American Journal of Community Psychology, Vol. 27, No. 2, 1999

Sociopolitical Development as an Antidote for Oppression—Theory and Action

Roderick J. Watts,[1] Derek M. Griffith, and Jaleel Abdul-Adil

DePaul University

Although psychology has an ample vocabulary for describing individual pathologies, the development of theory and concepts for understanding societal pathology remains in its infancy. Because community psychology theory views human behavior in its context, it is essential that interventions not be limited to stress management, personal coping, and similar programming. Interventions should not leave social injustice undiscussed and unchallenged. In this spirit we present a theory of oppression and sociopolitical development that informs an intervention with young, African American men in an urban setting. The five-stage theory highlights the role of Freire's notion of "critical consciousness," a sociopolitical version of critical thinking, in enhancing an awareness of sociopolitical as well as personal forces that influence behavior. The theory also draws on African American social-change traditions and their spiritual aspects. The action section of the study describes the Young Warriors program's use of mass culture (rap videos and film) as stimuli for the development of critical consciousness. Highlights from an empirical investigation of an eight-session high school version of the program will be presented to illustrate the practical challenges and benefits of sociopolitical interventions.

KEY WORDS: oppression; men's development; sociopolitical development.

The ability to think independently and critically is a necessary prerequisite for African American sociopolitical development. Over 60 years ago, Black

[1]All correspondence should be sent to: Roderick J. Watts, Ph.D., Dept. of Psychology, DePaul University, 2219 N. Kenmore Ave., Chicago, Illinois 60614-3504; e-mail: rwatts@wppost.depaul.edu

0091-0562/99/0400-0255$16.00/0

educator Carter G. Woodson posited that education that simply imparts information to African Americans was insufficient. True education for African Americans "resulted in making a man think and do for himself" (Woodson, 1933). From this vantage point, education ought to empower the disenfranchised to critically explore options for self and community development. According to Bowen (1902), all revolutions and improvements start with individuals as it is impossible to elevate a race en mass.

The ability to think and act sociopolitically is particularly important in this crisis era for African American men. Mauer (1990) reported that 609,690 Black men in their twenties (one in three) are incarcerated or on supervision by the corrections system—compared to the 436,000 Black men in this age group who are enrolled in college. This rate is far higher than comparable figures for White men (1 in 16) or Hispanic men (1 in 10). If African American men manage to avoid prison, they face other perils including rates of homicide, substance abuse, unemployment, and inferior education unequaled by any other racial or gender group in this country (Staples, 1987).

To be healthy under these conditions, young men need a holistic approach that includes the personal, cultural, sociopolitical, and spiritual domains. Conventional interventions on coping, stress management, conflict resolution, and similar personal skill-building are necessary but not sufficient. An exclusive focus on individual psychosocial development neglects the skills for building collective consciousness and promoting social justice. When the two domains are combined, it is possible to see personal and community development as two sides of the same human-development coin.

To better balance the scales of personal and community development, this article will present a theory of sociopolitical development based on a selective review of the social change and empowerment literature. The review will emphasize the African American struggle for social justice and its spiritual underpinnings. The psychological aspects of oppression will be a recurring theme, as will Freire's (1990) notion of Critical Consciousness. A later section of this article focuses on action. In it we describe the Young Warriors program and its use of critical consciousness (a sociopolitical version of critical thinking) as a strategy for sociopolitical development. One of the program's objectives is to enhance the awareness young men have of their collective social condition and the social forces maintaining it. Sociopolitical development is the psychological process that leads to and supports social and political action. Although previous theoretical work by two of the current authors (Watts & Abdul-Adil, 1994) stressed the cognitive aspects of this process, the next two sections will cover the cultural and spiritual components as well.

COGNITIVE ELEMENTS OF SOCIOPOLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

Critical consciousness is the cognitive cornerstone of sociopolitical development and of the Young Warriors program. It allows people to define themselves in an affirmative way, despite oppression and the asymmetrical distribution of desirable material resources. In other words, people are able to " . . . define themselves. They think from their own perspective. They are able to access their power by defining who they are. It is their definitions that give them power" (Akbar, 1991, p. 32). Similarly, Freire (1990) describes this active process of constructing reality:

> "The normal role of human beings in and with the world is not a passive one . . . they . . . participate in the creative dimension as well. . . . Men can intervene in reality in order to change it. . . . Integration . . . as distinguished from adaptation . . . results from the capacity to adapt oneself to reality plus the critical capacity to make choices and to transform that reality. To the extent that man loses his ability to make choices and is subjected to the choices of others [i.e.] from external prescriptions, he is no longer integrated. Rather, he is adapted. He has "adjusted." (Author's emphasis, p. 4)

To understand critical consciousness and its central role in sociopolitical development, it is necessary to start with a definition of oppression. Oppression is the principal target of critical consciousness. The definition of oppression used here is based on the work of Moss (1991), Blauner (1972), and Serrano-García & Lopez Sanchez (1992). It begins with the concept of asymmetry—the unequal distribution of coveted resources among politically salient populations. As critical consciousness develops, a person gains an understanding of the historical, racial, social, political, and cultural concomitants of asymmetry. Oppression is both a state and a process. As a state or outcome, it is the circumstances that result from long-term, consistent resource asymmetry. Oppression is easiest to sustain when the disenfranchised internalize their oppression and support rather than resist it (Watts & Abdul-Adil, in press; Griffith, 1996). For example, Woodson noted that:

> "Starting out after the Civil War, the opponents of freedom and social justice decided to work out a program which would enslave the Negroes mind inasmuch as the freedom of body had to be conceded. . . . If you can control a man's thinking you do not have to worry about his action. When you determine what a man shall think you do not have to concern yourself about what he will do. If you make a man feel that he is inferior, you do not have to compel him to accept an inferior status, for he will seek it himself. If you make a man think that he is justly an outcast, you do not have to order him to the back door. He will go without being told; and if there is no back door, his very nature will demand one." (Woodson, 1933, p. 84–85)

Likewise, Steven Biko (1978), a South African social activist, stated that "The most potent weapon of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed" (p. xix).

As a process, we define oppression as the unjust exercise of power and the control of ideas and coveted resources in a way that produces and sustains social inequality (Watts, Abdul-Adil, Griffith, & Wilson, 1996). It is what Woodson referred to in the previous quote as the "program." Distinguishing process from outcome is helpful for understanding outcomes such as multigenerational poverty, family disruption, drug abuse, antisocial behavior, and violence in sociopolitical as well as psychological context. Mental health professionals may see this behavior as psychopathology, but it can also be viewed as (mal)adaptive strategies that evolved in response to oppressive social processes. Viewing oppression as a process focuses our attention on the means by which unequal outcomes are created and sustained. Martin Luther King Jr. (1958) appreciated the interplay of oppressive processes and outcomes when he argued, "There must be a rhythmic alteration between attacking the causes and healing the effects" (p. 224).

Another important distinction in the definition of oppression is that between its political and psychological dimensions. Both Bartky (1990) and Prilleltensky and Gonick (1994) concluded that psychological and political oppression coexist and are mutually determined. Although oppression is generally conceptualized as political, economic, or social in nature, recent liberation struggles have demonstrated the importance of acknowledging psychological oppression, or what Fanon calls "psychic alienation" (Bartky, 1990).

White supremacy is one of the most enduring and pernicious forms of oppression (Akbar, 1991). It is especially "effective" because it defines oppression by physical appearance or culture. At its core it is an ideology of superiority in a broad range of areas—cultural, moral, intellectual, genetic, and spiritual. In this discussion, white supremacy is often used rather than racism because it is more precise. It cannot be confused with ethnic strife, nationalism, and other internecine struggles. White supremacy is the irrational preoccupation with the idea of the inherent superiority of Whites by virtue of their race and skin color (Akbar, 1991).

Although one may be oppressed in one context, that same individual may be the oppressor in another. For example, an African American man may be oppressed in U.S. society but the oppressor in a domestic context. These multiple roles at multiple levels of analysis are not revealed when the focus is exclusively on racism or white supremacy. True sociopolitical development occurs when the individual is able to integrate experience in different power relationships into a multileveled understanding of oppression. Sexism, homophobia, and other "isms" in African American communities cannot be ignored in the process of self and community development.

For African Americans, reducing internalized racism is also part of sociopolitical development. Existing empowerment theory does not explic-

itly acknowledge internalized oppression and the need for strategies to combat it. Without a sense of self-efficacy, effective action in the social world is less likely. The notion of internalized racism and internalized oppression is a useful sociopolitical complement to the intrapsychic construct of "low self-esteem"—the perennial concern of many community-based interventions. The struggle to gain a sense of self-efficacy while reducing negative feelings about one's racial group membership is also a theme in racial identity theory (Helms, 1994).

Critical thinking and psychological empowerment are necessary building blocks of sociopolitical development. However, at higher levels of development there is action as well as a change in thinking: "Psychological empowerment is not simply self-perceptions of competence but includes active engagement in one's community and an understanding of one's sociopolitical environment" (Zimmerman, 1995, p. 582; emphasis added). Empowerment at the psychological level is the cognitive engine for liberation at higher levels.

SPIRITUALITY AND SOCIOPOLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

The theoretical formulations in the previous section suggest that sociopolitical development is largely a cognitive process focused on conditions in the material world. However, even a cursory examination of African American social change movements reveals that the inspiration, strategy, and courage for this struggle relied heavily on religious and spiritual belief (Brookins, in press). For example, "Malcom [X]'s conversion was spiritual as well as political. It was not simply the acquisition of knowledge; it was a spiritual submission that implied a commitment to a set of beliefs and a way of life and membership in a community of believers" (Perry, 1996, p. 18). The ability to conceptualize and experience secular and material change on a spiritual level gives liberation behavior a higher purpose. At higher levels of sociopolitical development, shackles of oppression are no longer strong enough to restrain freedom of the spirit or ability to understand inequality. "Liberation is something that must happen to the soul of the human being, not just to our minds and bodies" (Akbar, 1991, p. 16–17). At the psychological level, spirituality is also a bulwark against pessimism and disillusionment when the rational mind would conclude the cause is hopeless. Andrew Young (1994), a prominent civil rights activist argued that:

> "[it is] the Spirit of God that empowers men and women to stand up for those rights and resist enslavement. . . . The irrepressible human spirit, endowed by the

> inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the power of God, leads many to risk their lives to make the world more like the kingdom of God." (p. 49)

Education, critical consciousness, empowerment, and liberation can take on greater meaning when in a spiritual context. Scripture and " . . . a religion-based theory of social change" (Abdul-Adil & Jason, 1991, p. 28) can provide a basis for action that is beyond the political. For example, in African-centered education, specifically Kemetic education, the goal is for the student to become more "godlike" (Hilliard, 1995). This suggests that the importance of learning extends beyond the personal level and knowledge was gained for a higher purpose and not simply for its own sake (Hilliard, 1995). The notion of "higher purpose" produces zeal and a basis for solidarity in mass movements. This is especially true of "Afrocentric spirituality [which] seeks to connect one with all humanity and every other aspect of the physical world" (Brookins, in press, p. 6).

In the liberation theologies that have developed among the oppressed, spiritual and existential freedom have empowered people to fight for social and political freedom. According to Dom Helder Camara of Brazil, "The protests of the poor are the voice of God" (Potts, 1994, p. 2). In the faith and systems of Al-Islam, "Jihad obligates Muslims to take an active role in confronting and conquering any personal, social or religious barriers that may impede their quest toward propagating the faith and systems of Al-Islam" (Abdul-Adil & Jason, 1991, p. 29). In sum, knowledge, or the acquisition of knowledge, has rarely acted without a "higher purpose or goal" in the struggle for African American liberation.

Thus, "transformation" is not limited to the material world and cognitive processes as the prior discussion of spirituality attests. The idea of a power beyond human limitations and a belief in "nonmaterial causation" have long been a part of the African and African American world view (Jones & Block, 1984). To prevent asymmetry in the material world from leading to a sense of worthlessness and hopelessness, African Americans and others have often turned to the invisible world of God and spirit. In psychology, spirituality is often seen as a coping strategy that puts events in perspective, yet it can also produce a sense of a higher purpose and a feeling of power and energy beyond what the material world can provide. Zeal when properly disciplined moves people to constructive action. Undisciplined, it can become authoritarian and fanatical.

SPIRITUAL DYNAMICS IN SOCIOPOLITICAL DEVELOPMENT

Sometimes, but not always, spirituality and sociopolitical development are synergistic. This does not mean that a strong spiritual worldview always

leads to liberation behavior (e.g., monks renouncing the world in the interest of spiritual development) or that atheism is incompatible with social change (e.g., Soviet-style communism). Nonetheless, for many movements throughout the world, spirituality has played an important role. The following is a summary of some inspirational and supportive roles that belief in "higher powers" can play. They are presented as brief statements and followed by questions as they would be phrased in work with young people:

Asymmetry Means that You Have Less, Not that You Are Less

A spiritual perspective prevents the awareness that you have fewer possessions from leading to a feeling that you are less of a person. Does having a lot of money make you a better person (or are all people equal before God)? Explore the saying "He who dies with the most toys wins [the game of life]."

The Concept of a Higher Power

The notion that there is intelligence and power that extends beyond the physical world—one that exceeds the intelligence and power of humans. What kinds of power can you drawn on in difficult and confusing situations? What role does belief in a higher power play in the lives of great African American leaders?

The Concept of Higher Purpose

Higher purpose is one that is not limited to personal gain. When it exists, many benefit, and often the purpose is aligned with explicit spiritual or social principles. Why would people risk their jobs or lives for something that does not make them a lot of money or get them something they want just for themselves?

Spiritual Perspective-Taking

Your psychological state and behavior are not controlled by circumstances. How do you think about difficult situations so that you don't get discouraged? What gives you the strength and hope you need to struggle

through challenges? What helps you feel confident that things will turn out okay? What gives you courage and keeps you from worrying too much?

Visualizing Life in Accordance with Higher Principles

Vision precedes effective planning and action. How would you like your neighborhood (and this country) to be different? What is right with the world now? What needs to change? How do you decide what would make your neighborhood a better place?

Tolerance and Appreciation of Diversity

Humans are equal but beliefs differ. Cooperation requires a just process for reconciling differences. What happens when others disagree with you about how to make the neighborhood better? Can two different ideas both be right? How can you work out these differences?

Purpose and Destiny

Exploring the sense that you are to play an important role in creating a better society. Is it important for you to play a role in making things better? Why? How can your talents and abilities be helpful?

SYNTHESIZING THEORY AND PREPARING FOR ACTION

This section integrates ideas from earlier sections, and it links them with previous theoretical work by Watts and Abdul-Adil (in press). The theory (see Table I) proposes five stages of sociopolitical development, beginning with a stage where a person is oblivious to social inequity or views it as a reflection of the inferiority of the oppressed. In stage two, the person recognizes inequity but does not confront it. Instead, she or he obtains what is desired through antisocial means or through seizing and being content with whatever limited opportunities exist—without challenging a system that sets unfair limits. The precritical and critical stages that follow herald new ways of thinking about inequity based on critical consciousness. The person becomes increasingly aware of oppression and the historical, cultural, and political processes that maintain inequity. The last stage, liberation, involves action or a strong desire to improve social condi-

Table I. Stages of Sociopolitical Development and Their Associated Coaching Questions

Stage of Sociopolitical Development	Key Action Concepts for Enhancing Critical Consciousness
Acritical stage: Resource asymmetry is outside of awareness, or the existing social order is thought to reflect real differences in the capabilities of group members. In essence, it is a "just world" (Rubin & Peplau, 1975).	Challenge internalized oppression: *What contributions have African Americans made to the U.S. and the world?* Critical thinking on class and race inequity: *Why can't kids in this (impoverished all-Black) school take their books home when kids in other (affluent White) schools can?*
Adaptive stage: Asymmetry may be acknowledged, but the system maintaining it is seen as immutable. Predatory, antisocial or accommodation strategies are employed to maintain a positive sense of self and to acquire social and material rewards.	Encourage critical thinking about socialization agents and psychic alienation: *What do rap videos tell us about Black men and their lifestyles?* Decision-making and values clarification: *What's the connection between choices of lifestyle and quality of life and neighborhood?*
Precritical stage: Complacency gives way to awareness of and concerns about asymmetry and inequality. The value of adaptation is questioned.	Cognitive reframing: *How many explanations can we come up with for the differences in the quality of high and low income communities?*
Critical stage: There is a desire to learn more about asymmetry, injustice, oppression, and liberation. Through this process, some will conclude that the asymmetry is unjust and social-change efforts are warranted.	Critical consciousness: *What events now and in the past maintain the differences in the quality of life in some Black and White communities?* Moral reasoning: *Is the inequity a sign that something is wrong with society? Why? Why not?*
Liberation stage: The experience and awareness of oppression is salient. Liberation behavior (involvement in social action and community development) is tangible and frequent. Adaptive behaviors are eschewed.	Community activism, solidarity, and liberation behavior: *What can you do (personally and as a group) to improve the situation?*

tions and eliminate oppression. Ultimately, the person becomes an active agent in the transformation of his or her environment.

This emerging theory of sociopolitical development and its spiritual aspects have not been tested empirically. As such, it is only one way of thinking about key elements of sociopolitical development. It may prove more useful to think about these so-called states as statuses, to reflect the possibility that there is no common starting or end point in the process (Freire, 1970; Perneman, 1977). This would yield a five-dimensional profile instead of a categorical designation. Helms (1995) has reached similar

conclusions about racial identity stages, and she has largely abandoned a fixed-stage approach to understanding racial identity development.

BUILDING AND MEASURING CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE REAL WORLD

The first challenge for our action-research team was developing a training strategy for enhancing critical consciousness while holding the interest of young men. To accomplish this we relied on rap music videos, television shows, and film as the subject matter for the training and as a stimulus for discussion. There were a number of advantages to using this material: (1) It validated an art form the young men valued but adults often despise (so when adults value it, the adults gain credibility); (2) it is ecologically and culturally relevant to the young men's life experience; and (3) it covered a very wide range of contemporary topics from many different vantage points. The second challenge was devising a method for evaluating any gains in critical thinking. The details of our empirical research on building critical consciousness are presented elsewhere (Watts & Abdul-Adil, 1998). Here, we will limit the discussion to defining critical consciousness for research purposes, describing the coaching techniques and highlighting some of the findings.

The operational definition of critical consciousness was derived from educational research and theory on critical thinking, particularly work by Ennis (1993), Hudgins & Edelman, (1988), Pierce, Lemke, & Smith (1988), and Smith & Alschuler (1976). For training purposes we distilled critical consciousness into five areas:

1. What did you *see?* Perception based on the stimulus;
2. What does it *mean?* Interpretation and meaning;
3. Why do you *think* that? Defense of interpretations;
4. How do you *feel* (what do you think) about it? Emotional and intuitive responses to the stimulus; and
5. What can you *do* about it? Action strategies—what constructive actions could be taken to improve the situation.

This version of the Young Warriors program was conducted with high school sophomores in an impoverished section of a large Midwestern city. The senior author and his assistant conducted the eight-session program weekly with a group of young, African-American men that varied in size from week to week. Seven young men attended at least four of the eight sessions, but another 25 dropped in for one to three sessions. Session size ranged from a low of five to a high of 12 (mean = 9.3). The trainers coached

participants on critical thinking through discussion of one or more of the program's themes—images of African Americans in mass culture, social forces that contribute to the condition of their community, gangsta lifestyles, community activism, masculinity, sexism, and African culture. Typically a rap video or film clip was shown followed by queries, discussion, and coaching on the critical thinking process.

To evaluate the critical consciouness development and general program reactions of the program's participants, transcripts of the eight, 45-minute sessions were analyzed manually and with the NUDIST qualitative data analysis computer program. The final classification scheme was the product of many hours of independent coding and discussion by seven members of the research team in a series of phases. The initial (a priori) classification scheme had separate categories for all five elements above. In the final scheme, See and Mean were collapsed into a single category, and a category called "Inference" was added. The intent was to remedy the problem judges had in distinguishing response units with interpretive features from those which were to be coded as purely perceptual ("See"). The reliability of the classification scheme was confirmed through the use of independent judges (Watts & Abdul-Adil, in press). Consistent with the critical thinking groups by Pierce, Lemke, and Smith (1988), and others (e.g., Hudgins and Edelman, 1988) small group discussions were the heart of Young Warriors. One of the major research questions in this study was: Can the Young Warriors program enhance critical consciousness during a brief intervention?

Figure 1 contributes an answer to the research question about the influence of Young Warriors on critical consciousness. The first data series

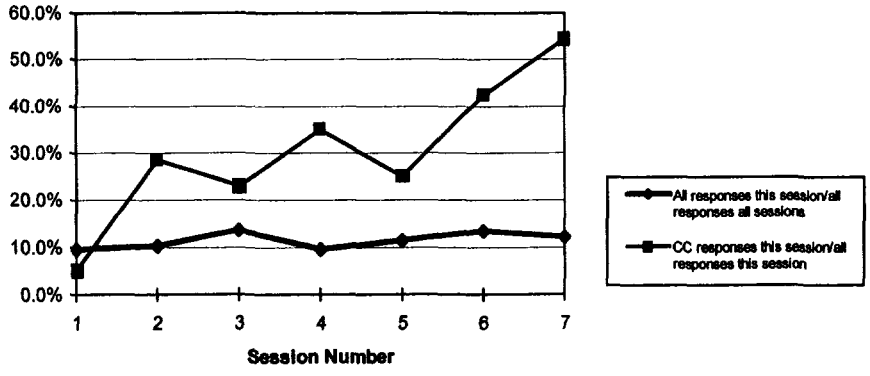

Fig. 1. Proportion of critical consciousness responses by session in the Young Warriors program.

shown in the figure illustrates the number of critical consciousness (CC) responses per session as a percentage of all coded responses in each session. The second data series in Fig. 1 tracks the proportion of all coded responses by session to show how the sheer volume of all types of responses increased over time. The results reveal an increase in the proportion of critical consciousness responses between session one and two, as well as a second upward trend from session five until the final program session (data from the wrap-up meeting is not presented because it focused on closure, not practice or learning). These data suggest that the Young Warriors program was associated with an increase critical thinking, the basis for critical consciousness, and not simply greater overall verbal output. These findings are suggestive and encouraging, but confirmation through the use of a control group will be necessary before a clear causal relationship can be established.

CRITICAL CONSCIOUSNESS IN THE WORDS OF THE PARTICIPANTS

In addition to frequency counts and category percentages, the optimal method of understanding critical consciousness and the other coded categories is to examine the actual comments of the students. In this section, we quote directly from the participants for each of the major critical consciousness categories. The most basic forms of critical consciousness, "See" and "Mean," include descriptive responses with minimal abstraction: "His father was gone and his mother was on crack, so he was by himself and he tried to steal a radio from this other dude." The "Inference" category differs from the "See" and "Mean" because it includes conclusions drawn from the stimulus that may or may not contain descriptive information. Inference responses involve additional cognitive processing and analysis, ranging from simple reactions or unsubstantiated opinion to sophisticated abstractions. For example, in response to a semi-autobiographical rap video, one student concluded simply, "I seen a person trying to survive in the streets." A more sophisticated form of inference involves additional substantiation in the form of a "Defense" of the conclusion. In the following response, the student links perceptions (evidence) to his inference to support his position: "What I saw was that the boy's mamma was a hooker. . . . She ain't all up on her job neither because there's some strong Black sisters out here who could take care of their kids who really want to." Judges did not rate the quality of the argument. The only coding requirement for this category was the linkage of an inference with some stimulus element. Despite this broad definition, Defense responses were observed infrequently.

"Judgment" responses showed evidence that the student tested the stimulus against his own values and then expressed his approval or disapproval. The judges coded this example as judgment and gender: "You ain't suppose to slap nobody. [The video shows] how men be beating on their women." The following is a series of "Judgment" comments expressed in succession by different students in response to a video stimulus: "He was hanging out with the wrong crew." "He didn't grow up in the right environment," and "He wasn't raised right in his family," More fine-grained analyses of "Judgment" were not reliable because only instances with clearly judgmental words like "right," "wrong," "bad," and "messed-up" produced reliable results. For example, the judges did not reach consensus on whether student statements such as "yeah and how warriors stand by their women because your woman is supposed to stand by you," "I think she wants too much, or she wants a lot of things that she can't get" were expressions of personal values.

Two examples from the Staff Talk category (which includes all responses by the trainers) taken from different sections of the transcript reveals the coaching process for critical consciousness:

> "Let's talk about what's going on in the neighborhood. If there are some things you can change in this neighborhood, what would you try to change? [pause] If you could change some things going on in this community, what would be some of the things you'd want to change?" [coded Staff Talk—Change/Action] "Now you see, that's a really good description; and what you said is what a lot of other brothers were saying about standing on your own and doing what you need to do, so that's a good example. Can anybody else think of any others? Something on rap videos about what is says about being a man or warrior?" [coded Staff Talk—Manhood/Warriorship]

The following is an uninterrupted exchange between the trainer and students prior to a video presentation in the initial session of the program. This dialogue illustrates the poverty of response in early sessions and the prompting from the trainers:

> Trainer: Why do you listen to rap music, to rap videos?
> Student: The beats.
> Trainer: The beats, what else?
> Student: Entertainment.
> Trainer: Entertainment, what else? I heard someone say lyrics. You listen to the lyrics sometime?
> Student: Yes and what he's saying. I like the women on them.

In later sessions, students advanced from descriptions to critiques. A few made the difficult transition from critique to creativity by generating suggestions or ideas that could improve a given situation. Such responses were classified as Change/Action. The following is an unedited series of exchanges from the final session. Responses were more complex and analyt-

ical, and their context suggested the increased presence of critical consciousness:

> Trainer: If you could change some things going on in this community, what would be some of the things you'd want to change?
> Student: Have more security around.
> Trainer: Have more security, keep people safe. What else would you change?
> Student: People have to be in at a certain time.
> Trainer: So the young folks get the type of guidance and learn [about] what they can do.
> Student: You know what, around my house, [they say] have your boy out of here at 11:30. [Trainers asking students for clarification].
> Student: I think it would be a lot more Black unity, then all of this would be settled. You know, all the drugs and everything.
> Trainers: Folks sticking together more?
> Student: That don't make any sense, you know, everyone killing each other. As much as our race has come up, we steady breaking it down.

DISCUSSION

Much of this article presented the broad outlines and implications of a theory of sociopolitical development based on our work with young African American men. This theory was built on the concepts of critical consciousness, oppression, white supremacy, and liberation behavior. Although the theory has not been directly supported by empirical research, the research highlighted in this article has contributed to one key element of the theory—critical consciousness. The Young Warriors program for young, African American men, the action component of our work, was designed to build critical thinking and critical consciousness and thereby promote the process of sociopolitical development. Though preliminary, our research findings suggest that Young Warriors increased the frequency of expressed critical thinking among program participants. What we do not know is whether critical consciousness increased the likelihood of community involvement and action, or decreased internalized oppression. There is obviously much work to be done, and these are questions for our ongoing research program.

Future action research efforts should focus on quantitative as well as qualitative tests of the theory, with a focus on the process of developing critical consciousness and the outcomes among those who acquire a high level of skill. We continue to believe that media socialization is often an agent of oppression against young people when there are no countervailing influences by significant adults or peers (Watts & Abdul-Adil, 1998b). Research of the impact of televised violence tends to support this contention (Green, & Thomas, 1986).

The community psychology tenets of ecological specificity and empowerment reinforce the importance of teaching young people to think and do for themselves, using the resources in their environment. Young people also enjoy watching film and videos, so media-based interventions hold a great deal of promise. The interest of scholars (Ghee, Walker, & Young, 1998) as well as hip-hop artists (e.g., KRS-One) on "edutainment" echo the emphasis on critical consciousness and entertainment in Young Warriors. Moreover, the growing interest in "media literacy" among educators and its emphasis on critical thinking hold the potential for some very constructive collaborations between progressive educators and activist scholars working with young people. Generalizing critical thinking skills to life in and outside of school is the goal of the program. Linking education to the sociopolitical realities of everyday life offers a new area of work in school-based interventions. Building critical consciousness is consistent with Madhubuti's (1990) belief that "the building of institutions, parties, and nations depends first on effective building of Black individuals and families."

Although African Americans have much to gain from sociopolitical development, its value is not limited to specific oppressed populations. Community psychologists, in collaboration with educators, might consider updating time-worn civics curricula. Civics could be transformed from an indoctrination into the status quo to an empowering citizen-development activity. As an owner of nearly 200 slaves, perhaps Thomas Jefferson (1787) was aware of how oppression can be sustained in the absence of critical consciousness and the free flow of information when he wrote: "Under the pretense of governing, they [Europe's governments] have divided their nations into two classes, wolves and sheep. I do not exaggerate. . . . Cherish therefore the spirit of our people, and keep alive their attention. Do not be too severe upon their errors, but reclaim them by enlightening them. If once they become inattentive to the public affairs, you or I, and Congress, and Assemblies, judges and governors shall all become wolves."

REFERENCES

Abdul-Adil, J. K., & Jason, L. A. (1991). Community psychology and Al-Islam: A religious framework for social change. *The Community Psychologist, 25*(1), 28–30.

Akbar, N. (1991). *Visions for Black Men.* Tallahassee, FL: Mind Productions and Associates, Inc.

Bartky, S. L. (1990). *Femininity and domination: Studies in the phenomenology of domination.* New York: Routledge.

Biko, S. (1978). *Steve Biko: Black Consciousness in South Africa.* M. Arnold (Ed.). New York: Random House.

Blauner, R. (1972). *Racial oppression in America.* San Francisco: Harper & Row.

Brookins, C. C. (In press). Afrikan and Community Psychology: Synthesizing Liberation and

Social Change. In R. L. Jones (Ed.), *Advances in African American Psychology: Theory, Paradigms, and Research.* Hampton, VA: Cobb & Henry Publishers.

Ennis, R. H. (1993). Critical thinking assessment. *Theory into Practice, 32*(3), 179–186.

Fairchild, H. (Ed.) (1992). *Discrimination and Prejudice: an annotated bibliography.* San Diego, CA: Westerfield Enterprises.

Fanon, F. (1968). *The Wretched of the Earth.* New York: Grove Press.

Freire, P. (1979). *Pedagogy of the Oppressed.* New York: Continuum.

Freire, P. (1990). *Education for a critical consciousness.* New York: Continuum.

Geen, R. G., & Thomas, S. L. (1986). The immediate effects of media violence on behavior. *Journal of Social Issues, 42*(3), 7–27.

Ghee, K., Walker, J., & Younger, A. (1998). The RAAMUS Academy: Evaluation of a two year edu-cultural afterschool intervention with African American adolescents. In R. Watts and R. Jagers (Eds.), *Manhood Development in Urban African-American Communities, Journal of Prevention and Intervention in the Community.* The Hawthorn Press.

Gibbs, J. (1988). Conclusions and recommendations. In J. Gibbs (Ed.), *Young, Black and Male in America* (pp. 339). Dover, MA: Auburn House.

Griffith, D. M. (1996). The Process of African-American Psychological Liberation. Unpublished manuscript, DePaul University, Chicago.

Helms, J. E. (1994). The conceptualization of racial identity and other racial constructs. In E. J. Trickett, R. J. Watts, and D. Birman (Eds.), *Human Diversity: Perspectives on People in Context* (pp. 285–311). San Francisco: Josey-Bass.

Helms, J. E. (1995). An update of Helms' White and people of color racial identity models. In J. G. Ponterotto, J. M. Casas, L. A. Suzuki, and C. M. Alexander (Eds.), *Handbook of Multicultural Counseling* (pp. 181–198). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Hudgins, B., & Edelman, S. (1988). Children's self-directed critical thinking. *Journal of Educational Research, 5,* 262–273.

Jefferson, T. (1787). Letter to Edward Carrington, January 16. *The Robert Drake Architecture and Philosophy Home Page* (on-line), http://www.index.com/rwd/rwdjeffl.htm.

Jones, J. M., & Block, C. B. (1984). Black cultural perspectives. *The Clinical Psychologist,* 37(2), 58–62.

King, M. L. (1950). An Autobiography of Religious Development (On-line) http://www.leland.stanford.edu/group/King/Docs/Volumes/Volume1/autobiol.htm.

King, M. L. (1958). *Stride Toward Freedom.* New York: Harper & Row.

Kretovics, J. (1985). Critical literacy: Challenging the assumptions of mainstream educational theory. *Journal of Education, 167*(2), 50–62.

Kvaraceus, W. (1965). *Negro Self Concept: Implications for School and Citizenship.* New York: McGraw Hill.

Madhubuti, H. (1990). *Black Men: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous?* Chicago: Third World Press.

Mauer, M. (1990). *Young Black Men in the Criminal Justice System.* Washington, DC: Sentencing Project.

Moss, J. (1991). Hurling oppression: Overcoming Anomie and self hatred. In B. Bowser (Ed.), *Black Male Adolescents: Parenting and education in community context.* Lanham, MD: University Press of America.

Penn, I. G., and Bowen, J. W. E. (Eds.) (1902). *The United Negro: His problems and his progress* (Containing the addresses and proceedings the Negro young people's Christian and educational congress, held August 6–11, 1902). Atlanta: D. E. Luther Publishing Co.

Perneman, J. E. (1977). *Consciousness Through Education.* On-line Dissertation Summary, http:www.ped.gu.se/biorn/diss.sum/perneman1/html.

Perry, T. (1996). Situating Malcolm X in the African American Narrative Tradition. In T. Perry (Ed.), *Teaching Malcolm X* (pp. 1–21). New York: Routledge.

Pierce, W., Lemke, E., & Smith, R. (1988). Critical thinking and moral development in secondary students. *High School Journal, 71*(3), 120–126.

Potts, R. (1994). Spirituality and Political Movements of the Oppressed: Implications for Community Psychology. Unpublished manuscrpit, DePaul University, Chicago.

Prilleltensky, I., & Gornick, L. (1996). Polities change, oppression remains: On the psychology and politics of oppression. *Journal of Political Psychology, 17,* 127–148.

Serrano-García, I. (1984). The illusion of empowerment: Community development within a colonial context. *Prevention in Human Services, 3,* 173–200.

Serrano-García, I. (1994). The ethics of the powerful and the power of ethics. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 22*(1), 1–20.

Serrano-García, I., & Lopez-Sanchez, G. (August 1992). *Asymmetry and oppression: Prerequisites of power relationships.* Presented at the annual convention of the American Psychological Association, Washington, DC.

Staples, R. (1987). Black male genocide: A final solution to the race problem in America. *Black Scholar, 18,* 2–11.

Watts, R. J. (1993). Community action through manhood development: A look at concepts and concerns from the front-line *American Journal of Community Psychology, 21*(3), 333–359.

Watts, R., & Abdul-Adil, J. (1998a). Promoting critical consciousness in young, African American men. In R. Watts & R. Jagers (Eds.), *Manhood Development in Urban, African-American Communities, Journal of Prevention and Intervention in the Community.* The Hawthorn Press.

Watts, R., & Abdul-Adil, J. (1998b). *A psycho-educational approach to manhood development in young African American men.* Unpublished manuscript available from http://condor.depaul.edu/~rwatts.

Watts, R., Adbul-Adil, J., Griffith, D. M., & Wilson, D. (August 1996), Practical Strategies for Sociopolitical Development in Young, African-American Men. National Convention of the Association of Black Psychologists, Chicago, IL.

Woodson, C. G. (1933). *The Mis-Education of the Negro.* New York: AMS Press.

X, Malcom, (1989). In G. Greitman (Ed.), *Malcolm X Speaks: selected speeches and statements.* New York: Pathfinder.

Young, A. (1994). *A Way Out of No Way: The Spiritual Memoirs of Andrew Young.* Atlanta: Thomas Nelson Publishers.

Zimmerman, M. (1995). Psychological Empowerment: Issues and Illustrations. *American Journal of Community Psychology, 23*(5), 581–599.