are the only ethnic group that shows the least amount of external regulation and exhibit higher intrinsic motivation. It is obvious that the majority of social studies students display Identified regulation in social studies classes with a student mean score of 24. The findings of this study have also shown that students at Boyd H. Anderson High School want to learn social studies content.

The next chapter will use the findings presented in this chapter to answer the research questions. I then present a discussion of the implications that these findings hold for the future study of student motivation in social studies classes. Additionally, I offer a set of recommendations for further research and study.

## CHAPTER V.

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Many researchers have studied student motivation in school over the last three decades. For example, Chiodo and Byford (2004) studied student motivation in social studies classes. Another well-known study, by Ryan and Deci (2000), studied student motivation from the perspective of Self Determination Theory. Their study was built on research and the academic self-regulation questionnaire created by Ryan and Cornell in 1989.

The results of the studies mentioned above inspired the present study. My research focused on how students gauge their motivation in social studies classes using an adaptation of the academic self-regulation questionnaire in a South Florida high school. To gain insight into this question, this study was conducted and an instrument was administered to students at a selected high school in Broward County, Florida between May 2010 and June 2010. Three hundred and thirty-seven students were recruited for the study, but only 277 students completed the surveys correctly for analysis. One instrument, the academic self-regulation questionnaire, was used to collect data for this study and was modified to determine student motivation in social studies classes.

#### Discussion of the Results

The present study examined student motivation in social studies in one predominantly African-American school in Broward County Florida. This study found some similar results as have a number of studies on student motivation and self-determination theory.

## Answer to Study Question One

The primary research question guiding this study was: How do students in one Broward County public high school perceive their motivation in social studies classes? Results from this study suggest that, on the whole, student motivation in social studies classes can be viewed as a continuum from external regulation to intrinsic motivation. My study confirms the research of Ryan and Deci (2000) who posited that motivation could be viewed as a continuum with amotivation at one end of the continuum and intrinsic motivation at the other end. The results indicate that the more an individual internalizes a form of regulation, by making it his or her own, the more it becomes part of the integrated self. All motivation can then viewed as a graduation between amotivation and intrinsic motivation, in which an individual can transition from one extreme to another, based on environmental or external factors. The attitudes of the students captured in this study reflect some of the outside pressures which impact student motivation including parental involvement, and student sense of community/school belonging. When students were asked: “why do you work on your social studies homework?” “Why do you work on your social studies classwork?” “Why do you try to answer hard questions in social studies class?” “Why do you try to do well in social studies class?” they responded 89.3%, 61.4%, 55.9%, and 88.2% “because that’s what I’m supposed to do” respectively. Ryan and La Guardia (2000) found this to be true stating, “after early childhood when the freedom to be intrinsically motivated is increasingly curtailed by social pressures [people] do activities that are not interesting and begin to assume a variety of new responsibilities” (p. 183 ) The perceived value of student education is also found in the data, when students were asked, “why do you work



on your social studies homework?” 91.6% of students responded, very true or sort of true, “Because I want to understand the subject.” When asked, “why do you try to answer hard questions in social studies class?” 91.5% of students responded, “to find out if I’m right or wrong.” In another section students were asked, “Why do you work on your social studies classwork?” 95.3% of students responded, very true or sort of true, “Because I want to learn new things.” These findings indicate that the high school social studies students surveyed at the test site are being motivated because of their own interest as well as by the social pressures outside their control.

#### Answer to Study Question Two

The secondary research question guiding this thesis was: What is the correlation between high school students’ grade level, race, gender, and their motivation in social studies classes? The ANCOVA that was run found no statistical significance between groups. These results may have occurred because of the small sample size, the methodology used in data collections, or because the study was limited to one test site.

In addition to the above questions, this research found that students have a genuine interest and desire in learning social studies content. Several survey questions revealed student interest in learning social studies content. When students were asked, “why do you work on your social studies homework?” 91.6% of students responded, very true or sort of true, “Because I want to understand the subject.” When asked, “why do you try to answer hard questions in social studies class?” 91.5% of students responded, “to find out if I’m right or wrong.” In another section students were asked, “Why do you work on your social studies classwork?” 95.3% of students responded, very true or sort of true, “Because I want to learn new things.” These results corroborate previous findings,

that students want to learn social studies content (Russell and Waters, 2010; Chiodo and Byford, 2004). It is clear that these high school students want to learn social studies.

### Implications

The literature review revealed that there is a lack of extant research in the field of social studies education concerning students' motivations to learn content material. This study underscores the need to analyze more comprehensively and specifically how students gauge their motivation in social studies classes. The present study suggests that changes in a student's level of motivation do not happen by chance. The literature suggests that motivation is affected by other factors including student perception of teacher caring, parental involvement, student sense of community/school belonging, and students' perceived value of their education. Educators should keep this in mind when they are creating lesson plans and should attempt to include students in the decision making process about their lesson activities.

Previously it was stated that John Dewey (1938) observed that students, had been conditioned by the educational system and found school to be boring and irrelevant to their lives. Forty years later Paulo Freire (1970) established that education had become a "banking system" in which students dutifully absorb the material being taught by the teachers. Both espoused that students needed to be engaged in learning that allowed them to engage in critical dialogue which would require students to develop their thinking and for teachers to aid students in drawing connections to the relevance of content being taught with their everyday lives. Collaboration with teachers will allow students to begin to develop positive experiences with their education, and gain a sense of ownership of their education. This collaboration could borrow from the ideas of

constructivist theory. Constructivist theory posits that learning occurs when students are actively involved in a process of meaning and knowledge construction versus passively receiving information (Washington School Research Center, 2003). It is through students' experience and interaction with knowledge that learning occurs. Some activities that teachers can use include fieldtrips, films, experiments, classroom discussion or debate and student selected research projects, which they can later present to the class. These activities put students on the front lines of the education process and allow them to gain a sense of ownership for their learning.

My study suggests that students have a genuine interest and desire to learn social studies content. Educators should be aware of their students' desire to learn and work to discover and implement new methods for fostering intrinsic motivation. Through professional learning teams in which teachers work together throughout the academic year to increase their expertise and knowledge or lesson study which allows teachers to determine the effectiveness of the same lesson as taught by other teachers, educators can develop their awareness of students' educational needs (Jolly, 2006; Fernandez, Cannon and Chokshi, 2003).

This study suggests that outside social pressures motivate students. As was shown, social studies students show high levels of external regulation, with a mean score at 22.31 and identified regulation in social studies classes as the results show a student mean score of 24. With this in mind, it appears that teachers and administrators cannot rely on one tool or technique to motivate students, but instead must incorporate active learning strategies that help students gain ownership for their learning.

## Limitations

Similar to other studies, this research has limitations. First of all, the sample of this study is over the minimum sample size; however the sample had a limited number of respondents for several racial categories. The largest sample group was African-Americans with a sample size of 224 respondents. However the other racial groups were Hispanic with 17 respondents, White with 6 respondents, Native American, 2 respondents, Asian/Pacific Islander with 6 respondents and Multiracial with 17 respondents.

The questionnaires did not specifically include a dimension for motivation. Perhaps some of the questions on this questionnaire did not apply to the students' motivation in social studies classes.

This research did not include qualitative data. It might have been more valuable to interview students or conduct student focus groups. No interactions between teachers and students were observed; instead the study focused only on student responses to the survey instrument.

## Recommendations for Further Study

As was revealed in the literature review, there is limited research on student attitudes or student motivation in social studies classes, which create a need for further study in this area. Studies, similar to the one presented in this thesis, should be done using different populations i.e., school district, state, region etc. to determine if age, race or geographic location significantly affects the results of the study. Similar studies should be conducted in which four different schools would participate. Another study might try to survey all social studies students.

A study which considers how social studies students' perceptions of their teachers' style of communication, particularly how teachers are perceived to support students' autonomy and provide useful feedback about students' learning progress, and the relationship to students' extrinsic and intrinsic motivation would advance the current understanding of student motivation in social studies.

Another recommendation for future research is to design this study using mixed methods to capture the whole picture of student motivation in social studies. The study could involve semi-structured interviews with social studies teachers to determine what teachers perceive as issues of student motivation. Surveys could be administered to students so that data can be analyzed and compared revealing any disparities in student or teacher perception of motivation. Researchers might also consider creating a focus group protocol in order to gain more insight into students' perspective on their motivation in social studies classes. Future research can also study teachers' perspectives on student motivation in social studies classes.

It might also be beneficial for future research to revise the instrument used in this study to examine the effect of omitting or revising certain questions and consider adding an amotivation subscale as this may apply to some students. Future research could also compare socioeconomic status and its impact on student motivation in social studies classes. Finally, further research is necessary to identify other hypotheses that are not covered in this study.

### Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to investigate how students perceived their motivation in social studies classes in an urban Broward County public high school and

to determine if a correlation exists between high school students' grade level, race, gender, and their motivation in social studies classes? The sample included 337 high school students in Broward County, Florida.

To assess and differentiate how students perceive and regulate their motivation and the degree to which they are autonomous a modified version of the academic self-regulation questionnaire was utilized. Results indicate that majority of social studies students show high levels of external regulation, with a mean score at 22.31. White students are the only ethnic group that shows the least amount of external regulation. The majority of social studies students display identified regulation in social studies classes as the results show a student mean score of twenty-four.

The findings revealed that student motivation could be gauged supporting and validating the idea that individual motivation moves in a continuum. No statistical significance was found between high school students' grade level, race, gender, and their motivation in social studies classes. The findings of this study have also shown that students at Boyd H. Anderson High School want to learn social studies content.

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Appendix A

**WHY I DO THINGS IN SOCIAL STUDIES CLASS (SRQ-A)**

Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Grade: \_\_\_\_\_ Gender \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher:  
\_\_\_\_\_

Race (Circle all that apply): Black Hispanic White Native American  
Asian/Pacific Islander

A. Why do I do my homework for social studies?

1. Because I want the teacher to think I'm a good student.  
Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true
2. Because I'll get in trouble if I don't.  
Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true
3. Because it's fun.  
Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true
4. Because I will feel bad about myself if I don't do it.  
Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true
5. Because I want to understand the subject.  
Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true
6. Because that's what I'm supposed to do.  
Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true
7. Because I enjoy doing my homework.  
Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true
8. Because it's important to me to do my homework.  
Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

B. Why do I work on my social studies classwork?

9. So that the teacher won't yell at me.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

10. Because I want the teacher to think I'm a good student.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

11. Because I want to learn new things.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

12. Because I'll be ashamed of myself if it didn't get done.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

13. Because it's fun.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

14. Because that's the rule.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

15. Because I enjoy doing my classwork.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

16. Because it's important to me to work on my classwork.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

C. Why do I try to answer hard questions in social studies class?

17. Because I want the other students to think I'm smart.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

18. Because I feel ashamed of myself when I don't try.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

19. Because I enjoy answering hard questions.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

20. Because that's what I'm supposed to do.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

21. To find out if I'm right or wrong.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

22. Because it's fun to answer hard questions.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

23. Because it's important to me to try to answer hard questions in class.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

24. Because I want the teacher to say nice things about me.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

D. Why do I try to do well in Social Studies Class?

25. Because that's what I'm supposed to do.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

26. So my teachers will think I'm a good student

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

27. Because I enjoy doing my school work well.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

28. Because I will get in trouble if I don't do well.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

29. Because I'll feel really bad about myself if I don't do well.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

30. Because it's important to me to try to do well in school.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

31. Because I will feel really proud of myself if I do well.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true

32. Because I might get a reward if I do well.

Very true      Sort of true      Not very true      Not at all true



## Appendix B

### **Scoring the Academic Self Regulation Questionnaire (SRQ-A)**

First, you calculate the subscale score for each of the four subscales by averaging the items that make up that subscale. Very true is scored 4; Sort of true is scored 3; Not very true is scored 2; and Not at all true is scored 1. The four subscales are: external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, and intrinsic motivation. Listed below are the item numbers associated with each of the four subscales.

External Regulation: 2, 6, 9, 14, 20, 24, 25, 28, 32

Introjected Regulation: 1, 4, 10, 12, 17, 18, 26, 29, 31

Identified Regulation: 5, 8, 11, 16, 21, 23, 30

Intrinsic Motivation: 3, 7, 13, 15, 19, 22, 27