

Toward Christian-Identity Response Theory: Exploring Identity, Spirituality, and Response to Adversity among African American Males Placed at Risk

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Abstract: This presentation adds to limited research integrating spiritual development as a central component of human development across the life span and provides a substantive theory for how spiritual development may lead to transformative practice. Thirty-four African American males in three age groups (13-17; 18-25; 26+), placed at risk during adolescence and connected with Christian Community Development Association (CCDA) organizations at the time of data collection, engaged in the research process. Focus group discussions or initial interviews were followed by in-depth interviews. Line-by-line and incident-by-incident coding led to the formation of tentative categories and themes. Data were compared to data and codes, and raised to conceptual categories. Substantive grounded theory emerged. A framework of adversities, self-constructs, adversity response strategies, positive and negative influences to adversity response strategies, and spiritual development components work cyclically to form Christian-Identity Response Theory. Spiritual development overlays other components, allowing for spiritual development to be a core developmental dimension with which other theory components interact and enact influence on over the course of the life span. Implications for a wide variety of educational contexts include targeted awareness of adversities faced, intentional development of Christian identity's influence on responses to adversity, and development of consistent relationships.

Keywords: Christian identity response theory, adversity, spirituality, African American males