Negotiating Invisibility: A Case Study of African American Men in a Therapeutic Support Group

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NEGOTIATING INVISIBILITY: A CASE STUDY OF AFRICAN AMERICAN MEN IN A THERAPEUTIC SUPPORT GROUP

Dissertation

by

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Abstract

Referencing Ralph Waldo Ellison's 1952 novel *Invisible Man*, psychologist Anderson J. Franklin has proposed that the "invisibility" detailed in Ellison's work—the experience of having one's true sense of self rendered invisible by racial stereotypes—is not only a very real experience encountered by Black men in contemporary society, but one that can serve to confound their relationships and personal sense of agency. To better understand the experience of invisibility, the current study utilizes a multiple-case, case study approach to analyze several videotaped sessions of a therapeutic support group organized specifically to address race-related stressors in the lives of the Black male participants. The transcripts of each session are analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis, an analytical approach that investigates actors' language, its implicit meanings and assumptions, and the manner in which it reflects power differentials operative in society.

The findings of the study reveal the presence of an intra-racial, as well as an internalized form of invisibility not currently found in the literature pertaining to Franklin's theory of invisibility. Further, the current study expands our understanding of how invisibility is experienced by Black men by identifying a variety of strategies used by members of the support group to counter those experiences and become "seen." Finally, the fact that the group was largely comprised of college-educated, professional Black men yields valuable insights regarding the race-related, emotional functioning of

an infrequently studied population. The study's findings are discussed in terms of their implications for group as well as individual mental health service delivery for Black men.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The path that has led me to the completion of this doctoral degree in Counseling Psychology began in 2004, in a dimly lit row of books in the Cornell University library. At the time, I was an unhappy doctoral student who had just completed a year in a program that was not feeding my evolving passions. While I had studied and worked in the field of community development for years, I found myself becoming interested in addressing the pain often found *within* low-income settings. Thus, a warm summer night in Ithaca, New York, found me in the library, going through books on therapy and ways of meeting the mental health needs of marginalized groups. I decided that night to email each of the authors of the various psychology texts I had stacked around me, explain my frustrations, and request their advice on my academic path forward. One author responded to my email, Dr. Thomas Parham; his response was simply, "Brother, call me." Through multiple phone calls (during which a number of readings were assigned) Dr. Parham helped me to discover Counseling Psychology, a field I had never even heard of before. That summer I attended an Association of Black Psychologists convention at Dr. Parham's invitation, and at the conclusion of that convention, I knew I had found my path. I withdrew from Cornell University and began my journey towards becoming a Counseling Psychologist. I am forever in Dr. Parham's debt; when I told him this years later, his response was, "You repay me by doing for others what I have done for you." This is what has guided my work until now and will continue to do so as I move forward.

* * * *

I was about an hour early for the Boston College Lynch School of Education Open House, so I sat on a bench to pass the time. It was two years after I had withdrawn from Cornell; I was now a Master's student in the Psychology Department at Teachers College, Columbia University, and desperately wanted to be accepted to Boston College's Counseling Psychology Ph.D. program. As I sat reading information I had printed about the program, a woman walking by stopped and asked "What are you doing just sitting here, young man?" When I mentioned that I was going to the Open House and was interested in the Counseling Psychology program, she said "Well, we've got some time before the Open House starts, let's go get something to eat." Surprised, I agreed, and we chatted as we walked across campus. I shared that I thought the program was "just really cool" and when she asked, I told her about some of the research I had done at Teachers College and what I would like to study at Boston College. Fearing I was monopolizing the conversation, I asked if she, too, was attending the Open House and if so, what program she was interested in. She responded "Oh no, I'm Dr. Sparks, I'm the Chair of the Counseling Psychology program." Since that chance encounter over ten years ago, Dr. Sparks has served as a mentor and guide, shepherding me through all aspects of the Ph.D. program. She has, without fail, provided the gentle push (or, when needed, the not-so-gentle whack) necessary to keep me moving forward. Thank you, Dr. Sparks, for your Tubman-esque commitment to getting me to the other side.

* * * *

As I stood in the bookstore and looked at the copy of Ralph Waldo Ellison's *Invisible Man,* I felt ashamed that I had not read it before. After numerous years of higher

education, with a degree from a Historically Black College, I was a graduate student at Columbia University, living in Harlem, but somehow, I had never gotten around to reading Ellison's seminal novel. In a class earlier that day, we had discussed the work in relation to Anderson J. Franklin's invisibility theory, but I couldn't bring myself to admit to my classmates that I had never actually read the classic work on which the theory was based. So, I purchased the book, and read it during my frequent subway rides around New York City. Nine days after completing the novel, I learned that Dr. Franklin had accepted a position in the counseling psychology program at Boston College. As I had many years before, I again turned to email and sent Dr. Franklin a message detailing my research interests and asking for advice and direction. The responses I received were not only warm and welcoming, but shared his lived experiences in a way that made the prospect of becoming a counseling psychologist seem even more exciting. I possess great pride in the fact that I would become Dr. Franklin's first Boston College doctoral student. In my time at BC, Dr. Franklin has facilitated my development as a scholar and therapist, while continually emphasizing the importance of community service. Dr. Franklin, I thank you for taking me on as an apprentice; for allowing, helping, and even forcing me to grow in ways that will, ultimately, help me to better serve others. Thank you for helping me to explore the experience of invisibility and, in turn, help those who are marginalized, be seen.

* * * *

In 2004, several of the readings I was assigned by Dr. Parham were works by Dr. Janet E. Helms. "These are important works that are central to the field. Read them

carefully, spend time with them, and then we'll talk again" he said. So, I proceeded to read, and as I did, I began to feel that I had been gifted with a new and exciting insight into the racial dynamics occurring around me. When Dr. Parham and I spoke about my plans to leave Cornell, he suggested applying to Boston College specifically because it would afford an opportunity to work with Dr. Helms. Once at Boston College, I was exceedingly nervous during my first interactions with *the* Dr. Janet E. Helms, whose works helped guide me from that Cornell library to my assigned graduate student cubby directly across from her office. Though it would have been easy enough for her to wield her authority in the field to keep students at a distance, I found Dr. Helms to be an incredibly kind and caring mentor. Over time, I came to understand that when she invited me into her office and asked "How are things going, Hammad?" she wasn't just asking about my academic progress. I'd respond with hurried explanations of my progress on her research projects or class assignments, until she'd say, "Yes, that's nice, but how are things going with *you*?" And in those instances when I did encounter challenges with the work, Dr. Helms helped me to identify the obstacles and navigate a way forward.

* * * *

In addition to this individual support, Dr. Helms also granted me the opportunity to be a member of the research team associated with her Institute for the Study and Promotion of Race and Culture (ISPRC). For me, ISPRC became an even more warm and welcoming space within the already warm, welcoming space of the Department. Not only was I provided an opportunity to work with some of the most talented young scholars and

therapists in the field, but these fellow researchers soon became dear friends. They challenged me, motivated me, and lifted my spirits when I was down, and we celebrated each other's accomplishments with vigor. So, I thank you, Dr. Helms, for investing your time and effort into me, and for creating a space for my growth and development, as you have done for countless students before me.

* * * *

One of my earliest memories in life is that of my mother studying. I remember her picking my brother and I up from daycare after she got off work. She would fix us dinner, get us washed up, put us to bed, and then, after all that, she would sit down at the dining room table to do homework. I remember sometimes waking up in the middle of the night, peeking out of my bedroom door and seeing her still sitting there, working under the glow of the desk lamp she used. This memory is closely linked to another, that of the pride visible on my grandfather's face when he told the story (again) of how he won a scholarship that took him, a poor kid from Harlem, to college in Minnesota. He loved education. You could hear it in his voice when he talked about majoring in Chemistry, minoring in Mathematics, and graduating at the top of his class. But along with this love and pride, you could also hear pain, when he talked about being drafted into a segregated Army during World War II, having his studies interrupted, his scholarship discontinued, and his dreams of becoming a doctor ended as a result.

When it came time for me to leave for college, my grandfather gave me his notes from his undergraduate classes "just in case they will help", and my mother bought me a new suit. My family has placed my feet to every path I have traveled in life, and

supported me as I have attempted to walk it. My brother, a kindhearted and hardworking man; my sister, a strong, loving, creative, funny woman; my niece and nephew, aunts and uncles, countless cousins and adoptive family members; they have all taken turns to pick me up when I have fallen and set me back on my way. I could not possibly have achieved the things I have without their support. So, at the end of the day, I dedicate this work to you, my family. You who are present, and you who are present in spirit, you have made me all that I am.

Chapter 1

Introduction

In his 1952 novel *Invisible Man*, Ralph Waldo Ellison depicted the day-to-day struggles of a man rendered invisible as a result of society's refusal to truly see him. The protagonist, a nameless, African American man, notes with a level of fascination and grim humor, that although he is "a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to possess a mind" (Ellison, 1952, p. 3), others are unable to see him as he truly is and, instead, perceive and engage a phantom of their own subconscious. Instead of interacting with him as an individual with personal aspirations and motivations, he is viewed as a stereotype, as an incarnation of an idea, a proxy for an assumed understanding of all African American men. "When they approach me they see only my surrounding, themselves, or figments of their imagination – indeed, everything and anything except me" (Ellison, 1952, p. 3). Thus, through the stereotyped perspectives held by others, Ellison displays the individual personhood of an African American man rendered invisible.

The Experience and Definition of Invisibility

Psychologist Anderson J. Franklin has proposed that the experience encountered by Ellison's character is, in fact, a reality frequently endured by all African American men. Franklin posits that, as in Ellison's novel, the unique characteristics, personalities, and abilities of African American men are often obscured by socially accepted stereotypes. Franklin has labeled this experience "invisibility," for he proposes that, like Ellison's character, African American men are also frequently rendered invisible as a

result of society's refusal to truly see them (A. Franklin, personal communication, October 17, 2007).

Franklin (1999a) has defined the Black male experience with invisibility as an "inner struggle with the feeling that one's talents, abilities, personality and worth are not valued or even recognized because of prejudice and racism" (p. 761). The experience of invisibility as defined by Franklin manifests in very distinct ways for African American men. For example, an experience of invisibility is frequently reported by African American male college students who feel they are often assumed to either be athletes, or to have gained admission via a preference system instead of as a result of their own personal academic achievement (Simiyu, 2009). Invisibility is similarly experienced by African American male professionals like Al Price, the first African American commercial airline pilot, who recounted experiences of being frequently mistaken for a baggage handler by both passengers and staff of his airline (Lyons, 1989). For such professional, highly educated African American men, invisibility is experienced through encounters with individuals who assume them to be less educated and of a lower social position than the one they occupy (Franklin, 2004).

Invisibility is also experienced when an African American male is automatically assumed to possess criminal intents or inclinations (Franklin, 2004). For example, on the evening of February 26, 2012, in Sanford, Florida, Trayvon Martin, a 17-year-old African American male walking through his father's fiancé's neighborhood was seen by George Zimmerman, a local neighborhood watch coordinator, and was assumed to be engaging in criminal activity. When he contacted Sanford police, Zimmerman stated, "This guy

looks like he is up to no good or he is on drugs or something" (Weinstein & Follman, 2012, What happened to Trayvon? section, para. 2). Zimmerman subsequently pursued the teenager, and following an altercation, shot and killed him. Commenting on the subsequent acquittal of George Zimmerman of murder charges, President Barack Obama provided personal insight into his own experiences with invisibility:

> There are very few African American men in this country who haven't had the experience of being followed when they were shopping in a department store. That includes me. There are very few African American men who haven't had the experience of walking across the street and hearing the locks click on the doors of cars. That happens to me -- at least before I was a senator. There are very few African Americans who haven't had the experience of getting on an elevator and a woman clutching her purse nervously and holding her breath until she had a chance to get off. That happens often. (Obama, 2013)

The President's comments on the killing of this teenage boy illustrated vividly that African American men of varying ages and life positions can encounter the experience of invisibility.

Intent of Study

Fully and accurately assessing the psychosocial impacts of experiences of invisibility is of particular importance for African American men. Franklin and Boyd-Franklin (2000) and Franklin (1999a, 2004) argue that repeated racial slights experienced by African American men not only produce feelings of invisibility, but can, after extended exposure, lead to a distinct grouping of psychosocial behavioral patterns that Franklin has labeled the "invisibility syndrome." The invisibility syndrome is a conceptual model designed to aid understanding of the African American male response to racial slights and the resulting feelings of invisibility. Franklin presents the invisibility

syndrome as "a way to explain the intrapsychic struggle for personal identity by African American men as the individual confronts specific encounters with racism" (Franklin, 1999a, p. 763).

Franklin (2004) asserts that unsuccessful coping associated with continued struggles with invisibility have the potential to produce perilous behavioral patterns among African American men (i.e., alcohol and/or substance use, or promiscuous sexual behavior). These and similar behavioral patterns are adopted as a means of coping as African American men attempt to provide validation of the self and obtain ways of being "seen." Unfortunately, however, Franklin (2004) argues that this developmental path inevitably leads to a rising sense of helplessness in which relationships are negatively impacted and African American men live "perpetually behind a mask of bravado or indifference" (p. 13). As one would expect, this prolonged struggle with invisibility exacts a substantial toll on the mental health and wellbeing of African American men (Franklin, 1999a). Efforts to effectively understand this experience, therefore, are critical to providing competent mental health services to this population, but such studies are still lacking.

There currently exists a paucity of research aimed at better understanding the experiences of invisibility or the manifestation of the invisibility syndrome among African American men. Tovar-Murray and Tovar-Murray (2012) write:

> Given that African American men often experience racial slights that may result in invisibility (Franklin, 1999), one might have expected volumes of research dedicated to understanding this phenomenon (Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000). However, since Franklin (1999) first introduced the concept of invisibility, there

> has been little research conducted on its effect on African American men's personal identity or ways in which racism can be mitigated. (p. 25)

As such, this study intends to add to the literature on invisibility and the invisibility syndrome by using a case study format to explore how African American men interpret, navigate, and cope with the experience of invisibility.

The primary area of focus for this study is to examine how the experience of invisibility manifests in the lives of African American men and their relationships with others. Franklin and Boyd-Franklin (2000) propose that invisibility, first and foremost, has the potential to negatively influence cross-racial relationships, such as those between African American men and Caucasian Americans. Secondarily, Franklin (2004) and Wyatt (1999) posit that the experience of invisibility can impact the ways in which African American men engage and respond to African American women. Finally, Franklin and Boyd-Franklin (2000) and Franklin (2004) suggest that the experience of invisibility can also impact the ways in which African American men interact with each other. Missing from the literature, however, are more nuanced accounts of how invisibility impacts intragroup interactions such as among African American men and women, familial, romantic, and platonic relationships, and friendships in general. Similarly, there is a need to study the impact of invisibility on African Americans' diverse interracial relationships with White Americans and other ethnic groups.

The second area of focus for this study is to better understand the strategies African American men utilize to counter the experience of invisibility, or essentially, how African American men work to become more visible. Franklin (1999b) argues that:

> In using the invisibility syndrome model, we should focus as much on the defining dynamic processes involved in the person's determining how he or she chooses to be visible as [well as] on how elements of invisibility might also influence his or her achievement of it. (Franklin, 1999b, p. 822)

Thus, Franklin (1999b) proposes that a full appreciation of the experience of invisibility can only be obtained by also understanding the efforts made in resistance to it. For through such efforts, African American men affect not only how others view them, but also how they come to understand themselves.

Unfortunately, the strategies and processes African American men utilize to counter invisibility have also not been thoroughly explored. For example, further research is needed that simply identifies what these strategies are. Another poorly explored area is the nature of accepted social norms or social codes associated with efforts directed at becoming more visible and how they are learned. Given the need to expand our understanding of the African American male experience of invisibility, this study proposes to explore the dual process by which African American men not only learn to cope with experiences of invisibility, but also how they make efforts to become more visible. To accomplish this, I propose to conduct a case study of a therapeutic support group for African American men.

Support Groups in the Study of Invisibility

The purpose of this study is to investigate the experience of invisibility among a sample of African American men across multiple therapeutic support group sessions. Through an exploration of the subjective experience of invisibility within this context, further insight can be obtained into both the individualized experience of invisibility, how

it impacts mental health functioning, as well as the potential effectiveness of therapeutic support groups as an intervention.

Therapeutic support groups differ from other forms of group therapy in that they are not usually predicated upon a declared or diagnosed mental health issue, as is frequently the case with other forms of group therapy. This difference is significant, for the support group format offers an opportunity to study common socioemotional challenges, but without imposing a perspective of pathology. The therapeutic support group format instead utilizes a healthy, strength-based model. Franklin and Davis (2001) further argue that "therapeutic support groups can assist Black men to better understand and self-manage external social factors, such as racism, as well as internal psychological factors such as disillusionment and self doubt" (p. 48). Support groups have also been found useful at assisting African American men in the construction of positive self-views that provide a counter narrative to the image of their masculinity found in the larger society.

It is, therefore, the intent of this study to explore how African American men talk about the experience of invisibility in conversations with other African American men, and what interpersonal and group dynamics emerge when they do. This approach, it is argued, will provide a better understanding of the invisibility experienced by African American men and identify productive pathways through which they can be assisted.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

Because so few empirical studies have examined the experience of invisibility or the invisibility syndrome, one must start somewhat indirectly, by seeking to understand the race-based social forces that contribute to the experience—forces such as racism, stereotyping, stereotype threat, and microaggressions (Franklin, 1999a). To this end, this chapter identifies and reviews the literature on invisibility that does exist, as well as the literature examining the historical and contemporary experiences that have served to render African American men invisible. From there, how these experiences combine to produce the adverse presentation of psychosocial symptoms termed the invisibility syndrome will be discussed. Finally, this review will examine therapeutic support groups as an intervention approach useful in countering experiences of invisibility among African American men.

Theory of Invisibility

In 1993 psychologist Anderson J. Franklin theorized that African American men experience a form of social invisibility that impacts their sense of identity. He posited that due to racist beliefs present in society at large, African American men will often encounter situations in which their individuality is overridden and obscured by stereotypes. "We are not literally invisible—that might sometimes be preferable. But on the streets, in stores, on elevators and in restaurants [African American men] are seen as potential criminals or as servants, not as ourselves" (Franklin, 1993, p. 34). Repeated

encounters in which they are perceived and engaged with in a manner that conflicts with the perceptions they have of themselves inevitably lead African American men to wrestle with feelings of devalued worth and a sense that they are not truly seen by their society (Franklin, 1999a; Franklin & Boyd-Franklin 2000; Parham, 1999; Tovar-Murray & Tovar-Murray, 2012). Franklin writes that the theory of invisibility is:

> …presented as a way to explain the intrapsychic struggle for personal identity by African American men as the individual confronts specific encounters with racism, particularly in cross-racial circumstances, and how these experiences obscure genuine identity and promote inherent stress related to their management. (Franklin, 1999a, p. 773)

Franklin (1999a) presents the theory as having seven dynamic elements that are representative of the process by which an African American male comes to feel invisible. Following a racial slight or subsequent to the cumulative effects of several race-based slights, the following response is set in motion:

> (a) One feels a lack of recognition or appropriate acknowledgement; (b) one feels there is no satisfaction or gratification from the encounter (it is painful and injurious); (c) one feels self-doubt about legitimacy – such as "Am I in the right place, should I be here?"; (d) there is no validation from the experience – "Am I a person of worth?" – or the person seeks some form of corroboration of experiences from another person; (e) one feels disrespected (this is lead to by the previous elements and is linked to the following); One's sense of dignity is compromised and challenged; (g) one's basic identity is shaken, if not uprooted. (Franklin, 1999a, p. 764)

Thus, the experience of invisibility is seen to be one in which external biases impact how others perceive African American men, and also, how African American men come to perceive themselves.

Tension and confusion over one's identity is seen as a central component of the experience of invisibility for African American men. This tension is a result of the

African American male struggle to achieve a viable sense of self—an acceptable identity within the context of how they are viewed socially (Franklin, 1999a). This acceptable identity is one that is multifaceted; it is one that includes how African American men see themselves, how they desire others to see them, and how they believe others actually do see them. Franklin argues that harmony among these facets must be achieved in order to produce a comfortable sense of one's social self. But due to socially accepted race-based biases, African American men frequently encounter difficulty in achieving this state of identity acceptance (Franklin, 1999a). "The negative stereotypes imposed on African American males contradict their beliefs about who they are, thus creating a state of confusion and bewilderment" (Yeh, 1999, p. 811). Franklin and Boyd-Franklin (2000) write that for such individuals:

> It becomes increasingly likely … in this "racialized context" to believe that their true personality and unique abilities are hidden by a cloak of psychological invisibility woven by attitudes of prejudice and discrimination on the part of others. (p. 34)

In essence, it is argued that due to race-based prejudices, the African American male self is rendered invisible.

The idea that the African American self is impacted by invisibility is expanded upon by the writings of Yeh (1999), who proposes that the invisibility experienced by African American men produces a "situational self":

> Culturally ingrained reminders and reinforcers of racism undermine and shape African American selves. Thus, African American selves adjust accordingly, and in response to, racialized interactions. Selves that emerge are essentially situational; they are influenced by competing social roles, expectations and stereotypes across relational, occupational, cultural and familial settings. (Yeh, 1999, p. 811)

Yeh argues that the practice of adapting one's self to larger social forces is found in other cultural group (such as various Asian cultures that foster the adaptation of the self to socially accepted role expectations); however, for African Americans, she argues that "it appears that African Americans selves shift and change to not only fulfill various role expectations, but to avoid them" (Yeh, 1999, p. 812). Differing from sociocultural selves found in other populations, the African American self is seen to be "the cumulative adaptation of individual, institutional and cultural racism" (Yeh, 1999, p. 812). Franklin (1999a) proposes that this adaptation to race-based role expectations is also reflective of the experience of invisibility.

The adaptations and forms of resistance that African Americans develop in response to their experiences of invisibility comprise a key component of Franklin's theory. In an article entitled "Visibility is important too," Franklin writes,

> Visibility is the counterforce to experiences of invisibility and is equally important to the model. The evolution of an identity has many sources that are proactive processes and not always reactive. There is no question that the context of racism is major in the lives of African Americans; but, in spite of, or because of, racism, there are other ethnic and cultural sources that constructively nurture identity and are not specifically racialized. (Franklin, 1999b, p. 821)

Franklin argues that in order to fully appreciate and understand the experience of invisibility, one must understand the efforts initiated by African American men to counter the social marginalization invisibility produces. Franklin (1999b) simultaneously notes, however, that one of the difficulties of studying the development of the African American self and the forces influencing it is that it can be difficult to discern what is and is not a product of American racism. To accomplish this task, one is required to explore more

fully how race-based biases present within the United States.

Stereotypes

Literally speaking, a "stereotype" is a metal plate used in printing that makes duplicates of a single page of written text (Jones, 1997). In applying this concept to the study of interpersonal interactions, Jones writes that through a stereotyping process, members of a group are viewed as duplicates of every other member. Thus, through stereotyping, a single member of a specific group, such as a Black male, would not be viewed as an individual, but instead, the understanding of him would be filtered through a mental picture, a stereotyped understanding of all Black men. Ronald E. Hall (2001) writes that stereotypes only highlight certain aspects of African American men while completely ignoring other aspects of this group for the sake of presenting a specific incomplete picture. For men of African descent, this incomplete picture has largely been negative (Hall, 2001). Through this process, the individuality of Black men is obscured, in essence, rendered invisible by the overlay of an external, mass-produced, and widely accepted stereotyped image. The scope of the experiences associated with invisibility is broad in the American social context, which is shaped by historical discourses of race and their contemporary legacies.

History of Black Male Stereotypes

The stereotypes associated with Black masculinity are complex and rooted in the history of American racism. It reveals the etiology of making the Black male person invisible. Some of the main historical stereotypes often associated with Black men are "the Brute," "the Tom," "the Coon," and more recently, "the Magic Negro." "The brute

defined Africans as primitive, temperamental, violent and sexually powerful…the brute stereotype in particular was effective in conveying Africans' mental dullness and lack of self-control" (Hall, 2001 p. 106). Of the brute stereotype, sociologist David Pilgrim writes:

> The brute caricature portrays black men as innately savage, animalistic, destructive, and criminal -- deserving punishment, maybe death. This brute is a fiend, a sociopath, an anti-social menace. Black brutes are depicted as hideous, terrifying predators who target helpless victims, especially white women. (2000)

When one examines American media of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, examples of the Black male brute stereotype are found in abundance. For example, in 1901, a year in which over a hundred black men died by lynching (Tuskegee University Archives, 2010), author George T. Winston (1901) wrote:

> When a knock is heard at the door [a White woman] shudders with nameless horror. The black brute is lurking in the dark, a monstrous beast crazed with lust. His ferocity is almost demoniacal. A mad bull or tiger could scarcely be more brutal. (pp. 108–109)

This notion of Black males as animalistic, angry, violent beings was further illustrated by the 1915 movie *Birth of a Nation*, which served to incorporate the Black brute stereotype into the American psyche. *Birth of a Nation,* one of the highest grossing films of all time, is distinct in American cinematic history in that it was the first movie to deal with a Black theme (Bogle, 2001). The movie focused upon commonly held beliefs regarding the violent and depraved nature of Blacks, primarily Black men, which, in this instance, had to be defended against by the noble and brave knights of the Ku Klux Klan (Bogle, 2001). The movie was not only a resounding success during its time, but served to

provide a thematic orientation towards Black men that was adopted by movie makers for generations to come (Bogle, 2001).

In his examination of the Black brute stereotype, author Donald Bogle notes the existence of two subgroups, "Brutes" and "Bucks" (Bogle, 2001). While Bogle (2001) argues that the differences between the two are minimal, he writes that the Black Brute as depicted by this stereotype, is driven solely by an innate barbarism. This stereotype portrays Black men as out to raise havoc, subhuman, animalistic, and full of unreasonable rage (Bogle, 2001). Bucks, on the other hand, are described by Bogle (2001) as depicted as "always big, baadddd niggers, oversexed and savage, violent and frenzied as they lust for white flesh" (p. 14).

Another early American stereotype of Black men discussed in the literature is that of the "Tom." The Tom, sometimes referred to as the Uncle Tom, is essentially the anti-Brute. Instead of representing all that is feared about Black men by White America, the Tom stereotype provides its users with a sense of comfort and reassurance through its depiction of a non-threatening , socially acceptable representation of Black masculinity (Bogle, 2001). Portrayed as both faithful and happily submissive, the Tom served as an affirmative defense of antebellum slavery (Pilgrim, 2000). Thus, like the Brute, the Tom stereotype also served the purpose of presenting Black masculinity in a very specific way. The larger point is that both stereotypes were more reflective of majority race needs (such as justifying inequality) than the actual lived experiences of Black men.

Tracing a similar history of imagery in commodity marketing, Pilgrim (2000) describes how Converted Rice became Uncle Ben's Brand Rice in the 1940s, and "began

using the image of a smiling, elderly black man on its package." Since then, the makers of Uncle Ben's Rice have made efforts to change the brand image of Uncle Ben, promoting him from servant to the fictitious role of chairman of the company (Elliott, 2007), but the bow-tied image is still seen by many as communicating the role of servant or porter and not that of company chairman (Scott, 2007). Similarly, beginning in 1893 the breakfast cereal Cream of Wheat employed the use of the Uncle Tom stereotype in the form of "Rastus" to market their goods. Initially portrayed as a smiling Black cook with a skillet and a bowl of Cream of Wheat in either hand, in the 1920s he was given the visage of the smiling cook still used to this day (Pilgrim, 2012).

Although portrayed and widely accepted as a "socially acceptable negro character" (Bogle, 2001) the Tom stereotype, like its antithesis the Brute, presented a denigrated image of Black masculinity. Thus, one finds the well-dressed Rastus depicted in past advertisements as slow-witted and barely literate, holding a sign that read: "Maybe Cream of Wheat aint got no vitamines. I dont know what them things is. If they's bugs they aint none in Cream of Wheat but she's sho' good to eat and cheap. Costs 'bout 1¢ fo a great big dish" (cited in Pilgrim, 2012). This theme of a pronounced level of ignorance is also found in another stereotypic presentation of Black masculinity, "the Coon." The Coon stereotype presented Black men as ignorant buffoons who were valuable solely for their ability to entertain (Bogle, 2001; Pilgrim, 2012). With its origin in Southern minstrel shows, this stereotype reaffirmed the commonly held belief that Blacks in general, and Black men in particular, were intellectually inferior to Whites (Pilgrim, 2012).

Each of the above stereotypes illustrates the perspectives White Americans have historically projected upon Black males across generations. Another more recent stereotype the "Magic Negro," however, provides a transition into understanding the ways historical perspectives of Black men transcends time to influence the invisibility Black men experience today.

Contemporary Black Male Stereotypes

In comparison to those early historical stereotype images, the "Magic Negro" stereotype is a relatively new phenomenon in the American cultural milieu. The Magic Negro is a supporting character found in cinema and literature who possesses a supernatural ability, which is used solely for the benefit of a White protagonist (Farley, 2000). For example, in contemporary films such as *The Green Mile* and *The Legend of Bagger Vance*, Black men are depicted as selfless, magical creatures who, while having no real character development themselves, sacrifice themselves to assist in the moral development of a White lead character (Glenn & Cunningham, 2009). These portrayals of Black men are depicted as completely lacking in purpose outside of their assistance to White men, communicating a stereotyped dependence of Black men upon a White other (Glenn & Cunningham, 2007). While the Magic Negro is often viewed by contemporary audiences as a positive, feel-good character, it is nevertheless, latently racist (Hughey, 2009).

Film maker Spike Lee has argued that the new, Magic Negro character "is just a reincarnation of 'the same old' stereotype or caricature of African Americans as the 'noble savage' or the 'happy slave' that has been presented in film and on television for

decades" (Gonzalez, 2001, para. 2). In the Magic Negro stereotype one can easily identify personality traits of the earlier Tom stereotype. Just as the Tom's sole purpose was to benefit a White benefactor, the Magic Negro is assigned the same task but provided magical powers to accomplish his goal.

The Tom is not the only historical stereotype that continues to resonate with contemporary depictions of Black men; in fact, when one examines the stereotypical perceptions still held about Black men today, one can readily see reflections of many historical understandings of Black masculinity. One stereotype in particular that has endured and continues to have profound impact upon the lives of Black men is the Brute. Like his antebellum ancestors, the modern Black man is also perceived as both violent and dangerous.

Studies Associated with Stereotyping of Black Men

In contemporary society as in earlier times, Black men are frequently portrayed in the media as violent, anti-social beings. For example, in a study of local television news reports, Dixon and Linz (2000) found that Black individuals were depicted as perpetrators of criminal acts at a rate twice that of Whites. Further, Entman (1992) identified that Blacks are more likely than Whites to have their mug shots appear on local news programming as well as more likely to appear in handcuffs. A variety of recent studies have, in fact, demonstrated, that this particular narrative of Black men as criminal has become so ingrained in the White American psyche, that it often operates at the level of the subconscious.

Human attention has evolved such that stimuli associated with survival responses have unconscious and conscious cognitive process supporting it (Ohman, Flykt, & Esteves, 2001). Thus, images of threatening animals such as snakes have been shown to capture attention more effectively than images of more benign animals (Ohman, Flykt & Esteves, 2001). In a study of race-based patterns of selective attention, Trawalter, Todd, Baird, and Richeson (2008) demonstrated that a similar bias in selective attention has led to an association of Black men with danger among White people. Similarly, Hugenberg and Bodenhausen (2003) examined implicit prejudice and the ability to interpret facial affect and found that White participants viewing faces designed to be identical, "saw hostility as lingering longer and appearing more quickly on the faces of African Americans" (p. 643).

Further, Maner et al. (2005) found that differences in interpretation of facial affect were not attributable solely to the fact that White study participants were asked to assess facial features phenotypically different from their own. When stimulated to feel threatened, scared, or in a fearful emotional state, White participants projected greater levels of anger on the facial images of Black men but not on that of Black women, thus demonstrating a tendency to discriminate in a stereotypical fashion between perceived threatening out-group members, (i.e., Black men) and non-threatening out group members (i.e., Black women who are often viewed as threatening in ways different from Black men). Such studies demonstrating that White individuals have a subconscious tendency to associate Black men with notions of danger, violence, and hostility clearly have negative potential implications for Black men themselves.

The consequences of subconscious race-based predilections are considerable when one incorporates the fact that such biases can also play a role in attitudes and violence directed *at* Black men from White individuals. In a study in which participants played a video game that required timed shoot/don't-shoot decisions in response to armed and unarmed targets—half of whom were Black and half of whom were White, researchers found that study participants shot armed Blacks much more rapidly than they shot similarly armed White targets and simultaneously decided not to shoot unarmed Whites much more quickly than deciding not to shoot unarmed Blacks (Correll, Urland, & Ito, 2006). The findings led the researchers to conclude that racial stereotypes promoted biased shooting behavior because "Black targets seem more threatening than White targets, and White targets conflict more strongly with the tendency to shoot than do Black targets" (Correll et al., 2006, p. 127).

Similarly, Payne (2001) conducted a study examining the ability of participants to correctly distinguish a gun from a common hand tool after being primed by brief images of faces differing only along lines of race. Findings indicated that:

> Non-Black participants were faster to identify guns when they were primed by Black versus White faces. The fact that this effect took place at a relatively short SOA [stimulus onset asynchrony, the amount of time that elapses between the onset of a prime and the beginning of the target stimulus] 200ms, suggests that the impact of the racial prime had properties of automaticity. In particular, the effect occurred very rapidly and affected performance at a task that was ostensibly unrelated to race. (Payne, 2001, p.187)

Further, the presence of Black faces in this study led participants to incorrectly identify tools as handguns when compared to the presence of White faces (Payne, 2001). Similar studies have found parallel race-based biases existing among White police officers in

their shoot/don't shoot decision-making process when Black targets are involved (Correll et al., 2007; Plant & Peruche, 2005). Thus, stereotypes held about Black men obscure them behind a social perception of dangerousness that operates on a subconscious level and renders them not only invisible, but also as potential targets for violence.

In 1997, psychologist James Jones defined a stereotype as a "set of beliefs held about the characteristics of a group of people" (p. 170). However, when a stereotype casts Black men as inherently violent it serves to impact such things as the shoot/don't shoot decisions of police and, in the process, is transformed from beliefs into direct action leading to systemic overt racism.

Racism

Jones (1997) describes racism as being similar to race-based prejudices. For Jones, racism and prejudice are "ways in which people devalue, disadvantage, demean, and in general unfairly regard others" (1997, p. 7). He goes on to specify that racism, however, also includes three important criteria.

> First, the basis of group characteristics is assumed to rest on biology – race is a biological concept. Second, racism has, as a necessary premise, the superiority of one's own race. Third, racism rationalizes institutional and cultural practices that formalize the hierarchical domination of one racial group over another. Therefore, although racism shares certain aspects of prejudice, it takes on a decidedly broader and more complex meaning. (Jones, 1997, p. 11)

Racism manifests in three distinctly different forms as individual, institutional, and cultural racism.

Individual racism is directly associated with the belief that one's race is superior to that of another's but is paired with "behavioral enactments that maintain those superior

and inferior positions" (Jones, 1997, p. 13). Thus through individual racism, prejudices are transformed by the empowered group into individual means of maintaining their social position and control. Examples of this are found in decisions property owners make with regard to who they will rent to, or the variety of actions individual people take after assessing who is or is not suspicious or potentially criminal.

The second way racism is seen to present is in the form of institutional racism. Jones (1997) argues that institutional forms of racism "are but extensions of individual racist thought in order to achieve racist objectives through manipulation of institutions" (p. 14). Thus, political policies such as poll taxes and grandfather clauses, the disproportionate administration of judicial treatment along lines of race, or legislative decisions restricting voting rights are all manifestations of institutional racism (Jones, 1997). Institutional racism can also manifest in more subtle forms, such as the construction of racialized norms by the majority group that are then used to assess an entire population. An example of this would be high-stakes achievement tests that are standardized in a manner that benefits one group over another (Jones, 1997). Jones (1997) argues that institutional racism is two-fold. First, it is the institutional manifestation of individually held racist beliefs that manipulate policies and practices that advantage one group over another. But it is also "the byproduct of certain institutional practices that operate to restrict – on a racial basis – the choices, rights, mobility, and access of groups of individuals" (Jones, 1997, p. 14).

Finally, cultural racism is defined as "the individual and institutional expression of the superiority of one race's cultural heritage over that of another" (Jones, 1997, p.

14). It is argued that through the preference of one racial group's culture over another, the empowered group is provided the opportunity to establish social norms while other ways of being are effectively marginalized (Jones, 1997). Through cultural racism, both marginalized and empowered groups are led to believe that only one of the two groups has contributed anything of note to the society at large, which, again, serves the purpose of supporting and maintaining inequitable social power differentials.

If racism can be viewed as the application of prejudiced and stereotypical beliefs as Jones (1997) suggests, then racism and its operation via stereotypes plays a direct role in the invisibility experienced by Black men. Racist acts, be they at the individual, institutional, or cultural level, serve to operationalize prejudices held about Black men in ways that oppressively obscure their individuality and render them invisible.

Microaggressions and Invisibility

Racial microaggressions are subtler than overt racist acts. They are "brief, everyday exchanges that send denigrating messages to people of color because they belong to a racial minority group" (Sue et al., 2007, p. 273). Microaggressions can serve to produce feelings of stress, confusion, and anger (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008) and communicate messages of marginalization (Pierce, 1988) and invisibility (Franklin, 1999a). Although largely subtle and relatively "minor" race-based slights, microaggressions can have a cumulative negative impact upon the psyche of minorities (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008). In fact, it has been argued that microaggressions can have a more pronounced impact upon the wellbeing of its victims than overt racist acts, as the subtle, confusing nature of microaggressions can defuse victims' ability to confront

the issue directly, and/or when they do confront it, they can be easily dismissed as oversensitive (Solórzano, Ceja, & Yosso, 2000).

In a study of microaggressions experienced by African Americans, Sue, Capodilupo, and Holder (2008) identified six specific types of microaggressions encountered by this group: an assumption of intellectual inferiority, an assumption of criminality, an assumption of inferior status, second-class citizenship, assumed universality of the Black experience, and assumed superiority of White cultural values/ communication styles. These microaggressions are communicated verbally thorough slights or hurtful comments, as well as behaviorally, such as a clutched purse when an African American enters an elevator with a White individual, or environmentally, when the setting itself communicates a racially-laden message (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder (2008). Other studies have identified the variety of settings in which African Americans encounter microaggressions, such as academic settings (Harwood, Huntt, Mendanhall, & Lewis, 2012), the work place (Sue, Capodilupo, & Holder, 2008), and in their day to day interactions (Allen, 2012). In each of these manifestations, microaggressions serve to project an opinion or bias onto interpersonal interactions with African Americans obscuring their individual personhood. So, when do these encounters begin and how do African Americans learn how to deal with them? As the following sections will show, an education in racism and invisibility begins early and is something that African American men negotiate all their lives in a range of contexts.

Racism, Invisibility, and the Black Male Child

Invisibility has been defined as an "inner struggle with the feeling that one's talents, abilities, personality and worth are not valued or even recognized because of prejudice and racism" (Franklin, 1999a, p. 761). Franklin asserts that the origins of this experience can be found in the earliest messages communicated to Black males (Franklin, 2004). Studies, for example, have shown that Black parents informally educate their children early about the world they will encounter, and attempt to develop strategies to help their children navigate racism and invisibility. In a study of middle-class African American fathers and their sons, Allen (2012) found fathers utilized two main forms of resistance to help their sons avoid microaggressions, or to successfully manage them when encountered: social capital and navigational capital.

Allen (2012) identified social capital as the ways in which the fathers utilized their own personal networks and community resources to facilitate their sons success in communities other than their own. Further, Allen identified middle-class African American fathers making use of navigational capital, which is defined as "the ability to maneuver through social institutions that were not initially intended for the inclusion of people of color" (p. 183). Allen found that the fathers included in the study frequently called upon their experienced-based understanding of the settings and circumstances in which their sons found themselves, to both respond and resist race and gender-based microaggressions.

> And so I've had to go to every school and kind of explain to each teacher, each principal or each counselor, "okay, the one thing I do know is my son. He's not going to start any trouble." . . . He's always been a huge kid, and so they automatically assume he's going to be a troublemaker. And come to find out, he's going to be your best student . . . being African American and always the biggest

kid in class, I think he automatically had that against him (Allen, 2012, p. 183). As this quote suggests, in order to fully comprehend racism-induced invisibility for Black males, one must consider the role of their early extra-familial experience as children in primary school.

In a qualitative study of the role urban public schooling plays in the development and social perception of Black masculinity, Ferguson (2001) argues that Black boys are, first and foremost, perceived distinctly different from boys of other racial and ethnic backgrounds. It is argued that Black boys are not viewed as childlike, but are instead viewed and treated as adults, and further are "denied the masculine dispensation constituting white males as being 'naturally naughty' and are discerned as willfully bad" (Ferguson, 2001, p. 80). An illustration of this perspective can be found when one examines disproportionality, a phenomenon found in American school systems whereby Black male primary school students are subjected to discipline at rates much higher than their White counterparts.

One of the primary tools of discipline used in American primary schooling is suspending a student from school for an identified period of time (Dupper & Bosch, 1996). This practice has been used with increasing frequency in American public school systems but, "because it involves the exclusion of students from the learning process, suspension frequently is perceived as one of the more extreme responses available to administrators within the continuum of various disciplinary options" (Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003, p. 30). Further, according to Raffaele et al., suspensions are usually only punitive in design; they provide no intervention to increase what is deemed to be more

pro-social behavior and they have also been associated with poor academic performance and failure, negative attitudes towards school, poor grade retention and increased school dropout rates (Brooks, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 2000; Nicolas, Ludwin, & Iadicola, 1999). Given the significant potential impact of this form of discipline, it is disconcerting that it is administered differently along lines of race.

In 1997 African American students represented only 17% of the population of public school students, yet they represented 32% of all public school suspensions during that time period (Brooks, Schiraldi, & Ziedenberg, 2000). More recently, the National Center for Education Statistics published reports identifying African American students as being twice as likely to experience a suspension from school than their White peers (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2003). Similarly, in 2004 the state of Indiana conducted a study of out-of-school suspension and identified African American students as possessing suspension rates at a level four times higher than Whites in the state, with the highest suspension rates being held by African American students attending suburban schools (Bryan, Day-Vines, Griffin, & Moore-Thomas, 2012). This disproportionality is found to possess distinct differences along lines of gender.

> Even after sociodemographic factors were controlled, such as mother's education, intact household, and urbanicity, African American males were still 20% more likely to be referred [to the office] and 270% more likely to be suspended for misbehavior than were their White counterparts. (Bryan, Day-Vines, Griffin, & Moore-Thomas, 2012 p. 178)

Similarly, in a national survey conducted in 1993, the Office for Civil Rights reported that while Black males composed only 8.23% of the total primary school population across the country, they were suspended at three times their representation in the

population (Townsend, 2000). Davis and Jordan (1994) presented evidence that Black males received exclusionary disciplinary measures such as suspension more than any other group. Further, in a study of a New Orleans school district, Garibaldi (1992) reported that while Black males represented only 43% of the population, they received 65% of the suspensions within the district and 80% of the expulsions.

This disproportionate suspension of Black males is a phenomenon that begins at the earliest levels of schooling. A study conducted by the Yale University Child Study Center (Gilliam, 2005) found that when compared with White male children, Black male children experience disproportionate exclusionary discipline beginning as early as the 5–6 year-old age group (Bryan, Day-Vines, Griffin, & Moore-Thomas, 2012). Similarly, in their study of a central Florida school district Raffaele, et al., (2003) found that the disproportionate suspension of Black male students was not age or grade-level specific; they found that at the middle school level, one half of all Black males in the district had experienced at least one suspension—a rate double that of Whites. Finally, Taylor and Foster (1986) report that the order for students likely to be suspended is: Black males, White males, Black females, White females. A number of researchers have attributed this disproportionality to prejudice and a stereotypic understanding of Black masculinity, an understanding that can be viewed as imbuing the Black male experience with invisibility.

In a study of a large urban school district in the Midwest, Skiba, Michael, Nardo, and Peterson (2002) found that not only are Black students disciplined (in this instance suspended) at different rates than White students, but the underlying reasons for the suspensions also differ. Skiba, et al., and Townsend argue that the subjectivity present in

Black student disciplining may lend itself to biased or stereotyped interpretations of Black student behavior from predominantly White teachers unfamiliar with Black adolescent communication patterns. Thus, it can be argued that an aspect of the disproportionality in disciplining that Black male students experience can be attributed to prejudiced perspectives and racially biased actions, which, in turn, produce an experience of invisibility; an experience where the individuality of Black male students is overriden by a stereotype. Biased understandings of young Black masculinity are not limited to discipline within primary education settings, but can also be found with academic tracking and placements.

Invisibility from Disproportionality in School Placements

Disproportionality within primary and secondary school settings can also be found when one examines the area of special education. In 2002 Black students represented 33% of all students identified nationally as "mentally retarded," a percentage far exceeding their 17% share of the school-age population at that time (Donovan & Cross, 2002). Black students are also two times more likely to be identified as mentally retarded than their White peers (Gregory, Skiba, & Noguera, 2010). Thus, when one examines tracking into special education courses, one again finds Black males disproportionately represented within such tracks—a phenomenon that has existed since the passage of the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) in 1975, and the inception of publically funded special education (Harry & Anderson, 1994; Noguera, 2003). Conversely, Black males are incorporated into honors or advanced placement

courses at rates significantly lower than their White peers (Noguera, 2003; Oakes, 1985; Pollard, 1993).

Harry and Anderson (1994) observed that the special education referral process is distinctly subjective and thus the teacher's perception of a Black male student is the initial step towards the child being tracked in this direction. Perceptions of young Black males' potential for academic achievement, as with perceptions of their potential for other types of behavior, are open to influence by bias, stereotypes, and racism. In a study of teacher perceptions of Black elementary school students, Ross and Jackson (1991) provided teachers with fictitious Black fourth-grade students; they were asked to predict each student's academic performance for the current year and in the future as well as rate their preferences for having the student in their class.

> Results indicated that even when students had equivalent qualities, teachers consistently held more negative expectations for Black males and gave them lower ratings. Teachers had the lowest expectations for nonsubmissive, independent Black males and preferred them least. Fear of Black males who are nonsubmissive and independent may be the cause of this bias. (Ross & Jackson, 1991, p. 78)

Such race-based differences in the school experiences of young Black men effectively serve as an introduction to what will likely be a lifelong struggle with stereotyping-related invisibility that will only intensify as they reach adulthood.

Racism, Invisibility, and the Black Male Adult

The negative stereotype-based experiences many Black males encounter as youth are experienced in similar fashion later in adulthood, though arguably the consequences of such stereotyping become even more dire. In their qualitative study of Black men and

urban policing in the United States, for example, Brunson and Miller (2006) identify a perspective held by Black male study participants that they have become the "symbolic assailant" in the eyes of local police. Indeed, studies have indicated that Black Americans experience police surveillance at higher rates than White citizens (Browning, Cullin, Cao, Kopache, & Stevenson 1994; Fagan & Davies, 2000; Gelman, Fagan, & Kiss, 2007; Hurst, Frank, & Browning, 2000; Jones-Brown, 2000); frequently experience disrespectful treatment including verbal abuse (Kennedy, 1997; Mastrofski, Reisig, & McCluskey, 2002; Weitzer, 1999) and experience disproportionate levels of the use of force and excessive force at the hands of the police (Jacobs & O'Brien, 1998; Smith & Holmes, 2003; Terrill, Paoline, & Manning, 2003; Terrill & Reisig, 2003; Weitzer, 1999). Brunson and Miller (2006) further state that within the Black community it is Black men in particular who encounter the largest share of these experiences. A vivid illustration of the encounters Black males have with local law enforcement can be obtained by examining the New York City Police Department's Stop-and-Frisk policy.

Stop-and-Frisk is an aggressive policing strategy used by the City of New York (and subsequently many other cities), in which New York City police officers temporarily detain and search pedestrians they deem to be suspicious. In 2011 alone, the NYPD conducted 685,724 such stops and searches of New Yorkers, representing 84,439 more than were conducted in 2010, an increase of 14 percent (New York Civil Liberties Union [NYCLU], 2011). Of the pedestrians stopped and searched in 2011, 87 percent were Black and Latino and, more specifically, 47 percent (322,290 individuals) were Black males (NYCLU, 2011; New York Police Department [NYPD], 2011). In fact, for

Black men in the 14–24 age group, the number who were stopped in 2011 (168,126 to be precise) actually exceeded the entire population of Black men in that age group in the City of New York (158,406) at the time, indicating that young Black men were experiencing multiple stops and searches (NYCLU, 2011). Further, NYPD data indicates that young Black men who were stopped were more likely to have forced used against them than White citizens who were stopped during the same time period (NYCLU, 2011). And perhaps most importantly, just under 90 percent of the stops of Black men during this period were of *innocent* individuals:

> Of the 685,724 stops in 2011, 605,328 were of people who had engaged in no unlawful behavior as evidenced by the fact that they were not issued a summons nor arrested. Of those, 310,390 were black (53.1 percent), 197,251 Latino (33.7 percent), and 53,726 white (9.2 percent). Young black and Latino males bore the brunt of these stops, accounting for 242,317 stops of innocent people (42.9 percent). (NYCLU, 2011, p. 15)

Relatedly, Gelman, Fagan, and Kiss (2007) note that when Black male pedestrians were stopped by the NYPD they were less likely to be arrested than White citizens. While seemingly counterintuitive, this outcome is the result of the sheer number of innocent Black males being stopped; conversely, when Whites are stopped, it is more likely associated with an actual legal transgression. These results are indicative of a much lower standard associated with stopping and searching Black men and highlights the predominant role played by stereotyping. As Gelman et al. put it, "the attribution of suspicion is more readily attached to specific behaviors and contexts for minorities than it might be for Whites" (Gelman, et al., 2007, p. 822).

Disproportionate encounters with law enforcement can be found in other areas of the country as well. In a report examining state trooper patrolling practices on the New Jersey Turnpike, the New Jersey Attorney General's Office concluded that "the problem of racial profiling is real and …minority motorists have been treated differently than non-minority motorists during the course of traffic stops on the New Jersey Turnpike " (New Jersey Attorney General's Office, 1999, p. 4). The report further concluded that it is likely that the underlying cause of the disproportionate stops of Black motorists on the New Jersey Turnpike was "possible de facto discrimination by officers who may be influenced by stereotypes and may thus tend to treat minority motorists differently during the course of routine traffic stops" (New Jersey Attorney General's Office, 1999, p. 11). Further, it is clear that Black men were largely the targets of this discriminatory treatment; in their efforts to refute gang activity as an explanation for the disproportionate number of stops within the Black community, the New Jersey Attorney General's Office stated:

> Regrettably, and as a reflection of the inherently tautological nature of stereotypes, some members of our society might not be aware that the percentage of young African-American or Hispanic males who are members of organized street gangs is so small that no officer could harbor an objectively reasonable suspicion that a motorist is a member of a gang on the basis of the motorist's race or ethnicity. (New Jersey Attorney General's Office, 1999, p. 79)

This level of disproportionate policing can be found in various studies throughout the United States. Bostaph (2008), for example, found that in 2001 in the city of Cincinnati, Ohio, the only significant evidence of multiple police stops was within the Black community, where "less than one percent of citizens account for 12 percent of the

motor vehicle stops" (p. 58). Similarly, in Riverside, California, Blacks were 25 percent more likely to be stopped by police (Gaines, 2002), 50 percent more likely to be stopped in San Diego (Berejarano, 2001), represented 63 percent of motorists who were searched by Maryland state police during a four-year time period on Interstate 95, and were 17 percent more likely to be ticketed by the North Carolina Highway Patrol (Smith et al., 2003). In each of these studies Black males were disproportionately represented in encounters with police relative to their peers in the White majority.

Unfortunately, the disproportionality that Black males experience with police engagement has an equally predictable and disproportionate result—witness the disproportionate incarceration of African American men. In her examination of the impact the prison industrial complex has had upon the Black community, Michelle Alexander (2012) utilizes the city of Chicago—the home of two Black mayors, multiple Black police chiefs, and the country's first Black president—to present a dire picture of the lived experience of Black men in America. Alexander (2012) notes that in Chicago, as in many urban settings, young Black men are more likely to go to prison than to go to a two- or four-year college. She argues that the mass incarceration of Black men, largely stemming from the misguided War on Drugs, has among other things produced an implicit meaning of American Blackness, such that "black people, especially black men, are criminals. That's what it means to be black" (Alexander, 2012, p. 197).

Invisibility Experienced in Professional Careers

Young Black men deemed potential or actual criminals are not the only ones subject to stereotypic understanding of their masculinity; Black male professionals in

high status careers also encounter experiences in the workplace that are unique to them and not shared by their White counterparts. Wingfield (2010), for example, argues that Black male emotional expression in the workplace is something that is guided by stereotypic understandings of race. While arguing that there are "feeling rules" that have always been at play in the American workplace—rules that state it is acceptable for White male attorneys, for example, to openly display anger, frustration and aggression, but less so for their female counterparts, Wingfield (2010, p. 259) also argues that there are race-based "feeling rules":

> Black professionals, however, suggest that the feeling rules that guide the expression of anger do not apply to them. This is not to suggest that they are free to show anger in any way; in contrast, respondents suggest that a different set of feeling rules apply to them altogether wherein they are not permitted to show anger under any circumstances. They cite numerous examples of white workers who have openly expressed feelings of frustration or annoyance in ways that they believe are simply unavailable to them as black employees.

The Black men included in this study recount numerous examples of having to conceal or internalize their feelings in deference to the understanding that there was a different notion of proper emotional expression specifically for them. As noted by one informant:

> One guy came up to me one day and said that my shirt was nice but maybe I should tuck it in. We have no office dress code. There's white men in the office that wear sneakers, jeans, and t-shirts. I had on Khakis and a polo shirt, and he says I would look professional if I tucked my shirt in? I'm like, Okay, but your office mates have on sneakers. There's different things that you want to say but you can't. Or you could, but you might not be there long. And that's one of the struggles of being Black in the workplace. You have to humble yourself, kind of like modern day sharecropping. (Wingfield, 2010, p. 260)

Such encounters reveal the paradoxical way in which Black men are made to feel simultaneously *hyper* visible when it comes to being singled out for negative attention

and critique, and *invisible* when it comes to others' inability to see them as they really are.

Racial Identity Development and Invisibility

A key variable in the literature that addresses how race-based experiences are perceived by people who encounter them is racial identity development. Racial identity development is conceptualized as an internal, race-based sense of self through which individuals process the race-related experiences they encounter. For people of color and African Americans in particular, the process of identity development is one through which individuals engage and process the marginalization and social messages they receive on a day-to-day basis as a result of their race. Given that one's racial identity can be inherently related to how one interprets race-related incidents, it can, therefore, also be related to the invisibility one may experience. In fact, Yeh (1999) argues that how individuals "respond to invisibility-promoting events is inextricably linked to racial identity status" (p. 814), while Franklin (1999a) argues that "awareness of and sensitivity to the racial context is essential to the experience of invisibility" (p. 777).

A variety of racial identity development theories have been presented as ways of understanding how members of marginalized groups interpret their social position and the resulting interactions that position affords. One racial identity development theory frequently cited in the literature is that presented by psychologist Janet E. Helms. Helms' (1995) People of Color model builds on previous stage-based approaches (Cross, 1971; Helms, 1984, 1990) that viewed African Americans as progressing through various, racial identity stages. Helms' (1995) People of Color model "describes different ego statuses,

that reflect attitudes, beliefs and information processing strategies an individual may utilize to make sense of racial stimuli" (Jernigan, 2009, p. 21). These ego "statuses" are conceived as a more dynamic understanding of identity than that employed by stage-based models and are, thus, more reflective of the ways in which African Americans engage the world around them.

The first status of the Helms (1995) model is Conformity. Individuals associated with this status of racial identity development conform to the race-based perspectives held by majority group members. About the Conformity Status Helms (1995) writes that individuals possess an "external self-definition that implies devaluing of own group and allegiance to White standards of merit" (p. 186). Such individuals are described as possessing a very selective perception in relation to issues related to race and may display a level of obliviousness to race-based concerns and affronts (Helms, 1995). An unexamined question associated with the relationship of invisibility to identity development is whether African Americans who conform to the majority perspective of their racial group experience invisibility at all. If one's internal perception fits the one projected upon you from external sources, does one experience the invisibility proposed by Franklin (1999a)? This question remains unexplored in the literature.

The second status proposed by Helms' People of Color model is Dissonance. Dissonance often occurs when a person of color experiences a negative race-based encounter that alters their Conformity-based perception of the racial dynamics in which they live. The Dissonance status is one of ambivalence and confusion (Helms, 1995). While occupying this status, an individual's identity is in flux as previous notions that

race is meaningless and racism antiquated clash with the experience of having encountered a contemporary, race-based stressor. One of the strategies employed during this status is to repress anxiety provoking racial information, which raises questions regarding the ways in which an individual at this level of racial identity development might experience invisibility. Given that it is a race-based incident that propels an African American into this status, entering it well may reflect an individual's first encounter with feeling invisible.

The third status employed by Helms' (1995) People of Color racial identity model is Immersion/Emersion. This status is perceived as building upon the awareness of race generated by the Dissonance status and is the opposite of the mindset found in the Conformity Status. In contrast to the Conformity Status, during which a person of color embraces the majority perspective of their racial group, in the Immersion/Emersion Status all things associated with the majority group are forcefully rejected. Helms writes that this status is reflective of "idealization of one's socioracial group and denigration of that which is perceived as White" (p. 186). Individuals occupying this status typically utilize own-group standards to self-define and place significant value in commitment and loyalty to their racial group. She also describes this status as possessing a high level of hypervigilance towards racial stimuli which in turn, could potentially serve to impact the invisibility an individual experiences.

The fourth status in Helms' model is Internalization. As the name suggests, in this status the person of color internalizes a positive commitment to their racial group while simultaneously developing an ability to interact and respond objectively with members of

the majority group (Helms, 1995). This stage is associated with greater flexibility and analytical ability in cross-racial dynamics. Jernigan (2009), elaborating on Helms, writes:

> Internalization requires the individual to have the ability to remain aware of racial inequality, as well as other forms of oppression that impacts all humans. As a result, Internalization is represented by an ability to recognize the strengths and weaknesses of all racial groups, including Whites. Subsequently, meaningful relationships with persons from all racial groups are established with the goal of an engagement and commitment to eradicate social and political manifestations of racism and oppression. (Jernigan, 2009, p. 24)

This greater level of flexibility culminates with the final status of the model: Integrative Awareness Status.

For the individual who has achieved an Integrative Awareness Status, life decisions are motivated by global humanistic self-expression (Helms, 1995). This individual is at peace with their racial identity and has successfully processed the race-based dynamics of the environs they inhabit. Further, individuals at this status are able to empathize and collaborate with members of other oppressed groups. While the relationship between Helms' model and the African American male experience of invisibility has not been widely explored in the literature, Franklin (1999a) writes that "awareness of and sensitivity to the racial context – including blatant forms of discrimination, subtle innuendoes and slights from individual microaggressions, and institutional racism – is essential to the experience of invisibility" (p. 777). He further argues that racial identity development can serve as a buffer for another potential component of the experience of invisibility: internalization of racism.

Internalization of Racism

The Black male experience with racism and race-based stereotypes is,

unfortunately, not one experienced solely from external sources but also from within the individual. Continuous encounters with harmful racial stereotypes can facilitate the internalization of these negative perspectives within the psyche of African American men themselves. Williams and Williams-Morris (2000) define internalized racism as "the acceptance, by marginalized racial populations, of the negative societal beliefs and stereo-types about themselves" (p. 255). Thomas, Witherspoon, and Speight (2004) have identified a variety of negative stereotypes as both endorsed within the African American community itself, and negatively correlated with self-esteem. Similarly, in a study of 96 African American couples, Taylor (1990) identified internalized racism as being inversely related to marital satisfaction among both husbands and wives. Further, in a study of youth violence, Bryant (2011) found that among African American male youth, internalized racism was found to be a risk factor and significant predictor for young African American male's propensity for violence. Bryant (2011) writes, "there are indications that as the level of internalized racism increased, the levels of aggressive behavior, attitudes towards guns and violence, and the overall propensity for violence also increased" (p. 702). Thus, in understanding the various components that produce the experience of invisibility for African American men, one must also incorporate an examination of internal race-based perspectives as well. One of the most widely studied manifestations of internalized biases is that of Stereotype Threat, a theory first proposed by social psychologist Claude Steele.

Steele and Aronson (1995) present stereotype threat as a predicament produced by the very existence of negative stereotypes. This predicament is largely an internal

struggle in which an individual's sense of self is negatively impacted by the potential of conforming to the perceived negative stereotype associated with their group.

> The existence of [a negative] stereotype means that anything one does or any of one's features that conform to it make the stereotype more plausible as a self-characterization in the eyes of others, and perhaps even in one's own eyes. We call this predicament *stereotype threat* and argue that it is experienced, essentially, as a self-evaluative threat. (Steele & Aronson, 1995, p. 797)

In a recent work Steele (2010) vividly illustrates the experience of stereotype threat by drawing on the writings of *New York Times* columnist Brent Staples, in which Staples detailed his experiences as a Black man living on the South Side of Chicago. Staples wrote:

> I became an expert in the language of fear. Couples locked arms or reached for each other's hand when they saw me. Some crossed to the other side of the street. People who were carrying on conversations went mute and stared straight ahead, as though avoiding my eyes would save them… I'd been a fool. I'd been walking the streets grinning good evening at people who were frightened to death of me. I did violence to them by just being. I tried to be innocuous but didn't know how…I began to avoid people. I turned out of my way into side streets to spare them the sense of being stalked. (Staples, 1986, p. 202–203)

To assuage the stereotype-based fears of others Staples began whistling Vivaldi while he walked down the streets in the evenings. Steele (2010) argues that in so doing, Staples was attempting to deal with an idea: "a phantom, a bad stereotype about his race that was in the air on the streets of Hyde Park – the stereotype that young African American males in this neighborhood are violence prone" (p. 6). Steele further argues that negative stereotypes have the effect of reducing the target of the stereotype to the expectations of others, particularly they are placed in circumstances where the stereotype will apply unless they devised explicit means to deflect it.

> Staples whistled Vivaldi, by his own account a very good version of it. What it did …was change the situation he was dealing with. And how it did this illustrates nicely the nature of stereotype threat. In a single stroke, he made the stereotype about violence-prone African American males less applicable to him personally. He displayed knowledge of white culture, even "high white culture." This caused him to be seen differently as an educated, refined person, not as a violence prone African American youth. Fear fades from their demeanor. Staples himself relaxes. The stereotype in the air that threatened him is fended off. And the change in the behavior of those on the street, and his own behavior, reveals the power that a mere stereotype – floating in the air like a cloud gathering the nation's history – was having on everyone all along. (Steele, 2010, p. 7)

The distinct internal nature of stereotype threat can be discerned from both Staple's internal struggle and his subsequent means of ameliorating it.

Steele (1997) further argues that the experience of stereotype threat can be viewed as having several distinct features. First and foremost, stereotype threat is considered to be a generalized threat not specifically tied to a particular marginalized or stigmatized group. Steele argues that stereotype threat should be viewed as a subtype of the fear of presenting a negative reputation more generally, thus an elderly individual who fears presenting in a manner illustrative of stereotypes associated with the aged may experience stereotype threat in association with age related concerns.

Secondly, Steele (1997) argues that the experience of stereotype threat is "turned on and off" by a specific controlling "mechanism," a concurrence of events in which a negative perspective about one's group becomes relevant to how one views themselves or when an individual integrates a space that triggers associations behavioral expectations. A third feature of stereotype threat is that

> [t]he type and degree of this threat vary from group to group and, for any group, across settings. For example, the type and degree of stereotype threat experienced by White men, Black people and people who are overweight differ considerably.

> Moreover for any of these groups, this threat will vary across settings. (Steele, 1997, p. 618)

Thus, this third aspect of stereotype threat indicates that the stereotype threat one experiences is directly associated to which group one belongs to and in which setting one happens to find oneself. Steele (1997) also uses an oft-cited experience by social psychologist James M. Jones to illustrate the fourth feature of stereotype threat—namely, that in order to experience the threat, one does not have to actually believe the stereotype to be true or reflective of themselves. For example, Jones (1997) wrote:

> When I go to the ATM machine and a woman is making a transaction, I think about whether she will fear I may rob her. Since I have no such intention, how do I put her at ease? Maybe I can't…and maybe she has no such expectation. But it goes through my mind (p. 262).

Steele argues that in this instance Jones (1997) is experiencing stereotype threat even though he knows the stereotype does not apply to him.

Finally, Steele argues that the fifth feature of stereotype threat is the fact that it tends to be particularly difficult to surmount. Indeed, efforts aimed at disproving the stereotype can be particularly daunting because, given the ubiquity of stereotypes in society, proving oneself dissimilar from a stereotype in one setting does not inherently translate to other settings. "Thus, even when the stereotype can be disproven, the need to do so can seem Sisyphean, everlastingly recurrent. And in some critical situations, it may not be disprovable" (Steele, 1997, p. 618).

For Black men, stereotype threat presents in a variety of ways. In studies conducted with male and female Black students, (Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995, 1998; Walton & Spencer, 2009) researchers have repeatedly identified a negative

relationship existing between experiencing stereotype threat and academic performance. In such studies, Black students are impaired by the stereotype that their academic performance as Blacks is expected to be substandard. This sensitivity to others' expectations of them produces in Black students a level of cognitive dissonance that impairs their performance (Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995, 1998; Walton & Spencer, 2009). In fact, Steele (2010) argues that, once triggered, the stereotype threat serves to distract black students, essentially burdening them with two simultaneous tasks—that is, completing the academic assignment and mentally battling race-based thoughts associated with their abilities, often on a subconscious level. Multiple studies (Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995, 1998; Walton & Spencer, 2009) have identified that when this second, race-based task is removed, gaps in Black/White academic performance and test scores disappear. Given the early school experiences discussed previously confronting Black male academic development, their encounters with stereotype threat add another distinct level of salience for understanding the experiences of invisibility.

In addition to academic performance, stereotype threat is also shown to possess a distinct impact upon the health and well-being of African Americans. Blascovich, Spencer, Quinn, & Steele (2001) have identified that when compared with Whites and African Americans not experiencing race-based stressors, those experiencing stereotype threat manifest specific physiological differences. African Americans experiencing stereotype threat exhibited higher blood pressure, which continued through a period of rest and on to the next assigned task (Blascovich, Spencer, Quinn, & Steele,

2001). Such findings suggest that the hypertension that African Americans historically experience may be impacted by experiences of stereotype threat to some extent.

The Invisibility Syndrome

Another manifestation of the internalization of stereotypes can be found in what has been coined the "invisibility syndrome." Repeated racial slights experienced by Black men have the effect of producing a distinct grouping of psychosocial behavioral symptoms which psychologist Anderson J. Franklin has termed the invisibility syndrome. To illustrate, Franklin (2004) details the experiences of Bill, an African American graduate of Yale University and a corporate professional who, during a business meeting with a White client, received multiple messages from the restaurant staff throughout dinner that communicated an assumption that he occupied a lower social status than his White client. This experience was followed by an inability to obtain a cab after dinner while White individuals around him obtained them easily. Franklin (2004) writes, "All evening he had struggled to contain his anger. He felt that he was being seen not as himself but as a stereotype – first, as too insignificant to host a client at an expensive restaurant, and then as too dangerous to be let into a cab" (p 4). Such experiences serve as a "leveler," an unsettling means of both reducing status and reminding Black men that regardless of their personal merits they are nonetheless still assessed in accordance with stereotypic belief systems (Franklin, 1999a). Eventually, Bill would come to throw himself across the hood of an oncoming cab that refused to stop.

The invisibility syndrome is a conceptual model designed to aid understanding of the Black male response to racial slights and the resulting feelings of invisibility

(Franklin, 1999a). Franklin presents the syndrome as "a way to explain the intrapsychic struggle for personal identity by African American men as the individual confronts specific encounters with racism" (Franklin, 1999a, p. 763). Franklin asserts that the origins of this syndrome can be found in the earliest messages communicated to African American males regarding the way in which they are perceived by the society they inhabit (Franklin, 2004). As a protective measure, parents often communicate to their African American boys that they must be ever vigilant of their behavior in public settings because they are perceived differently. These early messages to African American males can lead to a sense of self that attempts to put forth a "cool" façade, a hardened stance, while simultaneously struggling desperately with an identity plagued by invisibility (Franklin, 2004). Franklin argues that this initiates the Black male experience as filtered perceptions through the stereotyped lens of others about Black males that result often into internal psychosocial struggling against misperceptions.

> [It] starts with confusion, then self-doubting in association with racial identity and gender, because at an age when praise and approval from parents and others is crucial to positive identity formation, we learn that our behavior as a black boy disturbs other people and we must beware. (Franklin, 2004, p. 12)

It is important to appreciate the early exposure to invisibility that young black boys encounter, as it can provide a distinct orientation in their developmental trajectory towards manhood. Franklin (2004) argues that repeated early experiences with invisibility for Black males set the stage for later impaired understandings of their identity, their unstable authentic visibility within society, and subsequent features of the invisibility syndrome.

As Black males mature and progress in their personal development, continued struggles with invisibility can produce perilous behavioral patterns (i.e., alcohol and/or substance use, or promiscuous sexual behavior), which are sometimes utilized in an attempt to provide validation of the self and obtain socially acceptable ways of being "seen" (Franklin, 2004). Unfortunately however, this developmental path inevitably leads to a rising sense of helplessness in which relationships are negatively impacted by stereotypes and Black men live "perpetually behind a mask of bravado or indifference" (Franklin, 2004, p. 13), forgoing new experiences beyond their comfort zone in an attempt to limit the potential for experiencing invisibility. In a phenomenological study of the invisibility syndrome Tovar-Murray and Tovar-Murray (2012) identified Black male subjects as experiencing invisibility stemming from race-based slights as well as feelings of helplessness and anger. As one would expect, this prolonged struggle with invisibility can exact a substantial toll on the mental health and wellbeing of African American men (Franklin, 1999a). There is, therefore, a need for therapeutic approaches uniquely tailored to assisting African American men to develop a healthy authentic sense of self and personal agency in the face of ongoing encounters with invisibility.

Men and Therapy

In considering potential therapeutic approaches to assist African American men to manage encounters with invisibility, it is necessary to understand the male experience with therapy and help-seeking more generally. Research has shown that within contemporary American settings, men have been socialized to view use of health service providers or means of social support as less masculine (Mahalik, Burns, & Syzdek,

2007). As a result they will often adopt the more risk increasing position of attempting to "muscle through" on their own or demonstrate substantial hesitancy in their help-seeking behavior (Mahalik, Burns, & Syzdek, 2007). A wide variety of studies (Husaini, Moore, & Cain, 1994; McKay, Rutherford, Cacciola, & Kabasakalian-McKay, 1996; Padesky & Hammen, 1981; Thom, 1986; Weissman & Klerman, 1977) have demonstrated that when compared to women, men are less likely to seek help for a wide variety of problems, such as depression, substance abuse, physical disabilities and stressful life events (Addis & Mahalik, 2003). Addis & Mahalik (2003) further argue that the behavioral differences that are observed between men and women are largely non-biological in nature and instead can be traced directly back to the ways in which men process and internalize the social values and conceptualization of masculinity held by the societies they inhabit:

> Many of the tasks associated with seeking help from a health professional, such as relying on others, admitting a need for help, or recognizing and labeling an emotional problem, conflict with the messages men receive about the importance of self-reliance, physical toughness, and emotional control. (Addis & Mahalik, 2003, p. 7)

From a young age males are taught that emotional expression, particularly in regards to pain, sadness or anguish of any kind, is unmanly and they learn quickly to divorce themselves from awareness and expression of such vulnerable emotions (Good, Thomson, & Braithwaite, 2005). Socialization into this form of masculinity has been associated with a wide variety of mental health challenges. For example, Cournoyer & Mahalik (1995) demonstrate that men reporting higher levels of masculinity related conflicts demonstrate higher rates of psychological distress. Similarly, Good and Wood (1995) and Good, Robertson, Fitzgerald, Stevens, and Bartels (1996) have associated

aspects of masculinity with depression, while other researchers have associated such normative understandings of masculinity with difficulties with interpersonal intimacy and poor health behaviors (Cournoyer & Mahalik, 1995; Courtenay, 2000; Eisler, 1995; Fischer & Good, 1997; Good, Sherrod, & Dillion, 2000; Good et al., 1995; Watkins, Eisler, Carpenter, Schechtman, & Fisher, 1991).

When men do enter therapy, it is often as a result of pressure from a romantic partner, or via a court ordered mandate of some form (Good et al., 1995). Further, once *in* therapy, men are often hampered by the socialization associated with masculinity such that they encounter difficulty expressing vulnerable feelings or being willing to give up emotional control (Good et al., 1995). Men may demonstrate resistance to therapy by seeking to sabotage the therapeutic relationship, remaining stoic or disengaging from the therapeutic process (Good et al., 1995).

Mental Health Stressors for Black Men

African American men experience a wide variety of environmental stressors that place them at an increasingly high risk for experiencing psychological ailments (Thorn & Sarata, 1998). For example, African American men possess a lower life expectancy than their African American female counterparts as well as both men and women in all other racial and ethnic groups (U.S. Census Bureau, 2008). Relatedly, homicide accounts for the leading cause of death for African American males ages 15–34 (for males below age 15, homicide is still one of the third leading causes of death including among African American boys age 1–4, for whom homicide is the second leading cause of death and responsible for 14.3% of deaths within this age group) (Centers for Disease Control and

Prevention, 2007). Further, in 2012, African American males represented 81% of the suicides completed within the African American community (American Association of Suicidology, 2012).

Given these socioeconomic environmental stressors and the relationship existing between such factors and mental health functioning (Franklin, 1992; Thorn & Sarata, 1998), it is expected that African American men would endure significant psychological distress (Thorn & Sarata, 1998). Thus it is not surprising that African American men were found to be disproportionately represented among psychiatric in-patient populations (Jones & Gray, 1983; Warfield & Marion, 1985), are more likely to be involuntarily admitted to inpatient treatment than other groups (Snowden, Hastings, & Alvidrez, 2009) and experience depression at higher rates than both African American females (Jones & Gray, 1983) and other racial and ethnic groups.

Utilization of Mental Health Services by Black Men

Unfortunately, however, like other males, Black males demonstrate a distinct reluctance to utilize mental health services, which reduces the likelihood of addressing psychological distress from race-based experiences such as invisibility. Aymer (2010) argues that, like other men, Black men tend to associate therapy with perceptions of weakness and prefer instead to attempt to "muscle though" on their own. Similarly, Franklin (1992) argues that, for Black men, therapy compromises closely-held notions of "machismo" and "manliness," as Black men frequently are socialized to believe that they should be able to solve their own problems.

In addition to the perceptions of therapy frequently held by men of all racial and

ethnic groups, it is argued that the mental health services available to Black men may deter utilization in very unique ways. For example, contemporary approaches to psychotherapy tend to emphasize psychopathology, which

> does not address the emotional needs of African American men who may seek support in dealing with the distress caused by race-related problems (e.g., being perceived as a potential criminal while shopping rather than a customer) (Aymer, 2010, p. 21)

Further, many researchers (Franklin, 1992; Pierre & Mahalik, 2005; Sue & Sue, 1990) contend that the race-based experiences that African American men may encounter on a day-to-day basis play a distinct role in their mental health and their opinion of and ability to engage mental health services. For example, Franklin (1992) writes:

> Masking true feelings or thoughts and being guarded has unique consequences for both African American males and females. Learning to trust is difficult in a climate of racism. Thus, socialization of African American males has racial features designed to protect men in racially loaded and threatening circumstances (p. 352).

As such, the frequently observed male hesitancy to utilize the services of mental health practitioners is compounded by the unique, race-based considerations and socialization of Black men that enhances their reluctance to utilize therapy. Given the unique challenges faced by African American men, there is a distinct need to identify best practices that will adequately address mental health needs in a manner that is attractive to this group and increase their utilization of services. One approach that has produced some level of success is group forms of therapy, specifically in the form of therapeutic support groups.

Therapeutic Support Groups As An Intervention Approach For Use With Black Men

Yalom (2005) writes, "Different types of group therapy favor the operation of different clusters of curative factors" (p. 109). Yalom argues that the very nature, design, and pre-identified goals of a group can drastically impact therapeutic outcomes. Therapeutic support groups are therapist-led groups that often focus on providing social support and interpersonal resources to participants around a specific issue. In working with African American men, Franklin (2004) argues Black men will frequently make use of informal group settings, such as barber shops, to help manage the unique stressors associated with being a Black male in contemporary society. Franklin also argues that therapeutic support groups, if designed correctly, can take advantage of this informal group processing such that the tendencies for Black men to avoid therapy can be overcome. He writes:

> Therapeutic support groups for African American men can provide them with an opportunity to change conventional ways of relating to each other. By framing the support groups as a forum for discussing life as black men, as well as appealing to the need to restructure the way African American men communicate with each other, their typical resistance to therapy-like situations can be reduced. (Franklin, 1999c, p. 14)

It is also argued that therapeutic support groups are appropriate for use with a wide variety of challenges faced by this population. Franklin and Davis (2001), for example, discuss the benefits of using therapeutic support groups as an effective intervention for issues associated with fatherhood amongst Black men, while Franklin (1998) presents the benefits of the therapeutic support group in assisting Black men with anger management concerns. Goals of effective group therapy with this population should be to "help African-American men gain better insight into and control of their

behavior in emotionally provocative circumstances" (Franklin & Davis, 2001, p. 45), manage the social and personal expectations associated with being a man of African descent (Franklin & Davis, 2001), and change the contemporary ways in which Black men communicate, interact, and support one another (Franklin, 1999). Research supports the contention that therapeutic support groups are effective at meeting each of these goals (Franklin, 1998, 1999; Franklin & Davis, 2001). As such, it is appropriate to incorporate the use of this intervention approach to study the experience of invisibility as it relates to the day-to-day lives of African American men.

Chapter 3

Method

Case Study

To explore the African American male experience of invisibility and the invisibility syndrome, this study utilized a multiple-case, case study approach to analyze several videotaped sessions of an African American male support group facilitated by psychologist Anderson J. Franklin in the mid 1990s. Of case studies, Yin (2009) writes,

> In general, case studies are the preferred method when (a) "how" or "why" questions are being posed, (b) the investigator has little control over [behavioral] events, and (c) the focus is on a contemporary phenomenon within a real-life context. (p. 2).

The case study is a unique methodological approach to knowledge building that provides an ability to "derive a(n) (up-)close or otherwise in-depth understanding of a single or small number of "cases," set in their real-world contexts" (Yin, 2012, p. 4). Yin further argues that "case studies are pertinent when your research addresses either a descriptive question – "what is happening or has happened" – or an explanatory question – "How or why did something happen" (2012 p. 5). This was particularly apropos for this study in that it explored "what is happening" in the African American male experience of invisibility.

Research Questions

The research questions that guided this study reflected an attempt to better understand the experience of invisibility and the invisibility syndrome among African American men. They were as follows:

1. How does the experience of invisibility present for African American men in therapeutic support groups across their various relationships?

2. How do African American men represent their self defined identity, or "visibility," as suggested by Franklin (1999, p. 821)?

3. How do African American men express their thoughts and feelings about their experiences of invisibility and what inter-group dynamics come into play as they do?

4. How do group members manifest disillusionment, anger, doubts about self or personal efficacy in decision making associated with the invisibility syndrome as described by Franklin (1999, p. 767)?

Definition of Invisibility

For the purposes of this study, invisibility was defined as:

- Instances where members of the group explicitly communicate the notion, or can be inferred from their dialogue that "others see me differently than I see myself because of my race," as well as any race-based attributions that also serve to impact group member self-concept.

Participants

The study conducted was a re-analysis of existing data collected in a prior study. The data was in the form of videotaped recordings of weekly meetings of a therapeutic support group for African American men. The support group was organized to help the men analyze and process emotional experiences directly associated with being African American men. The videos were recorded a year into the formation of the group

beginning in 1994 and spanning through 1995. Participants were five African American men, ages 26 through 42 years of age, all living in a large metropolitan city in the northeastern United States. Two of the men were married with children, while three were single and in various forms of transitioning, heterosexual relationships. Of the group participants, four were college-educated professionals and the fifth had completed post-secondary technical training. All participants were high functioning and were referred to the group through referrals from colleagues and word of mouth within the local community. An African American male psychologist served as the group facilitator.

Sources of Evidence

The data used for this study represented one of the common sources of evidence used in completing case studies, direct observation (Yin, 2009). As the data consisted of eight videotape recordings of a therapeutic support group in session, and captured the interpersonal interactions and environmental dynamics of the group, it is classified as a direct observation in a field setting. This approach to data analysis is helpful in creating "a narrative based on what you might have seen, heard, or otherwise sensed" (Yin, 2009, p. 11). In addition, given that the tapes utilized for this study represented stored, historical information dating from the early 1990s, it was also representative of a third, common source of data utilized for case studies, archival records (Yin, 2009).

There were a total of eight archived video tapes that were used for this analysis. Each tape was approximately 1.5 hours in length and was been converted from VHS to digital format. The tapes documented weekly sessions of a therapeutic support group containing the same members and therapist across all tapes. Each of the tapes was

transcribed by a bonded agency and the accuracy of the transcriptions was verified by multiple readers utilizing separate auditors. The final verified transcript was used as the primary document uploaded into the qualitative data analysis software.

Data Analysis Software

This study utilized HyperRESEARCH to facilitate data analysis. HyperRESEARCH is a multi-platform; qualitative research tool developed by ResearchWare, Inc., a company with affiliations to Boston College. The software package is designed specifically for qualitative analysis of data in video, audio and text format. It provides the user with the ability to "code and retrieve, build theories, and conduct analyses" of qualitative data (www.researchware.com). The software was used to code the transcripts for experiences of invisibility defined as: (a) instances where members of the group communicate the notion that "others see me differently than I see myself because of my race"; and (b) any race-based external influences on group member identities. Through users' ability to code and retrieve specific sections of data and facilitate theory building, HyperRESEARCH was particularly well suited for the data analysis conducted in this study.

Critical Discourse Analysis

In discussing the process of data analysis utilized to examine case studies, Yin (2012) argues that "case study analysis takes many forms, but none yet follow the routine procedures that may exist with other research methods" (p. 15). The absence of a "cook book" format of data analysis for conducting a case study produces a need to select an

analytical approach best suited to the study proposed (Yin, 2012). This study used a data analysis approach called, "Critical Discourse Analysis."

Critical Discourse Analysis is an analytical approach to the study of language, its usage, and the manner in which language can serve to reflect and maintain power differentials that are present in society (Fairclough, 1995). Bernard and Ryan (2010) write:

> [Critical Discourse Analysis] starts from the observation that people in complex societies understand and reenact in speech the power differences that pervade those societies. Studies in this tradition focus on how the content of discourse establishes, reflects or perpetuates power differences between actors in society. (p. 222)

Originating in the field of sociolinguistics, Critical Discourse Analysis argues that both written and spoken language are, "social spaces in which two fundamental social processes simultaneously occur: cognition and representation of the world, and social interaction" (Fairclough, 1995, p. 6). An analysis of dialogues on invisibility – an inherently disempowering experience for Black men that contains both representations of the world and social interactions – is well suited to an analysis focusing on social domination in discourse. Through a Critical Discourse Analysis of experiences of invisibility, this study provided insight into the ways in which the sample interacts with, as well as resists the race-based power differentials that they may encounter on a day-to-day basis.

The use of Critical Discourse Analysis for an analysis of experiences of invisibility, unlike other forms of data analysis, rejects naturalism, the notion that the practices and labels that are applied by society represent reality (Rogers, 2004). This

aspect of Critical Discourse Analysis was of particular importance given that this study intended to examine discrepancies between the labels applied to Black men by society, and the ways they perceived themselves. Critical Discourse Analysis seeks to offer "not only a description of an interpretation of discourse in context, but also offers an explanation of why and how discourses work" (Rogers, 2004, p. 2). Because of these characteristics, Critical Discourse Analysis was uniquely suited to provide perspective into the lived experience of invisibility.

The process of conducting such an analysis proceeds in three specific steps. Bernard and Ryan (2010) write, that the "analysis is done from a critical perspective, but the method is hermeneutic: you lay out a chunk of text, add running commentary about what you think is going on, and interpret the result" (p. 245). The following steps illustrate how this study applied this approach to the study of invisibility.

Critical Discourse Analysis Step One: Present a Segment of the Coded Transcript

The first step in conducting a Critical Discourse Analysis is to identify and present a specific segment of the coded transcript. For example, in a segment taken from a preliminary analysis of the data, one finds two group members discussing the ways in which their identity has come to be related to the wider social expectations of Black men:

> **Member 1:** You had a definition out there of what a man is, and whoever had that, you tried to fit that. We all do it. We all do. We just all have to look at where that image comes from.
>
> **Member 2:** I didn't drink in college, I wouldn't touch nothing, even now, I wouldn't touch nothing, I don't care what kind of alcohol, champagne, I'd drink sparkling apple cider, whatever. I don't do drugs. Stopped them. Everybody experimented in high school, and I did for like a month or two. After that, stopped that. Tried to be pious and righteous all throughout college years and for

> some people, that's cool, but I was doing that based on trying to be anti -, as opposed to be who I am.

After presenting a coded segment of the transcript related to invisibility, the researcher then proceeds to step two, providing commentary on the segment of the transcript presented.

Critical Discourse Analysis Step Two: Commentary on Coded Section

As identified by Bernard and Ryan (2010), the second step in the process of conducting a critical discourse analysis is to provide commentary on the presented section of transcript to elucidate the ways it specifically relates to experiences of invisibility. For example, a commentary on the above segment of transcript could be as follows:

> In this segment of the transcript, the participants are discussing their feelings associated with a perceived inability to be genuine as professional Black men. Member #2 details behaviors he has avoided both during college and currently during his professional career in an attempt to be *"anti"* the stereotype he believes to be associated with Black men.

Through commentary such as this, aspects of invisibility can be pulled out of the transcript and thereby facilitating the third step in the analysis process, interpretation.

Critical Discourse Analysis Step Three: Interpretation

Bernard and Ryan (2010) write that in the third stage of the analysis the researcher presents "conclusions that are instantiated by prototypical quotes from the transcript" (p. 242). For example, an interpretation of the above discourse could present as follows:

This segment of dialogue illustrates elements of invisibility born of shaping one's identity in reaction to the stereotypic views held about Black men by the larger society. The speaker (Member 2) displays an awareness of the fact that his behavior, while socially acceptable, is not a genuine reflection of who he is. Instead, he admits to playing a role in an attempt to separate himself from the stereotype. Such a reactive identity can be viewed as facilitating the adoption of one level of invisibility in the attempt to escape another.

While the above analysis represents an example of approach to the data, it illustrates the ways in which Critical Discourse Analysis can be used to study the content of dialogue, and facilitate an analysis of the interplay between the lived experience of the individual, and the social context he or she inhabits. It was therefore, uniquely suited to an analysis of experiences of invisibility experienced by African American men. Further, it was also well suited to conducting such an analysis in a manner that provides a higher level of rigor and validity.

Rigor and Validity

Rigor is defined as the "use of logical systems that are shared and accepted by relevant scientists to ensure agreement on the predictions and explanations of the theory" (Reynolds, 1971, p. 19). Thus, a rigorous study utilizes accepted research design methods to ensure that findings are not only authentic, but are also trustworthy and reliable (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Further, rigor requires a research study to be explicit in what it sets out to do, and transparent in how it seeks to do it (Ryan, 2005). Ryan writes, "in other words, researchers need to be able to describe to their colleagues and their audiences

what they did (or plan to do) in clear simple language" (2005, p. 30). The subsequent validity of a qualitative study hinges upon a researcher's ability to demonstrate rigor. Steps that were utilized to ensure transparency and authenticity are discussed further below.

Validity in quantitative research reflects the ability of an instrument to measure what it is designed to measure. Relatedly, in qualitative study, validity refers to "gaining knowledge and understanding of the nature (i.e., the meaning, attributes and characteristics) of the phenomenon under study" (Krefting, 1991, p. 215). Krefting further argues "just as there is a need to look at the accuracy and trustworthiness of various kinds of quantitative data in different ways, there is also a need to look at qualitative methods for the different ways in which to ensure the quality of the findings". There are several approaches to ensuring the validity of qualitative studies. For the purpose of this study I used reflexivity, memo writing, and triangulation.

Reflexivity

Reflexivity refers to a process whereby researchers conduct an assessment of their own background, perceptions and interests and the way in which they may interact with the qualitative investigation (Krefting, 1991). It is argued that through a strategy of self-reflexivity; the researcher attempts to identify and account for biases in a manner that provides transparency to their audience (Yeh & Inman, 2007). As a college educated, African American man from a large metropolitan city in the northeastern United States, in conducting this study, I must endeavor to be aware of the biases I hold that may impact my analysis of a therapeutic support group of college educated African American men

from a metropolitan city in the northeastern United States. For example, as an African American man, I have personally experienced invisibility and, as such, must ensure that the "data accurately represents the reality of the participant rather than that of the researcher" (Yeh & Inman, 2007, p. 387). Although the methodology I have selected requires a distinct level of interpretation of the lived experiences of group participants, I believe that a process of ongoing reflection upon my own thoughts, feelings and reactions to the data will help to ensure validity. The process that was used to document this reflection is discussed further below.

Memo Writing

To facilitate the enhanced credibility of my study I used memo-writing to address assumptions, hunches, insights, as well as to identify the ways in which I found myself situated within the analysis I was conducting (Yeh & Inman, 2007). According to Bernard and Ryan (2010), there are three forms of memo writing used in qualitative studies:

1. Code memos describe the researcher's observations and thoughts about the concepts that are being discovered.
2. Theory memos summarize [researcher's] ideas about the existence of themes, about how themes are linked, and about what causes themes to exist in the first place.
3. Operational memos are about practical matters such as explanations for specific content or behavior found in the data (e.g., discussion related specifically to an approaching holiday) (p. 78).

Through memo writing, the process by which I arrived at codes was clearly elucidated thereby increasing the credibility of the analysis conducted.

Triangulation

In addition to utilizing reflexivity and memo writing to address validity concerns associated with my study, I attempted to utilize triangulation.

> Triangulation is a powerful strategy for enhancing the quality of the research, particularly credibility. It is based on the idea of convergence of multiple perspectives for mutual confirmation of data to ensure that all aspects of a phenomenon have been investigated. (Krefting, 1991, p. 219)

Triangulation represents an attempt to reduce the risk of chance impacting associations identified by the researcher (Yeh & Inman, 2007). There are several approaches to triangulation; *triangulation of data methods*, meaning that data are collected through various approaches and compared; *triangulation of investigators*, multiple researchers examine a single data set; *theoretical triangulation* in which analyses of data are from varying theoretical perspectives. The triangulation approach that was used for this study was triangulation of data sources (Krefting, 1991).

Triangulation of data sources is "based on the importance of variety in time, space and person in observation and interviewing" (Krefting, 1991, p. 219). This approach analyzes different sources of data collected at differing time periods. "Examples of triangulated sources include different seasons or days, different settings and different groupings of people (Krefting, 1991, p. 219). Given that this study is designed to examine group members' experiences with invisibility at several different points in time, across several different recorded sessions, I was afforded the opportunity to utilize

triangulation to assess my analysis of the data through comparisons at varying time periods. In so doing, I was able to further assess the experience of invisibility for this group of Black men.

Chapter 4

Results

Procedure Note

In exploring the research questions, the transcripts of each of the eight tapes were loaded into HyperResearch, the research software used for data analysis. The transcripts were reviewed for instances in which participants inferred or discussed experiences of feeling invisible. Again, invisibility as defined here, is an intrapsychic experience based on an individual's internalized reaction to stereotypes, acts of discrimination, or racism (Franklin, 2004). Therefore, invisibility experiences of the men were identified when they described feeling as if a racial stereotype was applied to them that, in turn, made them feel as if their true self was rendered invisible. The procedure in this study utilized exemplary quotations in the analysis of research questions studying the relationship between racial stereotypes and manifest experiences of invisibility. Quotations possessing minimal cross-talk from other participants that simultaneously, also effectively communicated the speaker's experience of invisibility were selected for analysis.

Research Question 1: How does the experience of invisibility present for African American men in therapeutic support groups across their various relationships?

To address this first research question, sixty distinct instances across the eight tapes were identified by the researcher in which group members were discussing a relationship encounter that represented an experience of invisibility for the speaker and/or

other group members. When reviewed by this researcher, the sixty instances of invisibility sorted into four distinct relationship contexts: 1) early childhood and early adult relationships, 2) general interpersonal relationships, 3) internalized relationships (i.e., the internal experience of invisibility members had within themselves), and 4) invisibility experienced from intra-racial relationships. From the sixty quotations identified, fifteen exemplary quotations were selected for analysis.

A. Invisibility Experienced in Early Childhood and Early Adult Relationships

Memo Note: One of the initial ways the group discussed invisibility was through examinations of early-life experiences. The quotes included in this section represent the earliest messages group members received about how to be a Black male. The selected quotes also clearly elucidate early experiences with invisibility, and an awareness of disjuncture between the ways others view them and how they view themselves.

> **Group Member A:** I'm caught between chasing this image, that picture on the wall and what I'm really like, what Black men are supposed to be like. You're supposed to, you know, sit on your emotions; you're not supposed to cry. I'm a very emotional, sensitive kid who gets picked on a lot, and the whole image that I get painted of what I'm supposed to be like, is in total contrast to what elements of my personality are already in place.

Researcher Commentary: In this section of the transcript the speaker is addressing the perspectives he obtained early in life from female family members about how he was expected to be emotionally as a Black male child and the ways in which that differed from who he knew himself to be (e.g., "I'm caught between chasing this image, that picture on the wall and what I'm really like").

It is clear that the speaker is wrestling with a sense that his true self is rendered invisible by race-based gender expectations regarding emotional behavior. Interestingly, the source of conflict embedded in the message for the speaker is Black family members' views about child socialization in displaying emotions. Later in the transcript this dilemma about emotional display is explored in cross-racial contexts that reinforce invisibility experiences.

> **Group Member B:** One quick question, I just wanted to ask this of [Group Member A]: When you were young and sensitive, especially being in a White school, were you thought of as abnormal by White folks? Did they ever see you cry? Because when White folks found out that a Black kid cried they're like "Black kids don't cry!"
> **Group Member A:** Right. It put me in yet another box.

Interpretation: A theme that is present in both of the previous sections of transcript is an emotional invisibility that is experienced by Group Member A. He describes an experience whereby his individual emotional presentation is obscured by a race-based understanding of how Black men are "supposed" to present emotionally to the public. Thus, the messages that Group Member A initially received from his Black family members were reinforced in cross-racial interactions with White school-aged peers. This emotional invisibility can be viewed as disempowering, as it relegates Black men to an emotional "box" in which their true emotions are neither understood, nor afforded opportunities to be properly explored and addressed. The message communicated to Group Member A by both Whites and family members was: manage your display of emotions according to what others perceive and expect them to be as a Black male.

Another early life experience of invisibility that is discussed within the group revolves around academic performance in secondary education settings.

> **Group Member A**: In high school I went to a college prep school. I was always good in school; I was always at the top of my class. But with White kids, as a Black guy, you were never quite as smart as they were, but in the neighborhood you were ostracized because you were smart. So, I was always kind of walking the curb, you know? Brothers in the street and White boys on the side walk so I'm just on the curb.

Researcher Commentary: In this section of text the group member discusses the ways in which he felt marginalized as an adolescent due to race-based perspectives on academic performance of Black males. As in previously referenced quotes, he also presents a dual perspective of invisibility, one experienced in relation to Whites with whom he interacts on a day-to-day basis in school, as well as one projected from Black peers in his neighborhood.

Interpretation: In this quote the speaker again describes how a perspective specifically based upon his race that he had of himself ran counter to those held of him by others. He portrays an understanding of himself best described as a high academic achiever proud of being "at the top of his class" and of his ability to secure good grades. This self-narrative, however, runs afoul of the race-based beliefs of his White classmates who concluded that despite his achievements, he was "not quite as smart as they were," a position different from how he viewed himself. This experience was then duplicated by his same-race peers who, also because of his level of academic performance, viewed him as different from them given their understanding of Black masculinity and academic performance.

From the perspective of Critical Discourse Analysis, in both of these instances, power is displayed through the ability to define and determine the conceptualization of both masculinity and intelligence. Because the speaker did not fit the expected norms set by the two empowered groups within their respective spheres of influence, he was denied access to both. Thus, the above quotations display how power differences are created, reinforced, and enacted in a manner that promotes marginalization.

This experience continues as another group member discussed his transition from childhood to early adulthood.

> **Group Member C**: If you played ball then you don't have to be academic, even if you're an academic kid! That's what I had to deal with. I went to a highly academic university, and I played ball so it was like "oh, you know, you don't really have to have such high expectations…you don't need A's you know, you're Black, you're All American. You're a hero to your folks with C's because you are excelling on the field."

Researcher Commentary: In this quotation, a group member discusses experiences of invisibility encountered as a college student again related to stereotype perception of Black male academic ability. He describes a perspective he encountered in which he is viewed not as an academic, as he perceives himself to be, but as an athlete with little expectations of him beyond his performance on the field.

Interpretation: Here the speaker presents a perspective of invisibility in which the stereotypic beliefs about Black men's academic performance are displaced by stereotypes associated with Black male athleticism. A wide body of literature in the field of sociology and social psychology has endorsed this "brawn vs. intelligence" perspective of Black men that the speaker identifies here.

Through this segment of text, a dual element of invisibility is identified. First, the speaker is rendered invisible by his academic potential being ignored or denied, and secondly, his family, and the Black community more generally, is stereotyped as valuing athletic performance over academic performance as well. In so doing, both the "academic kid" and the Black community's values over education are rendered invisible, another form of marginalization.

B. Invisibility by General Gender and Racial Roles

Memo Note: A manifestation of invisibility became evident in circumstances determined by general gender and racial roles assumed in everyday life. In these sections of the text, group members are discussing their experiences whereby others perceive them differently more as a function of the role they have or assumed than a specific interpersonal relationship. Of all the dialogue on the eight tapes, the quotes presented here most vividly displayed the ways invisibility can impact interpersonal relationships by a status, such as being a professional Black man or perceived as responsible decent person.

Reflexivity Note: As noted in the analysis conducted below, these quotes are in some ways reflective of the group's population of educated Black men who are, as a result, viewed as occupying a unique position within their communities. As the researcher is a Black male who occupies a similar positionality with regards to the Black community, that positionality may serve to impact the qualitative investigation. Further, in reviewing the data, I encountered a sense of familiarity with many of the experiences detailed here. Like the group members, I have experienced situations where stereotypes associated with Black masculinity have obscured the ways in which I viewed myself. It must, therefore,

be taken into account that the possibility exists that my own experiences have served to color the analysis of the data presented here.

> **Group Member A:** I shared with the guys in the group individually that I just elected to the board of trustees of my church….People approached me afterwards and they sort of said the job fits for the type of individual I am, you know, respectable, downright, upright, responsible, but all of these things, like the way people were describing me as being qualified for that job, didn't strike me as who I am, you know, that really sort of brought me in touch with, as I said, the thing of approachability, like I am somebody who wants to be approached, but, for some reason, I always seem to feel like this very lonely person who is trying to reach out to people, but, for some reason, you know, it is not coming across that way, and people have often told me that I am very unapproachable. Even though, on the inside, I don't feel like that, I feel like I am in this cage sort of, and the cage is the image that I project, for whatever reason, there is a certain image that I am putting out there. I am somebody who wants to be approached, but for some reason, whatever image I project, does not render me approachable and I haven't figured how to get out of that cage you know? It's like no matter where I go, I am just perceived to be upright and unapproachable, no matter what I do. Even if I say, "Help! Somebody talk to me!" you know? I'm screaming at the top my lungs people sort of act on their perceptions and they sort of mirror that.

Researcher Commentary: In this section of text the speaker is presenting that he feels isolated by the fact that others view him as "upright," a "respectable" Black man with no personal challenges. He is perceived as not being in need of support even when he feels he is urgently requesting it. He states that this perception differs distinctly from how he views himself and as such, his pain is not acknowledged or is in essence, rendered invisible because of the image he has created.

Other members of the group also shared this experience of personal image hiding reality.

> **Group Member C:** There are people that look upon you and don't allow you to struggle.
> **Group Member B:** Oh yeah man. I catch that in my neighborhood now!
> **Group Member C:** But still struggle! So, think about what's it like to be not allowed to struggle, and know that you still got struggle, or that we have to

> struggle, but you're not allowed to. And liking it, playing into it would not allow me to admit that I had to struggle.
> **Group Member A:** Basking in it and enjoying it.
> **Group Member C:** And liking it…it became my cage. I live in that cage. I get calls from people who talk to me like I'm a nonperson. I cannot be struggling.

Interpretation: In this quotation a unique form of invisibility that comes with the privileges of status becomes apparent. Because the therapeutic support group utilized in this study is largely comprised of professional Black men, the group understandably focused on experiences of invisibility that are unique to their social and educational status. The speaker is experiencing a form of invisibility whereby he is viewed, because of his success and status, to be without flaw, without emotional challenges. The result is that he is forced to endure the invisibility of his emotional difficulties in solitude.

Researcher Commentary: This section of the transcript is one in which multiple group members endorse the perspective of being viewed by others as not having any challenges, as being without flaw due to their status as professional Black men. They discuss how they are perceived in both professional settings and within their local communities as role models whose emotional life is separate and apart from the day-to-day emotional struggles experienced by others, "the average person."

Interpretation: The invisibility that is described here is that of being placed in an emotional cage. Given the status afforded them by their social status, the group members are perceived differently than they view themselves. Interestingly, they subsequently adapt to this perspective and it influences how they present themselves to others, in many ways "becoming" the very image that is imposed upon them. This is also evident in other segments of the transcript.

> **Group Member B:** I know the feeling though, because that has also prevented me from maybe doing what I want to do with my wife…which is possibility sever some ties. But the "Perfect Black Man" or the Black man on the block that is the only one that's married and didn't run around and has kids all over the place, can't do that. Because if he does that, --
> **Group Member C:** See, that's what I'm saying, that's what I'm saying.

Researcher Commentary: In this section of text Group Member B acknowledges that he too has wrestled with an image as an upstanding Black man with no personal struggles. He states, in fact, that this image has prevented him from divorcing his wife, something he says he actually wants to do. He explains that he has not done so, however, because he is perceived to be the "perfect Black man," an image that he is hesitant to discard.

C. Internalized Invisibility

Memo Note: Another prominent theme found in the transcripts of these group therapy sessions was that of "internalized invisibility." Internalized invisibility manifests in instances when Black men accept the stereotypes held about them. They are "race-based attributions that serve to impact self-concept." Given this definition, the following quotes are reflective of invisibility, as the speakers wrestle with negative racial perceptions about Black masculinity that they have internalized. Below, the speaker discusses a struggle that has plagued him in both academic and professional settings, where his level of knowledge is called into question.

> **Group Member B:** At one time I felt inferior. At one time, I could know two plus two equals four, but if a White boy said, "No, it's three." I'd actually question myself. And you know, this happened for a while. Not until about five or six years ago, did I really begin to believe in myself.

Interpretation: This section of the conversation expands upon the early education experiences of Group Member A, presented previously. In the previous quote, Group

Member A's academic and intellectual sense of self was disregarded by the early childhood messages he received that he was not as smart as his White peers because of his race. Here, we see an internalization of that invisibility. The external, socially presented notion that Blacks (males in this instance) are inherently less intelligent than Whites becomes part of the group member's self-narrative, making it difficult to embrace what he knows to be otherwise true about his abilities.

> **Group Member B:** I find, it is hard to find white folk to get an open and honest dialogue [about race], I mean, or people willing to challenge their beliefs and myths, you know…be it my own myth of inferiority, or my own belief of inferiority compared to their…belief that they're superior for whatever reason.
> **Group Member A:** You know, I prefer to be around my own kind. I have issues about…just like you mentioned about superiority versus inferiority. How White boys walk around basically like they got the world by the tail. Like whatever they can see can be theirs. But for me, there is some kind of glass ceiling. Why would I feel like there is a limit on what I can get out of this situation and they walk around like they got the whole thing wrapped up?

Researcher Commentary: This section is an extension of previous conversations in which the members of the group are discussing self-image in relation to race-related considerations. The speaker is exploring what he experiences to be a self-imposed "glass ceiling," which serves to limit his perceived abilities and potential. He views White males as not experiencing this phenomenon and instead operating from a perspective that they are in control of the larger world around them.

Interpretation: In this section of text it is important to understand how the speaker is using the term "glass ceiling." In common usage, the term glass ceiling usually refers to limitations that are put in place by others that subsequently serve to impede achievement past a certain point. In this instance, however, the group member is using it to describe

limitations that he experiences internally. It demonstrates that the stereotypes that Black men encounter socially, once internalized, serve to impair their ability to enjoy an accurate sense of their true self or potential.

> **Group Member A:** I'm like, well, all right, well if I'm not smart enough to be White, but then I'm not down enough to be with the brothers, so. Part of my own personal isolation, and I think that whole image thing I was talking about last week, it's like a personal cage that I've created for myself that I've been trying to get out of, are because of these differences. Smart, but you know, always feeling like the White boys are just a little bit smarter, because they got their own smart club and they keep redefining the terms so you can never qualify anyway.

Researcher Commentary: Again, we encounter commentary in which the speaker discusses his view of his own abilities in relation to that of his White peers. The group member illustrates a past belief that was reflective of self-doubt and isolation associated with feeling that his White peers were smarter. He is also able to identify the Black-White power differentials that produce the circumstances shaping his feelings.

Interpretation: This quote, while reflective of internalized invisibility, is also unique in that it demonstrates a level of reflection on the underlying power structure that has served to create and maintain the self-narrative that Blacks, like himself, are not as smart as Whites. The speaker both acknowledges that he has internalized a belief that "the White boys" are smarter, but at the same time he reflects on the underlying social dynamics that have served to produce the belief—namely, Whites' power to define and control the terms of what counts as "smart" in the first place.

D. Intragroup Racial Invisibility

Memo note: Another aspect of invisibility that was discussed by group members was invisibility projected upon them by fellow Black individuals. Intragroup-racial invisibility

is about Black-to-Black attitudes and interpersonal relations that are not studied as much as interracial relations. And yet, for the members of this group, such intragroup relations proved almost as salient for their emotional wellbeing as the invisibility they experienced in cross-racial contexts. I found this section of the data particularly compelling because it illustrated a community-level internalization of stereotype notions of Black masculinity. This suggests that the Black community is, itself, complicit, to a certain extent, in perpetuating some of the dynamics of invisibility. The quotations included for analysis are excerpts of conversations that represent how the men in the group were viewed differently by their Black peers than how they viewed themselves.

> **Group Member D:** Black people sometimes…I think about where I work, a lot of teenage guys who are trying to be hard, perceive me as White, or trying to act White,…or gay. Those are the two! And I'm just trying to show them that there are different types of men, not just one type of man. So, it's about feeling comfortable with Black people…but also feeling so threatened sometimes by them.

Researcher Commentary: In this section of the transcript, the speaker is reflecting upon his work in a youth program that provides services for primarily young Black males. He describes the Black male teenagers as "trying to be hard," that is, attempting to present a tough persona they see as representative of Black masculinity. He contrasts this with how he believes the teenagers see him as a professional Black male who differs from their understanding of how a Black male is expected to act. As a result of this difference in perception, the teens question his dedication to his race, his sexual orientation, and by extension, his masculinity.

Interpretation: The invisibility illustrated here results from the disjuncture between Group Member D's own race and gender-based identity and the identities that are projected upon him by the youth with whom he works. In essence, the youth have adopted the Black male stereotype of being "tough" and "cool" in order to facilitate their own street survival, but this stance then contrasts with the thoughtful and empathic behavior they are asked to develop for group participation. In their eyes, any Black man who differs from this "cool pose" posture is suspect. This creates a dilemma for Group Member D, who must contend with the youth's stereotypes about Black masculinity, while also trying to model *other* forms of Black masculinity as acceptable. Through his reflections, Group Member D provides insight into the emotional consequences of intra-racial invisibility. For in describing the above experience, he portrays a conflicted relationship in which he views his racial group as the source of both comfort and threat. This notion was shared by other group members.

> **Group Member B:** But, the middle class Waspy kids, you know, if you show that you're going to stand up to them, they will generally back down, no matter how many of them there are. But, you know there are few of the cops who will try to hurt you, or some of those other ethnic kids, be it Yugoslavians or Italians....
> **Group Member C:** What I'm hearing you say is that all White folks will try to hurt you, but cops and Italians can hurt you.
> **Group Member B:** No, all can hurt you, but I'm talking about my personal fear, as far as ["waspy" white kids] I'm just not afraid of them I just will not back down from them, whereas others, for some reason, it seems like they have an even more ingrained hatred, I guess you could say, or a sickness so it seems. And sometimes I get that same feeling with my own folk, as much as I love them. At times, as much as I love my own people, they scare me because I see the hatred within. Maybe I'm just being overly sensitive…but if I'm dressed like this, and I walk on a train…brothers look me up and down, constantly checking me out. And sometimes I wonder if it was just, you know, because I'm clean cut or whatever. The only saving grace that I get sometimes if I'm getting rolled up on by four or five brothers, is that they think I'm with the Nation, so you know they generally

won't do anything. But, I've had many brothers check me immediately. "You think you're all that!? "Oh, you a Tom!" If you appear a certain way they automatically think you're selling out or want to be White or whatever.

Researcher Commentary: In the above section of transcript group members expand upon the conversation introduced by Group Member D. Group Member B initially shares about his own encounters with different ethnic/cultural groups of Whites and examines the differing response their prejudice and racism generates for him. He states that while he will "not back down" from the racism experienced from "waspy" Whites, he experiences fear from other ethnic groups and then goes so far as to parallel that experience with feelings encountered from fellow Blacks. Group Member B describes experiencing fear associated with the ways Blacks view him differently from how he views himself. For him, these experiences of intra-racial invisibility include the possibility of physical confrontation with other Blacks based upon their interpretation of his physical appearance or demeanor, namely, their perception that he is either a racial sell-out or one who believes that he is better than other Blacks. While it is clear this perception is what the youth perceive not what the speaker himself believes to be true about himself, it nevertheless represents a conflicted attachment to the Black community.

Group Member B further states that a protective factor in this dilemma is that occasionally other Black males will interpret his dress to mean that he is a member of the Nation of Islam. The male members of the Nation of Islam frequently wear suits and are clean-shaven. The Nation of Islam is a respected religious and revolutionary group within the Black community whose mission has long been to oppose the White power establishment in this country. They have sought to accomplish this not via guns or

violence, but through holding strong religious beliefs and "upright" values of self-empowerment. Thus, here the speaker is presenting the fact that he finds himself in the dilemma of being perceived to be an Uncle Tom (see Chapter Two) or as a member of the Nation of Islam, a socially respected group in the community, neither of which is a true representation of who he is

Interpretation: Again, a dichotomous experience is identified in regards to race and gender-based interactions with Black community members. The speaker feels love for his community but also experiences a level of fear and intimidation connected to how his fellow Black peers perceive him. At other times, he finds a certain sense of safety behind perceived membership within other groups that have some public credibility in the Black community but to which he does not belong. Ultimately, Group Member B experiences self-doubt wondering aloud if he is being too sensitive when he feels that other Black males are assessing him as deliberately as he assumes they are in public spaces. His concerns appear warranted, however, given his assumption that "many brothers check me immediately" and with that "check" comes, at least in his mind, an associated threat of violence that parallels his fears of White ethnic groups. The speaker continues:

> **Group Member B:** I had to fight to like myself that I wear suits. I actually had to say "Look, I like to wear them. Bottom line, I like to wear them. I like how they look. I like how they feel." Now, does that mean I'm not Black anymore? I had to seriously think about that…and I didn't get over that until like a year or two ago.

Researcher Commentary: The conversation of the speaker identifies how the race and gender-based encounters facilitated a question in his mind about his own racial identity, and the ways in which it is acceptable to act as a Black male.

Interpretation: In an earlier section of the text, this group member reflected upon the ways in which invisibility invoked by Whites caused him to doubt himself. In this current section, a similar experience is generated by intra-racial experiences of invisibility provoked by encounters with Blacks. In both instances, he stated that it took a period of years of self-reflection to overcome these external influences on his identity. Thus, it could be argued that the level of self-questioning and emotional dissonance experienced by intra-racial invisibility is as provocative as inter-racial encounters. Other evidence found within the text further suggests this impact.

> **Group Member** C: I've gone to schools and they don't have no place to put you. No place! So they've got to come up with either you…you know…ain't from the neighborhood or-
> **Group Member** B: You're Special.
> **Group Member C:** No, you're [gay]! Young brother don't know what "special" means. You just don't fit into the mold!
> **Group Member B:** Oh, okay, I understand.
> **Group Member C:** And if you ain't throwing out a whole bunch of "f—ks" then they just figure you're from another planet!
> **Group Member B:** Do you feel that if young people ignored you, you would feel invalidated?
> **Group Member C:** Yeah. If young – if my own people ignored me I'd be nowhere! Because I know how White folks see me. I'd be f—king nowhere!

Reflexivity Note: The speakers in this section of text wrestle with the fact that members of the Black community subscribe to the notion that the presentation of Black masculinity is limited in a manner that does not include their unique individuality. I have in the past, encountered similar messages from community members associated with educational attainment. Although academic achievement has a long and proud history within Black American history, contemporarily one does occasionally confront anti-education

perspectives within the Black community. I have at times, encountered this at various points in my life.

Research Question 2: How do African American men represent their self-defined identity, or "visibility," as suggested by Franklin (1999, p. 821)?

Procedure Note: To address the second research question, the transcripts of each of the eight tapes were loaded into HyperResearch, the research software used for data analysis. Once loaded, the transcripts were reviewed for instances in the conversations where the participants discussed efforts they undertook to become more "visible" in spite of experiences that engendered invisibility. Across the eight tapes utilized, nine related quotations were identified. When reviewed by this researcher, three of the nine quotations were deemed best suited for inclusion in this analysis.

Memo note: Franklin (1999) writes, "Visibility is the counter-force to experiences of invisibility and is equally important in the model. The evolution of an identity has many sources that are proactive processes and not always reactive" (Franklin, 1999, p. 821). As such, the second research question examined the various proactive approaches group members employed to offset the invisibility they experienced. A significant portion of the strategies identified involved the men managing the perceptions held of them by other Blacks. We also see competing strategies; in one instance, for example, a group member consciously mimics a racial stereotype, in essence, playing a role in order to be accepted by other Blacks. In another instance, a different group member develops a way of viewing himself that serves to distance himself from stereotypes associated with Black

men in order to be viewed more favorably. Through these seemingly conflicting strategic approaches, Black males are forced to figure out, depending upon the circumstances, whether to enact projected stereotypes or to reject them by asserting their true identity and sense of self.

> **Group Member C:** When I get on the train, I get on with a certain attitude because I don't want them to think that I'm not Black as they are. Thousand dollar suit like [Demonstrates how he sits on the train. Initially begins to cross legs but then remembers and places legs wide apart and slouches down].
> **Group Member B:** [laughs] Got to grab your nuts!
> **Group Member A:** Yeah, don't forget that.

Researcher Commentary: In this section of text the group discusses strategies they employ to navigate the invisibility they experience as a result of how they infer how other Blacks might perceive them in particular public settings, like the train. In this instance, the speaker, supported by several group members, discusses how he physically postures in order to appear "more Black."

Interpretation: The strategy employed by Group Member C is a form of impression management. In essence, he non-verbally communicates that he understands the expected Black male stereotype behavior, and consciously decides to conform to it as a means of managing the perception of others. In so doing, the speaker maneuvers to eliminate any potential negative interactions with fellow Black train riders who may have questioned his "Blackness" given other aspects of his behavior that might be deemed atypically "Black."

A similar illustration of managing perceptions in relation to race-based stereotypes can be found in a discussion the group has about how one member reconciles

the "upstanding," good guy image he creates in platonic relationships with female friends, even though he has a desire for those relationships to be sexual given the demise of his marriage.

> **Group Member C:** We know, you are pissed off at them, but you got off on that image of being a righteous guy.
> **Group Member B:** Exactly…I'm not pissed at them. I realize the blame lies on myself, strictly.
> **Group Member C**: I'm not trying to blame you; I'm just talking about your payoff. Your payoff is that you liked it, I'm not talking about blame, but you liked being an upstanding brother, whatever that is.
> **Psychologist:** A different brother.
> **Group Member C:** A different brother! Right! That's what he said "a different brother."
> **Group Member D:** "I'm not Black in that way." Brother from another planet.
> **Group member C:** Right. Brother from another planet. "I don't know where he is from, but he ain't from this world!" [Group laugher] You like that, and said "yeah, yeah!"
> [Group Member B nods agreement]
> **Psychologist:** All the time you are never presenting who you have defined as yourself, you are still presenting what you have allowed others to define as you.
> **Group Member B:** You can only live that way for so long, you begin to slip up and reality starts to slip around you.

Researcher Commentary: In this discussion, the group is collectively processing an approach that Group Member B uses to manage perceptions and thereby separate himself from the stereotypes applied to Black men in romantic relationships with women. Although Group Member B is unhappy in his marriage and would rather end the marriage and engage in sexual liaisons with a variety of his platonic female friends, he works to be perceived as an "upstanding brother," which prevents him from pursuing this course of action. He discusses being frustrated at his platonic female friends for seeing him as an upstanding Black male with no flaws. The group, however, points out that he willfully employs this strategy to his own benefit.

Interpretation: In this segment of text Group Member B is actively managing the impression his female friends have of him in order to be viewed as different from the stereotype that Black men are commitment-averse and driven solely by sex. He attempts to obtain his own form of visibility by distancing himself from the stereotype. In so doing however, he is frustrated by the fact that this portrayal does not reflect his true feelings.

Another way in which participants managed their encounters with invisibility was through the formation of an identity – a sense of self – developed specifically in response to race-based stereotypes.

> **Member C:** You had a definition out there of what a man is, and whoever had that, you tried to fit that. We all do it. We all do. We just all have to look at where that image comes from.
> **Member B:** I didn't drink in college, I wouldn't touch nothing, even now, I wouldn't touch nothing, I don't care what kind of alcohol, champagne, I'd drink sparkling apple cider, whatever. I don't do drugs. Stopped them. Everybody experimented in high school, and I did for like a month or two. After that, stopped that. Tried to be pious and righteous all throughout college years and for some people, that's cool, but I was doing that based on trying to be anti -, as opposed to be who I am.

This "reactive identity" is one that the participant develops in an attempt to be "seen" by being different. It is important to note, however, that both the development of a "reactive identity" as seen here, as well as the use of impression management continue to obscure their users' true selves.

Research Question 3: How do Black men express their thoughts and feelings about their experiences of invisibility and what intergroup dynamics come into play as they do?

Procedure Note: To address the third research question, the transcripts of each of the eight tapes were reviewed for instances in the conversations that represented how the men express their thoughts and feelings about their experiences of invisibility as manifested in the importance of the group for them. Thirty such instances were identified and six of the thirty quotations were selected for inclusion in this analysis.

> **Group Member A:** I get strung out without you guys, I really do, I really do. A lot of sh-t happens in my life that I can't even deal with anybody else. At least here if nothing else, at least I get to think about it, because, even if I don't say it, there is a lot of sh-t that goes on in my head here that really does help me later on. I mean, I don't always walk out of here thinking, "Oh, my life has changed!" but sometimes during the week something somebody says comes up.

Researcher Commentary: During this encounter the group members are discussing how the group facilitates personal growth and change, specifically with regard to managing race and gender-related stressors. One member reflects on his participation in the group and is able to identify its positive influence upon him.

Interpretation: This dialogue displays a sense of emotional isolation that the speaker experiences, apparently in all other areas of his life except for when participating in the group. In speaking of being emotionally "strung out" without the group, he is clearly reflecting on periods of times when he was absent from the group, experienced emotional challenges and was not able to attain a comparable level of resolution by himself. Interestingly, not only does in-the moment participation in this group appear to be emotionally restorative for him, but he is also aided by reflecting on the content of the session throughout the remainder of the week.

> **Group Member A:** [Group Member D] and [Group Member E] called me and I appreciate it.

> **Psychologist:** [To Group Member E] You called him?
> **Group Member E:** I didn't get to talk to him.
> **Group Member A:** No, you left me a message, and I didn't get back to you, but I appreciate that guys. Because on your part you were demanding some accountability…it is important for me that you guys thought enough to do that. You didn't just leave it up for grabs and wait until I showed up this week. That was really good. I am glad that you decided to reach out like that, because it's nice to know you've got a safety net in case I started slipping into bad behavior.

Researcher Commentary: In this section of the text we find the group discussing the ways in which they support one another outside of the group. Prior to this session, Group Member A had been absent for a period of time and fellow group members contacted him during the week to see how he was doing. As he had communicated to group members in the past that during times when he is disengaged from the group he becomes emotionally overwhelmed and "starts slipping into bad behavior," they provided an additional means of support which Group Member A appreciated.

Interpretation: The group dynamic created a "safety net" of primary support that extends beyond their weekly meetings. As the group was designed to specifically focus on the race and gender-based challenges of Black men, it proved attuned to the unique needs of the group members. But thought the group provided support in many instances, disclosures during the group process also made the protected persona of the men vulnerable to the group's adopted value of being honest with each other. This is captured in one group member's restructured conception of another member over time.

> **Group Member B:** [to Group Member C] I'm gonna tell you brother, straight up, part of me is very envious and I also look up to you a great deal about the fact that you seem to have yourself together. But now, it's kind of weird, I don't know whether it's like my hero or idol has fallen or, I don't know if my hero or idol was full of sh-t to begin with. I recall you saying something like, "I don't even know

who I am" or something like that and it seems like you're just struggling with identity.
Group Member C: Well if you heard me say that then why did you build me up to be an idol?
Group Member B: Because you filled every nook and cranny that I needed. Because I guess [you] represented to me a lot of the ideals that I wanted to have…very strong , very decisive, seemed like not a care in the world.
Group Member C: And I can be all that and still not know who I am. That's what I'm saying, man. I am strong and decisive but I still don't know who I am.
Group Member A: You didn't hear what I said either when you were asking me "are you really representing the real you now, or just giving us some more bullsh-t?" But what I said in the beginning was that this group has shown me that I have an identity and am learning through this group who I am and that part you didn't seem to hear.

Researcher Commentary: This section of transcript revolves around a conversation in which Group Member C revealed, in detail, areas of his own personal struggle. Group Member B expresses a sense of dismay at finding out that Group Member C is not the flawless individual he thought him to be. Both Group Members C and A point out that Group Member B's perspectives are the result of ignoring parts of the conversation in which they shared their challenges and they ask why he selectively ignored those areas of discourse. Group Member B reveals that it is a result of his own perspectives and biases that are playing a role in his perception of fellow group members.

Interpretation: While this therapeutic support group was organized in part to facilitate an examination of experiences of invisibility that impact Black males, the group is not immune to assumptions and stereotypes indicative of invisibility within the group itself. This is exemplified when a group member ignores fellow group members' personal challenges and struggles, thus rendering them invisible and only enabling him to see them through his own personal needs and biases. The subsequent impact of this upon both

parties (Members B and C) is elucidated by a follow-up conversation facilitated by the group's psychologist.

> **Psychologist:** The lesson for you out of this behavior is that when you hear the brothers in here expressing some of their weaknesses or their limitations, perhaps you selectively not hear that because you want to see them in a strong image without the weakness.
> **Group Member B:** Yeah, I can definitely say that I've placed both [Group Members A and C] on a slight pedestal to a certain extent.
> **Psychologist:** So the question you have to ask, and this is for everybody, is why is it important for you to do those things?
> **Group Member B:** I can tell you exactly why in their case. You know, no Black male figure in my life, I mean this is it for me right now. And I even told you that's why I wanted to join this group – no older Black male figures for guidance, understanding, respect…my knights in shining armor. So to see your flaws shows that you know, brothers have flaws, and I've seen that enough.
> **Psychologist:** But you see what you do? By keeping him flawless because it's important to you, you don't do anything to help [Group Member C] deal with his issues because you can't afford for him to have any issues or flaws.
> **Group Member C:** Thank you!

Researcher Commentary: The above conversation is a continuance of the previous section of transcript in which the group analyzes a process whereby a group member views other members as perfect and flawless thereby rendering their true selves and all associated struggles, invisible. Group member B does this because he has experienced little exposure during his life to positive models of Black masculinity and as such, seeks to fulfill that need from the Black men of the group.

Interpretation: In this section of transcript an important, two-fold process is presented. First, the psychologist facilitates discussion representing how Group Members A and C's personal challenges have been rendered invisible by the greater need by others to perceive them as strong without flaws. This becomes apparent to all participants in the group. Secondly, Group Member B, saw Group Member C as flawless thereby idolizing

him and ignored his disclosures of personal challenges. This exchange was used to examine the ways in which individuals see things the way they want in the service of their own need. An advantage of group therapy is that it provides an opportunity to explore with others emotionally challenging experiences and to learn skills from others that can then be applied outside of the group.

> **Psychologist:** How did you feel about him putting you in that position?
> **Group Member C:** I didn't like it.
> **Psychologist:** And he put you in that position for many weeks.
> **Group Member C:** Right. I didn't like it because it didn't allow me to struggle. That's what I was saying. It didn't allow me to admit that I had to struggle, and that – no, that's not true. Playing into it would not allow me to admit that I had to struggle.
> **Group Member A:** Basking in it and enjoying it –
> **Group Member C:** and liking it would not allow – it became my cage.
> **Psychologist:** Yeah, but you stayed in that cage for many, many weeks.
> **Group Member C:** I live in that cage! I mean it's a cage I'm in! It's only here, weekly, that I started looking at being outside that cage.
> **Psychologist:** But the fact is though, you talk about you live in that cage, and you're not going to allow yourself to come out rarely, except here, you started to do that. [Group member A] has talked about being in a cage also. But the question becomes why don't you do that more often?

Researcher Commentary: In the above section of text the psychologist facilitates an analysis of an exchange about unique individual experiences within the group that is representative of how persons can be captive to their own perceptions that make them invisible.

He, and other group members point out the fact that the invisibility that was projected onto Group Member C by Group Member B, is one that Group Member C plays a role in creating. While aware that he is "caged" by this others as perfect and flawless, Group Member C colludes with this assumption and left his personal challenges unexamined

over the course of several sessions. The psychologist pushes the group to examine why they engage in this behavior of collusion.

Interpretation: This section of text reflects the ways in which the group serves to assist members to identify and overcome internalized invisibility. Group Member C's experience with invisibility in the group parallels what he experiences in his day-to-day life. In both settings he is viewed as the perfect professional Black man with no personal challenges. Unfortunately, the allure of this self-deception is one that Group Member C finds attractive yet, when forced to reflect upon it, he acknowledges that it also causes him to feel trapped. Through the interpersonal dynamics of the group and the direction of the group's psychologist, this dynamic is made apparent, and thereby available to change. Group therapy promotes sharing of process and outcome so that the revelations of members can indirectly promote insights within other group members. In the following week Group Member D exemplified this outcome.

> **Group Member D:** The conversation we had last week…it was nice to hear that we all kind of struggle with our own race…people in our own race. Because I have a group I run at my school of boys who are Black and Hispanic, and after our conversation, when we had supervision of that group in school I said, I felt that because I was Black that some of the kids that I work with should treat me in a different way than some of the White therapists there because I'm Black. In a sense I know it's irrational…but I felt that way. You know? "I'm here trying to help but sometimes you are trying to knock me down!" So we talked about it and it really just has to do with these kids have had so much go on in their life that it doesn't have to do with race. It has to do with "why should I trust you whatever color you are?" So, we were able to talk about race at work…because I was able to do it here. I think that some people were surprised that I brought it up; I was just talking about how I felt and I think that it was always there but it wasn't until this group that I had permission to say that. The thing is that because I was able to talk about it here, I was able to bring it outside here and talk about it at my job and then other staff were able to talk about how they felt, being white and being female. So you know, a lot of things came up from this group.

Interpretation:

Participation in this therapeutic support group has provided the speaker in this quote with a sense of agency to raise the topic of race with others in new ways. In earlier sections of the transcript he had discussed the ways that he feels unappreciated and viewed as different by the young men with whom he works. Although he participates in clinical supervision while facilitating the boys group, he has not utilized supervision to discuss the way race confrontations and innuendoes in the group generate conflicted racial identity feelings for him. It was his own therapeutic support group, however, that provided him with this new perspective on race and the sense of empowerment to engage in discussions of race and identity. It appears that the therapeutic support group assisted members to explore race and gender-based issues in ways that they have been unable to access on their own.

Research Question 4: How do group members manifest disillusionment, anger, doubts about self or personal efficacy in decision making associated with the invisibility syndrome as described by Franklin (1999, 763)?

Procedure Note: To address the fourth research question, the transcripts were reviewed for instances in the conversations that were reflective of anger, disillusionment, and doubts about self, associated with race-based interactions. Across the eight tapes utilized for this study, thirteen such instances were identified. When reviewed by this researcher, five of the thirteen quotations were selected for inclusion in this analysis.

Memo note: This section of the data contained some of what was, to me, some of the most powerful content of the entire analysis. The group discussions occurred during the time period that Colin Ferguson was on trial for the 1993 Long Island Rail Road massacre of primarily White commuters. Also during this timeframe, several White Staten Island police officers were found not guilty of a crime in the killing of an unarmed young Black male. This time period was a moment of great race-based social discussion in the country as a whole, as well as within the group. The group members discussed feelings of rage and even reflected upon their own thoughts of violence. The five quotations that were selected were chosen for their vivid and detailed portrayal of the emotional content of this discussion.

> **Group Member B:** I see brothers constantly getting hurt, you know, mentally, physically, and I've seen it down the ages, and then I wonder, you know, when is it going to stop? And then – you know, what happens to brothers that finally do decide to stand up and say, f-ck it? And, where are those brothers that do that. Am I one? Can I be one? Should I be one? Do you remember that young man out in Staten Island who was killed, Ernest Sayon? He was strangled. Anyway, a couple of the guys I know, knew him, knew his routine and everything. And we really thought about hurting my man, you know? And that's the rage I get at times.
> **Psychologist:** You thought about hurting…?
> **Group Member B:** Hurting that cop.
> **Group Member C:** Hurting the cop that strangled him?
> **Group Member B:** Oh, hell yeah. We thought we knew his routine, knew everything. And, you know, for whatever reason, some of us knew we weren't like that but were like "f-ck it, I've had enough" you know?

Researcher Commentary: In this section of text the group is discussing a then widely publicized incident in which several White New York City police officers killed an unarmed Black male while attempting to subdue and arrest him, and were ultimately exonerated for their actions. The group member describes feeling a level of rage that led

him to want to exact vengeance against one of the police officers. He acknowledges that such actions don't represent his inner identity, but he describes reaching a point where he no longer cared given his anger and frustration.

Interpretation: The actions discussed in this section of text are reflective of a rage that nearly overwhelmed the speaker's ability to control. He perceives this race-based injustice as just one more of many, and cannot currently conceive of any other recourse except for direct physical confrontation. This is also reflective of disillusionment driven by an underlying belief that there can be no justice for Black men, making the speaker consider uncharacteristic measures of retaliation. He feels disrespected, that Black male's sense of dignity is compromised and challenged, and it is also apparent that he questions his own basic identity to some degree.

> **Group member B:** I just have one quick question and I just thought about this too: Not necessarily what is going on now with Colin Ferguson, but how did you feel when you first heard about it? I'm not talking about his whole court scenario and all of that now, but the reasons he stated why he got on that train and did that, did you feel any kinship? Did you feel any sickness or morality? Did you feel like, "it is not the right thing but I have definitely felt like that" or just….how did you feel about that?
> **Psychologist:** Why are you asking that?
> **Group Member B:** Because, I felt like that at times! I have been out to Long Island, I used to go to school out there and I see, I used to work out there and I have felt the sh-t that they can make you feel, especially if you let them or if you feel inferior to begin with. They will reinforce it for you in a minute and I just understood his anger or the reasons why he said he supposedly did this. And even though I wouldn't do it myself,….yeah I wouldn't do it myself…I understood why he did it to a degree, and I've always felt like if I ever I got pushed too, too, too far. Who knows, you just might read about me going ape somewhere! I mean, granted I have never been pushed to the point where I've felt that, I mean, I have been attacked by White folk here and there, and I have never felt myself getting to that point of that extreme, but, I definitely can relate to where it was coming from.

Researcher Commentary: In this section of text the speaker wrestles with Ferguson's actions and the rage he too shares along with indignities as a result of racial discrimination from Whites.

Interpretation: This incident has served to reveal the strong, race-based emotions the speaker feels. It is apparent that he believes he shares a similar level of pain and rage as Colin Ferguson and, while he can't view himself acting in the same fashion, he states that he can relate to the underlying feelings that produced the actions.

> **Group Member A:** Well, I thought he was crazy, but then…you know, thinking about it a little deeper on some level, because of my own rage…I think I feel the need to separate myself, you know.
> **Group Member E:** Separate yourself?
> **Group Member A:** I can say that I feel enraged at times, but not enough to get on a train and start shooting people, although, to me, to make that distinction is irrelevant. It is like the question that [Group Member B] asked, I mean, if you feel enough rage, whatever vehicle is available to you, you are going to express it through that. So for me to say, "You know, I felt rage, but not enough rage to go on a train and start shooting people"….maybe if I have access to a gun (Laughter), so by making that distinction myself, I realize that there is probably a need for me to separate myself from that kind of scenario. More out of my own fear, of what I might do on the same situation. If that makes any sense?

Researcher Commentary: Here, the conversation about the actions of Colin Ferguson continues such that another group member examines the events in the light of the feelings he experiences due to discrimination and racism. To avoid circumstances where his own rage may become overwhelming, this group member describes actively avoiding situations where he feels race-related stressors may cause him to lose control.

Interpretation: Franklin's invisibility syndrome theory proposes that as Black individuals experience repeated exposures to invisibility, a potential for perilous behavior to develop is evidenced (Franklin, 2004). The speaker experiences a level of fear and an

uncertainty of what he would do if placed in circumstances of high racial oppression and consequently avoids certain forms of provocative interracial interaction or situations with potential for perilous behavior.

> **Group Member E:** I don't think I would discriminate.
> **Group Member C:** You know he's not prejudiced! [group laughter and cross talk]
> **Group Member E:** You know, during the course of my life, whatever negative encounters I've had with White people where they are coming at me from their personal negative perspective and that may be race…but I mean generally speaking here is just this politics of difference. We all have afros and you don't, then you're f-cked, we all have Nikes and you don't then you're f-cked.
> **Group Member A:** Yeah, I've had just as many scenarios I mean…I've grown up where a Black man is just as likely to stick me as a White man, and he'd probably be more likely to kill me.
> **Group Member B:** It seems like more with brothers the threat is physical violence is more prevalent with them in the immediate situation, but in the overview, I'm saying, White folks like to pulls those strings, be it economic, political, emotional, psychological, whatever, but, brothers have the more immediate response, yeah, that is immediate, you know, that is who you face.
> **Psychologist:** So, what I hear is that a lot of what is at the source of your rage is not only racism and the feelings you have against what White people do in terms of discrimination and pissing you off that way, but also there is a lot of feelings about the divisiveness and what Black folks do to each other. So you've got two sets of anger, one that's reserved for White folks and one that's reserved for your own folks?
> [Collective agreement]

Researcher Commentary: In this section of transcript the discussion of the Colin Ferguson case has transitioned to group members examining feelings of interracial and interracial rage generated toward both Blacks and Whites. Other members also explored feelings of fear, anger, and helplessness inspired by their interactions with fellow Blacks.

Interpretation: Throughout the analysis a recurrent theme is that the experience of invisibility by group members is as much a result of their interracial interactions with Whites, as they are from intraracial interactions with fellow Blacks. While the

conversation about rendering harm to others was largely in jest, it reflected genuine feelings of upset and anger with people harboring stereotype notions of Black men, both Black and White people.

> **Group Member A:** I mean I feel like I walk around with rage and I say that I "stuff it" or whatever it is you supposedly do with it to control it. But, there are certain dynamics in every situation, I'd say with something like rage, it's a lot like energy, it doesn't just disappear. It changes forms but it doesn't disappear. So you gotta figure, if you can't account for it going somewhere, I can only hope that mine isn't destructive. But in many cases, it gets turned in on ourselves, and we're not even aware of it. So, those are some of the things that I discover sometimes in moments of anger that I find myself doing self-destructive things, and I say to myself "Ooooh, that's where some of that goes!" So I try to identify where some of that anger goes. If I can't get rid of it directly, then I'm sort of looking for it. I'm on a little mission where I'm like "where did that anger go? Did it change forms…did it go into some backdoor fashion where I'm inflicting it on some individuals that are close to me? Like someone I'm in a relationship with?
> **Psychologist:** That is an important observation. It is an observation that really should make everybody think because the question is: Do you know where your anger goes if you don't let it out? Whether it's provoked by racism from White folks or aggravation from Black folks, When you get upset, you get angry and you don't express it, do you know where your anger goes? What form it comes out in? How it's wrapped the next time you see it. How well do you know yourself?

Researcher Commentary: In this section of text the speaker is identifying the fact that, while he is aware that he often experiences raged associated with race-related issues, he is not always aware of the forms that that rage takes for him. He identifies a process whereby he "stuffs" his anger inside, leaving it unexplored and not well understood. But he also recognizes that this anger is at risk to manifest, perhaps more self-destructively, at another moment in his life. He thus works to process the rage he experiences more effectively. The group's psychologist extrapolates this discussion to the whole group, asking them how well they understand and process their anger.

Interpretation: The final question asked by the group psychologist, "How well do you

know yourself?" in many ways, captures much of the work that was done in this Black male therapeutic support group for it is central to the experiences of invisibility that were explored. Although one is rendered invisible by others perceiving you differently than you perceive yourself, it is clear from the many quotations representative of the group process that how one perceives and understands themselves is central to the very experience of invisibility, and thereby, the invisibility syndrome. In this section of the transcript, the group is challenged to explore how they understand themselves specifically in relation to the strong emotions generated by experiences of invisibility. In doing so, they may be able to more effectively manage their encounters with invisibility and how it impacts them and their relationships with others.

Summary of Findings

In summary, the above analysis presented a variety of compelling findings. With regard to the first research question of how the experience of invisibility presented for Black men in a therapeutic support group, a number of experiences of invisibility were identified. In examining early time periods of their lives, group members talked about the emotions provoked by experiences of invisibility; they also talked about experiencing invisibility as a results of expectations associated with their academic and athletic performance. The analysis also identified experiences of internalized invisibility—experiences that particularly pertain to professional Black men—as well as invisibility that they were subjected to by members of their own racial group.

The second research question's transition to an analysis of strategies used by group members to counter experiences of invisibility revealed the interesting finding that

members do not always attempt to avoid the stereotypes that promote invisibility. Thus from the data we found the primary strategy of impression management, as manifested in instances when group members consciously adapted their behavioral patterns in response to their encounter with stereotypes. These adaptations were found to be bi-directional; in some instances the members embraced the encountered stereotype, and at other times they purposely worked to counter it.

Research question three's focus on the group dynamics within the therapeutic support group also identified interesting findings. Specifically, one of the primary group dynamic outcomes was that the members utilized the group to create a support network that was both manifested within the group process, and also extended beyond it. Further, there was evidence that group participation produced a level of agency that facilitated an ability to engage issues of race outside the group. Finally, another key finding of question three was that the experience of invisibility was encountered within the group itself as group members applied stereotypes even in their views of other members.

Lastly, question four examined group experiences from the perspective of Franklin's invisibility syndrome. Findings from this analysis again displayed the duality of the participants' experiences with race-based encounters. While group members did indeed display elements of Franklin's invisibility syndrome associated with race-based interactions with Whites, members also discussed similar reactions associated with race-based interactions with Blacks. These results provide further insight into the Black male experience with stereotypes and invisibility.

Chapter 5

Discussion

In his *Invisible Man*, Ralph Waldo Ellison depicts the lived experiences of a Black man constantly confounded by the racial stereotypes held by those around him. Throughout the novel, a work inspired by his own personal experiences, Ellison portrays a man wrestling with a sense of self that is influenced by race- and gender-based identities prescribed to him by others. This experience and its imposition of an identity at odds with one's own sense of self was described by Ellison as "invisibility," given its ability to render the victim's true self unseen.

Psychologist Anderson J. Franklin has proposed that the experiences detailed in Ellison's fictitious work can also be identified as a distinct intra-psychic and psychosocial phenomenon in the identity-formation and day-to-day lived experiences of Black men (Franklin, 1999). The literature further exploring the theory and research of invisibility remains sparse. The purpose of this qualitative study, therefore, was to further study invisibility in a sample of Black men by analyzing their interactions in a therapeutic support group. The transcripts of eight sessions from this therapeutic support group were studied to understand how Black men process emotions associated with race-based stressors. Research questions used to guide the study were the following: 1) How does the experience of invisibility present for African American men in therapeutic support groups across their various relationships?; 2) How do African American men represent their self-defined identity, or "visibility," as suggested by Franklin (1999, p. 821)?; 3)

How do Black men express their thoughts and feelings about their experiences of invisibility and what intergroup dynamics come into play as they do?; and 4) How do group members manifest disillusionment, anger, doubts about self or personal efficacy in decision making associated with the invisibility syndrome as described by Franklin (1999)?

For the analysis I utilized Critical Discourse Analysis, a qualitative methodology specifically aimed at identifying how power differences embedded in race based attributions, that is, when Black men are confronted by public stereotypes and attitudes imposed upon them, are "perpetuated, reinforced and resisted" (Ryan, 2010, p. 240). Reading through the transcripts, I looked for instances in which the men articulated experiences and emotions relevant to race based attributions related to my research questions, and then I looked for patterns. Below, I draw some conclusions emanating from the main themes and issues identified through my analysis.

Invisibility Experienced in Early Childhood and Early Adult Relationships

The first research question of the study sought to identify the ways in which group participants experienced invisibility across their various relationships from childhood to early adulthood. As detailed previously, invisibility was defined as instances in which members of the group either explicitly communicated the notion that "others see me differently than I see myself because of my race" or this idea could be inferred from what they did express.

One of the initial presentations of invisibility in the data was in group members' discussion of their childhoods. For example, one of the participants when reflecting upon

his childhood reported being cognizant of distinct differences between his personal pattern of emotional presentation and the emotional expression stereotypically associated with young Black males, and therefore expected of him. While this experience, as described, fits the duality in the experience of invisibility utilized for this study, what is particularly noteworthy in this case is the focus by the group member and others in the group upon their family members as perpetrators in cultivating this duality. The traditional focus of the literature on invisibility and related areas often focuses upon cross racial encounters and less upon how individuals of one's own racial group, namely, his family in this instance, can be instrumental in shaping self-beliefs. This "duality" experience of invisibility as coming from both "sides," so to speak, intra-racial and cross racial was one of the key findings in this study and will be discussed further throughout this discussion of results.

Although findings associated with Black males subjected to the experience of invisibility by other Black individuals is less in the literature on invisibility, the underlying cultivation of this duality in emotional invisibility is linked to related studies. For example, Nelson, Leerkes, O'Brien, Calkins, and Marcovitch (2012) noted in a study of parenting practices that African American mothers tended to be less likely to deem it appropriate for their children to display negative emotions in both public and private settings than European American mothers. Further, Matsumoto (1993) identified that Black mothers were less accepting of negative emotional presentations among their children than majority race mothers, a fact Consedine and Magi (2002) and Dodge,

McLoyd, and Lansford (2005) attribute to minority mothers' fear that their children will be assessed negatively by majority race members if negative emotions are displayed.

It is noteworthy that as the conversation continued in this specific section of the transcript, the participant transitioned from a discussion of intra-racial invisibility to the sense of invisibility he experienced when White school-age peers viewed his emotionality as abnormal because "Black kids don't cry!" Thus, the participant experiences invisibility imposed by the dilemma of family expectations to control expression of emotions that is a source to the "cool pose" demeanor represented by street youth (Majors & Billson, 1992), while needing to be the "sensitive kid," which puts at risk misrepresentation of Black boys' public emotional stance if genuine sensitivity is revealed. In this reflection the group member sees himself as pulled in two different directions: he is seen differently than he sees himself by majority race members, and his self-concept is impacted by race- and gender-based expectations held by members of his family and own racial group peers. The resulting experience is one that the participant described as being placed in a "box," revealing his sense of powerlessness and frustration in the face of expectations.

Another way in which invisibility was experienced for study participants was in their early school lives. This was evident in one participant's reflection about early primary school days in which invisibility is associated with stereotypes about Black male academic performance. As noted in Chapter 2, stereotypes about the academic potential of Black males are widespread in American society and impact teachers' assessment of Black male students (Ferguson, 2001; Ross & Jackson, 1991), Black male students'

interactions with academic staff and White students (Ancis, Sedlacek, & Mohr, 2000), and how Black students actually perform academically (Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995, 1998; Walton & Spencer, 2009). The pervasive low expectations of Black male academic achievement in education are reflected in the observations of the group member. It challenges his self-concept and creates self-doubt about abilities. Thus, although the study participant attended a college prep high school, views himself as a good student, and identifies as being "at the top of my class," he feels he is viewed as less intelligent than his White classmates. The invisibility of his academic talents, and associated power differentials inherent in teacher-student status, the analysis of group member's dialogue on this topic align well with the duality experience intrinsic to invisibility represented within the literature (Franklin, 2004; Steele, 2010) .

Interestingly however, the participant's portrayal of his experience with invisibility does not end with his stereotype-based interactions with his White peers. He also engaged in a discussion about how he is viewed by Blacks within his local community. In so doing, we again encounter a more complex dynamic than just cross-racial studies imply by the "Black victim - White perpetrator" scenario typically found within the literature. The stereotypes of Black male intelligence held by Whites also serve to put the participant at odds with the stereotypic racial and gendered expectations held by Black peers within his community. This is exemplified in the quotation: "But with White kids, as a Black guy, you were never quite as smart as they were but in the neighborhood you were ostracized because you were smart." Again, a duality exists such that the participant experiences invisibility from both interracial and intra-racial sources.

Furthermore, the dialogue of this experience of invisibility illustrates a sense of powerlessness and frustration when navigating two peer groups, each with their own different beliefs, attitudes and expectations.

Another aspect of academic-related invisibility was represented when participants related that if they were part of an athletic team while in college, the academic expectations of them were low, regardless of how academically oriented or capable they were. Literature on the academic experience of Black athletes reveals that they are often viewed as non-academically oriented based upon the assumption they obtained admission primarily for their athletic abilities (Simiyu, 2009). This was captured by one member's reflection: "If you played ball you don't have to be academic, even if you're an academic kid." Participants in this study represented they learned early, from both Black and White sources, what was expected (or more accurately, not expected) from them in terms of academic performance. It is not surprising that some of the messages they encountered became incorporated into their own personal narrative.

Internalized Invisibility

Williams and Williams-Morris (2000) define internalized racism as "the acceptance, by marginalized racial populations, of the negative societal beliefs and stereo-types about themselves"(p. 255). If stereotypes can be internalized as the literature suggests (Steele, 1997; Steele & Aronson, 1995, 1998; Walton & Spencer, 2009; Williams and Williams-Morris, 2000), then it stands to reason that the invisibility theorized by Franklin can be internalized also. Further, if invisibility is understood as experiences in which an individual's true self is obscured by stereotypes, then

internalized invisibility, like internalized racism, is an experience whereby an individual has accepted the negative stereotypes about themselves and experiences difficulty perceiving their true self.

Within the data there were three distinct instances in which participants described experiences synonymous with internalized invisibility. In the first instance, one participant reflected on the messages he received as a youth about his intelligence level and stated that there was a time in his life when: "I felt inferior. At one time, I could know two plus two equals four, but if a White boy said, "No, it's three," I'd actually question myself." In the second instance, another speaker described a self-imposed "glass ceiling" that impacted his sense of what he felt able to accomplish. Finally, a third instance of this form of invisibility emerged in the data when a participant elaborated on the idea of "intelligence." He argued that the majority race controlled the definition of what it meant to be "smart" and, indeed, changed this definition to suit their own needs and interests; for him, this had produced a feeling of being intellectually "less than," solely because he was Black.

Over the course of the eight tapes the participants only directly discussed the internalization of stereotypes in the above three instances; however, given the plethora of stereotypes encountered by Black men, this is potentially a very important area worthy of further exploration. Invisibility, as it has traditionally been presented in the literature, is an experience that is the direct result of an interaction that takes place between the victim rendered invisible and the party unable (or unwilling) to view the victim's true self. What the literature is missing is a conceptualization of invisibility as also produced through an

internalized process, one in which interaction may not be between two parties per se, but between a victim and a widespread and culturally powerful set of ideas that a person engages in a more abstract sense. This particular area of a Black man's thought process, and thinking about stereotypes socially perpetrated goes beyond studies of reaction to stereotypes to include the cognitive and emotional process of internalization. For example as suggested in an above quotation, how does a young Black boy go from knowing that two plus two equals four to doubt that it might be three because a White boy says so? Why is self-integrity compromised? This is why research on the internalization process of invisibility is another important area of study.

Intragroup Invisibility Experienced in Adulthood

Group participants regularly encountered experiences of invisibility when they talked about their adult lives as well. It is important to review once again the demographic characteristics of the group. The group was composed of five professional Black men, four of whom possessed at least a Bachelor's degree, while the fifth had a degree from a trade school. Given that only 2.5 percent of all bachelor degrees in 1993 where awarded to Black men (NCES, 1996), the participants differed in distinct ways from the larger Black male population. To the extent that the sample was not representative of the average Black male academic accomplishments, nevertheless, many of the men described their failure to conform to stereotypic expectations of Black masculinity held by Black members of their community. This engendered a sense of invisibility.

In the first instance, one group member, who worked with young boys of color, discussed the fact that his racial identity and masculinity were frequently called into question by the youth who did not view him as fitting the stereotypic model of a Black man. The group member expressed frustration with the fact that his unique form of Black masculinity (largely a product of his education and professional experiences) was not considered valid, resulting in their perceiving him as: "either gay or acting White." Similarly, another member described commuting to and from work on public transportation and being frequently confronted by other Black males who judged him to be an "Uncle Tom" due to his business attire. Both instances appeared to have had a significant negative emotional impact on the participants, throwing the disjuncture between their self-image and the perceptions of others into sharp relief.

I believe this to be a significant finding for a number of reasons. First, traditionally, studies associated with the topic of Black males "acting White" have focused almost entirely upon academic performance in primary and secondary schooling (Fordham & Ogbu, 1986; Ogbu, 2004; Tyson, Darity, & Castellino, 2005). Less represented in the research literature, however, are the perspectives of professional Black men who are marginalized as a result of similar negative associations with Black masculinity achievement encountered in early childhood academic settings. Consequently, more research needs to focus on the emotional impact upon professional Black men when their adult accomplishments are disparaged like their childhood academic achievements by both interracial and intra-racial encounters in early schooling.

Strategies of Visibility

In the article "Visibility is important too: Viewing the larger systemic model," Franklin (1999) writes:

> So much of my discussion of the model has emphasized the invisibility dimension that the visibility component of the experience is being underrepresented in importance. Visibility is the counterforce to experiences of invisibility and is equally important in the model. (p. 821)

The position presented here is that the efforts of Black men to navigate and even resist the invisibility they encounter are central to fully understanding the experience of invisibility itself. Given this, another vital goal of this study was to better understand the ways in which Black men contend with invisibility-producing stereotypes.

The primary finding associated with this research question was that participants engaged in two processes to manage their encounters with invisibility: impression management, and a secondary process in which they developed what I have labeled as a "reactive identity"—a sense of self that has formed in response to imposed invisibility. Much of the literature pertaining to identity development within groups of color focuses on the processes that guide an individual though an understanding of their race-based sense of self (Cross, 1971; Helms, 1984, 1990). There is much less work examining how experiences with invisibility, specifically, can also serve to impact one's identity.

In regards to the impression management approach, participants actively engaged in strategies to adapt to the stereotypes they encountered on a day-to-day basis and in so doing, actively navigated situations in which they were rendered invisible. One group member, for example, described intentionally uncrossing his legs and slouching down

when in a train full of other Black men—men who, the participant believed, expected him to conform to a specific presentation of his race and gender. The act of "mimicking" the stereotype in this instance was a conscious one that the participant employed in order to navigate a space he thought was likely governed by specific stereotypes of Black masculinity. In so doing, he was aware of the fact that his self-presentation did not match with his own self-image; in this sense, he made *himself* invisible.

Conversely, other group members described employing a very different approach in response to stereotypes of Black masculinity. Unlike the participant above who consciously performed the expected stereotype in order to navigate a specific environment, other group members developed a form of internal self-identity that explicitly rejected expectations, a *reactive identity*. Some participants, for example, presented themselves in diametrical opposition to the negative stereotypes associated with Black men in an attempt to be "seen." Thus a group member abstained from drinking and stayed in an unsatisfying marriage to counter the stereotype that Black men are marriage averse. The downfall of this strategy, however, was that it allowed participants no greater freedom to display their genuine selves; they remained as restricted by their effort to refute stereotypes and expectations as they would have been trying to meet them. Essentially, all they did was trade one form of invisibility for another.

Up to this point, the literature on invisibility has been primarily focused on presenting the varied ways in which invisibility has impacted Black men, as well as working to better understand the stereotypic encounters that produce this effect (Franklin,

1999, 2004; Franklin & Boyd-Franklin, 2000; Parham, 1999; Tovar-Murray & Tovar-Murray, 2012). The findings of this study help to round out this literature by providing less explored perspectives of professional Black men, and also insights regarding Black men's strategies and responses once they have been rendered invisible.

Dynamics Within the Therapeutic Support Group

Franklin (1999) points out that "there is an urgent need for innovative, ethnic-appropriate interventions to improve effective delivery of services to Black men" (p. 786). He has proposed the therapeutic support group as a well-suited means of assisting Black men to engage and process race-based stressors. At the same time, he has also offered this proviso:

> It is not uncommon for men to come together and talk socially, but to talk with other Black male strangers about personal life struggles in a support group is forbidding. It violates basic gender codes of survival, which for many African American men derive from "street life codes" and community rules about surviving as a Black male (Anderson, 1990; Majors & Billson, 1992; Mancini, 1980). Any revealing of vulnerability threatens personal image and alters necessary power alignments between men, particularly according to codes within the African American male "brotherhood." (Franklin, 1999, p. 787)

Given the racialized gender norms against discussing personal challenges and emotional difficulties with others, the fact that participants in this study did precisely that is both uncommon and invaluable. Their conversations provide a rare window into the emotional functioning of Black men in therapy group settings as well as the power dynamics that emerge therein—the focus of the study's third research question.

One of the most noteworthy findings in this section of the data is the fact that the invisibility that the group members encountered in their day-to-day functioning as Black

men also came to be manifested within the group itself. Thus, for example, a group member who previously described an inability to be his true self as a result of race-based stereotypes encountered outside the group applied those same stereotypes in his engagement with the Black men within the group. This pattern of behavior is predicted by Yalom (2005), who argues that group therapy produces a microcosm that is reflective of group members' respective levels of functioning. He writes:

> A freely interactive group, with few structural restrictions, will, in time, develop into a social microcosm of the participant members. Given enough time, group members will begin to be themselves: they will interact with the group members as they interact with others in their social sphere, will create in the group the same interpersonal universe they have always inhabited. (Yalom, 2005, p. 32)

Yalom (2005) argues that this is a beneficial process because, by recreating within the group the problematic lived experiences outside of the group, "the central problematic issues of all members will be evoked and addressed" (p. 41). This dynamic was certainly evident within this group when one member placed another on a pedestal as a father surrogate without flaws. His assumptions and expectations were just as restrictive as the same stereotypes encountered outside of the group. All of the group members were able to explore the process by which they had experienced within group sessions intraracial circumstances that rendered them invisible and think about how to counter it. This process assisted group members to explore the ways in which they had come to internalize stereotypes about Black men themselves. The transcripts present this process as an individually and collectively empowering experience. One group member discussed, for example, how being in the group provided him with a greater sense of agency and thus enabled him to address race-related concerns in his workplace.

Finally, findings also indicated that participation in the group facilitated the members' ability to provide emotional support to one another in a manner that exceeds that usually afforded to Black men by other Black men. Participants described the group as providing an emotional safety net that prevented them from falling back into self-destructive behavior. Participants also developed and shared a level of intimacy that was beneficial for both their emotional health and well-being and their ability to navigate race-based stressors. It is clear from these findings that this intervention approach has intrinsic value as a means of enhancing the ability of Black men to function emotionally in environments impacted by stereotypes and invisibility.

Manifestations of Invisibility Syndrome

The invisibility syndrome as defined by Franklin (1999) is "an inner struggle with the feeling that one's talents, abilities, personality, and worth are not valued or even recognized because of prejudice and racism" (p. 761). Franklin (2004) further argues that prolonged experiences of invisibility can produce chronic indignation, disillusionment, rage, and an impaired sense of self. As such, the data was analyzed specifically to identify instances reflective of the anger, disillusionment, self-doubt associated with race-based interactions.

The findings in this area conformed to the invisibility syndrome as defined by Franklin (1999). Coincidentally, one of the group sessions utilized in this study took place at a time when local events produced a significant amount of emotion and reflection upon topics of race within the nation as a whole, but also within this particular session of the group. Following the strangling death of an unarmed Black male by local White

police officers (and the officers' subsequent acquittal), and a mass shooting of White commuters by a Black man, group members discussed the events and the feelings of frustration and rage that they evoked—feelings that fit well with Franklin's model of the invisibility syndrome. In addition to expressing feelings of rage in the face of what they perceived to be prejudice, racism, and injustice, the group members also reflected upon their very identities and how they perceived themselves. Thus, one participant shared with the group that he had considered responding to police violence with violence of his own, but after spending time reflecting on his identity, he decided that such action would not comport with who he is. This example illustrates precisely what one would expect according to Franklin's definition of invisibility syndrome, albeit in somewhat intensified form given the particular timing of the events described.

There were also, however, unique presentations of the invisibility syndrome that are not typically found within the literature. Previous writings have primarily focused upon the syndrome as the result of an accumulation of race-based stressors originating from White sources. But, as I have pointed out in other sections, the participants in this study cited a number of intra-racial interactions that produced the same symptoms traditionally associated with the invisibility syndrome. In ways likely shaped by their unique status as professional Black men, the participants described experiencing anger, frustration, and impairment of their sense of self as a result of prolonged exposure to race-based stressors from fellow Blacks. This finding serves to expand the understanding of the invisibility syndrome and the ways in which a more diverse group of Black men may experience it today.

Invisibility and the Self

A core element of the experience of invisibility identified in this study concerns how participants understood and presented their own unique sense of self. Examinations of the self – the cognitive, emotional and interpersonal presentation of one's identity – have been a traditional area of focus in studies of human emotional functioning. Likewise, the self is also found to play a pronounced role in the experiences of invisibility presented here. Using Winnicott's (1960) theory of object relations, I note insights regarding the development of the Black male self as it relates to invisibility, as well as ways to facilitate positive growth of the self.

Winnicott's Object Relations Theory revolves around several key factors in early childhood – the "good enough mother," a safe and stable "holding environment," and a sense of "omnipotence" – each of which, Winnicott argues, enables individuals the ability to develop a true sense of self. When the parental unit meets a child's needs as they present, and creates a safe space where the child can comfortably explore her/his individual wants and needs, a secure understanding of the self is attained. Conversely, when these conditions are denied, a false sense of self is produced. Considering the experience of invisibility from the perspective of Winnicott's Object Relations Theory, Aymer (2010) writes,

> Similar to a mother's inability to respond adequately to the developmental needs of her child, which induces the false self, the failure of social structures to recognize the myriad ways (e.g., unemployment, police harassment, underemployment, poor health care) injustices thwart African American men's life-affirming qualities also produces the false self. (p. 25).

This perspective is supported by the findings of this study. The variety of race-based stressors encountered by the participants in both same-race and cross-racial contexts impacted their perspectives of themselves and their interpersonal interactions with others. Indeed, a common theme that emerged from the data was participants' expressing the fact that they did not know who they truly are.

If there are parallels that can be drawn between the false self of Winnicott's Object Relations Theory and the self impacted by the experience of invisibility, then it stands to reason that similarities would also exist between how one can facilitate the transition from a false to a true self and the journey from invisibility to visibility. The object relational treatment goal, as dictated by Winnicott, is to facilitate the renewed growth and development of areas of the self that were stunted in early childhood. In this study, the therapeutic support group served precisely this role of facilitating personal exploration and development. Again, `Aymer notes that:

> The true self can emerge through the provision of resources from social and political systems, which, in turn, can lead to viable opportunities thereby instilling confidence and eroding the stains of marginalization. This can facilitate ego mastery (i.e., having a strong sense of self), which is necessary to exercise personal autonomy (p. 25).

Through the support group analyzed here, members were provided with a safe space that nurtured the growth of their sense of self. The group's therapist functioned not unlike an effective parent, who helped participants to identify and value their own wants and needs. It is clear that this approach to working with Black men provides exactly the kind of resources and opportunities that Aymer identifies as crucial for the development of the Black male self.

Invisibility and Black men's relationship with Black women

Noticeably absent from the participants' discussion of their experiences of invisibility are substantive reflections on the role that women play in this process. While one participant discussed how female family members' expectation of how Black boys are supposed to present emotionally served to shape the invisibility he experienced in early childhood, the role women play in making Black men feel invisible was left largely unexamined. There are two viable explanations for this absence: either the participants simply did not discuss this issue during the particular sessions recorded and used for this study, or the issue did not come up because the men did not perceive women as playing a significant role in their experiences of invisibility. Both possibilities merit further exploration.

The data for this study is comprised of eight recorded sessions of a therapy group that met for a span of several years. The role of women may well have been discussed by the group during sessions not utilized for this study. In considering this explanation, however, it is important to note that while only a fraction of this group's collective experience was utilized for this analysis, the topic material covered during these eight tapes was quite expansive. Given the diversity of angles and perspectives that *were* explored regarding the experience of invisibility across the eight tapes, the absence of any discussion of the role of women in relation to invisibility is notable, particularly given that women were discussed in other ways and in relation to other issues. This suggests the possibility of the second explanation.

In the overwhelming majority of cases, when the men in this study talked about experiencing invisibility, they did so in the context of male-male interactions. It is possible that the reason for this could be associated with the fact that the study was an examination of the behavior of men existing within a patriarchal social system where race and gender strongly interact. Throughout the study, the participants repeatedly defined themselves along race and gender lines, through reference to standards set by other males. Thus, for example, one participant reflected upon his sense of self when confronted by male passengers on a train, while another wrestled with his identity in light of perspectives held by young male teenagers with whom he interacted. It may be that women appear less frequently in the group members' contemplation of their own invisibility because, simply put, the men have been socialized within a patriarchal society to consider the perspectives of women as less salient or important than those of other men with regards to defining their sense of identity. According to this logic, even if women *were* influential in the development and maintenance of the men's sense of self, the men may not have wanted to share this information for fear of it being interpreted as a form of weakness given patriarchal standards of masculinity. Ultimately, given the all-male composition of the group and the fact that the issue was not explicitly discussed on the tapes used in the study, I can only speculate about the explanation. Further research is needed to explore the many gendered dynamics that likely shape experiences of invisibility; in particular, the benefits and drawbacks of mixed-gender therapy groups would be interesting to consider in relation to this question.

Clinical Implications of the Study

There currently exists little literature on culturally appropriate intervention approaches for addressing the emotional needs of Black men; this is also the case for professional Black men, a distinct population within the Black community. Therapeutic support groups such as the one utilized in this study represent a viable intervention for working with this population. The study supported the perspective that therapeutic support groups can capitalize upon normative social interactions in relationship building that frequently guide how Black males engage each other (Franklin, Chen, N'cho, Capawana, and Hoogasian, 2014).

Through the group, members were able to connect with one another in a manner initially similar to that found in other settings (i.e., barber shops, sports bars, etc.). They used humor and friendly banter to form connections with fellow group members, which was in turn, utilized to explore more substantive areas of their emotional functioning. It is argued here that this intervention proved itself to be a viable option for working with professional Black men as well as to be a beneficial approach for facilitating the emotional development and healing of Black men from varying socioeconomic positions.

In addition to displaying the value of the therapeutic support group as an effective intervention, the study also endorsed the Theory of Invisibility as a means of conceptualizing the race-based challenges Black men encounter. Therapists working with this population in either group or individual settings, would be well served to explore the ways in which their Black male patients are obstructed from manifesting their genuine selves due to either external or internal, race-based stimuli.

Finally, the study also indicated that therapists working with professional Black male patients in particular, should pay unique attention to the ways in which their patient's social status can serve to generate feelings of alienation from other Black men, their family or the Black community as a whole. Given the socially ubiquitous stereotypes associated with how Black men are "supposed" to present, as well as the way in which professional Black men often differ from these stereotypes, therapists working with this population should explore their patient's feelings of communal connectedness and the associated impact this male ethnic connectedness, or lack thereof, can have upon emotional functioning. Such efforts would serve to enhance mental health providers' cultural competence in counseling diverse Black male populations.

Limitations of the Study

The findings reviewed above do have several limitations, though the value of such limitations is that they simultaneously point out fruitful directions for future research. First, while the study was designed with the intent of using triangulation as a means of demonstrating rigor and validity, the data was not well suited to this approach. Triangulation of data sources uses a comparison of data at varying time periods to assess the validity of the derived conclusions. Although the data consisted of several individual taped sessions, the topics of each of session varied widely and were often independent of previous sessions, thus denying the ability to compare the analysis at varying points in time.

Another limitation of the study is associated with generalizability of findings. While a qualitative analysis allows for a level of interpretation of the data more intimate

and individualized than that typically found with quantitative analyses, given the small sample size of participants in the group examined here, and the limited number of tapes used for the analysis, the findings cannot be considered to be generalizable. Further, the participants utilized for the study were largely college-educated Black men, and while significant gains have been made in Black male college education rates, the demographics of the group are not reflective of the larger Black male population and thus the findings should be considered with that limitation in mind. Finally, the group members were all residents of one urban area in the northeastern United States and, therefore, the findings do not shed light on the ways in which invisibility might differ in different areas of the country with different inter- and intra-racial dynamics. Despite these limitations, however, I believe that this small, yet extremely rich data set has provided a unique perspective on invisibility and the invisibility syndrome as proposed by Franklin.

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