Abstract In this paper I present an approach to understanding the dialogical self that considers the role that social, cultural and institutional dynamics of domination and subordination, and structures of power of privilege, play in the development of identity. To accomplish this I expand Penuel and Wertsch’s (1995) ‘mediated action’ approach to identity development to include a dialogical process of what Mikhail Bakhtin (1981) calls ‘ideological becoming’. Using the Autobiography of Malcolm X as an illustrative example, I argue that the development of Malcolm’s identity, via the process of ideological becoming, is influenced in profound ways by his experience of subordination and oppression, and his lack of power and privilege, growing up as a black man in the United States in the first half of the 20th century. Thus the ‘politics of ideological becoming’ refers to the degree to which the process of identity formation is necessarily different for persons from different social locations, who stand in different relationship to structures and systems of power, privilege and authority.

Key Words dialogue, domination, identity, mediated action, self, subordination

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Domination, Subordination and the Dialogical Self: Identity Development and the Politics of ‘Ideological Becoming’

Arguably the most striking aspect of The Autobiography of Malcolm X (1964) is Malcolm’s transformation from a street hustler, a drug dealer, a pimp and a thief to a member and minister of the Nation of Islam. This transformation occurred largely while Malcolm was incarcerated in the Massachusetts state correctional system for burglary (he was imprisoned in February 1946, at the age of 20.) During this time, initiated first by a visit from his brother Reginald, Malcolm was exposed to the teachings of Elijah Muhammad, the founder (in 1930) and spiritual leader of the Nation of Islam. While at first Malcolm resisted these teachings, as the result of a rigorous and extensive
process of self-education, cleansing and redemption he ultimately became a convert to the Muslim faith and a full member of the Nation of Islam.

The depth of Malcolm’s commitment to the pro-black/anti-white teachings of Elijah Muhammad is illustrated by the following scene, which occurs near the end of Malcolm’s seven-year incarceration:

I found that a lot of Negroes attended a bible class, and I went there. Conducting the class was a tall, blond, blue-eyed (a perfect ‘devil’) Harvard Seminary student. He lectured, and then he started a question-and-answer session. I don’t know which of us had read the bible more, he or I, but I had to give him credit; he was really heavy on his religion. I puzzled and puzzled for a way to upset him, and to give those Negroes present something to think about and talk about and circulate.

Finally, I put up my hand; he nodded. He had talked about Paul.
I stood up and asked, ‘What color was Paul?’ And I kept talking, with pauses, ‘He had to be black . . . because he was a Hebrew . . . and the original Hebrews were black . . . weren’t they?’

He had started flushing red. You know the way white people do. He said ‘Yes.’

I wasn’t through yet. ‘What color was Jesus . . . he was Hebrew, too . . . wasn’t he?’

Both the Negro and white convicts had sat bolt upright. I don’t care how tough the convict, be he brainwashed black Christian, or a ‘devil’ white Christian, neither of them is ready to hear anybody saying that Jesus wasn’t white. The instructor walked around. He shouldn’t have felt bad. In all the years since, I have never met any intelligent white man who would try and insist that Jesus was white. How could they? He said, ‘Jesus was brown.’

I let him get away with that compromise. (pp. 189–190)

Much has been written about Malcolm’s radical conversion experience (see, e.g., Perry, 1991; Wolfenstein, 1981). For my purposes, however, I am less interested in Malcolm’s (1964) autobiography as a story of religious conversion per se (James, 1902/1958), and more interested in his autobiography as a developmental narrative—particularly as it represents transformations in his identity, his self-understanding, and the way he presents himself to the world.

For the past decade or so I have been exploring and attempting to articulate an explicitly sociocultural approach to the study of moral functioning, with a particular focus on understanding the dialogical nature of the moral self and moral identity, as these dimensions of moral experience are represented in narrative and, more specifically, autobiographical, texts (see Day & Tappan, 1996; Tappan, 1991, 1992, 1997a, 1997b, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2000). The autobiographical text I have considered in the greatest detail is the published autobiography...
of Ingo Hasselbach (1996), the founder (in 1991) of the National Alternative neo-Nazi party in East Germany (Tappan, 2000); I have also considered a life-history written by Hilda Grey, a Jewish émigrée from Nazi Germany (Garz & Tappan, 2001; Tappan, 1999a). Both Hasselbach and Gray describe a series of striking transformations in their moral self/moral identity, and, in the process, provide clear evidence of the degree to which moral identity is, at its core, a function of the ongoing dialogical interchange between self and others (see also Hermans, 1996, 2001; Hermans & Kempen, 1993; Hermans, Kempen, & van Loon, 1992).

I have come to be interested in Malcolm X’s (1964) autobiography, however, because it represents a dimension of human experience that I have not fully considered in my previous work on identity development and the dialogical self. This is the experience of those who are members of subordinated, marginalized or minority groups in any given society, those who are powerless and (often) victimized, those, in other words, who are ‘oppressed’—to use the term popular in contemporary discourse on this topic. My aim in this paper, therefore, is to add to the relatively small, but growing, number of theoretical and empirical contributions to the literature on the dialogical self that consider the role that social, cultural, political and institutional structures of power and privilege play in the development of identity (see, e.g., Bhatia, 2002; Bhatia & Ram, 2001a, 2001b; Hermans & Kempen, 1998; Holland, Lachicotte, Skinner, & Cain, 1998; Sampson, 1993).

Specifically, I want to begin to explore how the structural/systemic dynamics of domination and subordination shape and influence the development of the dialogical self and the process of identity formation, broadly defined.

Identity as Mediated Action

While many have explored the ways in which both physical and semiotic tools, artifacts and resources mediate and shape human mental functioning (see, e.g., Cole, 1996; Valsiner, 1998; Vygotsky, 1978), I have found James Wertsch’s (1995, 1998) conception of ‘mediated action’ to be particularly helpful in clarifying these processes. Wertsch (1998) begins his discussion of mediated action by arguing that the goal of sociocultural (and, I would say, dialogical) inquiry is to understand the relationship between the person and the social, cultural, historical and institutional contexts in which the person lives. To accomplish this goal, he says, we must be careful not to limit our focus to individual mental functioning, on the one hand, or to the sociocultural setting, on the other. Rather, we must find a way to ‘live
in the middle’ (p. 17), and thus to avoid the perils of both individualistic and social reductionism that have plagued the human sciences for generations.

Wertsch proposes that focusing on mediated action provides the most useful way to ‘live in the middle’, so to speak. Mediated action entails two central elements: an ‘agent’, the person who is doing the acting, on the one hand, and ‘cultural tools’ or ‘mediational means’, the tools, means or ‘instruments’ used by the agent to accomplish a given action, on the other. Following Kenneth Burke (1969), understanding and analyzing any action as mediated action therefore involves focusing on both agent and agency, on both ‘what person or kind of person performed the act’ (‘who did it’), and ‘what means or instruments [s/he] used’ (‘how [s/he] did it’) (p. xv).

The concept of mediated action is profoundly influenced by the work of Lev Vygotsky (1978, 1987) and his colleagues and contemporaries writing in Russia in the early decades of the Soviet era (see Cole, 1996; Wertsch, 1985, 1991; also Bakhtin, 1981, 1984). Key to Vygotsky’s theoretical perspective is his claim that in order to understand the mind and its development we must understand the ‘tools’ that mediate and shape its functioning. Ultimately Vygotsky focused his attention on language as the most important psychological tool, because language, by definition, has both semiotic and communicative characteristics (Wertsch, 1985). When a psychological tool, like language, begins to play a part in a particular psychological function (i.e. begins to mediate that function), that function, Vygotsky argued, is fundamentally transformed:

By being included in the process of behavior, the psychological tool alters the entire flow and structure of mental functions. It does this by determining the structure of a new instrumental act, just as a technical tool alters the process of a natural adaptation by determining the form of labor operations. (Vygotsky, 1981, p. 137)

In sum, taking mediated action as the unit of analysis entails assuming that any human action—at least any action that represents what Vygotsky (1978, 1987) called ‘higher psychological functioning’ (action that is not biologically or instinctually motivated)—always involves an irreducible and dynamic relationship between an agent and his or her cultural tools/mediational means. Humans, in essence, are ‘tool-using animals’, and the concept of mediated action extends this insight from the physical realm, where technical tools like knives, shovels, machinery and computers are used, to the psychological, semiotic and symbolic (i.e. the dialogical) realm, where the tools
The concept of mediated action has been extended to the realm of identity by Wertsch and his colleague William Penuel (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). Their work seeks to connect Vygotsky’s insights about developmental analysis, sociocultural processes and mediation to Erik Erikson’s (1968) insights about identity development in adolescence and young adulthood. While Erikson (1968), who defined identity as ‘a subjective sense of invigorating sameness and continuity’ (p. 19), tended to emphasize individual functioning in his analysis of identity formation, and Vygotsky tended to emphasize sociocultural processes in his analysis of developmental phenomena, it is possible, Penuel and Wertsch (1995) argue, to ‘integrate individual functioning and sociocultural processes’ (p. 88) into a coherent approach to identity formation. That is, by seeking to maintain the dynamic tension that necessarily exists, as both Vygotsky and Erikson recognized, between the individual, on the one hand, and society, on the other, an understanding of the role that social, cultural and historical processes play in the formation and transformation of individual identities is not only possible, but also quite desirable.

Penuel and Wertsch’s (1995) ‘mediated-action approach’ to identity formation gives rise to four central claims (pp. 89–90). Two of these are most important for my purposes in this paper:

1. ‘Mediated action’ provides the basic unit of analysis for any exploration of identity development.
2. Cultural and historical resources (particularly ideologies) serve as both empowering and constraining tools for identity formation.

Let me briefly explore each of these claims in turn.

With respect to the appropriate unit of analysis to be used to understand identity formation, Penuel and Wertsch (1995) argue that we must move beyond Erikson’s notion of an ‘inner sense’ of coherence and stability as characteristic of identity, towards a focus on the forms of mediated action in which an individual is typically engaged. Such a focus on agents and the cultural tools that mediate their action (and interaction), moreover, entails acknowledging the fundamental and irreducible tension that necessarily exists between these two elements (Wertsch, 1998). That is, in examining the dialectic between agents and cultural tools at work in any given (inter)action, it is always tempting
to reduce the action in question to a function of one or the other element. Such a temptation must be resisted, however, or we run the risk of destroying the phenomenon under observation.

Methodologically, adopting a mediated action approach to identity formation means focusing less on what persons say about their own sense of self-understanding, and more on what they do in specific situations and circumstances:

Taking mediated action as the unit of analysis... allows us to ask a different set of questions about the way individuals use cultural tools to form an identity, without having to sacrifice Erikson’s concern for coherence. In this approach, what we are attempting to interpret, explain, or analyze is meaningful human action, rather than either inner states of individuals or sociocultural processes, considered in isolation. ... The sociocultural framework asks us to focus on specific questions about the mediational means or cultural tools that people employ to construct their identities in the course of different activities and how they are put to use in particular actions. When identity is seen in this framework as shaped by mediational means or cultural tools, questions arise as to the nature of cultural tools and why one, as opposed to another, is employed in carrying out a particular form of action. (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995, p. 91)

Turning next to the fundamental role that cultural and historical tools and resources play in identity development, Penuel and Wertsch (1995) focus on the ideologies that are available in a particular social-cultural-historical context—ideologies that shape and mediate identity in critical ways. Such ideologies, however, can have both empowering and constraining effects on the development of identity:

On the one hand, cultural tools in the form of ideologies provide individuals with a coherent world view, something that, in [Erikson’s] view, youth desperately need to fashion an identity. In that way, these ideologies are empowering, providing youth with a compass in a contradictory and complex world. At the same time, these resources are, according to Erikson, constraining, in that individuals are limited in who they can become by the array of choices of ideology, career, and self-expression. (p. 90)

Penuel and Wertsch also argue that the meaning of ideologies as cultural tools is not fixed and immutable, but is rather quite fluid and flexible, determined, in large measure, by how such resources and tools are used in a particular situation:

The cultural and historical resources for identity formation do not constitute a single, undifferentiated whole, but represent a diversity of mediational means. In that way, identity may be conceived as formed when individuals choose on particular occasions to use one or more resources from a cultural ‘tool kit’ to accomplish some action (see Bruner, 1990; Wertsch, 1991). Ideologies are embedded in a multitude of tools and signs; in this respect, identity
researchers must be open to the variety of settings and signs in which an individual’s identity is being constructed or expressed. (p. 90)

This brings me to a central question—one that is essentially a developmental question: how are the cultural tools and resources, like ideologies, that mediate identity acquired? I use the Bakhtinian term ‘appropriation’, rather than the more commonly used Vygotskian term ‘internalization’, to describe the process by which agents acquire cultural tools/mediational means, mindful, in so doing, of recent debates and discussions on the relative utility of these two terms (see Arievitch & van der Veer, 1995; Lawrence & Valsiner, 1993; Packer, 1993; Rogoff, 1990, 1995; Valsiner, 1998; Wertsch, 1993, 1998). Simply put, my use of the term ‘appropriation’ signals that this process is not viewed as one in which something static is taken across a boundary from the external to the internal (a simplified internalization view). Rather, it highlights, as Barbara Rogoff (1995) argues, ‘active participation itself as . . . the process by which [persons] gain facility in an activity’ (p. 151).

There are two dimensions of the process of appropriation that I want briefly to highlight here. The first is a sense of ‘mastery’—that is, ‘knowing how’ to use a given cultural tool with a relatively high degree of skill or facility (Wertsch, 1998, p. 50). The second dimension is a sense of ‘ownership’—that is, how an agent takes a given cultural tool, something, quite commonly, ‘that belongs to others’, and ‘make[s] it one’s own’ (Wertsch, 1998, p. 53). In addition, it is important to note that this process is often difficult, and that agents do not always easily come to a sense of ‘ownership’ of the cultural tools they use. Moreover, while high levels of mastery are often associated with high degrees of ownership, this is not always the case.

To clarify the process of appropriation, to highlight the dialogical nature of the development of identity as mediated action, and to consider more fully the role that ideologies play in the process of identity development, let me turn directly to the work of Mikhail Bakhtin (1981). How, indeed, does this process of making others’ words one’s own occur? According to Bakhtin:

[Another’s word] becomes ‘one’s own’ only when the speaker populates it with his own intention, his own accent, when he appropriates the word, adapting it to his own semantic and expressive intention. Prior to this moment of appropriation the word does not exist in a neutral and impersonal language (it is not, after all, out of a dictionary that a speaker gets his words!), but rather it exists in other people’s mouths, in other people’s contexts, serving other people’s intentions: it is from there that one must take the word, and make it one’s own. And not all words for just anyone submit
equally easily to this appropriation, to this seizure and transformation into private property: many words stubbornly resist, others remain alien, sound foreign in the mouth of the one who appropriated them and who now speaks them; they cannot be assimilated into his context and fall out of it; it is as if they put themselves in quotation marks against the will of the speaker. Language is not a neutral medium that passes freely and easily into the private property of the speaker’s intentions; it is populated—overpopulated—with the intentions of others. Expropriating it, forcing it to submit to one’s own intentions and accents, is a difficult and complicated process. (pp. 293–294)

This description of the process of ventriloquation, which entails an ongoing ‘positioning [and re-positioning] of oneself with respect to others over time’ (Wortham, 2001, p. 147; see also Brown, 1998; Wertsch, 1991), ultimately leads Bakhtin (1981) to a consideration of what he calls the process of ‘ideological becoming’.

A speaking person, according to Bakhtin (1981), is always, to one degree or another, an ‘ideologue’, because language is always ‘a particular way of viewing the world, one that strives for social significance’ (p. 333). To understand the formation of an individual’s own ideology (and hence her identity), therefore, we must consider the process by which she appropriates others’ words, language and forms of discourse, as she constructs her own ideologically mediated perspective on the world.

In his discussion of the process of ideological becoming, Bakhtin distinguishes between two different types of discourse: authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse. The distinction between these two types of discourse, or ways of speaking, rests on the degree of ‘ownership’ (including both authority and responsibility [see Tappan, 1991] ) that one accepts (or can accept) for what one says, and does; it also parallels differences in the ways in which children are asked to learn texts in school: ‘When verbal disciplines are taught in school, two basic modes are recognized for the appropriation and transmission—simultaneously—of another’s words . . . : “reciting by heart” and “retelling in one’s own words”’ (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 341).

When another’s words are ‘recited by heart’, they function as authoritative discourse. Authoritative discourse demands that we acknowledge it, demands that we make it our own——we encounter it with its “authority already fused to it”’ (p. 342). ‘It is not a free appropriation and assimilation of the word itself that authoritative discourse seeks to elicit from us’, argues Bakhtin, ‘rather, it demands our unconditional allegiance’ (p. 343). Authoritative discourse is distanced, it cannot be changed or altered, it cannot be doubted, and hence there can be no true dialogue, and no play with the context that frames it
(Emerson, 1986). It has, in other words, complete and unquestioned authority:

The authoritative word is located in a distanced zone, organically connected with a past that is felt to be hierarchically higher. It is, so to speak, the word of the fathers [of adults and of teachers, etc.]. Its authority was already acknowledged in the past. It is a prior discourse. It is therefore not a question of choosing it from among other possible discourses that are its equal. It is given (it sounds) in lofty spheres, not those of familiar contact. Its language is a special language. It can be profaned. It is akin to taboo, i.e., a name that must not be taken in vain. (Bakhtin, 1981, p. 342)

When another’s words are ‘retold in one’s own words’, in contrast, they become internally persuasive. Internally persuasive discourse is much more open, flexible and dynamic than authoritative discourse. It becomes genuinely dialogical (see Lightfoot, 1997). When another’s words become internally persuasive, therefore, they become one’s own—or as close to one’s own as is ever possible:

Internally persuasive discourse—as opposed to one that is externally authoritative—is ... tightly interwoven with ‘one’s own word.’ In the everyday rounds of our consciousness, the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else’s. Its creativity and productiveness consist precisely in the fact that such a word awakens new and independent words, that it organizes masses of our words from within, and does not remain in an isolated and static condition. It is not so much interpreted by us as it is further, that is, freely, developed, applied to new material, new conditions; it enters into interanimating relationships with new contexts. More than that, it enters into an intense interaction, a struggle with other internally persuasive discourses. Our ideological development is just such an intense struggle within us for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values. (pp. 345–346)

We come, finally, to Bakhtin’s account of the dynamics of identity development as ideological becoming. It is premised on the assumption that the development of the self necessarily occurs in a shared social context, mediated by many different words, voices and forms of discourse. As such, identity development as ideological becoming, for Bakhtin, entails gradually coming to authorize and claim authority for one’s own voice, while remaining in constant dialogue with other voices:

Consciousness awakens to independent ideological life precisely in a world of alien discourses surrounding it, and from which it cannot initially separate itself; the process of distinguishing between one’s own and another’s discourse, between one’s own and another’s thought, is activated rather late in development. When thought begins to work in an independent, experimenting and discriminating way, what first occurs is a separation between internally persuasive discourse and authoritarian enforced
discourse, along with a rejection of those congeries of discourses that do not matter to us, that do not touch us. (p. 348)

The force that drives development, therefore, is clearly the experience of dialogue. Sometimes such a dialogue is pleasant and easy; other times it is very difficult, characterized by conflict and struggle:

The importance of struggling with another’s discourse, its influence in the history of an individual’s coming to ideological consciousness, is enormous. One’s own discourse and one’s own voice, although born of another or dynamically stimulated by another, will sooner or later begin to liberate themselves from the authority of the other’s discourse. This problem is made more complex by the fact that a variety of alien voices enter into the struggle for influence within an individual’s consciousness (just as they struggle with one another in surrounding social reality). (p. 348)

For Bakhtin, therefore, ‘authorship’—in real life as in literature—is necessarily a function of both self and other. The utterances that self-as-author produces thus do not arise ex nihilo from a single, solitary, Cartesian mind, spoken by a single, monotonic voice. Instead such utterances emerge from a dialogical relation—a form of mediated action—that must be the primary unit of analysis (see Wertsch, 1991). This is, in fact, the essence of self, for Bakhtin: self is dialogical, and it speaks in a polyphony of voices (see also Hermans & Kempen, 1993).

Bakhtin (1981), in conjunction with Penuel and Wertsch (1995), thus offers an explicitly dialogical account of the development of identity. He does so by acknowledging that the words, language and forms of discourse that mediate/constitute the self are always shared, communal, distributed, and thus are never the ‘property’ of individual persons. While one’s voice, one’s own sense of self, does gradually emerge from the multitude of voices that one encounters in the social world, for Bakhtin one’s identity is never simply defined in terms of one’s individual characteristics, qualities or properties. Rather, from the start, it is always a function of conversation and dialogue; it involves acting, enacting and performing one’s identity using a specific set of cultural tools and resources (see Brown, 1998; Butler, 1991; Willie, 2003); positioning and re-positioning oneself in relation to others’ words, language and forms of discourse:

To become a self one must speak, and in speaking, one must use words that have been used by others. In using words that echo with the voices of others, one must take a position with respect to those others. Expanding this analysis metaphorically from the level of the speech event to the level of a whole life, Bakhtin argues that becoming a self involves positioning oneself with respect to other speakers whose words (and relational stances, characteristic acts, and viewpoints) one ventriloquates. (Wortham, 2001, p. 147)
Thus, for example, moral identity (to consider one important dimension of identity) consists, on this view, of an understanding of oneself as a moral person that comes not from oneself alone, gaining access to, or reflecting on, one’s ‘true’ or ‘essential’ moral self (see Blasi, 1984). Rather, it comes from ongoing dialogue with others in one’s social world—dialogue that is necessarily shaped and mediated by specific cultural tools and ideological resources (Penuel & Wertsch, 1995). Chief among these tools and resources are moral voices, orientations or ideologies that are carried and transmitted via others’ words, language and forms of discourse (Tappan, 1992, 1997b; see also Gilligan, 1982). One finds one’s moral identity, therefore, primarily in the ideologically mediated moral action/enaction/performance (see Day, 1991) in which one engages, not simply via a process of self-reflection. As such, the development of moral identity entails a process of ‘ideological becoming’ whereby one appropriates the words, language and forms of discourse of others with whom one is in dialogue, and, in so doing, struggles to strike a balance between ‘authoritative’ and ‘internally persuasive’ forms of discourse (see Day & Tappan, 1996; Tappan, 1991; also Lightfoot, 1997).

This conception of the development of moral identity is clearly reflected in Ingo Hasselbach’s (1996) autobiography (see Tappan, 2000). Hasselbach, who speaks and writes from a dominant, privileged social location, does not tell the story of the gradual development of his own inner sense of himself as a moral person. Rather, he tells the story of his appropriation of a series of ideologically mediated identities—identities, that is, shaped by specific cultural tools and resources (i.e. the ideologies of the hippies, the punks, the skinheads and the neo-Nazis), and embedded in a particular historical time and place (East Germany before and after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989). Moreover, these various identities were not generated simply by self-reflection, or by the construction of an inner sense of self-coherence. Rather, they were generated by acting (and interacting), positioning and re-positioning, enacting and performing—often in aggressive, violent and hate-filled ways. And, finally, I have argued that Hasselbach’s story exemplifies the relationship between externally authoritative discourse and internally persuasive discourse that lies at the heart of Bakhtin’s conception of the process of ideological becoming. Specifically, it is Hasselbach’s move from authoritative to internally persuasive discourse that opens the door to his ultimate repudiation of the neo-Nazi movement, and his corresponding rejection of his ideologically mediated identity as a neo-Nazi.

But the question remains: ‘How well does this conception of the development of identity as mediated action capture the developmental
experience of someone who comes from a very different social location; someone who is not a member of the dominant social group; someone who does not enjoy, as Hasselbach did, the power and privilege that is associated with dominant group membership and identity; someone who is, instead, a member of a subordinated, marginalized or oppressed social group? These are the questions to which I now turn.

Domination and Subordination

While there are many helpful sources to which one can turn for an exploration and analysis of the dynamics of domination and subordination, privilege and oppression, both historical and contemporary (see, e.g., Bartky, 1990; Fanon, 1963, 1967; Foster, 1993; Freire, 1970; Harvey, 1999; Kimmel & Ferber, 2003; Memmi, 1967; Pharr, 1988; Sherover-Marcuse, 1986; Young, 1990), I have found Jean Baker Miller’s classic Toward a New Psychology of Women (1976) to be particularly enlightening.

In her analysis of domination and subordination, Miller (1976) argues that in most instances of difference there is also a factor of inequality—inequality of status and power. In situations of what she calls permanent inequality, some people, or groups of people, are defined as unequal by means of ascription (p. 6). The criteria used in this process may be race, sex, class, nationality, religion, sexual orientation, and so on. In such situations of permanent inequality, where the goal is to maintain the relation of inequality, and thus the power, privilege and advantage of the dominants over the subordinates, Miller argues that subordinates come to assume certain characteristics and qualities that result from what she calls the ‘internalization of dominant beliefs’ (p. 11). These characteristics and qualities include the following.

First, dominants define one or more socially acceptable, appropriate or ‘normal’ roles for subordinates (typically providing a service that the dominants don’t want to provide themselves). Preferred roles and activities, in contrast, are defined as the exclusive domain of the dominants. These preferred roles are closed to subordinates, and it is assumed that they are unable to perform them, because of ‘innate defects of deficiencies of mind or body’ (p. 7). Subordinates come to appropriate (master and own) this ascription, and find it difficult to believe in their own ability in a variety of areas. This, of course, echoes Paulo Freire’s (1970) description of ‘self-deprecation’ or self-hatred as one of the central characteristics of the oppressed (see also Memmi, 1967).

Second, subordinates are described in terms of personal psychological characteristics that are pleasing to the dominant group—submissive, passive, docile, dependent, lacking initiative, unable to think, to decide,
and to act for themselves (qualities more characteristic of children than adults). Subordinates are encouraged to develop or adopt (i.e. appropriate) these characteristics; if they do so, they are considered well-adjusted, ‘normal’ (p. 7). If, however, subordinates develop other characteristics—e.g. intelligence, initiative, assertiveness—there will be no place for them in the dominant framework. They will be defined as unusual or ‘abnormal’, and there will be no opportunities for them to exhibit their talents and skills. ‘How many blacks and women have pretended to be dumb?’ asks Miller (p. 7).

Third, in a situation of permanent inequality of power and resources, subordinates have to concern themselves with basic survival. Thus direct, honest reaction to domination and oppression is avoided (p. 10). Subordinates thus resort to disguised, indirect and other subtle ways of acting and reacting to members of the dominant group. Passive-aggressive and other indirect expressions of aggression and/or anger become common.

Fourth, subordinates know much more about the dominants than the dominants know about the subordinates: ‘They become highly attuned to the dominants, able to predict their reactions of pleasure and displeasure’ (p. 10). As a corollary to this, subordinates also often know much more about the dominants than they know about themselves. There is little purpose in knowing yourselves, says Miller, if survival depends on knowing those in power (p. 11). This also explains why subordinates so easily appropriate the untruths created by the dominants.

Finally, within each subordinate group there are tendencies for some members to imitate the dominants, believing that to be like the dominants will lead to power and control (this echoes Freire’s [1970] discussion of what he calls ‘identification with the oppressor’). This can take various forms. Some may try to treat their fellow subordinates as destructively as the dominants treat them (this echoes Freire’s [1970] concept of ‘horizontal violence’ [see also Fanon, 1967] ). A few may develop enough of the qualities valued by the dominants to be partially (but not completely) accepted into their fellowship (e.g. ‘Uncle Toms’, women who ‘think like men’) (p. 12).

In short, domination and subordination go hand in hand; they are interdependent and indissociable. Domination and privilege always result in the oppression of subordinate group members (Eagleton, 1990). The power, privilege and status of dominant group members are predicated on the existence of subordinate group members (Brantlinger, 2003). In fact, as Bellamy (1998) argues, the colonizer’s identity depends on a lack that can only be filled by a colonized Other (p. 342).
Moreover, it is important to acknowledge the role that ideology plays in maintaining, reinforcing and reproducing the dynamics of domination and subordination. To study and understand ideology, argues John Thompson (1990), ‘is to study the ways in which meaning serves to establish and sustain relations of domination’ (p. 56). Starting with Marx’s concept of ideology, Thompson expands Marx’s analysis of relations of class domination and subordination as the principle axes of inequality and exploitation in human societies, to offer a more inclusive perspective on the ways in which ideology establishes and maintains various forms of dominant–subordinate relations. In so doing, he identifies five general modes through which ideology can operate to establish and sustain relations of domination: ‘legitimation, dissimulation, unification, fragmentation, and reification’ (Thompson, 1990, p. 60). As such, Thompson’s analysis echoes Gramsci’s (1971) theory of hegemony, which claims that dominant groups use ideologies much more effectively than force or violence to keep subordinate group members in their place, and to rebuff any attempts at resisting the status quo. Ideologies serve this purpose by convincing subordinate group members of the legitimacy of their position in the social hierarchy (see also Brantlinger, 2003).

From a psychological perspective, the terms ‘internalized oppression’ and ‘internalized domination’ have traditionally been used to characterize members of subordinate and dominant groups, respectively (see, e.g., Pheterson, 1990). As I have argued elsewhere, however, the phenomena that have been called ‘internalized oppression’ and ‘internalized domination’ are better understood not simply as psychological phenomena, but rather, like all human action, as forms of mediated action (see Tappan, 2004). On this view, the central aspects of these phenomena must not be seen simply as a set of internal, deep, unchanging psychological qualities, characteristics or attributes. Rather, they must be seen as a specific set of ‘dispositions’ associated with particular forms of mediated action—forms of mediated action, moreover, that serve as ‘relational’ or ‘positional’ identities (having to do with ‘day-to-day relations of power’) rather than ‘narrative’ or ‘figurative’ identities (having to do with ‘the stories, acts, and characters that make the world a cultural world’) (Holland et al., 1998, p. 127).

We should, therefore, replace the term ‘internalized oppression’ with the term appropriated oppression. As such, appropriated oppression results from the mastery and ownership of cultural tools that transmit oppressive messages and scripts. Similarly, we should replace the term ‘internalized domination’ with the term appropriated domination/privilege. As such, appropriated domination results from the mastery and
ownership of cultural tools that transmit dominating/privileging messages and scripts. These tools, both oppressive and privileging, come from a variety of sources, including parents, teachers, friends, the media, and so on. And they take a variety of forms, from words, phrases, jokes, books, pictures, images, television shows, films, and so on. No matter the source or the form, however, these tools are marked and inscribed by a set of ideologies that are promulgated in and by the dominant culture, and then appropriated by both the oppressed and the privileged—ideologies, as Thompson (1990) argues, that establish and sustain relations of domination and subordination.

Finally, such a move from ‘internalized’ oppression and domination to ‘appropriated’ oppression and domination makes clear that domination and subordination are fundamentally dialogical and sociocultural phenomena, not simply psychological phenomena. As such, this move is in keeping with the original intent of Fanon (1963, 1967), Freire (1970) and others to explain forms of subjectivity (like ‘internalized oppression’ and ‘false consciousness’) in terms of social interaction and social structure. This move, in other words, to a mediated action perspective on domination and subordination, when linked with a mediated action perspective on identity development (both of which entail a central focus on ideology, operating on both the structural and personal levels), opens the door, I believe, to a new way of thinking about the developmental experience—the ‘ideological becoming’, if you will—of someone like Malcolm X.

The Autobiography of Malcolm X

The story that Malcolm X (1964) tells in his autobiography, the story of his transition from Malcolm Little, the intelligent boy growing up in Mason, Michigan; to ‘Detroit Red’, the drug-dealing hustler, pimp and thief; to Malcolm X, the self-educated Black Muslim minister and loyal follower of Elijah Muhammad; to El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz, the self-actualized follower of Islam, who no longer preached the ‘white man–devil’ doctrine but instead denounced the world-wide system of privilege and oppression as it impacted all marginalized groups, is a long and complicated one, told with great passion and great wisdom. It is also a story, I would argue, of Malcolm’s ongoing appropriation of a variety of cultural tools, resources and ideologies that shape and re-shape his identity and sense of self-understanding—i.e. his role as an agent/actor in the world—in both negative and positive ways.

I obviously cannot provide a full summary and review of Malcolm’s autobiography and his life story in this context. I can, however, point
to several pivotal scenes that illustrate his process of identity development as ideological becoming.

Malcolm’s early life—as it is represented textually—provides many examples of the ways in which his appropriation of the oppressive cultural messages, ideologies and scripts about being black (and thus not-white) not only give rise to the classic characteristics of subordination and oppression described above, but also shape and re-shape his identity-as-mediated-action. As a young teenager, to take one of these examples, Malcolm both hated the ways of white people and found himself, at times, trying to assimilate as much as possible:

In the second semester of the seventh grade, I was elected class president. It surprised me even more than other people. But I can see now why the class might have done it. My grades were among the highest in the school. I was unique in my class, like a pink poodle. And I was proud; I’m not going to say I wasn’t. In fact, by then, I really didn’t have much feeling about being a Negro, because I was trying so hard, in every way I could to be white. (Malcolm X, 1964, p. 31)

Here Malcolm exhibits clear evidence of what Freire (1970) calls ‘identification with the oppressor’. Even though it could never happen, Malcolm tried so hard to be white that he did not even acknowledge, at least consciously, his subordinate status in the class.

A year later, however, a ‘well-meaning’ English teacher, Mr Ostrowski, helped to put Malcolm ‘in his place’:

He told me, ‘Malcolm, you ought to be thinking about a career. Have you been giving it thought?’

The truth is, I hadn’t. I have never figured out why I told him, ‘Well, yes, sir, I’ve been thinking I’d like to be a lawyer.’ . . .

Mr. Ostrowski looked surprised, I remember . . . . he kind of half-smiled and said, ‘Malcolm, one of life’s first needs is for us to be realistic. Don’t misunderstand me, now. We all here like you, you know that. But you’ve got to be realistic about being a nigger. A lawyer—that’s no realistic goal for a nigger. You need to think about something you can be. You’re good with your hands—making things. Everybody admires your carpentry shop work. Why don’t you plan on carpentry? People like you as a person—you’d get all kinds of work.’ (p. 36)

In other words, in this scene Mr. O is providing a set of cultural tools and resources for Malcolm to appropriate and use to mediate his identity. Ideologically, Mr O employs a form of ‘legitimation’, specifically, ‘rationalization’, to ensure that his message effectively supports the relation of white domination and black subordination in which he and Malcolm are engaged (see Thompson, 1990, p. 61). As such, his words clearly carry a particular racist and oppressive message—‘you’ve
got to be realistic about being a nigger'. Moreover, we must assume, at least initially, that these words are, in Bakhtin’s terms, ‘externally authoritative’ for Malcolm—they are imbued with the power and privilege that is associated with Mr O’s whiteness. And it is that power and privilege that allows them to have such an impact on Malcolm.

A pivotal scene, illustrating Malcolm’s complete subordination and oppression, is Malcolm’s description of his decision, upon moving to Boston at age 15, to allow his friend Shorty to conk his naturally curly hair for the first time:

My first view on the mirror blotted out the hurting. I’d seen some pretty conks, but when it’s the first time, on your own head, the transformation, after a lifetime of kinks, is staggering.

The mirror reflected Shorty behind me. We both were grinning and sweating. And on top of my head was this thick, smooth sheen of shining red hair—real red—as straight as any white man’s.

How ridiculous I was. Stupid enough to stand there simply lost in admiration of my hair now looking ‘white’. . . . I vowed that I’d never again be without a conk, and I never was for many years.

This was my first really big step toward self-degradation: when I endured all of that pain, literally burning my flesh to have it look like a white man’s hair. I had joined that multitude of Negro men and women in America who are brainwashed into believing that the black people are ‘inferior’—and white people ‘superior’—that will even violate and mutilate their God-created bodies to try to look ‘pretty’ by white standards. (p. 54)

I would argue that, at this point in his life, Malcolm has fully appropriated the white supremacist, racist ideology of the culture in which he lives. He has mastered it, and, more importantly, he has ‘made it his own’ in the context of his own ideological becoming. He ‘retells’ this ideology ‘in his own words’—it has become, as Bakhtin says, ‘internally persuasive’. As a result he enacts/ performs his identity so as to exhibit, as he himself acknowledges, the classic characteristics and patterns of subordination and oppression, including ‘identification with the oppressor’ and ‘self-deprecation’ (see Freire, 1970; Miller, 1976). As such, I would argue, Malcolm exemplifies the way in which appropriated oppression, as a form of enacted/ performed/ mediated identity, arises via the process of ideological becoming.

While there is obviously much more that can and should be said about the early life of Malcolm X, let me turn now to the second scene presented at the beginning of this paper—the scene, which occurs near the end of Malcolm’s incarceration, in which he challenges the prison chaplain regarding the race of Jesus and his disciples.

There are several things to notice about this scene—the most important of which center on the obvious transformation/ development that
has occurred in Malcolm’s identity. Malcolm not only looks different (he tells us that by this point in his life his hair is no longer conked, and he’s wearing glasses), but, more importantly, he acts different—primarily, I would say, because he talks differently. In other words, he enacts/performs his identity using different cultural tools, resources and ideologies, and he positions himself differently vis-à-vis these cultural tools.

Malcolm uses these tools and resources to challenge the authority of the chaplain, and by extension the authority of Western Christianity, by arguing that Jesus and his disciples were most likely people of color. He has, by this point in his life, converted to the Nation of Islam, and is a devoted follower of Elijah Muhammad. That is his identity (moral, religious, racial and otherwise), and it is an identity that is clearly mediated by the words and teachings of Elijah Muhammad—words and teachings that Malcolm has appropriated.

But even though Malcolm has obviously mastered these cultural tools, it is still useful to ask the Bakhtinian question, precisely ‘who is speaking’ in this scene? The complete answer, I would say, is that Malcolm is ventriloquating the voice of Elijah Muhammad. A dialogical relation clearly exits, in which even though Malcolm is doing the speaking, the words he speaks are still ‘externally authoritative’—they resonate with the power and authority of Elijah Muhammad, and Malcolm can do nothing more than ‘recite them by heart’. It will be some time, in fact, before he has fully appropriated them, before he can ‘retell them in his own words’.

Nevertheless, in spite of the authoritative nature of Malcolm’s discourse here, the most important thing to note is that he no longer demonstrates the classic characteristics of subordination and oppression. Instead, he has moved toward a position of liberation. As such, he has undergone, I would argue, the kind of ‘critical consciousness raising’ that Paulo Freire (1970, p. 40; see also Roberts, 1983, p. 25; Tappan, 2004) suggests is necessary for attaining freedom/liberation from oppression:

1. unveiling the world of oppression;
2. expelling the myths and images created and promulgated by the old order—rejecting the oppressive images of one’s own culture (i.e. rejecting oppressive cultural tools and resources, voices, ideologies, etc.);
3. replacing old myths and images with new images, stories, ideologies, that are more liberating (i.e. appropriating liberating cultural tools and resources, voices, ideologies, etc.).
Malcolm’s identity as mediated action, in other words, is no longer mediated by the oppressive messages, scripts, images and ideologies of the dominant culture. Instead, using the tools provided to him by Elijah Muhammad and the Nation of Islam, he has ‘unveiled’ the dynamics of domination, subordination and oppression at work in the world, he has ‘expelled’ the oppressive myths, images and ideologies which had mediated his identity and sense of self-understanding, and he has ‘replaced’ these old myths, images and ideologies with new set that are more positive and liberating. As a result, he has constructed a new identity, that of Malcolm X:

... during this time I received from Chicago my ‘X.’ The Muslim’s ‘X’ symbolized the true African family name that he never could know. For me, my ‘X’ replaced the white slave-master name of ‘Little’ which some blue-eyed devil named Little had imposed upon my paternal forebears. The receipt of my ‘X’ meant that forever after in the nation of Islam, I would be known as Malcolm X. Mr. Muhammad taught that we would keep this ‘X’ until God Himself returned and gave us a Holy Name from His own mouth. (p. 199)

Thus, from one angle, Malcolm’s process of identity development/ideological becoming appears to be very similar to that of Ingo Hasselbach (Tappan, 2000). Like Hasselbach’s repudiation of the neo-Nazi movement, Malcolm’s conversion to the Nation of Islam begins from a position where the dominant ideology (racism/white supremacy) had been fully appropriated and ‘owned’. Like Hasselbach, for Malcolm it was only when this dominant discourse was fully appropriated—when he evidenced the characteristics of appropriated oppression to such a degree that he was ‘imprisoned’, both literally and symbolically—that he was open to change, to conversion. Hasselbach’s move from authoritative to internally persuasive discourse opened the door to his ultimate repudiation of the movement, and his corresponding rejection of his ideologically mediated identity as a neo-Nazi. Similarly, Malcolm’s conversion was made possible by his full appropriation of the racist/oppressive ideology of the dominant culture—only then could he begin to move toward a new ideologically mediated identity as a member of the Nation of Islam. Had that ideology been authoritative, Malcolm could not have experienced the kind of ‘intense struggle . . . for hegemony among various available verbal and ideological points of view, approaches, directions and values’ that is key, from a dialogical perspective, to genuine and authentic identity development. For, as Bakhtin says, when others’ words become internally persuasive they not only enter into ‘interanimating relationships with new contexts’, but they also enter into ‘an intense interaction, a struggle with other internally persuasive discourses’ (p. 346).
Yet, in spite of these points of intersection and commonality, there remains a striking difference between these two cases that must be acknowledged: while Hasselbach’s conversion begins from a dominant position of power and privilege, Malcolm’s begins from a position of subordination, marginalization and oppression. What difference does this difference make with respect to the process of identity development?

Let me briefly highlight the issue that I think makes the most difference in considering Malcolm’s experience of ideological becoming. Malcolm, by virtue of his experience as a member of an oppressed group, necessarily stands in an oppositional position vis-à-vis the dominant racist discourse as his conversion/transformation begins, even at the same time as he has apparently fully appropriated (mastered and owned) that discourse (as evidenced by the appropriated oppression he exhibits upon entering prison). No matter how complete one’s appropriated oppression is, one still understands that one is different than the dominant culture, that one is an ‘outsider’ not an ‘insider’, that members of the dominant culture have access to power and privilege that members of the subordinate culture do not (see Miller, 1976).

This position is what W.E.B. Du Bois (1903/1995) has in mind when he describes the ‘peculiar sensation [of] double consciousness’ that characterizes the ‘American Negro’:

This sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others, of measuring one’s soul by the tape of a world that looks on him in amused contempt and pity. One ever feels his twoness—an American, a Negro; two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals in one dark body, whose dogged strength alone keeps it from being torn asunder. (p. 45)

It is also what Freire (1970) has in mind when he describes the ‘duality of the oppressed’:

The oppressed suffer from the duality which has established itself in their innermost being . . . They are at one and the same time themselves and the oppressor whose consciousness they have internalized. The conflict lies in the choice between being wholly themselves or being divided. (pp. 32–33)

Eugene Wolfenstein’s (1981) psychobiography of Malcolm X offers this account of his double consciousness, his duality, his ‘twoness’, grounded in a Freudian/Marxist reading of his autobiography:

It is clear from Malcolm’s representation that the process of conversion was a war between two psychic forces, virtually two selves. On the one side was the Bad Self (as he calls himself, the ‘personification of evil’), the divided unity of satanic pride and Christian guilt . . . his actual self, which had
already become potentially his former self. On the other side was the Good Self, characterized by the morally unifying force of Muslim pride-through-purity—the future self who already existed in him potentially. (pp. 215–216; see also Dyson, 1995)

Or, as Malcolm himself says, ‘I was going through the hardest thing, also the greatest thing, for any human being to do; to accept that which is already within you, and around you’ (Malcolm X, 1964, p. 164).14

It is from such a position that Malcolm begins his conversion to the Nation of Islam, and thus his liberation from subordination and oppression. As such, I would argue, his ‘double consciousness’, his ‘duality’, enabled him to engage in the dialogue and struggle between different forms of discourse—both authoritative and internally persuasive—that is key to the process of ideological becoming. He had help in this process, obviously, from members of his family, and from Elijah Muhammad. But, in the end, I would argue, this dialogue and struggle was different—and perhaps even easier—for Malcolm than it was for Hasselbach, who did not experience the same kind of ‘double consciousness’, ‘duality’ or ‘twoness’.15

This doubleness or duality, I would argue, is captured well by Bakhtin’s (1981) warning that the process of appropriation/ventriloquation is not the same for everyone, that it is not always easy or smooth: ‘many words stubbornly resist, others remain alien, sound foreign in the mouth of the one who appropriated them and now speaks them; they cannot be assimilated into his context and fall out of it’ (p. 294). In fact, it seems to me that this description parallels the notion that ‘in the everyday rounds of our consciousness, the internally persuasive word is half-ours and half-someone else’s’ (p. 345). Taken together, these ideas suggest that for someone like Malcolm, who is oppressed, even when the dominant discourse appears to be fully appropriated and ‘owned’ (giving rise to appropriated oppression), there remains an opening, a mismatch, an opportunity to resist the definitions of ‘reality’ that are socially constructed and sanctioned by the status quo, that must not be overlooked (see Brown, 1998). And it is this act of resistance, in the end, that provides for Malcolm, as it has for so many others, the starting point for liberation, for the development of critical/emancipatory consciousness (see Sherover-Marcuse, 1986; Willie, 2003).

**Conclusion**

In conclusion, then, even though I have used a dialogical conception of identity development, inspired by Bakhtin, to understand the
experience of members of dominant social groups, like Hasselbach, I
would argue that it is even more useful in understanding the experi-
ence of members of subordinated and oppressed social groups, like
Malcolm X. This is precisely because the nature of subordination and
oppression, and the double consciousness of the oppressed, as I have
attempted to show above, parallels Bakhtin’s conception of ideological
becoming in striking and significant ways. Moreover, as I have also
attempted to argue, oppression, like identity, is, at its core, a mediated,
dialogical phenomenon. Thus it makes sense to turn to a dialogical
perspective to explore how these processes intersect and interact,
particularly in lives like Malcolm X’s—all the while keeping in mind
the role that differences in power, privilege, authority, access to social
and cultural resources, social location, and so on—in other words,
politics—plays in shaping the process of ideological becoming and
identity development.

Let me also, here at the end, acknowledge another aspect of the
politics of all of this that perhaps I should have acknowledged at the
outset—namely, that there are significant risks associated with any
attempt by someone like me, a white, male, heterosexual, able-bodied
academic, writing about internalized oppression and trying to say
something useful about the life of someone like Malcolm X. Wolfen-
stein (1981) puts it quite bluntly: ‘in a racist society, no white person
can claim an existential appreciation of the black experience’ (p. ix). I
would certainly agree. Moreover, there is also the risk of continuing to
‘fetishize’, in Michelle Fine’s (1997) words, the experience of folks like
Malcolm X:

Today the cultural gaze of surveillance—whether it be a gaze of pity, blame,
or liberal hope—falls … squarely on those who are marked: Colored. . . .
Social scientists, too, have colluded in this myopia, legitimizing the fetish,
turning away from opportunities to surveil ‘white,’ refusing, therefore, to
notice the institutional choreography that renders whiteness meritocratic
and other colors deficient. (p. 64)

In the end, therefore, my hope for this approach—and for the dia-
logical perspective, in general—is that we take this concern to heart,
and that we turn our attention not only to members of subordinated,
marginalized or oppressed groups, but also to members of dominant
groups qua dominant group members. This will entail focusing not
only on oppression, as I have in this paper, but also on appropriated
domination, and how it is transformed and transcended (see Tappan,
2004). Such a focus will, I believe, also enable us to say something
useful about how ‘whiteness’, like other markers of dominant group
membership, ‘accrues privilege and status; gets itself surrounded by protective pillows of resources and/or benefits of the doubt; how whiteness repels gossip and voyeurism and instead demands dignity’ (Fine, 1997, p. 57).

The effort I am envisioning will not be easy. It will take courage, determination and patience. In the end, however, if it is successful, it will move dialogical psychology toward a critical psychology (see Packer & Tappan, 2001), and maybe even toward a form of political practice. And, in so doing, perhaps we can contribute, in some small way, toward re-making our world into one in which all people’s lives can be more self-affirming, more free, more just and more compassionate.

Notes

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1. Malcolm X was an African American religious and civil rights leader. He was born Malcolm Little in Omaha, Nebraska, on May 19, 1925, and was assassinated on February 21, 1965, in New York City.
2. Wertsch uses these terms interchangeably, as will I.
3. It should be obvious, I hope, that mediated action is fundamentally dialogical in both form and function.
4. Note that Wertsch (1998), following Bakhtin, uses the term ‘appropriation’ to refer exclusively to this dimension of the process by which social experience influences mediated action. I prefer, however, to use appropriation, following Rogoff and others, to refer, more broadly, to the general process by which agents acquire cultural tools/mediational means—of which then both mastery and ownership are understood to be specific dimensions or characteristics.
5. Note the parallels here between Bakhtin’s account of the process of ideological becoming and the well-known developmental processes of differentiation and integration (see Werner, 1957; Werner & Kaplan, 1956).
6. This sociocultural/dialogical approach to identity development, drawing on the work of Penneu and Wertsch and Bakhtin, obviously shares many similarities with the approach adopted by Holland et al. (1998), whose Vygotsky/Bakhtin-inspired explorations of identity and agency focus on the ways in which individuals ‘produce’ identities using various ‘cultural tools and resources’ available to them (p. 4). Holland et al. also include two chapters that focus particularly on issues of power and privilege. In
the end, however, I have found the link between Bakhtin’s conception of ideological becoming and Penuel and Wertsch’s discussion of identity as mediated action more useful for my purposes in this paper, although, ultimately, a more extensive consideration of what Holland et al. might offer to such a project would be very worthwhile.

It is important to acknowledge that Malcolm X’s (1964) autobiography was actually written by Alex Haley, based on interviews he conducted with Malcolm over the course of several years. As such, the autobiography itself is certainly a dialogical text, an instance of identity as mediated action (the ‘action’ being self-presentation), in which Malcolm and Haley, together, employ a number of literary tools and resources to tell the story of Malcolm’s development into, through and then away from the ideology of the Nation of Islam.

Consequently, he occupies a position somewhere between the ‘pre-encounter’ and the ‘encounter’ stages of black racial identity development (see Cross, 1991; Helms, 1993; Tatum, 1997).

Here I am taking Malcolm’s word for his experience of self-deprecation, and I am assuming that if we could go back and see the ‘real’ Malcolm at age 15, we would observe these and other characteristics of appropriated oppression in action. Obviously this passage was also intended to be a critical interpretation of his experience as a young man, written many years later, with the clarity of hindsight, and most likely informed by the work of Franz Fanon (1963). Thus I am not relying on Malcolm’s own analysis of his oppression and false consciousness in this passage to make my case here; rather, I am ‘borrowing’ this analysis, if you will, to make my case that at age 15 or so, Malcolm had fully appropriated the white supremacist, racist ideology of his time, so much so that ‘conking’ his hair became a clear example of the way in which he enacted or performed his identity.

This process, of course, as a dialogical process, must necessarily be different for different people, who selectively appropriate others’ discourses within a particular sociocultural context. Needless to say, this suggests that Malcolm’s experience as a black man growing up in the US in the mid-20th century differs in many ways from that of people of color living in the US today.

This achievement corresponds to Malcolm’s trip to Mecca, and his ultimate break with Elijah Muhammad (see Perry, 1991).

And hence to a new stage of racial identity, that of ‘immersion/emersion’ (Cross, 1991; Helms, 1993; Tatum, 1997).

This move, from oppression to liberation, requires a re-definition of ideology, from ‘meaning in the service of domination’ (Thompson, 1990), to something like ‘meaning in the service of power’. It also entails, theoretically, combining Bakhtin’s ideas about ideological becoming, in which ideologies are any system of ideas, with Freire’s ideas about liberation from false consciousness, in which ideologies carry the kind of political valence that Thompson (1990) describes. While this blending of theoretical perspectives may strike some as problematic (or at least incomplete), I do so in the service of my ultimate goal in this paper: understanding what I have called the ‘politics of ideological becoming’.
14. Note the connection between these ideas and Sennett and Cobb’s (1972) discussion, following R.D. Laing, of the ‘divided self’ as a characteristic of members of the oppressed working and lower-classes in the United States: 

. . . the process of political conversion involves the same kind of division of self: a man gets along according to the lights of a world he abhors, and carries within himself a vision of a world he does not yet know which also guides his actions. (p. 207)

15. Thus Hasselbach, living with the power and privilege associated with what I have called appropriated domination, was ultimately motivated for different reasons (compassion, or a sense of justice, perhaps) to engage in genuine, transformative dialogue with others whose discourse fundamentally challenged not only that power and privilege, but also his ideologically-mediated identity.

16. Michael Chandler (2002) reports that 80 percent of the Aboriginal Canadian youth he and his colleagues have interviewed express a narrative/dialogical form of self-understanding.

References


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**Biography**

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