

# Slaying the Three-Headed Dragon: Spirit Healing from Memetic Infection

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## **Abstract**

Violence has a tremendous impact on the social fabric of the Black community at large and on society as a whole. This paper provides an overview of a brief group intervention based on Afrocentric methodology and the seminal work of Dr. Nobles (1986c) on ‘path-of-life development’. Three of Dr. Nobles’ four stages (decomposition, germination and transformation) establish a framework for the intervention presented in this paper as well as an organizing theme for addressing what Dr. Nobles (2015) refers to as ‘memetic infection’.

The paper further proposes an African-centred organization of mixed media, as a component of the intervention, to address the lingering psychological effects of chattel slavery, including those that have corrupted and distorted Black identity and African consciousness, owing to ‘memetic infection’ and its outgrowth, the ‘Three-Headed Dragon’. Addressing the ‘Three-Headed Dragon’ – depression, frustration tolerance, anger, cognitive/emotive factors highly correlated with violent behaviour – has not been central to the efforts of the United States to reduce violence among young men of African descent (Jackson 2015). Finally, Dr. Nobles’ concept of ‘Kinzungu Zongu’ (tornadoes of the mind), and his identification of toxic ‘sensoria information structures’, along with Akbar’s (1986b) assertion that the spiritual psyche of Black youth has been killed by a deliberate falsification of their historical reality, help establish a template for understanding and conceptualizing treatment of ‘spirit illness’ in diaspora as well as continental Africans.

**Keywords:** Memes, African centred, Trauma, Police Terror, Violence, 3-Headed Dragon, Spirit Illness

If we do not ever challenge the cultural ground we stand on and the intellectual categories or categorical conceptualizations we utilize, then we will simply continue the process of being victims of “violence beyond violence” and never knowing that we are victims (Dr. Wade Nobles).

## **Introduction**

Violence is not new to America. It has been on an upward spiral since this country’s inception. It is endemic to American society (despite a white American mythological view of the ‘good old days’), and is currently an epidemic in American society at large. In no other US population is the impact of violent crime and disparity in imprisonment rates more evident than in young Black males. This segment of our populace ‘bears the brunt’ of the tragic and destructive outcome of violence and violent crime (Fitzpatrick & Boldizar 1993).

However, violence against Black females is not far behind as rates of sexual assault, intimate partner homicide and, more recently, violence by law enforcement continue to occur at a much higher rate for Black women than any other ethnic group (BJS 2009; Violence Policy Center 2013).

Statistics on violent crime, as they relate to the Black community, reveal that the problem is even more profound than it appears on the surface. Not only does the victimization of Black communities pose serious mental and physical health problems, but also the incarceration rates for Black males have devastating economic and social impact on this already vulnerable ethnic community. The overrepresentation of Black males within the prison systems inside the US renders a staggering number of men unavailable as fathers and family/community leaders. Their prison histories also serve to reduce community resources because these men subsequently find it difficult to find credible employment, pursue advanced education, attain professional licensure, and contribute to community defence against discriminatory policy and practices.

Unfortunately, largely owing to the growth of the for-profit prison industry, its lobbying power and the development of policies designed to disproportionately affect people of colour, especially Black men (Pew Report

2009; ACLU Report 2011; Gopnik 2012), rates of imprisonment have only worsened. It is telling, that the US imprisons more human beings than any other nation on earth, including Russia, China and Iran (ACLU Report 2011; Misplaced Priorities 2011). US prisons, also, are often a final receiving point for many Black males who have endured a lifetime of discriminatory treatment.

Eberhardt *et al.* (2004), in a Stanford study, where the participants were police officers and undergraduate students, investigated the influence of stereotyped associations on visual processing, and found that when the faces of Black people were introduced, participants immediately perceived criminality and/or threat at a level that would impact their decisions and behaviour.

Many Black youth are socially, economically and politically disenfranchised. Sensitivity to problems in their families, schools and communities is evidenced by the disproportionate rates of behavioural and learning disorders, the high incidence of emotional disturbance in delinquents, and the high rates of necessary psychiatric treatment among young Black males (Gibbs 1988; Holzman 2006). Gibbs (1998:237) states:

Since studies suggest that Black male children as compared to females are given less nurturing by their parents, treated more harshly by their teachers, discriminated against more by employers, and treated less favourably by nearly every other institution in American society, it is reasonable to infer that their lower level of self-esteem is the inevitable outcome of their persistent, differential and demeaning treatment.

Whether conscious or unconscious in its motivation, the assault and battery of the young teenager, Darren Manning, by Philadelphia police is but another example of racially driven violence. It is the type of violence that clearly stems from hatred and quite possibly from a fear of genetic annihilation. Darren Manning, on January 7, 2014, was on his way with some teammates to play in a high school basketball game. They were wearing their team uniforms, hats and scarves. Darren was a 16-year-old model student at the Mathematics, Civic and Sciences Charter School. The boys were approached by police and started to run. However, Darren started to run and stopped because, as he reported, he 'had done nothing wrong'. What followed was an unnecessary

beating and groping session at the hands of the Philadelphia police. He was cuffed by the officers, groped and grabbed by his testicles by a female officer who squeezed and pulled so hard she ruptured one of his testicles, requiring that he go to the hospital where surgery was performed the next day. Doctors warned his mother of the distinct possibility that he may never have children.

Of course, as is usually the case in the inner cities of America, the officers charged this straight ‘A’ student, who, according to the school’s principal, had never had a disciplinary problem in his high school career, with resisting arrest. Witnesses at the scene have corroborated the young man’s story, and Darren’s mother, Ikea Coney, blamed herself for teaching him to respect the police and not to fear them, reasoning that perhaps if he had run his life would’ve been different. She was quoted as saying ‘I’m just grateful they didn’t kill him.’

In a more recent American Psychological Association published study, titled ‘The Essence of Innocence’, Goff *et al.* (2014) found that Black boys as young as 10 may not be viewed in the same way as their white peers relative to childhood innocence. In a four-part study including police officers and non-police officers, researchers found a disturbing picture of the effects of racism on Black children in the US. The study provides evidence that Black children are afforded the benefit of innocence to a lesser extent than children of other races.

Black boys are misperceived as older and seen as more censurable for their actions relative to peers of other races, and evidence points to these racial disparities being tied to implicit dehumanization of Black people. This tendency to dehumanize Blacks was not only predictive of racially disparate perceptions of Black boys, but predicted racial disparity in police violence toward Black children in the real world. Finally, regarding what the research suggests, the authors state: ‘If, as Alice Walker says, “The most important question in the world is, ‘Why is the child crying?’”, then for Black children, the most important answer may be that they cry because they are not allowed to be children at all.’

Whether we are discussing the attack on Darren Manning in Philadelphia or the murders of Amidou Diallo, Oscar Grant, Treyvon Martin, Tamir Rice, Eric Gardner, Sandra Bland, LaTasha Harlings, Troy Davis, Renisha McBride, Kendrick Johnson, Freddy Gray, Michael Brown, Mario Woods, Philando Castile, Alton Sterling, Delwan Small, and countless others, this demeaning, abusive and deadly treatment does, in fact, have

psychiatric consequences for its victims (including family, friends and community).

Such treatment is part and parcel of an ideation that is a necessary component of an extremely racist and systemic substructure. Dr. Welsing draws from the work of Neely Fuller Jr. as she functionally defines racism:

The local and global power system structured and maintained by persons who classify themselves as white, whether consciously or subconsciously determined; this system consists of patterns of perception, logic, symbol formation, thought, speech, action and emotional response, as conducted simultaneously in all areas of people activity (economics, education, entertainment, labor, law, politics, religion, sex and war). The ultimate purpose of the system is to prevent white genetic annihilation on Earth – a planet in which the overwhelming majority of people are classified as non-white (black, brown, red and yellow) by white-skinned people. All of the non-white people are genetically dominant (in terms of skin coloration) compared to the genetically recessive white-skinned people. (ii)

It is important to understand that such a system necessitates the creation of negative, denigrating and destructive images about Black/African people. Even more devastating has been the instillation of the mindset of devaluing Black life, and the evolution of the mentality of self-hatred; a memetic infection resulting in a condition Nobles (2015) has described as ‘Kinzungu Zongu’ (tornadoes of the mind). Western media as a structural system, unfortunately, have had a long and devastating history of propagating imagery responsible for such debilitating programming. However, Europe and its outgrowth of Western culture have not always viewed Africa and Africans in such pejorative ways.

Nobles (1989: 5) thus describes Europe’s orientation toward Africa (ns):

Literally, from the beginning of human consciousness to the advent of ‘the Negro’ the position of the Black man and woman and the relationship between the African and the non-African was the opposite of what it is now. The meaning of the African in the historical consciousness of the European, for instance, was (up until the advent

of the ‘Negro’) associated with high culture, superior civilization and sophisticated human systems of organization (i.e. governance, commerce, family, religion, etc.

Nobles (2015) in *The Island of Memes: Haiti’s Unfinished Revolution*, considers Europe’s brutal and savage colonization of Africa and the equally brutal chattel enslavement of diaspora Africans the ‘unaddressed twin evils; infecting the modern world.

European contact with Africa has always been driven by the desire to transform or rearrange African phenomena into fundamental European constructs in the service of domination and exploitation...there are three methods of colonial reorganization. The first is that colonial reorganization always has to deal with the domination of the physical space. Secondly [it] requires the managing of the indigenous modes of production .... The third method, which is perhaps the most important aspect of colonization, has to do with the reformation...of the African mind...which is done by replacing African indigenous education, religious, and psychological systems. (37-38)

It is to this third method we turn our attention; to this invisible destructive and ever-present force Franz Fanon described as ‘Violence beyond violence’. Fanon observed the significance of the outright denial of Africa’s historical contributions to the world as the first volley of violence beyond violence. Europe’s position of dominance through trickery, deceit and a willingness to sanction and commit horrendous violent acts and crimes against humanity forced a perverse and pervasive view of Europe as a universal standard-bearer for humanity. For continental and diaspora Africans, it is the inculcation of alien and enemy values and norms that lead to ‘spirit illness’.

African-American people, in general, and young African-American males, in particular, suffer from a cultural void, which, for them, means spiritual death, in that culturally the two are inseparable. This negation of the history and intellectual realization of African people is tantamount to a cultural and mental death (Akbar 1986a).

Akbar has long proposed that part of the difficulty in effective functioning for young African-American males is that their spiritual psyche, and/or soul, and that of Africans in general, have been killed by a deliberate

falsification of their historical reality, which destroys the foundation of reasonably human self-esteem. This has paved the way for self-hatred and self-destruction. Therefore restoring the spirit becomes a therapeutic necessity for young African males, and in order to restore the spirit one must restore the history.

Nobles *et al.* (1987) have also proposed that ‘When the symbols, rituals and rites of one’s culture lose their legitimacy and power to compel thought and action, then disruption occurs with the cultural orientation and reflects itself as pathology in the psychology of the people belonging to that culture’ (p.12). This psycho-spiritual pathology can be understood as resulting from ‘memetic infection’. It may be useful here to explore Nobles’ (2015) discussion of memes as it relates to ‘memetic infection’.

In furthering Dawkins’ ideas, memes could also be thought of as contagious symbiotic reproductive sensoria-information structures and patterns, including all of the senses that influence human knowing and awareness. In doing so, the sensoria-information structure/patterns can alter behavior and propagate patterns of behavior to be consistent with the sensoria-information structures/patterns....Sensoria-information structures/patterns, like memes, should be thought of as orienting ideas, which act like a self-replicating nexus for the propagation and legitimation of behavioral dispositions and functioning....In effect, memes are ideas and information, which are the substance of behavior. Fundamentally or foundationally memes serve as ‘epistemic memetic nodes,’ which shape and support a particular aesthetic, moral code, and behavioral norms *The Island of Memes: Haiti’s Unfinished Revolution* (2015).

According to Nobles, the process by which sensorial information structures symbiotically infect consciousness resulting in the reinforcement of the sensorial is called ‘memetic ideation’. Memes can exist in the form of ideas, symbols, images, feelings, words, customs, etc....and can be clustered and organized to represent ‘meme complex’ in the form of political dogma, religion, artistic styles, culture etc....They must be transferred from one generation to the next with their core content intact, ensuring the ability to preserve the altered behaviour. As such, memes represent ‘orienting ideas acting as self-replicating nexus’ for the growth, sustenance and legitimation

of certain behavioural dispositions.

Memetic infection, therefore, would imply that devastating sensorial-information structures that infected the minds of enslaved Africans were complexes that supported the African as merely a chattel, with no human value and without worth.

Certainly, it can be argued that European memetic ideations retained in Haitian consciousness can be seen in Africans throughout the diaspora as well as in continental Africans. These ideas and beliefs include the belief in aristocracy and class privilege, elitism, subjugation, life-long slavery, racial inferiority, genetic inferiority, apostolic authority, exaltation of Christ and Christianity and the belief in the sacredness, superiority and power of 'whiteness' (or Frenchness in the case of Haitians) (Nobles 2015). The resulting mental state is that of 'shattered African consciousness' and 'fractured Black identity', symptoms of contact with White people and their worldview, which requires the dehumanization and 'de-Africanization' of Africans at home and abroad.

In stark contrast, African memetic ideations retained in Haitian consciousness can also be seen in diaspora and continental Africans as represented in numerous revolutionary movements (Cuba, Haiti, South Africa, United States, Brazil, Mexico etc.).

These ideas and beliefs include respect for elders, the belief in the power of spirit, personal responsibility, ancestor veneration, Nommo, divine destiny, interdependence and the nature of reality and human meaning as spirit and energy (Nobles 2015).

Reintroducing, elucidating and/or retaining African memetic ideation may provide a bridge to reconnecting with the ancestral spirit and to health for many African youth.

Programmes based upon sharing these values have been beneficial for youth.

Mentoring and 'rites-of-passage' programmes historically imbue young men and women with cultural philosophy, values and principles to develop in ways consistent with cultural models of manhood and womanhood. Indications are that such programmes increase social and intellectual competencies, increase positive attitudes toward African-American people and culture, and are associated with healthy racial identity (Bethea 2012). Although very important research on the concepts of racial respect and racial socialization (DeGruy, Kjellstrand, Briggs & Brennan 2012) indicate both are

significant as moderators for harm reduction in African-American youth who experience routine neighbourhood violence, little is known about which cognitive or affective mechanisms are affected. There is also still much to explore regarding memetic ideations that support destructive disposition. A key issue for the implementation of components of such programmes within the field of psychology is the question of their clinical relevance, which the study outlined below attempted to address.

## **Background**

As a legacy of slavery, Black-on-Black violence is a common response to the frustration, internalized anger, and depression felt by many African-Americans. Hutchinson (1990) notes that, historically, no matter how much Blacks were victimized by White violence, retaliation was not permitted. Black males who attempted to protect themselves and their families were frequently and severely maimed or even murdered. Men and women who resisted or questioned authority were treated harshly to serve as examples to the rest of the Black community. Outlets for the tremendous frustration, anger and rage that grew out of this experience were found in work, at home, or within the Black community, thereby forcing Blacks to internalize their anger and displace their aggression onto each other (DeGruy-Leary 2005). Penalties for Black violence against other Blacks were far different from those assessed for violent acts toward Caucasians, which instilled the belief that violence and repression against other Blacks was a socially approved behaviour (Stampp, 1956; Hutchinson, 1990). An outcome of these inculcated belief systems can be seen in the high incidence of Black-on-Black crime.

Cultural and ethnic factors must be considered in any discussion related to violence owing to their influence on the expression of aggression and anger; truly ‘tornadoes of the mind’, or as stated previously, Kizungu Zongu. Violence among young Black males can be viewed as emanating from skewed self-perceptions – solely as descendants of slaves, ‘Niggas for life!’, ‘Pimps up, hoes down’ – as well as skewed perceptions of European others leading to distorted beliefs surrounding personal potential (Akbar, 2001). Such negative self-image illustrates the devastating and dehumanizing effect of systemic, institutional and interpersonal racism in American society, and how it has manifested into intense self-hatred and self-destructive behaviour

patterns in Black youth.

Although the relative number of violence-prevention programmes designed specifically for young African-American men are few, they have shown some evidence of success in decreasing violent/aggressive behaviour (Wilson-Brewer 1992; Hammond & Yung 1993). However, very little research has been conducted on culturally sensitive interventions aimed at reducing the 'Three Headed Dragon' of depression and frustration, and mediating anger in Black adolescent males (Baggio 1987; Davies 1989; Muran, Kassinove, Ross & Muran 1989; Jackson 2015). Focusing on the effects of Afrocentric methodological approaches to these three factors may hold important keys to developing crucial treatment modalities for victims of violent experience, as well as for those who perpetrate the violence. Toward this end, an ecological framework (Gordon 1992) was used in this study. Studies of the individual experience within the social ecological context include those analysing family systems, communities, and cultural contexts. An ecological model considers the history of violence in America, including its impact on African-Americans during slavery, and the cultural context, which includes how norms and personal belief systems and values are shaped. Cultural context also encompasses the historical, political, social and economic realities influencing society, which compromise and, in some cases, determine quality of life for many African-Americans.

There is great need for the discipline of psychology to face the challenge of designing, implementing and evaluating programmes and techniques aimed at influencing nonviolent behaviour. If the task of the mental health system is to facilitate the return to a state of mental/emotional health and balance of any individual, then there are two options for managing the state of imbalance and disorder:

1. The mental health system can attempt to control the situation externally, colluding with the criminal-justice system. In doing so, it will characterize and label violent offenders as deviant personalities, which like a cancer, must be 'cut off' from a society of 'normal', 'peace-loving' people (Wilson 1993).
2. Alternatively, the mental health system can assist troubled individuals by adding a level of order to their internal world, with the possibility of facilitating eventual health and balance to their lives.

To engage in the latter, the entire current framework of mental health delivery couched in the Western narrative must be challenged and replaced with that of an Afro-centric perspective, a perspective that may include theories that fall along the lines of what Azibo has described as positivist theories, or what Kambon has proposed as Afrocentric theories (Jackson 2015). Prime examples can be found in the works of Abraham (1962), Nobles (1986a), Azibo (1991), Akbar (1996), Kambon (1998) and Fu-Kia (2003). Such theories of African personality primarily attempt to describe the process by which Africans develop a positive identity out of a negative, denigrated and belittled African identity. These theories, though they do not purport to address personality per se, can be regarded within the conceptual framework of advanced African personality theory.

It is this author's belief that when developing methodology for African-Americans such methodology should be supported and structured by a framework that is itself Afrocentric.

The use of such a framework not only incorporates African worldviews, and the dynamics of African personality, but it offers a means of conceptualizing the 'problem' of young African-American males along a time continuum or path. It informs the methodology in a way that allows for much more than the extinguishing of certain destructive behaviour. Such a framework allows for the development of methods that deal with deeper psychological issues that underlie problem behaviour, and encounter the African-American male on the path of life development. The stages of this path can be seen as occurring on four levels: (1) decomposition, (2) germination, (3) transformation, and (4) transcendence (Nobles 1986c).

The 'germination' stage may also be considered from the Bantu, Kikongo concepts of Sengumunwa or Vulumunwa – conceived ideologically from their root verbs of sengumuka or vulumuka (to emerge, to rise, to come to be) as a process that gives birth to a vital principle (N'kingu wangudi/N'kingu wavumuna) of double directional motion, Kala ye Zima (Fu-Kiau 2003). Movement at this stage is critical in striving toward the deep and multilayered Bantu concept of Kinenga (or balance). To the ancient Africans, language was symbolic, full of signs and symbols. This is important in the development of treatment/intervention models that aim at affecting the attitudes, beliefs, and ideas of people of African ancestry, including Americans of African ancestry, in an effort to impact on behaviour.

The 'transformation' stage may also be considered from the concept

of African self-consciousness (Kambon 2012), in that a strong African self-consciousness represents psychological health in the movement towards balance, for Africans in general and Americans of African ancestry in particular. In addition, the Kemetian concept of ‘Putah’ as a characteristic of mental maturity captures this stage. In the context of Kemetic metaphysics, Putah is one of seven dimensions that help form the basis for human growth and development in ancient African psychology (Nobles 1986; Akbar 1994). The seven interrelated dimensions as described by Parham (2009) are as follows:

1. The Ka – the physical body (also understood as the sum of the following dimensions).
2. The Ba – the breath of life; energy or life force transmitted by the Creator and ancestor to each individual.
3. The Khaba – the emotions and rhythmic movement/pattern of life.
4. The Akhu – our intellect or capacity for thought and perception.
5. The Seb – the eternal soul; at pubescence, one’s ability to self-create/reproduce.
6. The Putah – the union of the brain with conscious mind reflecting mental maturity.
7. The Atmu – the divine or eternal soul.

Finally, the stage of ‘transcendence’ can be seen as aligned with the Kemetian concept of the ‘KA’, the summative aspect of all seven (Ka, Ba, Khaba, Akhu, Seb, Putah, Atmu) interrelated dimensions of the psyche or soul (Nobles 1986b).

Our mandate as healers, relative to Black youth, can be seen as assisting them in addressing certain questions in the context of therapeutic intervention. What is their path? At what stage do they presently exist? What is their human potential? What is the meaning of their collective being? How do their perceptions create reality?

Again, the task of the therapist can be seen as the task of changing the inappropriate behaviour, which is, in effect, a task of cultural realignment; realigning the adolescent's behaviour with Afrocentric principles of conduct, which are consistent with the highest level of human functioning. Violent, self-destructive and deviant behaviour, based on culturally distorted ideas, offer little resiliency to states of depression and frustration, and destructive

mediation of anger. Such ideation must be realigned with culturally accurate and appropriate ideas, which can lead to faith and hope in tomorrow, motivation to achieve, and intellectual development.

## **Study Objectives**

Currently there is a dearth of information on studies focusing on treatment that directly addresses cognitive factors associated with violence among young African-American males, which made this study all the more critical. The current article locates these cognitive factors in what the author believes to be their appropriate context of memetic infection and resultant programming. The stated research hypotheses were as follows:

## **Research Hypotheses**

- (1) Exposure to historically based/culturally relevant material will have a significant effect on the level of frustration tolerance in young African-American males as measured by the Survey of Personal Beliefs (SPB).
- (2) Exposure to historically based/culturally relevant material will have a significant effect on the level of depression in young African-American males as measured by the Reynolds Adolescent Depression Scale (RADS).
- 3) Exposure to historically based/culturally relevant material will have a significant effect on mediation of anger in young African-American males as measured by the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory (STAXI).

## **Null Hypothesis**

- (1) Exposure to historically based/culturally relevant material will have no significant effect on the level of frustration tolerance in young African-American males as measured by the Survey of Personal Beliefs (SPB).
- (2) Exposure to historically based/culturally relevant material will have no significant effect on the level of depression in young African-American males as measured by the Reynolds Adolescent Depression Scale (RADS).
- (3) Exposure to historically based/culturally relevant material will have no significant effect on mediation of anger in young African-American males as measured by the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory (STAXI).

## **Study Overview**

The study entitled *The Effect of Exposure to Culturally/Historically Based Material on Level of Frustration Tolerance, Level of Depression and Mediation of Anger in African-American Young Males* (Jackson 1997) was conducted to test the effectiveness of a brief group intervention, based on Afrocentric methodology, on the level of frustration tolerance, depression, and mediation of anger in African-American young men. Initially, 20 subjects were pretested using the Reynolds Adolescent Depression Scale, Survey of Personal Beliefs, and the State-Trait Anger Expression Inventory. Fourteen subjects remained at the time of post-testing.

A repeated-measures ANOVA was performed on mean test scores for experimental and control groups. Also Cochran's C, Bartlett-Box F and Box's M were conducted on pre- and post-test scores to evaluate the homogeneity of variance and normality.

While there was no significance found, qualitative trends indicate a reduction of depressive symptoms endorsed and reduction in level of state anger. For example, the repeated-measures ANOVA showed significant differences between and within the groups and over time (see Table 4). However, the significant differences were found in both the control and experimental groups. The reduction in the level of depression may be due to a variety of factors, and therefore cannot be solely attributed to the culturally relevant intervention designed for this study. The null hypothesis of no significant difference in the level of depression can be rejected. However, ANCOVA results did not confirm that PRERADS is a significant predictor of POSTRADS, regardless of group (experimental or control).

As expected, subjects did not indicate an increase in their level of overall anger or an exacerbation of long-standing anger as a result of the intervention. A critical limitation of this study was the problem of small sample size, which compromised the assumption of homogeneity of variance and normality, affecting significance.

## **Treatment Materials**

The criteria for the development of treatment protocol required that the materials (a) reflect Afrocentric thought, and (b) reflect a 'true' or accurate representation of history according to Afrocentric historians. The materials were selected for their potential impact on participant attitudes of perceived

hopelessness and/or helplessness, as well as their anticipated effectiveness in motivating cultural/spiritual realignment, as defined by Parham, Ajamu and White (2011).

The methodology was designed to affect deeper psychological issues that underlie problem behaviour, and that are typically encountered by the African-American male on his path-of-life development. The concept, documented by Nobles (1986), of 'path-of-life development' entailed the following stages: decomposition, germination, transformation, and transcendence. This manner of delineation was useful in establishing a framework for the intervention presented in this current study, and the former three stages were incorporated in anticipation of the existing decompositional status of African-American young men. The decomposition-related material was expected to produce results involving the expression of anger and surprise, as well as amusement and disgust. Upon review of this material, the participants responded with overwhelming anger and a sense of injustice.

## **Decomposition material**

Treatment material related to decomposition reflected the current status of socio-psychological racism, Black identity formation, and violence within the Black community – all within a historical context. This material was presented to facilitate the expression of emotions relative to the socio-economic and psychosocial condition of Black males in America. Videotaped material was also selected with this function in mind for its utility in enhancing the joining process. This material was also selected with consideration for the level of respect for, familiarity with, and relative influence of the speakers/artists in the study sample.

## ***Sample Decomposition Material***

### **Session #1:**

Lusane, G, *Pipe Dream Blues*. 'Black youth, attacked, abandoned, angry and addicted' (pg. 22-24) (Discussion); 'Racism and the drug crisis/ (pg. 25-38) (hand out).

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Farrakhan, L. (Speaker), Nation of Islam (Producer). *Stop the Killing* [Video] (2:14 - 4:15 / 43:00 - 58:00 min.).

Jackson, P. (Editor) News excerpts on Rodney King aftermath [Video] (1:20-1:46/2:08-2:24/2:47-6:38 min.).

Riggs, M. (Producer) *Ethnic Notions* [Video] (0-3:09/ 4:44-8:30/ 9:35-14:43/15:48-20:58).

Ice Cube (Vocals), Priority Records (1991, 1992). 'Bird in the Hand' / 'Tear this MF up' [CD Recording].

### Instructions:

- a) Play 'Bird in the Hand' as introduction to segment.
- b) Distribute and introduce the outline for 'Pipe Dream Blues' and review for 10 minutes.
- c) Have group view videotape of selection from *Ethnic Notions*.
- d) Have group view videotape of news excerpts from Rodney King beating and L.A. rebellion.
- e) Play 'Tear this MF up.'
- f) Have group view videotape of *Stop the Killing*.
- g) Conduct brief discussion on information presented.

The stage of germination was crucial in this study. It was hoped that the participants would begin to challenge some of their preconceived negative perceptions through this stage. Their response to the germination-related material was one of interest. They expressed surprise, wonder, and a sense of pride. Additionally, they demonstrated germinating signs of recognizing African pictures and artifacts, and objected when shown a video segment that misrepresented historical facts. Participants verbally expressed their anger and were able to cite information introduced earlier in the study.

### ***Germination Material***

Germination treatment material offered new ideas regarding the origins of civilization and the historical contributions of African people in an attempt to

challenge existing negative perceptions that could block participants from realizing their full potential. This material also focused on the concept of collective being as it relates to African-American young men.

### Sample Germination Material

#### **Session #4:**

Karenga, M., Ivan Van Sertima (Producer). *African Contribution to World Science* [Audiotape Recording]. (12-30 min.)

Goody Mob (Vocals), La Face Records (1995). 'Cell Therapy' on Soul Food [Audiotape Recording].

'Free Your Mind, Return to the Source: African Origins' Video: Dr. Asa Hilliard III and Listervelt Middleton. Producer: Waset Educational Productions. (41 - 55/ 56:40 - 1:07.30 / 1:18.30 - 1:28 min.)

#### Instructions:

- a) Play 'Cell Therapy'. Briefly discuss.
- b) Play 'African Contribution to World Science' audiotape. Briefly discuss.
- c) View 'Free Your Mind' videotape. Discuss.

The stage of transformation attempted to challenge culturally distorted ideas and begin the process of realigning thought patterns with Afrocentric principles. Behavioural changes were noted in the following three broad areas: (a) level of attention during sessions, (b) verbal responses, and (c) within-group behaviour. By the ninth session, earlier problems with attentiveness were negligible. Even when participants demonstrated the most difficulty with attention – during the presentation of audiotaped information – their attempts were visibly noticeable. They began to reflect upon their own past behaviour as they evaluated material challenging destructive behaviour in general. Fewer unplanned breaks were necessary during group sessions, and participants

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began to raise interesting questions and comments regarding their anger at never having learned this information in school.

### ***Transformation Material***

Transformation material focused on questions relative to the participants. What is their path? At what stage do they presently exist? How do their perceptions create reality? This material challenged culturally distorted ideas surrounding self, and motivated participants to realign their behaviour with Afrocentric principles of conduct (Nobles 1986).

### **Sample Transformation Material**

#### **Session #9**

‘African Origins of Judeo-Christianity’ video: Ashrwa Kwesi (1-10 min.)

‘Keynote Address’: 1986 Conference of the Association of Black Psychologists Audiotape: Dr. Ivan Van Sertima (10-43 min.)

‘Save the Family’ Video: Min. Farrakhan (30-45 min.) Instructions:

- a) View videotape.
- b) Listen to ‘Keynote Address’ audiotape.
- c) View segment of ‘Save the Family’ videotape. Discuss.

Goals toward changed attitudes and/or improved understanding surrounding individual situations were appropriate for the use of a short-term cognitive approach where specific memetic ideation represented as cognitions (i.e. thoughts or images) and/or schemata (i.e. silent assumptions) account for the onset and persistence of symptoms or memetic infection (Ursano & Hales 1986; Nobles 2015). Participants were made aware of stereotyped views and schemata they brought to situations, and were able to recognize and adjust such views toward a more objective reality.

## Statistical Findings

**Table 1.**

Descriptive statistics for the Survey of Personal Beliefs (SPB, Pre-test and Post-test, for the Groups: Experimental and Control

	Experimental Group (N=6)		Control Group (N=8)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<b>Pretest</b>	34.67	10.25	31.75	4.03
<b>Posttest</b>	30.50	5.36	29.63	3.78

**Table 2.**

Summary Table of Repeated-Measures ANOVA Performed on Mean Test Scores from the Survey of Personal Beliefs (SPB) Pre-test and Post-test between Groups

Source of Variance	df	SS	MS	F
Between Subjects	13	617.00		
Groups	1	24.65	24.65	0.05
S(G)	12	592.35	49.36	
Within Subjects	14	364.86		
Test	1	67.86	67.36	2.81
Group X Test	1	7.15	7.15	0.31
Residual	<u>12</u>	<u>289.85</u>	24.15	
Total	27	981.86		

**Table 3.**

Descriptive Statistics for the Reynolds Adolescent Depression Scale (RADs), Pre-test and Post-test, for the Groups: Experimental and Control

	Experimental Group (N=6)		Control Group (N=8)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<b>Pretest</b>	74.17	8.33	81.75	6.56
<b>Posttest</b>	69.00	6.32	75.75	8.83

**Table 4.**

Summary Table of Repeated-Measures ANOVA Performed on Mean Test Scores from the Reynolds Adolescent Depression Scale (RADS) Pre-test and Post-test between Groups

Source of Variance	df	SS	MS	F
Between Subjects	13	1223.61		
Groups	1	352.19	352.19	4.85 <sup>a</sup>
S(G)	12	871.42	76.62	
Within Subjects	14	741.37		
Test	1	231.76	213.76	4.87 <sup>a</sup>
Group X Test	1	1.19	1.19	0.03
Residual	<u>12</u>	526.42	43.87	
Total	27	1964.98		

a=p.<0.05

**Figure 1.**

Analysis of covariance results for experimental and control groups where dependent variable is post-test Reynolds Adolescent Depression scale and covariate is pre-test Reynolds Adolescent Depression scale

*Model Summary* <sup>a, b</sup>

Model	Variables		R.	R. Square	Adjusted R. Square	St. Error of the Estimate
	Entered	Removed				
1	PRERADS GROUP c,d		.473	.224	0.083	7.9766

- a. Dependent Variable: POSTRADS
- b. B. Method: Enter
- c. Independent Variable: (Constant), PRERADS, GROUP
- d. All requested variables entered

*Anova<sup>a</sup>*

Model	SS	df	MS	F	p.
1. Regression	201.829	2	100.915	1.586	.248b
Residual	699.885	11	63.626		
Total	901.714	13			

- a. Dependent Variable: POSTRADS
- b. Independent Variable: (Constant), PRERADS, GROUP

*Coefficients<sup>a</sup>*

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.	95% Confidence Interval for B	
	B	St. Error	Beta			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
1.Constant	54.13	25.686		2.107	.059	-2.403	110.668
GROUP	-4.74	4.916	-.293	-.965	.355	-15.56	6.075
PRERADS	.264	.312	.257	.847	.415	-.423	.952

- a. Dependent Variable: POSTRADS

**Table 5.**

Descriptive Statistics for the State Anger Scale (SANG), Pre-test and Post-test, for the Groups

	Experimental Group (N=6)		Control Group (N=8)	
	Mean	SD	Mean	SD
<b>Pretest</b>	26.67	9.46	17.38	4.04
<b>Posttest</b>	23.50	5.32	19.38	4.27

**Table 6.**

Table of Repeated-Measures ANOVA Performed on Mean Test Scores from the state Anger Scale (SANG) Pre-test and Post-test between Groups

Source of Variance	df	SS	MS	F
Between Subjects	13	723.29		
Groups	1	308.58	308.58	8.94a
S(G)	12	414.71	34.51	
Within Subjects	14	470.51		
Test	1	2.33	2.33	0.07
Group X Test	1	45.76	45.76	1.30
Residual	<u>12</u>	<u>422.42</u>	35.20	
Total	27	1193.80		

a=p.<0.05

## **Discussion**

The study findings provide a measure of qualitative support for use of a brief therapeutic intervention developed from an Afrocentric methodological base. Minimal research exists related to culturally relevant treatment strategies addressing factors associated with violence in young men of African descent, rendering the present study an even more critical addition to the literature.

The tested intervention was designed to produce more than an impact on destructive behaviours. It was also modelled to effectively deal with psychological issues underlying the behaviour, motivating discussion surrounding the following fundamental questions:

1. At what stage do the young African-American males in this study presently exist?
2. What is their human potential?
3. What is their path?
4. What is the meaning of their collective being?

5. How do their perceptions create reality?

Responses clearly indicated cultural realignment of the negative and destructive attitudes and beliefs of the participants. Culturally accurate and appropriate ideas and beliefs had also become apparent. For example, an indication of initial negative attitudes and beliefs was the high level of intolerance for the views of peers. Participants would initially respond to other group members with derogatory and inflammatory statements and excessive argument while chiming lyrics to rap songs condoning and glorifying Black-on-Black violence, as well as denigrating women. For example, participants would respond to other group members by making statements like, ‘Shut the fuck up!’ ‘Man, fuck that!’ or ‘You don't know shit.’ Also participants would rap or reiterate the lyrics to rap songs like ‘Niggas ain’t shit’, ‘I’ll bust a nigga in the dome’, signifying Black-on- Black violence, and would consistently refer to women as ‘bitches’ and Black men as ‘niggers/niggas’.

Midway through the intervention, the participants began to question these negative practices and to concern themselves with why this type of material was disseminated within their communities. By the sixth session, behavioural change in group movement, expression, and unity emerged. They began to become more interactive as they began to develop a sense of ownership and defensiveness for the project. For example, on occasion when interrupted by a staff member, the group members would become angry and say things like, ‘They always wanna fuck something up. This is *our* shit!’. Also, experimental group participants were initially reluctant to be on time. This changed as they began to show more interest in the information presented.

By the ninth session, earlier problems with attentiveness were negligible.

Group members at this stage would attempt to keep each other quiet, even where participants had the most difficult time with attention to audiotaped information.

When seeing the gold artifacts and symbols in ancient Kemet they responded immediately with amazement. They also expressed amazement at seeing black people all around the world, and they began to verbally associate their love for gold with their ancestors, as they discussed their gold teeth and jewelry. Participants paid particular attention to the Minister Farrakhan videotape, which featured speakers who challenged the destructive actions of Black youth, some of which the group members had participated in. They

began to laughingly joke about different speakers, saying things like: ‘He’s fat!’ ‘Look at that hair!’ and ‘Damn, he’s pissed.’ Then, in more serious tones, they expressed their agreement with the speakers, saying, for example, ‘Niggas need to chill on all that violence.’ ‘You know they right!’ ‘You know that shit is real!’ (You know they are telling the truth). As a group, we experienced fewer unplanned breaks, and they began to raise interesting questions and comments regarding their anger at never having learned this information in school. Some discussed going to school once they are able to leave the institution, and others discussed simply not returning to be institutionalized.

Although it is difficult to measure the construct of ‘spirit’ using empirical methods, this study attempted to offer a structured format for restoring the spirit (Azibo 1996; Parham *et al.* 2011) expected to impact self-respecting consciousness. This attitude of self-respect is essential in developing a reasonable foundation for healthy self-esteem (Akbar 1986; DeGruy-Leary 2005). Differences in the level of depressive symptoms endorsed between the control and experimental groups were expected to indicate a noticeable impact on the level of self-respecting consciousness. Half of the participants within the experimental group expressed strong differences in critical items endorsed across the pre-testing and post-testing on the RADS. For example, item #14 indicating self-harm or suicidality: ‘I feel like hurting myself’ was endorsed pre-test as 2 (Hardly Ever), 3 (Sometimes), and endorsed post-test as 1 (Almost Never). Item #26: ‘I feel worried’ was endorsed pre-test as 3 (Sometimes) and post-test as 1 (Almost Never) and 2 (Hardly Ever). All the experimental group members endorsed a critical self-efficacy item: ‘I feel like nothing I do helps any more’ pretest as 4 (Most of the Time), 3 (Sometimes), and 2 (Hardly Ever), and post-test as 1 (Almost Never), with one exception of 2 (Hardly Ever). These trends were not surprising given Akbar’s description of the role of historical reality and the impact of its destruction on people of African descent in general Support for the intervention’s impact on motivating cognitive processes which serve as protective barriers to environmental factors that normally result in increased levels of anger and depression, although not statistically significant, was evidenced by RADS and STAXI results. When examining individual RADS scores we found a noticeable group difference in the number of participants who moved from a score well above the cutoff score for serious depression to a score below that of the cutoff. Pretest scores for

the experimental group indicated a total of three participants who scored above the cut-off, while control group scores indicated five participants scoring above the cut-off score. However, post-test results revealed that one of six experimental group members scored in the critical range for serious depression, whereas seven of eight control group members scored in the critical range for serious depression.

### **Clinical Implications**

Differences in pre-test and post-test depression scores suggest an impact was indeed made upon the participants' sense of perceived powerlessness, which, if internalized, often leads to depression. The risk for increased anger expression, and/or otherwise deviant behaviour as a result of exposure to treatment, was minimal. These findings present strong implications for future use of such treatment material in both educational and mental-health arenas where identity formation and individual sense of self are socially driven. These results underscore the importance of positive imagery in the development of youth of African descent, suggesting the possible clinical relevancy of rites-of-passage programmes.

The potential for effective treatment of delinquent and/or incarcerated young men of colour, using exposure to similar material or culturally based programmes, seems quite strong. Both the efficiency and cost-effectiveness of this brief group-therapy design has wide implications for the field of mental health as well as for the development of crime- and violence-prevention programmes. Finally, this study makes a strong case for the inclusion of Afrocentric methodology and further development of culturally sensitive models toward violence prevention and intervention among people of African descent.

The participants in this study represent one of the most difficult populations to support within the field of clinical psychology. Young men who are incarcerated at this age have already internalized much of the destructive and negative imagery this society attributes to their culture. Regardless, the intervention model presented in this study, which was based upon Afrocentric methodology including an Afrocentric understanding and conceptualization of the problems confronted by African-descended youth within this culture, was able to produce noticeable change in important cognitive areas. Perhaps further

study of similar interventions will reduce the need to wait for behavioural outcome as a primary means of evaluation. For some youth, the wait is too long, and the evaluation comes too late.

## **Limitations of the Study**

This study was not free of difficulties. Logistical problems and conflicts between the probation and education departments emerged that posed numerous challenges. Access to participants, as well as to facilities, was sometimes problematic. Behavioural problems, though anticipated, occurred on an ongoing basis in the initial phase of the research. When considering the generalization of findings to the total population of young African-American males, careful consideration of the breadth of experience among such populations is recommended. Although individuals may share many of the same experiences and stressors, given the inherent racism in American society, they tend to differ across lines of class, cultural orientation, and familial stability.

The small sample size was a limitation of this study. Both the experimental and control groups began with 15 members – a total of 30 participants. It was necessary to eliminate 10 individuals immediately, owing to incomplete testing. Both groups were subsequently reduced as adolescents dropped out of the study, or were involved in incidents of unauthorized absence from the institution. Consequently, attrition resulted in an insufficient number of participants to avoid violating the assumption of homogeneity of variance and normality.

Other possible limitations of this study included the fact that the pre-test and post-test differences may have been minimized, thereby reducing effect size. The method of evaluation may also have presented a limitation. Adding a qualitative approach could have been valuable in measuring change. Perhaps critical changes occurred that were not detected by the instruments used. Finally, a strong limitation to this study was the lack of funding for its design and implementation. Use of more updated technology would have enhanced editing capability, and minimized delays in the transition from audio to audiovisual treatment material. Merging musical selections with visual images holds potential for reducing problems related to participant attention and concentration.

## **Recommendations for Future Research**

An important issue relative to this research is whether the inclusion of culturally relevant, socio-historically based materials in mainstream therapies could prove efficacious for young, African-American men, in particular, as well as African-Americans in general. This question certainly deserves closer analysis. The results of this study were profoundly limited by the choice of evaluation parameters (i.e. quantitative vs qualitative), the dynamics between the subsystems at the study site, and sample size. Perhaps an evaluative approach that balances quantitative with qualitative data would be more appropriate for future study.

In addition, future study would be greatly advanced by using assessments developed within the context of an African-centred framework (as none of the instruments used in this study had been). Use of instruments like the African Self-Consciousness Scale (ASCS) and the Cultural Misorientation Scale (CMS) in assessing ASC and CM may be critical (Kambon 2003; Kambon & Rackley 2005; Kambon & Bowen-Reid 2010) to meaningfully evaluating African-American behaviour and mental health. These instruments have been used in various studies involving salient variables such as personal causation, psychological well-being and health promoting behaviours vs anti-Black behaviour. Both instruments have been shown to be reliable and valid.

In conclusion, qualitative findings suggest that the use of culturally relevant and socio-historically based information in the treatment of young men of African descent impacts factors antecedent to violent behaviour. This has important implications for the practice of psychotherapy and for the future development and use of Afrocentric models and methodology in the treatment of youth within this culture where access to mental-health services is often restricted owing to a lack of resources. Brief-therapy and group-therapy models become important cost-effective approaches under such circumstances. Given the indicated group movement through the stages of decomposition, germination, and transformation, future research would be best served by a detailed investigation of the path stages (Nobles 1986c). Developing criteria for each stage could promote development of a framework with the potential of being highly effective in conceptualizing issues and challenges that confront youth of African descent. This study endeavoured to 'bridge the gap' between psychological and sociological

conceptualization of issues related to the mental health of young men of African descent. The applied nature of this research shows great promise for future psychological treatment of high-risk populations in general.

It should be noted that given the myriad consequences of cultural derailment, development of treatment methodology for young African-American males is an extremely sensitive and challenging task. Young African-American males represent a significant portion of urban youth. Urban youth culture is characterized as an 'oppositional culture' (MEE Report 1992), and as a culture, is highly suspicious of messages perceived to represent mainstream culture. This poses a significant challenge for those who wish to disseminate information or ideas to this population through the use of popular media, i.e. television, film, music (radio), or the internet. Music videos, in particular, have been identified as possibly having the ability to be more current and to penetrate more quickly and completely than other forms of media, while maintaining an acceptance as part of the culture. In addition, music videos, via internet platforms like YouTube and Vimeo, or that show up on Facebook, etc. give the impression of being more shaped by the culture and are perceived as coming from within the culture, taking a role in defining it. Reflection on these factors could only enhance the development of future treatment methods.

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