



# IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT IN AFRICAN AMERICAN YOUTH: FOUR KEY FACTORS

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REFERENCES

## THESIS

- This project aims to identify factors that contribute to identity development in African-American youth and provide ways in which healthy identity development can be achieved.
- It is hypothesized that authentic identity development and mental well-being can be achieved by consistently tending to self-discovery, self-construction, and self-acceptance through spiritual, biological, social, and personal factors.

“IT’S LIKE **EVERYONE** TELLS A STORY ABOUT THEMSELVES **INSIDE** THEIR OWN HEAD. **ALWAYS**. ALL THE TIME. THAT **STORY** MAKES YOU WHAT YOU ARE. WE **BUILD OURSELVES** OUT OF THAT STORY.”

– PATRICK ROTHFUSS, THE NAME OF THE WIND

## FUTURE METHODS

- The upcoming plan involves creating a curriculum for focus groups of 16 African American youth (ages 14-18), incorporating surveys, self-report measures, and structured interventions.
- Through guided activities on self-discovery, self-construction, and self-acceptance, such as personality assessments, cognitive restructuring exercises, and narrative therapy, the curriculum will provide practical tools for youth programs and organizations to support identity formation and mental well-being.



## BIOLOGICAL

### GENETICS or NATURE VS. NURTURE?

- In any culture, the physical traits of African parents are typically inherited by their children.
- In a study conducted by Chapman et al., it was found that the offspring of anxious African American parents were significantly more likely to develop an anxiety disorder compared to those whose parents did not have anxiety issues.

- Specifically, 55 parents met criteria for at least one anxiety disorder, and 34 children met criteria for at least one anxiety disorder (Chapman et al., 2012).

- It is speculated that similar behavioral patterns related to depression, antisocial behaviors, and fears may also be observed, potentially influencing individuals' perception of personal identity.

## SOCIAL

### RELATIONSHIPS = MEANING-MAKING

- Interpersonal relationships play a crucial role in shaping the identity development of black youth, as they navigate interactions within family, peer groups, and broader communities.
- Environmental stressors, including poverty, educational expectations, and societal pressures related to appearance, significantly impact their sense of self-worth and belonging.

- Peter J. Burke's feedback loop model of identity further suggests that the identity control system aims to match environmental inputs to internal standards, indicating that individuals adapt to these standards, which may be negatively influenced by other factors (Burke, 1991).

- Moreover, exposure to trauma, whether through direct experiences or systemic injustices, can profoundly disrupt identity formation, leading to feelings of vulnerability, mistrust, and a distorted sense of identity.

## PERSONAL

### WHO ARE YOU WHEN NO ONE IS WATCHING?

- In moments of introspection and solitude, youth have the opportunity to explore their innermost convictions, aspirations, and values independent of societal expectations or cultural pressures.
- As Dr. Thema Bryant articulates that “individuals face myriad expectations and pressures to conform, often necessitating the suppression of their true feelings...

- ...Homecoming, the journey toward embracing one's authentic self, liberates individuals from judgment and censorship, allowing them to express their genuine emotions“ (Bryant, 2021).

- This autonomy fosters a sense of self-discovery and authenticity, enabling black youth to navigate the complexities of identity formation with confidence and clarity.

## SPIRITUAL

### DOES A BELIEF IN GOD MATTER?

- Beliefs about God within the African American community vary widely, mirroring the diversity of the African Diaspora.
- Despite the absence of a singular religious belief due to the rich history of African culture, theological considerations among black youth profoundly shape their self-perception and behaviors.

- Martin et al. discovered that adolescents who received messages emphasizing other-worldliness tended to harbor negative feelings about the appearance of African Americans/Blacks, while those exposed to higher biblical principles from the church were more likely to reject negative stereotypes (Martin et al., 2021).

- This highlights the significant impact of religion on both self-perception and social involvement.