

Chapter 48

I Can't Breathe: The African American Male With Emotional Disabilities in Education

Richard D. Williams

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-7966-6854>

American University, USA

April J. Lisbon

Spotsylvania County Public Schools, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter is a critical analysis using African American Male Theory (AAMT) to examine and critique the status of the African American male with an emotional disturbance in the American education complex. This chapter expands upon AAMT by applying a critical lens to various AAMT tenants. A vignette of Ahmad, a young African American male, shows the injustice endured by many African American male students. A review of literature on the mental health of African American students and equity in education provides for a rich discourse. This chapter also provides implications for further discussion and recommendations for practitioners.

INTRODUCTION

The plight of the African American student has been one of oppression since the inception of the United States, and the transatlantic slave trade stole millions of Africans from their homes and forced them into centuries of bondage. That bondage has transcended society through oppressive policies, beliefs, and pedagogies. In a time when African American male student's mere existence is criminalized, fetishized, and their culture paradoxically exploited and hated, this paper aims to address the plight of the African American male with an emotional disturbance in the American education complex. Utilizing African American Male Theory (Bush & Bush, 2013), this chapter explores the juxtaposition of being Black with a mental illness in the American educational complex and its impact on the identification, supports, and outcomes of African American males with an Emotional disturbance.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-4507-5.ch048

African American males have a uniqueness that is inherent in their African heritage, and the inter-generational transmission of trauma endured over hundreds of years of oppression within the American context (Bush & Bush, 2013). African American males often navigate social norms within the African American community that are resistant to mental health concepts (Miller & Bennett, 2011). Mental health in the African American community has a complicated history that straddles the absolute need for care, religious traditions, an oppressive and culturally ill-equipped mental health system (Miller & Bennett, 2011).

Within the American educational complex, African American children face disproportionate suspension rates, deficit model policies, oppressive pedagogies, both a bastardization and resistance of their culture and culturally misaligned educational supports (Ford & Russo, 2016; Artiles, 2011). Even with the introduction of Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports (PBIS), African American male students with emotional disabilities face unparalleled challenges in accessing those positive supports, cultivating positive relationships with their white peers and teachers, and avoiding the school-to-prison pipeline that entraps millions of students (Artiles, 2011).

A thorough discussion, with an exemplar, identification of root causes for these challenges within the context of the conceptual framework within the African American community and the American educational complex will anchor a discussion of diversity in education, specifically African American male students with an emotional disturbance. In the discussion of educational diversity, systemic oppression, cultural misalignment and other challenges to the individualized success of African American male students with an emotional disturbance will illuminate possibilities for the improvement of the American educational complex towards embracing and honoring the African American male student with ED and promote success within school and community.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

AAMT was established by Bush and Bush in 2013, "Introducing African American Male Theory (AAMT)" in the *Journal of African American Males in Education*. The theory advances of six tenets summarized as (a) using an ecological approach to understanding the individual and collective experiences, behaviors, outcomes, events, phenomena, and trajectory of African American males; (b) there is a uniqueness of being male and of African descent; (c) African culture, consciousness, and biology continues to influence African American males; (d) African American males are resilient and resistant; (e) Race, racism, classism, and sexism have a profound impact on African American males; and (d) AAMT should be used in the pursuit of social justice (Bush V. & Bush, 2013).

To further implement AAMT in the literature, Bush and Bush (2013) noted that the AMMT model is founded in Bronfenbrenner's interconnected environmental systems theory. With this foundation, AAMT developed a 6-level ecological system. In the heart of the systems lies the microsystem, divided into an inner which represents personality, sexual orientation, beliefs, etc., and the outer which includes family, community, school, etc. Separating the micro from the mesosystem is the first instance of a subsystem. This subsystem includes supernatural and spirit, and unconscious archetypes. The mesosystem includes the interactions between the inner and outer microsystem and the first subsystem. The exosystem holds concepts such as unemployment and access to health care, leading to the macrosystem of cultural hegemony, Black nationalism, laws and policies. The fifth system is the chronosystem, which encompasses

12 more pages are available in the full version of this document, which may be purchased using the "Add to Cart" button on the publisher's webpage:

www.igi-global.com/chapter/i-cant-breathe/296983

Related Content

Advancing Muslim Modest Fashion Clothing: Impact on Consumer Behavior and Challenges for Young Female Muslim Influencers

Shamima Raihan Manzoor, Abdullah Al-Mahmud, Arnifa Asmawiand Shahida Raihan Manzoor (2024). *Journal of Comparative Asian Development* (pp. 1-26).

www.irma-international.org/article/advancing-muslim-modest-fashion-clothing/346369

Movement Control Order (MCO) - A Viable Legal Mechanism in the Management of COVID-19 Pandemic in Malaysia?

Suzana Muhamad Said, Aini Aman, Mohd Rohaizat Hassanand Omkar Dastane (2022). *Journal of Comparative Asian Development* (pp. 1-15).

www.irma-international.org/article/movement-control-order-mco---a-viable-legal-mechanism-in-the-management-of-covid-19-pandemic-in-malaysia/315650

The Background of Challenges on Developing Education Policy for Syrians in Turkey: Organizations

aduman Kapusuzoluand Mehmet Durnal (2019). *Immigration and Refugee Policy: Breakthroughs in Research and Practice* (pp. 205-222).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-background-of-challenges-on-developing-education-policy-for-syrians-in-turkey/229266

The Relation Between Moral Attitudes and Political Identity

Tuuli-Marja Kleinerand Reinhold Melcher (2020). *Political Identity and Democratic Citizenship in Turbulent Times* (pp. 203-229).

www.irma-international.org/chapter/the-relation-between-moral-attitudes-and-political-identity/257979

Harnessing the Demographic Dividend in Africa Through Lessons From East Asia's Experience

Ehizuelen Michael Mitchell Omoruyi (2021). *Journal of Comparative Asian Development* (pp. 1-38).

www.irma-international.org/article/harnessing-the-demographic-dividend-in-africa-through-lessons-from-east-asias-experience/279130