Playing the Game: Exploring Dialectical Tensions and Co-Cultural Communication Strategies of Black Males in Predominantly White Organizational Structures

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I am grateful to God for setting me on this path and seeing me through the process. To my parents, thank you for your continuous love and wisdom. To my wife Danielle, without your love, support, and patience, the completion of this project would not have been possible, much gratitude to you. To my children Romere and Autumn, you inspire me. To my beloved family and special friends, thanks for keeping me encouraged.

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This thesis is dedicated to the voices of Solomon Northup, Ralph Ellison, Ellis Cose, and all those invisible individuals who desire to be heard. I have tried to represent your experiences as honestly and sincerely as possible.

Mark C. Hopson
As non-dominant group members enter and attempt to succeed within the United States’ organizational structures, there continues to be a need for scholarly examination concerning how their communication is impacted by culture and power. This thesis focuses specifically on how discourse is influenced by these factors. It is an exploration of the dialectical tensions that beset the communication of African American males whose interactive success or failure in academic and professional organizations is often associated with the historical differences of culture and power. A review of existing literature addresses the communication dilemmas and co-cultural strategies that “outsiders within” (Collins, 1986), and Black males in particular, use within U.S. organizations and academic institutions. This thesis addresses the general question “How does the Black man survive communicatively within the predominantly European-American U.S. organization?” This thesis seeks to crystallize the struggles of persons seldom acknowledged in traditional research (Allen, Orbe, & Olivas, 1999). Primarily, this research attempts to look beyond cultural generalizations (Orbe, 2000) and offer a critical exploration of power, culture, and language themes.
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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Although the U.S. workforce is becoming increasingly diverse, the majority of research and theorizing in communication continues to be based on an assumption of cultural similarity (Fine, 1991). For communication scholars, indications of this assumption should raise questions. Do limited research endeavors parallel a lack of comprehensive understanding, regarding the impact of culture and gender on the U.S. institution and its members? Furthermore, how are culture and gender impacted by the U.S. institution? The answers to questions like these may lend epistemological and ontological insight to the discourse that encircles us, particularly in multicultural and organizational communication, and related diversity issues. For these reasons, communication scholars must lead the way in meeting the challenge of deconstructing the predominance of race, culture, and power in U.S. organizational structures.

In the past, U.S. organizations could be complacent about denying access to those in the workforce who were neither White nor male (Fine, 1991). Subsequently, many U.S. organizations and institutions have largely ignored the need to examine the participation dynamics for members who were neither European-American nor male (Orbe, 1998a). Additionally, they have failed to address the powerful impact of subtle rights and privileges held by some organizational members and denied to others (Orbe, 1998a).
The influence of culture on communication is indeed worthy of study. Fine (1991) writes:

Even when people of different racial and cultural backgrounds speak the same language, they have difficulty communicating with one another. People from different cultural backgrounds bring different meanings, values, assumptions, and discourse styles into workplace discourse. (p. 159)

To include power and privilege to discourse that is already burdened with cultural difference will undoubtedly increase the complexities of organizational communication. The thesis presented here seeks to investigate the questions previously stated, and to extend this effort to address the penalty and privilege (Collins, 1990; Orbe, 1998a) between members of non-dominant and dominant group members in organizational structures.

The rate of success or nonsuccess of Black males in dominant organizations symbolizes the reality amidst a host of discussions about diversity within the U.S. organization. Taking a critical look at this reality is important not only to Black males, but to disenfranchised groups, and others, who benefit from the workforce and/or institution that values and reflects an inclusive society.

Purpose

Various endeavors have been made to elucidate the dynamics of Black male participation in both corporate and academic organizations (Gibbs, 1988; Oliver, 1989; Orbe, 1994). However, it is a relatively recent occurrence, that communication academe has set aside restrictions for communication research to allow marginalized voices to be heard in the same way as "those persons who are European American (White), male, heterosexual, able bodied, and/or from the
middle or upper socioeconomic status (Orbe, 1998b, p. 2). The result of which is a field of study largely constructed within a eurocentric point of view. Some scholars have addressed the need to achieve a broader and more worldwide scope by including the observations of the outsider-within (Collins, 1986; Orbe, 1998a), the oppressed, or outsider (Allen, 1996), and those who question the status quo (hooks, 1992). This road to inclusion has been an important, yet difficult one indeed, hinging on antagonistic cooperation (Ellison & Murray, 2000).

Continuous examination of this process may reveal communication tendencies that further delineate non-dominant group member's efforts to belong, yet acknowledge differences within the organization as well. For example, the inexhaustible efforts of Black males towards sincere participation is poignantly expressed by Ribeau (2000), who refers to his scholastic and professional frustration as “roping for a connection between my experience and the discipline which seemed to ignore it” (p. 20).

If the number of Black males employed in dominant structures is increasing (U.S. census, 2000), so too should his strategies of communication increase, in order to create and maintain, respectively, any semblance of success within those structures. Furthermore, if the U.S. organization is to understand success or failure for Black men within the organization, it is important to identify the dialectical tensions and strategies that inform communication styles for Black males who, as Gibbs (1988) describes, have been failed by all the major institutions of American society. Researchers should analyze how cultural difference informs communication. Orbe (1995) suggests that scholars recognize the diversity within,
simultaneously “underscoring communication differences between African American and European Americans” (p. 64); thereby extending the reasoning of Hecht, Ribeau, & Alberts (1989) in recognizing that understanding strategies in use to enhance interethnic communication are an important step in promoting understanding in discourse.

Rationale

As stated earlier, non-dominant group members are a larger part of U.S. organizations today (U.S. Economic Census, 1997). Non-White groups in U.S. organizations include African Americans, Latino/as Americans, Chinese Americans, Japanese Americans, Filipina/o Americans, Native Americans and Puerto Ricans, and have collectively been referred to as people of color (Allen, 1995), non-dominant groups (Buzzanell, 1999), or co-cultural groups (Orbe, 1998a & 1998b). As the changing face of U.S. organizations become more multicultural, it will be important that the organizations recognize perceptions of, and by, the aforementioned racial/ethnic groups (Fine, 1991). Specific insight is needed to understand how these perceptions influence intercultural communication within the organization (Mumby, 1997).

The increase of racial/ethnic group members in U.S. organizations bespeaks an increasing need to explore how communication is impacted by dialectical tensions of non-dominant group members, particularly Black males, in dominant settings, as well as the strategies they enact to manage those tensions. Furthering these and similar investigations will undoubtedly reveal variance in communicative practices for this group.
Additionally, as communication scholars focus on the process of how individuals and groups are given voice, it exemplifies the idea that perhaps there is a special obligation to examine the communication of a group of Americans [Black males] who have been described as endangered (Foeman, Brown, Pugh, & Pearson, 1996).

Lastly, the study of communicative patterns within organizations may uncover new ideas central to the communication tensions and strategies of its members. Critical investigation of institutional or organizational culture, language, and symbols, may create insight to a pattern of power agendas in the structural meaning that have historically determined which issues are legitimately open for debate. This critical investigation will focus on and reveal other hegemonic privileges, that are often defined as the way things are and not susceptible to change (Zak, 1996).
CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELEVANT LITERATURE

Scholars have identified race, culture, and power as key components to the organizational success or failure for the persons of color in dominant settings (Allen, 1995, Fine, 1991, 1993; Hecht, Rebeau & Sadano, 1996; Orbe, 1995, 1998a, 1998b, 1999). Reich (1981) cites race as a major basis for domination, and a major means through which the division of labor is determined in organizations. Nkoma (1992) views race as forever salient in organizations, even if muted and suppressed. The influence of race in the organization is a prevalent issue, but seemingly overlooked (Martin & Nakayama, 1999; Orbe, 1998b). Yet, scholars express communication between non-dominant group members has not been examined fully (Buzzanell, 1999). Consequently, through critical interpretation, people of color, women, and other non-dominant groups have attempted to create more than one traditional source of knowledge (Mumby, 1997), offering experience as truth through standpoint theory (Harding, 1987, 1991; Hartsock, 1983; Smith, 1987; Wood, 1992), in hopes of raising consciousness for all (Allen, 1998).

This goal of this thesis is to analyze the signs that create and maintain meaning in the dominant organizational setting (Eco, 1976). Recognizing the organization as a matrix full of possible meanings (Frey & Frey, 1984), this thesis does not claim one “form of dominant group communication” (e.g., men’s communication, European communication) (Orbe, 1998b p. 12). As such, it seeks
to avoid generalizing group experiences, and does not claim to articulate one form of Black male communication. However, it does call attention to culture’s influence on communication (Niva & Hickson, 1996), and the power differences within the organization that work to subdue its non-dominant members (Jackson, 1997), and force these members to develop strategies for mere organizational survival (Orbe, 1998b).

The following chapter highlights those critical elements of organizational discourse that will greatly impact the experience of its non-dominant group members, particularly Black men. In the following sections culture, communication, and power, respectively, are reviewed and articulated as significant factors that influence the communicative practices of Black men within the organization.

Culture

The nation could not survive being deprived of the presence [of African Americans] because, by the irony implicit in the dynamics of American democracy, they symbolize both its most stringent testing and the possibility of its greatest human freedom. (Ellison, 1970, p. 44).

In the U.S., the signature salad bowl of the world, the concept of culture is a significant focus of study (Goldberg, 1994), not only in intercultural and interpersonal communication, but to organizational communication contexts as well. Culture refers to a state of identity for all people, and is often times affiliated with ethnicity and skin color (Orbe & Harris, 2001). It is possible that the origin of combined culture and communication research dates back to the time of the early Greeks (Reischauer & Fairbank, 1958), who attempted to describe social relations by exploring culture. The term “culture” takes on different meanings in
different types of research (Moon, 1996), and includes studying the culture of ethnic groups, organizations, companies, workgroups, and gender groups. Culture informs humankind and describes the truths people come to know. Regardless of the context, culture is always present in human interaction (Nieva & Hickson, 1996).

This thesis emphasizes culture as a form of social identity. Race and ethnicity are linked to culture in that each is commonly used to distinguish between groups. Existing research (Martin & Nakayama, 1999; Orbe & Harris, 2001) explores the ways in which culture, race, and ethnicity influence communication. Orbe and Harris (2001) define culture as learned and shared values, beliefs, and behaviors common to a particular group of people. Furthermore, culture creates a group’s identity and contributes to the group’s survival.

Race is included in cultural identity, but a person’s culture is more than his or her race. Race categories are socially constructed (Hacker, 1992; Orbe & Harris, 2001) and largely used as a means of human classification.

Ethnicity is a cultural marker that indicates shared traditions, heritage and origin. Ethnicity embodies both psychological and historical implications. Ethnicity is different from race in that one’s race may be Asian American yet their ethnic makeup may be Korean (Orbe & Harris, 2001, p. 6).

This thesis also seeks to identify tensions associated with culture, race,
and ethnicity differences within the organization. More specifically, this investigation uncovers communicative strategies that may emerge from the combination of U.S. organizations and Black masculinity.

The following sections continue to examine culture and probe its impact on organizations and communication. Additionally, organizational power structures are discussed as a direct influence on the success or non-success of co-cultural group members. A dialectical approach is used to further identify specific tensions of co-cultural group members, particularly Black males, in organizational settings. Lastly, this proposal offers opportunities for extending scholarly examination of intercultural communication and presents future directions for research.

The Influence of Culture on Communication and Organizations

Communication research has demonstrated that culture plays an important role in how people experience life. Furthermore, culture and communication are inextricably linked (Brislin, 1993; Orbe, 1995).

Traditionally, communication research has been presented from a European cultural perspective (Martin and Nakayama, 1999). In particular, the experiences of White men have dominated. Communication then is a discipline "whose epistemological base is largely situated within a dominant worldview" (Orbe, 1998). Scholars argue that when the human condition is expressed primarily from the vantage-point of White men the existence of others is only validated via Whiteness (Jackson, 1997). While many existing theories do not account for cultural differences (Fine, 1991), recently scholars have argued that culture plays an important role in how people experience communication (Allen, 1996; Orbe, 1998).
1995, 1998). Consequently, perceptions of the interaction deeply affect the discourse between dominant and non-dominant groups.

Both culture and communication help to determine human identity. Based on values, perceptions, and beliefs, culture may then magnify communication similarities or differences in human beings (Fine, 1991). Normal human misunderstandings are often magnified by the wider differences in cultural assumptions and belief systems inherent in cross cultural interactions (Steinfatt & Christophel, 1996). For example, Hopson (2001a) describes the experience of an African American male in a job interview. The perception is that the facilitator is one who would question the honesty of Black men based on negative stereotypes. Hopson (2001a) writes:

[In the middle of the interview the European American interviewer] stepped away momentarily, leaving a large set of keys and a credit card on the desk. Needless to say I passed what a co-worker would later refer to as the test. (p. 12)

Whether this “test” was the result of a stereotypical misconception or a matter of forgetfulness on the part of the interviewer, the fact remains that hegemonic cultural assumptions do exist for both parties involved in the discourse. These assumptions may influence interracial or intercultural communication.

Culture continues to play an important role within the organization. The meaning of organizational culture includes the set values and ideals that are developed and maintained by a group of individuals who share the common ground of the workplace. Byers (1997) reports that culture may refer to all the accepted and patterned ways of behavior of a given people. Culture consists of the language used, the images and themes explored, and the rituals of daily routine.
within the organization or with various subgroups (Morgan, 1986). It is very much like a mini-society that has its own distinctive patterns (Byers, 1997). While members may share organizational goals and objectives, individuals also bring a variety of personal experiences to their work setting. These individual experiences will undoubtedly influence their communicative exchanges within a particular organizational context, and ultimately will assist in shaping that setting (Farb, 1978).

Culture, that which is named and unnamed, is therefore a salient issue within organizational systems because these systems are comprised of interacting individuals who engage in a processual activity that constitutes the organization (Thompkins, 1984). In this way each individual brings their part to the whole of the organization. The activities of individuals in organizations must be integrated through role coordination, interdependence, and interlocked behaviors (Barnard, 1938; Farace, Monge & Russell, 1977; Hawes, 1974; Weick, 1969).

Consequently, people must interact, and on the result of their interactions rests the success or failure at organizational goal accomplishment (Redding & Thompkins, 1988). Equally important is the dynamic nature of the communication between individuals in an organization that inform changing attitudes, opinions, and self-expression for these members. Culture then is unavoidably linked to organizational communication through day-to-day practices and norms of the participants involved (Redding & Thompkins, 1988).

Communication researchers examine ideologies associated with the perceptions of race and culture in communication (Fine, 1991). In an analysis of
the influence of culture and language in communication, Collier (1988) found distinct differences in conversations among African, European and Mexican Americans. Results indicated that European Americans generally emphasized verbal content whereas African Americans emphasized individuality. Also, many Mexican Americans were found to expect a relational climate during interpersonal communication.

These subtle, yet diverse, approaches to interpretation and communication take on important meanings for non-dominant group members within the organization and in larger systems. Prior research suggests variations in communication styles and strategies are specific indicators of the success or nonsuccess of non-dominant group members, particularly African American males, within corporate America (Allen, 1998; Collins, 1986; Buzzanell, 1999; Orbe, 1998a & 1998b; Orbe, 1999). For example, does the Black male “play the part” or “keep it real” in instances where he attempts to have his voice heard, only to be ignored by others (Orbe, 1998b, p. 53)? Like other non-dominant group members in dominant organizational settings, he must always consider the consequences of his choice.

Communication is a critical part of organizations at every level (Harris, 1993). Scholars document differences in communication styles of non-dominant group members within organizations (Allen, 1998; Collins, 1986; Orbe, 1998a, 1998b; Nakayama, 1999), and the communicative strategies used by those members in their attempts at effective communication (Broome, 1991; Orbe, 1998a, 1998b). Prior research on the impact of culture on communication has
primarily come from a dominant perspective. Research from the non-dominant view frequently articulate generalizations regarding non-dominant communicative practices (Gonzalez, Houston, & Chen, 1995; Orbe, 1995). Furthermore, ethnicity and gender impact communication throughout the workplace and have a profound effect on the people who make up that workplace. Cox, Lobel, and McCleod (1991) report cultural norms and values among ethnic groups in the United States will manifest themselves in different work related behaviors. Additionally, Collins (1986) has suggested that some non-dominant group members become designated to roles within organizations that regulate their participation, thus making them outsiders within.

Power Structures

Organizations are systems of domination based on obvious and explicit structural arrangements that create power within the hands of the few. In addition, power operates within the organization through informal relations that are dictated by the arrangements of power widened through cultural, social, and political means (Ford, 2002). There are often times unwritten practices employed by its members that greatly influence the general conduct, communication, and effectiveness of the organization (Murphy, 1998). Therefore, organizational power is determined not only by those who construct the organization’s guidelines and practices, but also by those who enact them. Power is the key to dominance of one group in the organization as well. Power helps to shape an organization’s culture and determines which members will be part of the insider/outsider (Collins, 1986), and dominant/non-dominant groups (Orbe, 1998a, 1998b). Because of inadequate
representation within the organization, Black males and other non-dominant group members typically hold less organizational power paralleling their societal power. Differences in perceptions of who holds power continually affects the roles of an organization’s members and the interaction between those members.

Researchers suggest that variance across the communication styles of marginalized groups exemplify differences in relative power between the dominant and non-dominant groups in a given situational context. However, little research has been done that focuses on how non-mainstream or dis-empowered groups perceive these interactions (Buzznell, 1999). Allen, Orbe, & Olivas (1999) discuss the complexity of intercultural and interpersonal communication from the perspective of the non-dominant group member within the academy. Additionally, critical investigation should focus on the structure of meaning that embodies and reinforces power and domination from the perspective of the non-dominant member, in the same way semiotic analysis focuses on the ways in which meaning is created and realized (Barthes, 1972).
Co-cultural Communication Theory

One work day, while I was utilizing a few moments of free time to work on this research project, a European-American man approached me and asked if I was working on my thesis. I said yes. He then asked what it was about and during that moment I analyzed his question in a variety of ways. I considered telling him it was about the communicative experiences of Black males in organizations, but experience has taught me that the word ‘Black’ has a way of stirring negative connotations for some Whites. This was opposition I didn’t need at the time. I even considered lying about my topic, thinking it better he didn’t know at all. Finally I answered, “it’s about the experiences of minorities in organizations.” “Interesting,” he replied.

As he walked away I scolded myself. I couldn’t believe I used the word “minorities.” As a student of history, I was taught that people of color were not a minority in the global perspective. As an educator I have shared this same knowledge with countless youth. But here I was using language I did not approve of, simply to put this man at ease. Oh my God, I thought, I’m living out nonassertive assimilation (Orbe, 1998b).

(Hopson, 2002)

Scholars report that the communication styles of non-dominant group members within U.S. organizations differ from the communication styles of dominant group members in those same organizations (Collier, 1988, 2000; Orbe, 1998a).

Furthermore, scholars report these communication differences are the result of hegemonic forces at work within the organization, and cite specific struggles or tensions of non-dominant group members in dominant organizations. Orbe (1998b) investigates the “distinct consciousness” related to “basic truths” (p. 11) of persons typically marginalized in public structures, and identifies communication strategies of non-dominant members. This deconstruction of intercultural communication is based within five premises:

1. A hierarchy exists that privileges men, European Americans, heterosexuals, the able bodied, and middle and upper classes.
2. Dominant group members occupy positions of power that they use consciously or unconsciously-to create
and maintain systems that reflect, reinforce, and promote their experiences.

3. Dominant communication structures impede the progress of those whose lived experiences are not reflected in public communication systems.

4. Co-cultural group members share a societal position that renders them marginalized and under-represented within dominant structures.

5. Co-cultural group members adopt certain communication behaviors when functioning within the confines of public communicative structures. (Orbe, 1998b, p. 12)

True to its grounding in feminist standpoint theory, co-cultural inquiry reveals the product of racial and cultural perceptions between persons in the organization (Orbe, 1998b, p. 12) by incorporating the personal experiences, thoughts, and opinions of marginalized group members. Positioned as co-researchers instead of subjects or participants, the non-dominant group member’s perceptions of her or his reality is incorporated to shape research that “reflects a general change from traditional empirical research in which objective examinations of non-relational others is valued” (Orbe, 1998b, p. 13).

Additionally, Orbe (1999) extends existing discussions on the organizational communication practiced between members of different cultures. Group members from different cultures bring with them norms and beliefs that create and maintain the communication to be enacted within the workplace. Co-cultural theory provides the phenomenological framework that urges academia to recognize the extent to which culture and power differences impact the communication, thus the success, of non-dominant group members in U.S. organizations. Emerging from the core of oppression, co-cultural theory is complex in that participants of co-cultural communication can be same ethnicity,
same sex, and same gender. The question is then who holds power in that particular discourse, and how does that power influence communication. Additionally, the author suggests that persons can be both the target and the vehicle for oppressive communication.

**African American Men as a Co-cultural Communicative Group**

Co-cultural research can be used to examine the tensions faced by African American males in organizational settings. It is also helpful in investigating the communication strategies this group employs when challenged by these tensions. For example, the tensions experienced by Black males in organizations include being perceived as little more than a helper, servant, or supporter (see Tale of “O”, Orbe, 1998b), which dates back to a time in U.S. history when Blacks held little purpose other than to serve the dominant group. Co-cultural research hinges on recognition of the popular image of Black males as physical beings who are perceived as objects of sexuality. In addition, non-dominant group members are often times expected to adopt the role of mascots who will stand on the sidelines and cheer for the dominant group as they achieve great things. This cheering emerges in the role of amusing or entertaining Whites who participate in the serious side of life. Lastly, non-dominant groups, Black males in particular, are often seen as militant. Attempts to avoid blending in, or opposing the views of the dominant culture may result with the Black male being labeled as militant, radical, tough, aggressive, dangerous, violent, or deviant (Hopson, 2001a; Orbe, 1998b). Hopson (2001a) describes an organizational scenario where his vocal opposition
resulted in being labeled “overly-sensitive, aggressive, and having a problem with authority” (p. 17).

Black males often use specific strategies to challenge the previously mentioned tensions, in their attempt at organizational success. Orbe (1998b) investigates a number of these strategies including “emphasizing commonalities,” where one attempts to stress similarities and downplay differences in order to identify with the dominant culture. Black males and other non-dominant group members may also attempt to “avert controversy.” Here, the non-dominant member consciously evades issues like race and culture to minimize potential conflict, and play the part of the content member. Furthermore, “confronting” is the act of assertively opposing that which is viewed as unjust, in order to stay true to one’s personal values and beliefs. Confronting is also described by some co-researchers as “keeping it real” (Orbe, 1994). “Avoiding” is the act of remaining physically distant from interaction with oppressive issues or dominant group members. Additionally, “maintaining barriers” is the use of verbal or nonverbal cues in order to maintain a psychological distance from dominant group members.

Non-dominant group members, particularly Black males, in organizational settings frequently devise a number of coping strategies, ranging from direct confrontation to façade (Lyle, 1986). Co-cultural theory identifies the practice of strategic communication as being reinforced by times when co-cultural group members attempt to be heard, but are largely ignored by others. The following sections introduce tensions and strategies of co-cultural group members,
particularly Black men, in their attempts at effective communication within the organization.

The most sophisticated balancing act probably takes place among Black men in corporate settings (Lyle, 1986). African Americans have historically been victimized by institutionalized racism. This is the result of nearly 250 years of slavery, 100 years of legally enforced segregation, and decades of racial discrimination in every facet of U.S. life (Gibbs, 1988). The significance of color is so deeply engrained in society it is difficult to imagine any system that has not been pervaded by its presence (Sims, 1991). The abusive effect is prevalent particularly for Black males who face a barrage of stereotypical images during their developmental stages and beyond. Starting at a young age Black males are labeled by society as delinquents, street smart, at-risk, aggressive, deviant, and minority (Gibbs, 1988; Hopson, 2001a; Kunjufu, 1986). These classifications are carried into adulthood as Black males attempt to join ranks where their academic and professional legitimacy is often challenged by those members of the dominant group who either contribute to, or buy into, societies’ hegemonic images of the Black male (Hopson, 2001; Kunjufu, 1986). Some of these images will challenge the Black male throughout his organizational lifetime. Hence, Black men frequently devise a number of coping strategies, ranging from confrontation to facade (Lyles, 1986; Orbe, 1994). When a Black male in an organization confronts oppression, the outcome may be external struggle with dominant group members. If he allows himself to be quietly subdued by the oppression the result may be struggle from within. Organizations prove to be testing grounds for non-
dominant group members who expect hard work to lead to success (Hopson, 2001a).

Mass media also serves as a tool for promoting misconceptions of the Black male to the larger society (Orbe & Hopson, 2001). Black images have been filtered through the racial misconceptions and fantasies of the dominant White culture (Dates & Barlow, 1990), and consequently, these images remain in a constant state of degeneration, particularly for the Black male (Berry, 1992; Bogle, 1994; Smith, 1993).

The Black male in the organization is not exempt from the influence of the mediated Black male image. To the contrary, his success or nonsuccess may be (in) directly affected by the reputation that precedes him. Perceptions of being violent, angry, aggressive, and sexual attempt to lock Black males into stereotypes that will influence their discourse with others (Orbe & Hopson, 2001; Orbe, Warren, & Cornwell, 2001). Furthermore, the Black man's efforts to resist dominant culture and define himself are seen as an unacceptable type of disobedience. The media accents and confirms the perceived barbarity and delinquency of African Americans as an attempt to chastise them for their digression (Jackson, 1997, p. 737).

The effect of Black male images is not just limited to interpersonal or organizational communication. For the Black man this image may support a translucent perception of himself. Jackson (1997) indicates a sense of self-fulfilling prophecy, adding to the notion that environment always predetermines behavior. Additionally, Oliver (1989) makes reference to a “dysfunctional cultural
adaptation" where people adopt to specific styles of group adjustment in response to structurally induced social pressures. In essence, the result is living out the expectations of others. Furthermore, there is a great deal of evidence that indicates the adverse impact of the inferiorization process on Black males resulting from the peculiar institution of racism (Gibbs, 1988; Jackson, 1997; Kunjufu, 1986; Oliver; 1989).

Communication scholars call for science that identifies the various African American perspectives on interethnic communication (Hecht et al., 1989; Orbe, 1995). Previous research indicates that African Americans and European Americans have very different perceptions of what is considered successful multicultural communication (Hecht, Larkey, & Johnson, 1992; Martin, Hecht, & Larkey, 1994; Orbe, 1995). Communication research focusing specifically on African American males is limited, and mainly presented in a traditional methodological framework, which limits moving beyond the African American communication “prototype” (Orbe, 1995 p. 65). And, although traditional frameworks may acknowledge African American male’s thought patterns and interactions to be significantly different from that of majority groups, little consideration is made for this reality in the structure of research (Foeman, et al, 1996).

Black males are likely to experience dialectical tensions as the result of their interaction within oppressive power structures. Scholarly examination may further identify those tensions that stem from the challenges of effective intercultural communication, particularly for Black males.
A Dialectical Approach to Communication

Persons in relationships are frequently pulled simultaneously by different dialectical forces (Altman, Vinsel, & Brown, 1981; Baxter, 1988, 1990; Baxter & Simon, 1993; Bochner, 1984; Montgomery, 1993; Rawlins, 1992). These dialectical forces influence the discourse and determine the growth or deterioration of the relationship (Baxter, 1988, 1990). Dialectical theorists present a relational dialectics perspective, and refer to contradiction as the interplay or tension between unified oppositions, and a key component of relationships as well (Baxter & Erbert, 1999). Opposing contradictions, forces, or themes may effect the relating process of human interaction. When contradictions of the relationship are not fundamentally maintained, it is likely the relationship will begin to decline (Baxter, 1988).

A dialectical approach to communication is based on understanding that interaction is a dynamic and changing process (Martin & Nakayama, 1999). In organizations, dilemmas and tensions are often a result of the cultural differences that lead to uncertainty between members. For example, researchers report that even when persons speak the same language, communication is challenged by race and culture differences (Fine, 1991). Culture is reality, and different cultural backgrounds and beliefs may reflect different realities for some persons. Additionally, scholars discuss the need for uncertainty reduction (Berger, 1979, 1987, 1988; Berger & Calabrese, 1975; Berger & Gudykunst, 1991) which describes those persons involved in human interaction as constantly searching for information to reduce their uncertainties about each other.
Dialectical tensions impede upon the progress of communication practices within the relationship, and increase uncertainty for all parties involved. This particular exploration is based on the assumption that, for some, culture creates difference and uncertainty. Furthermore, increased uncertainty in communication will result in an increase of ineffective messages, missed interaction and/or organizational goals, and potential interpersonal conflict.

Intercultural Dialectical Tensions

A dialectical approach recognizes the importance of similarities and differences in understanding intercultural communication (Martin & Nakayama, 1999, p. 16). Martin and Nakayama (1999) propose new methods of studying intercultural communication. Emphasizing the roles of culture and power in communication, they urge scholars to move beyond the traditional paradigm for communication research. The following sections will briefly describe Martin and Nakayama’s discussion of the four paradigms of research (Burrell & Morgan, 1988) used to explore current issues in communication research. Following these research approaches will be an explanation of six dialectics or contradictions (Baxter, 1988, 1990; Baxter & Montgomery, 1996; Montgomery, 1992) of intercultural interactions: cultural-individual, personal/social-contextual, differences-similarities, static-dynamic, present-future/history-past, and privilege-disadvantage dialectics. As Martin and Nakayama (1999) indicate, these dialectics are neither exhaustive nor exclusive but represent an ongoing exploration of new ways to think about intercultural interaction and research.
Functionalist paradigm research became dominant in the 1980’s and is often identified with the labels of functionalist (Ting-Toomey, 1984), analytic-reductionistic-quantitative (Kim, 1984), positivist (Kim, 1988), objective (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1989), and traditional (Hall, 1992). This scientific paradigm seeks to describe and predict behavior. From the traditional point of view, culture is seen as a stable variable with orderly characteristics. Martin and Nakayama (1999) recognize the works of W. B. Gudykunst (1989) and colleagues for popularizing functionalist research and extending uncertainty reduction theory to intercultural contexts, communication accommodation theory, expectancy violations theory, and extending similarity-attraction theory to intercultural contexts (p. 4). Additionally, Ting-Toomey and colleagues are referenced for their functionalist works on face management (1994) and conflict style (Ting-Toomey, 1986; Ting-Toomey et al, 1991).

Interpretivism emphasizes the "knowing mind as an active contributor to the constitution of knowledge" (Mumby, 1997, p. 6). This research does not see culture as only a stable variable, and has been described as interpretive (Ting-Toomey, 1984), holistic-contextual-qualitative (Kim, 1984), humanist (Kim, 1988), and subjective (Gudykunst & Nishida, 1989). Here, the goal is not to predict but understand how culture is "socially constructed and emergent" (Martin & Nakayama, 1999, p. 6). Furthermore the relationship between culture and communication is seen as reciprocal, and culture is not only influenced by communication but it is also constructed and enacted through communication.
Interpretive scholars interested in intercultural communication seek issues that are not generally covered in functionalist research. For example, the role of power reflects debates among scholars (Deetz, 1996; Mumby, 1997), and some interpretive researchers (Orbe, 1994, 1998b; Casmir, 1993) see power as a primary reason for why culture is not stable but a site of struggle for various meanings by competing groups (Ono, 1998). Again, scholars operating within this paradigm seek to describe communication rather than predict, but this approach has been less integrated into mainstream intercultural communication research (Martin & Nakayama, 1999).

The critical humanist paradigm is a socially conscious approach to communication research in that its ultimate goal is to change “uneven, differential ways of constructing and understanding different cultures” (p. 8). Here, culture is seen as a site of struggle where meanings are contested. Martin and Nakayama describe critical humanist research as founded largely upon the work of Althusser (1971), Gramsci (1971) and the Frankfurt school, where scholars worked towards articulating ways in which humans transcend and reconfigure the larger social frameworks that construct culture identities in intercultural settings. Examples of critical humanist research includes Hall’s (1985) focus on cultural identity, where he describes himself as having no real identity to those speaking to him, aside from sometimes being looked at as a Black, West Indian, immigrant, or Negro. Altman & Nakayama (1991) also question the idea of a real identity as opposed to the ways in which individuals negotiate their relations with larger discursive frameworks within society and the world. Additionally, Nakayama and Krizek’s

Like critical humanists, critical structuralists also seek to change differential ways of understanding cultural identity, but in ways more dependent upon the structure of society. This paradigm grew out of Western Marxism (Gramsci, 1971, 1978; Lukacs, 1971; Volosinov, 1973) and relies on the power of dominant culture to effect change in society. This approach to research identifies culture within society as influenced by structural and material conditions, thereby building and maintaining power for a dominant group. Critical structuralists examine the methods used to establish power, and attempt to articulate how these methods affect the societal positioning for non-dominant group members. Examples of previous research include Frederick's (1986) study on the Radio Marti and the U.S. radio presence in Cuba, and Nakayama and Vachon's (1991) study of the British film industry between World War I and World War II. Martin and Nakayama (1999) urge scholars to consider interpreting these ontological assumptions, while retaining the significance of how this knowledge is expressed.

Martin and Nakayama identify dialectical tensions that emerge during intercultural interactions and reflect the communicative struggles of non-dominant group members, particularly for Black males discussed in this thesis proposal. These tensions include six similar dialectics that seem to operate interdependently in intercultural interactions (Martin & Nakayama, 1999, p. 15); cultural-individual, personal/social-contextual, differences-similarities, static-dynamic, present-future, and privilege-disadvantage.
Cultural-individual dialectic refers to the fact that people are individuals as well as members of their cultural groups. Traditional research has focused on communication patterns shared by particular cultural groups (Martin & Nakayama, 1999, p. 15), and used these patterns to describe entire groups of people. Critical scholars attempt to avoid labeling an entire group of people with one individual’s particular behavior. For example, Black males in organizations may be expected to speak for all Black males as the result of having their individual identity overlooked. The focal point here is how people experience this tension of wanting to be acknowledged as individuals, and yet have their cultural groups affirmed as well. Martin and Nakayama state a need to recognize cultural membership, and at the same time recognize people as individuals who are not to be put into boxes.

Personal/social-contextual dialectic examines the context of each individual’s role during discourse. People communicate differently, depending on their positioning at the time. Group members may communicate with each other differently in different places (office, grocery store, classroom) and express different aspects of themselves. Martin and Nakayama (1999) urge scholars to investigate these contradictions and attempt to understand how context influences intercultural relationships. For example, how does intercultural communication differ for the Black male interacting with friends as opposed to the Black male’s discourse at work?

Differences-similarities dialectic refers to the conflict of measuring similarities and differences among people from different cultural backgrounds. This tension takes into account how obvious differences between groups have laid
the foundation of traditional communication research. Although a great amount of similarities exist between different cultural groups, some separating factors have been politically exploited in the struggle for power (Houston, 1992). Differences and similarities can simultaneously exist inside the organization but the question then becomes how does one manage these multiple differences and similarities in everyday intercultural interaction (Martin & Nakayama, 1999).

Static-dynamic dialectic describes the contradictory forces at work during intercultural communication. This tension implies that culture is both ever changing and constant. Certain patterns of a particular cultural group may be true today but might not be true tomorrow. Critical researchers have emphasized the instability and fleetingness of cultural meanings (Martin & Nakayama, 1999). To the contrary some values of a culture may not change for long periods of time. As the authors point out, thinking about culture as static and dynamic can help members navigate through a diverse world and develop new ways of understanding intercultural encounters (p. 17).

Present-future/ history-past dialectic express the tensions included in intercultural interaction resulting from member’s perceptions of past interactions. Scholars add history as a variable in understanding contemporary intercultural interaction (Martin & Nakayama, 1999, p. 17). Individuals may experience tension due to prior group interaction, such as the historical impact of slavery on relations between African Americans and European Americans (Morris, 1997). How does this factor influence the communication of Black males in
predominantly White organizations, how do these groups balance this fact within their interaction? This thesis will attempt to shed light on this issue.

Privilege-disadvantage dialectic is the final tension discussed by Martin and Nakayama (1999), and is concerned with how power is distributed via political, social position, or status. This particular tension is a combination of the previous tensions mentioned, in that it may be “fleeting, unstable, or depend on topic and/or context” (Martin & Nakayama, 1999, p. 18). Traditional communication research has paid little attention to privilege-disadvantage dialectics, although the authors cite Pennington (1989) and Gallois (1995) as exceptions. Furthermore, group members can be both privileged and disadvantaged depending on the context of their communication.

In their discussion, Martin and Nakayama (1999) stress the importance of investigating dialectical relational shifts. Any of the tensions may intersect with each other during common every day interaction. Subsequently, the dialectical perspective approach makes explicit the dialectical tensions between what previous research topics have been studied (cultural differences, static nature of culture) and what should be studied (how cultures change, importance of history). Understanding how these elements influence the interaction between organizational members who represent different cultures will, the authors state “represent a major epistemological move in our understanding of culture and communication” (Martin & Nakayama, 1999, p. 19). Additionally, scholarly research should move towards entering “into uncertain ways of knowing about
others” (Martin & Nakayama, 1999, p. 19). The following section explores dialectical tensions of Black men within the organizational structure.

The Dialectical Tensions of Black Males Within the Organization

And I write this piece for my brother in hopes that he will recover one day, come back to himself, know again the way to love, the peace of an unviolated free spirit (hooks, 1992, p. 88).

African American males in U.S. organizations often experience dialectical tensions as the result of culture and power differences within their organizations (Hopson, 2001a). These organizational tensions are often based on a foundation of uncertainty and scrutiny that urges the Black male to ask “Am I to be respected and accepted for me, or limited to that which you perceive me to be?” An unwritten rule of corporate America seemingly constructs the assumption that one must shed any trait of cultural heritage not in tune with that of the dominant culture (Hopson, 2001a; Orbe, 1998). Thus, non-dominant group members, and specifically Black males adjust their speech, dress, walk, attitude, and opinions when interacting within this realm. Black males are also expected to overlook discourse that minimizes their existence (Ellison, 1952; Jackson, 1997; Hopson, 2001a). In this regard not only is uncertainty felt on the part of non-dominant group members who remain wary of the undertones of racism or sexism, but also emerges in the forms of biases and generalizations passed on by dominant group members. Consequently, Black males experience uneasy feelings from these situations that supposedly have no discriminatory aspects; yet display discriminatory behavior in conversations, routine occurrences, research concepts,
examples, laws, and explanations for occurrences (Buzzanell, 1995; Fine, 1993; Martin, 1990; Williams, 1991; Woods, 1994).

The dialectical tensions for Black males in organizations offer abundant opportunities for investigation. Society is largely presented with only negative images of African American men (Molloseau, 2000). Considering the degree of difficulty with which these men will have to experience academic and professional atmospheres, there is a considerable lack of pertinent, scholarly research specifying details (Sims, 1991). In reference to the availability of literature pertaining to this condition of young Black men, "they are either ignored completely or treated in a very marginal manner" (Sims, 1991, p. 4). Sims (1991) also cites the narratives of one co-researcher who verbalizes the connection of his race and gender to the laborious task of obtaining employment and/or promotions inside predominantly White corporations. Regarding his road to organizational success, the co-researcher expresses simply "it takes a little longer."

Once inside the organization, Black males often face stereotypical images projected by dominant group members who accept these images as a convenient reality. Fry & Fry (1983) describe stereotyping as a form of semantic disclosure that narcotizes certain parts of the potentiality, while opening other parts of the potentiality. Through their analysis of mediated stereotyping, Orbe, Warren, and Cornwell (2001) found that Black males were often stereotyped as angry, violent, and aggressive. In an attempt to confront negative perceptions of his reality, the Black male may face dialectical tensions within the organization, and consequently, any firm opposition to these stereotypes may result in a job or career
change. Authors discuss accounts of confrontation and intense anxiety, when personal frustration was the result of "laboring to avoid calling the situation racial-when indeed it truly was" (Hopson, 2001a, p. 17). Hopson (2001a) writes:

These strategies include efforts to censor myself, which I found to be both physically and psychologically unhealthy at times. When a specific interaction with a [European-American] supervisor took a turn for the worse, I can recall feeling intense anxiety. Other times, when I had been more vocal and used confrontational tactics, I found myself to be the recipient of stereotyping, which accused me of being overly sensitive, aggressive and/or having a problem with authority. (p. 17)

Many Black men who are familiar with culture and gender related conflict within the organization describe their daily interactions as cautious, superficial, selective, and skeptical (Orbe et al, 2001). Furthermore, these dialectical tensions indicate that Black males within the organization will face a war of images (Hopson, 2001a). This "war" is mainly comprised of a constant oscillation between worlds; conformity and anxiety, assimilation and separation, trust and distrust, success or failure, keeping it real or selling out.

Black men are constantly playing the part in Black-White communication episodes (Orbe, 1994). Additionally, scholars (Orbe, 1994; Foeman, et al 1996) write that Black males adapt communication styles and strategies during interaction, based on dialectical tensions within that organization. These strategies include censoring, overcompensating, dissociating, dispelling stereotypes, using liaisons, confronting, maintaining barriers, and attacking (Orbe, 1998b).

Researchers (Martin & Nakayama, 1997; Allen et al, 1999) include the perceived power difference between dominant and non-dominant organizational members as a critical issue in dialectical tensions for non-dominant groups.
Arguably, dominant group members in a perceived position of power are likely to sustain a feeling of being empowered as a result of the accommodating communicative strategies of co-cultural group members. As dialectical tensions become more intense, so too does the increased usage of communication strategies by African American males in organizations (Orbe, 1994; 1998b).
Conclusion

This thesis seeks to explore how African American males perceive communication with others in an organizational setting. The study specifically focuses on factors that inform communication for the Black male. Although coping and communication styles of African Americans have been studied previously (Foeman et al. 1996; Jackson, 1997; Orbe, 1994), this particular investigation seeks to extend knowledge of specific communicative strategies connected to dialectical tensions of African American males in organizations. The objective for this research is to identify common epistemological assumptions of intercultural interactions, resulting from, or directly related to, dialectical tensions of co-cultural group members.

Co-cultural theory represents a theoretical advance where those groups traditionally without U.S. societal power contribute to communication academe by identifying communication strategies enacted within oppressive dominant structures (Orbe, 1998b). This thesis assumes that non-dominant group members will continue to enter the American workforce, and cultural differences among organizational members will not only influence their discourse, but may influence the communication within the overall organizational structure as well.

Culture and power are linked within the organization and inform the communication practices of its members (Martin & Nakayama, 1999). This combination of culture and power inform dialectical tensions for some non-dominant group members. Although some scholars document differences in the communication styles of dominant and non-dominant groups most examinations of
culture and communication have been presented from a dominant point of view (Hecht, et al, 1989). This exploration aims to uncover perceptions overlooked in previous communication research. Especially important to this thematic analysis is the idea that language creates meaning and meaning helps create the conscious and unconscious behaviors that will be enacted in those organizations.

Co-cultural theory (Orbe, 1998b) provides a framework for examination of the communicative techniques utilized by African American males in the U.S. workforce. Additional research suggests that communicative practices are indicators to the success or nonsuccess of African Americans within corporate America. Extending investigations of co-cultural theory can expand prior investigation of culture and power differences within organizations (Orbe, 1998a, 1998b), and further identify the dialectical tensions and communicative strategies of African American males who are influenced by these differences.

This investigation can contribute to the exploration of intercultural communication by adding insight to the struggles of those who have attempted to have their voices heard only to feel ignored by others (Collins, 1986). The field of organizational communication research may also benefit from the investigation concerning how discourse directly impacts the success or nonsuccess of non-dominant group members (Allen, 1998; Buzzanell, 1999; Collins, 1986; Mumby, 1997; Orbe, 1998a, 1998b). Additionally, this research may prove to be a valuable resource for U.S. organizations that have traditionally denied entry to those who were neither White nor male (Fine, 1991).
Recognizing the need for additional scholarly exploration of the Black male’s organizational communication experience, the following research questions are offered.

RQ 1. What are the specific dialectical tensions African American males encounter in dominant organizational structures?

RQ 2. What are common communication strategies used by African American males in dominant organizational structures to negotiate these tensions?
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

The methodology for this thesis will consist of a thematic analysis of texts that describe the communicative experiences of the Black male. This study of lived experiences seeks to illuminate the perspective of the outsider-within (Collins, 1986). Equally important to this analysis are the ways in which reality is constructed, and how communication informs that reality for non-dominant group members. This thematic analysis will explicate dialectical tensions of Black males in different organizational and intercultural contexts, and will represent standpoints from at least three specific U.S. time periods, regions, and persons. From within these narratives themes will emerge, specifically identifying dialectical tensions as well as communication strategies of Black males.

Observations of dialectical tensions experienced by Black males may include instances of feeling dehumanized, minimized, scrutinized, invisible, and/or a token minority. Observations of communication strategies may include acts of assimilation, separation, face saving, bargaining, and overcompensating. Additionally, this research proposal seeks to differentiate the central themes found in each text. It may also identify the historical patterns of these themes, linking them to broader social issues of communication and culture differences. Furthermore, an interpretive analysis of the central themes may reveal that as dialectical tensions increasingly develop resulting from perceived powerlessness,
so too does the increased usage of co-cultural strategies by African American males in dominant societal structures.

Overview of Research Methodology

This study focuses on three texts, written by Black men in different eras that explain the dialectical tensions and communicative strategies of Black males in predominantly White organizational structures. A thematic analysis will identify themes from each text that reveal the communication experiences of Black males. McCracken (1988) offers scholarly guidelines to breaking down data into the appropriate sections. According to McCracken (1988), data analysis should follow these steps: (a) initial sorting out of important from unimportant data; (b) examination of the slices of data for logical relationships and contradictions; (c) rereading of transcripts to confirm or disconfirm emerging relationships and beginning recognition of general properties of the data; (d) identification of general themes and sorting of the themes in hierarchical fashion, while discarding those that prove useless in the organization; and (e) review of the emergent themes for each of the texts and determination of how these can be synthesized into themes.

Within this inquiry, I rely heavily on the thematic analysis described by Owen (1984). Owen (1984) strives to reveal a “pattern of feelings, motives, fantasies and conventionalized understandings grouped about some locus of concern around which has a particular form” (p. 274). According to Owen (1984), relational themes are defined by the “patterned semantic issue or locus of concern around which a couple’s interaction center” (p. 274). Consequently, these themes allow a careful analysis of communication behaviors in “close friendships”. There
are three criteria involved in the thematic analysis process: (a) repetition, (b) recurrence, and (c) forcefulness (Owen, 1984). This will be discussed later in the chapter.
Description of Texts

This thematic analysis will include the text *Twelve Years a Slave* was originally published in 1853, and later published in 1968 by Louisiana State University Press. This is the 19th century autobiographical account of Solomon Northup, an educated, free Black man who is kidnapped from the north, taken to the south, and forced into the peculiar institution of organized and legalized slavery. Not only is Northup expected to work and interact within this setting, but he must also survive within a societal structure based on race and cultural differences, and powerlessness. His observations of kidnapping and enslavement make Northup’s story unique and important to this thematic analysis. Furthermore, the historical and communicative value concerning his, and the early Black American experience, cannot be denied. There is a controversial history of race and culture in America, and this is the basis from which many dialectical tensions of Black males may be grounded.

Solomon Northup was a thirty-year old father and husband when he was kidnapped in 1841. For the next twelve years he would be chattel, fully educated and totally aware of his circumstances. *Twelve Years a Slave* (1968) is his account of those circumstances. The introduction, written by editors Sue Eakin and Joseph Logsdon, present a critical prelude to Northup’s insightful standpoint. It reads:

> The tragic turn in Northup’s life gave him a unique set of qualifications for observation and analysis. He entered slavery educated, curious, and fully aware of his former freedom and dignity. Without that prior experience it is doubtful that he would have been able to present so detailed and accurate a description of slave life and plantation society. (Northup, 1968, p. x)
In 1853, abolitionist and scholar Frederick Douglass reviewed the 252 page text in which Northup offers his experience as truth (Foss & Foss, 1994).

Referring to the autobiographical account as a strange history, Douglass wrote:

Think of it. For thirty years a man, with all a man’s hopes, fears, and aspirations—with a wife and children to call him by the endearing names of husband and father—with a home, humble it may be, but still a home...then for twelve years a thing, a chattel personal, classed with mules and horses. (Northup, 1968, p. ix)

Although this text is not specifically descriptive of the modern-day organization it does symbolize a modern-day pattern for Black males in organizational and intercultural settings. This research examines those patterns that connect the lived communicative experiences (Van Manen, 1990) of today’s Black males to those of Black males who lived over a century ago. Many of the aforementioned dialectical tensions are based on historical structures that have led to a society of dominant and non-dominant groups. Power has been divided and distributed throughout society and organizations in a multitude of ways, including, and perhaps above all others, culture and race. To some degree, the roots of dominant and non-dominant groups within the U.S. can be traced back to segregation, Jim Crow, reconstruction, and slavery. This thesis also seeks to identify this connection and to further identify those historical communicative experiences that parallel what many Black males believe exist within the organization today.

The next text to be used for this thematic analysis is Ralph Ellison’s Invisible Man (1952). Originally published by Random House, this 439 page classic novel is chosen because of the main character’s view of himself as invisible
within U.S. society. This “invisibility” refers to the main character’s quest to be acknowledged as a man worthy of respect within a U.S. culture that refuses to do so, much like Black males today who find themselves either represented by stereotypical images, or positioned as outsiders within (Collins, 1986) various levels of society. The novel includes both the organizational and intercultural experiences of the Black male’s attempt at success.

Starting from boyhood, this novel follows the life of a young man who learns what it means for Black males to be “kept running” (Ellison, 1952, p. 26), as he winds up doing so throughout his academic and employment experiences. Invisible Man (1952) is exemplary and exploratory in its discussion of race relations of the early 1900’s. The standpoint presented here is a historical reflection of the Black male’s experience in discourse. The main character employs communication strategies to describe, overcome, and in some cases simply maintain in the face of oppression resulting from culture and power differences. Ironically, throughout the text Invisible Man draws parallels between himself and his society’s burden. It seems his blackness is all that is recognized of him amid academic and work settings. He sees whiteness as striking, elegant, and confident, a goal to be accomplished. Yet he describes blackness as dusty, lacking individuality, constantly waiting, poor, and ignorant, something from which to be disassociated (Ellison, 1952, p. 31). Consequently, Invisible Man “plays the part” (Orbe, 1994) expected of him so thoroughly that he continually verbalizes his discontent with blackness (Ellison, 1952, p. 77). Black males playing the part as a tool for survival is articulated in a heated discussion between Invisible Man and his
university president. The president, upset with Invisible Man because of his less than satisfactory interaction with a White campus visitor says:

We take these White folks where we want them to go. We show them what we want them to see. Don’t you know that? I thought you had some sense. (Ellison, 1952, p. 79)

Ralph Ellison (1914-1994) won international fame when he published Invisible Man in 1952. It is said that he began his National Book Award winning novel after sitting down at a typewriter to which he wrote “I am an invisible man” (Russell, 1998). In his attempt to discover what he meant by the statement, the author penned the experiences of a U.S. citizen forced to break social, political, and racial codes as he encounters the “paradoxes of the nation” (Russell, 1998, p. 41). Although this text is considered fictional, it has been hailed as a realistic look at African American life, specifically for Black males, during the early years of the 20th century.

After the success of Invisible Man (1952), Ellison lectured both nationally and internationally, describing the beauty and antagonistic struggle (Ellison & Murray, 2000) of the Black Experience.

The third text, Ellis Cose’s (1993) The Rage of a Privileged Class, is a 192 page collection of standpoints (Harding, 1987, 1991; Hartsock, 1983; Smith, 1987; Wood, 1992) aimed at revealing the experiences of the best educated, most respected, and wealthiest Black professionals in the U.S. Published by HarperCollins, Inc., this text draws upon the aforementioned historical experiences, and puts those tensions and strategies within a 21st century perspective. The Rage of a Privileged Class (1993) includes examples of
frustration, anger, and despair articulated by African Americans, particularly Black males, involved in academic and professional organizations throughout the nation. These life-stories provide evidence that culture and power differences may indeed influence the organizational success or nonsuccess of a group commonly thought to have moved beyond the problems of everyday Black folks. Cose, who focuses much of his attention towards educated and upwardly mobile African Americans in their pursuit of the American dream, writes:

No other racial group has endured as much rejection on the path to acceptance. No other group has stared so longingly and for so long at what Sharon Collins, a University of Illinois sociologist, calls “the final door.” And no other group remains so uncertain of admittance. (Cose, 1993, p. 9)

The Rage of a Privileged Class (1993) offers a point of expression for African Americans who went to all the right schools, said all the right things, and went along with the dominant program, expecting to be rewarded for their perseverance and psychological stamina. Many of the standpoints presented in this text exemplify experiences previously mentioned in this proposal. For instance, this text like the others used in this analysis, refer to censoring (Orbe, 1998b) as a common strategy for Black men when confronted with the power of dominant groups. Cose also describes non-dominant group members as having their voices “stilled” when sensitive racial issues arise (1993, p. 66). Personal and applicable topics are discussed in The Rage of a Privileged Class (1993) concerning the challenges of non-dominant group members within the organization.

The Rage of a Privileged Class (1993) continues to address the myth that quality education and hard work always equals success for the non-dominant group
member. Many of the standpoints presented oppose the idea that going along with
the program worked towards their favor. As one co-cultural group member put it:

What usually happens is that Blacks get in with all these credentials.
They’ll make it one or two years, and then all of the sudden they start
to get this real fuzzy kind of feedback—from their supervisors. Somehow
they’re ‘not good team players.’ They’re ‘too outspoken, too aggressive.’
Another favorite one is that ‘they just don’t know how to develop people.’
All of this is subjective, nothing that you can fix. And when you ask for
examples, it gets even flimsier. (Cose, 1993, p. 78)

Ellis Cose began his career in journalism as a weekly columnist for the

Chicago Sun-Times. He is the author of both The Press, and A Nation of

Strangers, and has received numerous fellowships, grants and awards.

Additionally Cose, who resides in Manhattan, is the former editorial board
chairman and editorial page editor of the New York Daily News, and a
contributing editor and essayist for Newsweek.

Planned Textual Analysis

Each text brings diverse perspectives to this thesis, albeit by way of different time
periods and different approaches to Black male communication. Although they do
not share proximity, the texts do share very similar communicative tensions and
struggles. Furthermore, the similarities in this collection of experiences may
reveal a historical pattern to the ways in which non-dominant groups, specifically
Black males, view their roles within dominant systems.

To gain insight to the lives of these Black males and the dialectical tensions
they experience within dominant settings, I utilize McCracken’s (1988) order of
data analysis. Taking a qualitative, interpretive approach, I read one text at a time,
completely, without taking notes. The purpose of this first reading was to acquire
additional familiarity with the text, draw from the information, and gain increased insight to the standpoints presented. After having completed the entire text, I read through it again with the intent of sorting out important from unimportant data (McCracken, 1988). At this point I highlighted all data that consisted of communicative experiences of Black males within predominantly White power structures and organizations. This part of the analysis process was done in exactly the same way for each text used in this thematic analysis.

As was stated earlier, I rely heavily on the thematic analysis described by Owen (1984). Owen (1984) seeks a "pattern of feelings, motives, fantasies and conventionalized understandings grouped about some locus of concern around which has a particular form" (p. 274). According to Owen (1984), these relational themes are defined by the "patterned semantic issue or locus of concern around which a couple's interaction center" (p. 274). Consequently, these themes allow a careful analysis of communication behaviors in close friendships. Again, the three criteria involved in thematic analysis include repetition, recurrence, and forcefulness.

The repetition criterion refers to the repeating key words and phrases that are especially significant in describing a certain experience or feeling. For example, several references repeated focus on escaping the binds of dominant power structures: running from the oppression of slavery (Northup, 1853), a symbolic note written to those in the dominant power structure urging them to keep Invisible Man constantly "running" (Ellison, 1952, p. 26), and Black men
who feel like they are constantly moving, uneasy, and unable to simply relax within academic institutions and professional organizations (Cose, 1993, p. 14).

The recurrence criterion examines the meanings that are threaded throughout the text, even if the authors use different wording to represent the same meaning. In short, recurrence meaning refers to the various ways that reviewers communicated similar ideas. These particular texts reveal similar perspectives of Black manhood. For example, Northup (1853) reports being labeled as property, chattel, and less than a man, Ellison's (1952) character feels like an invisible man, and Cose's (1993) collection of standpoints include feel unaccepted, and treated as "less than a full human being" (p. 1).

A forcefulness criterion enables the researcher to understand the importance or uniqueness of certain words or phrases. Forcefulness is traditionally displayed through the use of vocal inflection or volume of the written messages. Within this thesis an example of forcefulness may be seen in the use of bold or underline text, using all capital letters, or other forms of accentuation (i.e., repetition). Forceful is also displayed by the use of shocking, yet revealing stories. For instance, the above texts contain several references to non-dominant group members who believed they were on the verge of overcoming oppression, only to be brought back to a painful reality. This is a pain seldom acknowledged by the dominant group. Ellison (1952) writes of Invisible Man's participation in the battle royal where he believes he will deliver a speech, but instead he is forced to participate in a blindfolded battle with other young Black men. The young men are paired off against one another in both the ring and on an electronic carpet for
prize money. They are also forced to look at a naked woman, faced with the threat of violence at the slightest reaction. Dehumanized and humiliated, the young men are used as nothing more than amusement and entertainment (Orbe, 1998b) for the dominant members. Furthermore, it appears the young Black men are not the only group to have lost sight. Although the perpetrators see the young men well enough to abuse them, they do not view them as human beings, nor do they acknowledge the young men’s pain and degradation.

Cose’s (1993) forceful description of the Black male’s plight within the dominant structure reads this way:

As the first race approaches, [he] is both apprehensive and elated. He is unsure of his own abilities but delighted that he will finally have a chance to show [the others] what he can do, and he is comforted by the thought that once he does [show them] they will accept him as a peer. On the day of the race, however, an unexpected thing happens. Even before he starts to run, the crowd pelts him with garbage and stones. When the race begins, he stumbles and the other kids [pass] him. Some pass him with looks of concern and sympathy, others pass with looks of scorn, and a few even elbow him or kick him as they scamper on their way. As he struggles to understand why he is being treated so, he learns that the people in the crowd suffer from a strange affliction, that though they can see him well enough to abuse him, no one up there can see what he is going through. (Cose, 1993, p. 132)

These descriptions of Black male experiences offer insight to readers who may not be familiar with the dialectical tensions of Black males and other non-dominant group members in predominantly White organizations. Furthermore, these narratives challenge the reader to understand reality from another’s point of view.
Thematic Analysis

After highlighting examples of dialectical tensions and communicative styles and strategies of Black males, I examined the slices of data for logical relationships (McCracken, 1988). As I examined the slices of data I wrote comments in the margins of the data highlighted, in order to indicate any relationship and/ or contradiction in the data. Next I re-examined both the highlighted data and the written comments in order to confirm or disconfirm emerging relationships or contradictions, and recognition of general properties of the data (McCracken, 1988). After rereading the data, I identified general themes, sorted them in hierarchical fashion, and discarded those that proved useless in the organization (McCracken, 1988). I then typed, printed out, and reviewed the emergent themes for each of the texts to in order to determine how these could be synthesized into larger themes (McCracken, 1988).

As Owen (1984) indicates, I initially sought a pattern of feelings, motives, fantasies, and conventionalized understandings about the communicative practices of Black males in dominant structures. Owen (1984) states that relational themes are defined by the “patterned systematic issue or locus of concern” around which interaction centers (p. 274). Therefore, it is through the Black male’s articulated standpoints of their experiences that patterns began to emerge. I examined the data collected from each standpoint to identify tensions or communication strategies that emerged, together and/ or separately.

After separating data that identified themes in Black male communication, I then sought Owen’s (1984) three main criteria in the thematic process: repetition,
recurrence, and forcefulness. The comments included the repetition of key words or phrases (Owen, 1984) that describe feelings emphasized in the standpoints of the three texts. This analysis reveals patterns of Black male communication, and discusses how the previous and present societal positioning of Black males continue to inform dialectical tensions within dominant organizational structures, as well as the Black male’s use of co-cultural communication strategies.

Conclusion

This investigation addressed both the tensions and communicative strategies of Black males within dominant structures. Furthermore, this exploration identifies dialectical tensions of co-cultural groups, specifically Black males, and detail specific incidents of organizational/ intercultural communication conflict. The basis for this research is embedded in the premise that co-cultural communication may influence the success of non-dominant groups, specifically Black males, within dominant structures. The success or non-success of the Black male in the organization will hinge on his ability to negotiate dialectical tensions and to proactively avert obstacles in communication. This analysis reveals insight to the success or non-success experienced by Black males who confront culture difference and power issues in dominant organizational settings. As such, the intent of this research is to centralize properties of culture and power rather than to generalize them.

In conclusion, this type of research should prove to be a valuable resource for anyone interested in organizational and intercultural communication. Additionally, this explication of culture, power, and communication may present a
historical context seldom acknowledged in U.S. mainstream academia. Although research limitations are subject to complications when attempting to interpret the feelings of individuals, thus rendering the study less than 100% accurate, the significance of a study like this is unlimited in terms of increased understanding. As diversity issues continue to gain saliency, there is a need for genuine progress to be made on this frontier. Studies like this one may extend previous understanding and invite further investigation.
CHAPTER FOUR
ANALYSIS OF TEXTS

This thematic analysis focuses on three narratives that collectively embody institutional, organizational, and societal experiences of Black men in the U.S. These texts included one autobiography, one highly acclaimed work of fiction, and a collection of interviews, all published between 1841-1993. An attempt was made to select standpoints that profiled the Black male experience in three U.S. time periods and regions, each of which was manifested within different structural contexts. This thesis searches discourse of past and present for connections, as well as implications, to the future. The result is a collection of communicative experiences that span approximately 150 years and offer critical insight into the 21st century experiences of U.S. Black males. What is presented here is a significant collection of standpoints, each revealing similarities and contrasts in communication tensions and co-cultural communication strategies for Black males, beginning in 1841, spreading throughout the 1940’s, into the dawn of the 21st century.

A total of 883 pages of text were analyzed to identify potential themes. The first reduction of capta involved reading through each text and assessing each process of communication while identifying those slices of narrative surrounding intrapersonal, intercultural, and interpersonal representations of Black male discourse. The initial thesis proposal stated that each text would be read and then re-read, at which time important information would be highlighted. However,
upon the preliminary reading, and after having fully entered the documented world of the first author, initial reaction to this standpoint was such that I immediately began to highlight these vivid illustrations of Black male communication.

Thus, I returned for the second review to begin sorting out important from unimportant information (McCracken, 1988). This consisted of highlighting additional signifiers of dialectical tensions and communicative strategies of Black males in dominant structures, commenting in the margins, and discarding information that was determined to be unproductive for this critical investigation. Detailed researcher’s notes were added to record the location and description of selected discourse.

The third step in this thematic analysis involved sifting through the many slices of narrative, paying particular attention to those which specifically identified communicative experiences of Black males within predominantly White structures. From this, common relationships were derived and loosely categorized with similar tensions and/or strategies. Researcher’s notes include reactions and interpretations of this capta (Dempsey, 2001). Slices of narratives with exceptionally dynamic implications for further review were highlighted in these notes as well.

At this point the capta was typed and printed out. Sixteen single spaced pages of signifiers were reviewed repeatedly and themes began to emerge. During the transcription, key words and phrases reflecting Owen’s (1984) criteria of repetition, recurrence, and forcefulness were grouped into ‘like’ themes using varying colors of ink.
Themes emerged from certain signifiers and symbols. These (underlined) include power (circled in brown in researchers notes) as the root cause of dialectical tension for Black males, specifically the organizational, structural, and societal power of Whites, and the ways in which Black male communication is influenced and ultimately shaped by perceptions of White power. Also, the recurrence of image proved to be a central theme in the narratives of these Black males. This thesis focuses on the “mediated/public image” (highlighted with yellow and circled with orange) and the “self image” (highlighted with pink) of Black males and how power construct these images as a source of tension. Related closely to the aforementioned themes is the concept of the Black male as invisible (highlighted with yellow) “to others” within the organizational, institutional, and societal structure. In addition, depending on the degree to which he is affected by these power structures, the Black male may feel “invisible to himself.”

Out of each theme comes tension, and each text is grounded in the realization that dialectical tensions (underlined and encased in brown pencil) will arise from intercultural communication as Black males attempted to succeed within White power structures. These tensions include: feeling as though one is “constantly running” and never able to relax, “coping and juggling never ending racial issues,” the Black male’s “attempt to rationalize the irrational,” contending with “opposition within the dominant structure,” constantly “being watched and scrutinized” within the structure, “emotional turmoil resulting from the burden of constant racial tension,” and perceptions of the “Black male’s physical stature (highlighted with orange) as threatening and dangerous.”
Each of these narratives included the use of several co-cultural communication strategies (circled in blue ink) as Black males attempted to address the previously mentioned tensions. These strategies varied and included efforts to “censor self” during blatantly oppressive discourse, constant attempts to “emphasize strength and value to the dominant structure,” uses of “confrontation” as a form of resistance, and “bargaining” as a tool to gain specific advantages. Additionally, this thesis discusses saving face, or the Black male’s “attempt to make Whites comfortable during interaction,” as both a tension and strategy.

Several themes emerged from these texts given the voluminous array of tensions and strategies expressed, and the need for additional research has not been exhausted. This chapter describes the central themes of power, image, and invisibility, and provides examples of signifiers that contribute to the actualization of these themes, particularly those signifiers that meet Owen’s (1984) criteria for thematic analysis.

Power in Predominantly White Structures

The analysis begins by exploring the ways in which power is signified in narratives of Black males. This power exemplifies historical instantiations of structural power, and includes slavery, segregation and 21st century racism. Next, power is seen as directly informing public-image and self-image of the Black male, both of which will impact his organizational success. In addition, this analysis explores how dominant power structures also render the Black male as invisible, as either tension or strategy.

*Man who’s this they you talkin so much about?*

*Why the same they we always mean, the White folks, authority, the*
Ralph Ellison's (1952) poignant excerpt sets the precedent for dialogue in this thesis' explication of power and privilege in communication. Here, in chapter seven of *Invisible Man* (Ellison, 1952), a character known as the vet offers past and present illustrations of Black male interaction within dominant structures. He constructs an imagery of the power of Whites for his argumentative companion Crenshaw, and *Invisible Man*. All three men have experienced this power before and their conversation results from finding themselves on the same bus after the powers that be, or what the vet refers to as the "authority" (Ellison, 1952, p. 117), forces them to leave town due to an uneventful experience with the White trustee, Mr. Norton. The vet's statement represents an old reality for many co-cultural group members, a belief that has been handed down from one generation to another; White power exists. Here, words that rang true before the Civil War are once again given life in the twentieth century. The vet's words symbolize a power struggle that, historically, has been an oppressive reality for Blacks, and a privilege some Whites choose to forget. As a result of that power, both the vet and *Invisible Man* must leave the south.

This thesis identifies power as a central theme for Black male communication within predominantly White organizational structures. Furthermore, power is seen as significantly influencing dialectical tensions and communication strategies of the Black male. Scholars write that the concept of power is always at the forefront of Black male discourse within predominantly
White structures (Ellison, 1952, p. 13; Deetz, 1996; Mumby, 1997; Orbe & Hopson, 2002, p. 225). Power determines how often, and to what degree, the Black male will be allowed to participate (Collins, 1986).

After leaving the south, Invisible Man goes to New York where he believes he will be given a chance to earn money and return to his studies. But, the reality of the matter is, his future is about to take a turn because the powers that be will not welcome him back to the college. After several experiences in the city he finds himself joining what he believes to be a grass roots community organization. Invisible Man eventually joins this brotherhood and begins to climb his way to the top. Or so he thinks. One day, while in his office, Invisible Man is reminded of the reality of a societal power that is anti-Black. He receives an anonymous letter that describes the power structure this way:

Remember that you are one of us and do not forget if you get too big they will cut you down. You are from the south and you know this is a white man's world. So take a friendly advice and go easy so you can keep on helping the colored people. They do not want you to go too fast and will cut you down if you do. (Ellison, 1952, p. 289)

This quote signifies the Black male’s perception of societal power. “You know this is a White man’s world” (Ellison, 1952, p. 289), written in the letter to Invisible Man during his time of leadership with the Brotherhood, represent the power of racism that has been signified to Black males throughout U.S. history. This hegemony, derived from slavery and passed on through the generations, has threatened the very existence of African descendants (Browder, 1996). For centuries, power has prompted Black males to modify their discourse within the U.S. structure. Ellison’s Invisible Man (1952) depicts the U.S. power structure of
the early 1900s as ‘anti Black’ and describes how this power is used to oppress Black males. He describes a White power structure that renders the Black male to speak softly and powerlessly (Ellison, 1952), and one which encourages Whites (who in essence may be symbols of power themselves) to “do all the thinking” (Ellison, 1952, p. 355). The Black male knows he must remain cautious when operating within the White power structure, and he knows that attempting to step outside the boundaries of that power leaves him figuratively and literally expendable. In the case of Invisible Man, “this is a White man’s world” (Ellison, 1952, p. 289) is symbolic of the warning and threat told to him by his grandfather years ago. In essence, each tells Invisible Man that if he gets too big he is sure to be cut down by the powers that be.

Prior to the Civil War, and one hundred years preceding the birth of Invisible Man (Ellison, 1952), power is a similar issue for Solomon Northup (1968) who also writes of living in an anti-Black societal structure. This free Black man understands the desire to seek one’s personal destiny within a power structure that enslaves people of color. He is free, educated, and fully aware of his circumstances. Solomon Northup is a human being, a husband and a father who writes of wanting only the best for his family, even though he must also recognize that the organization of his country (Northup, 1968, p. 7) guarantees him little more than a life filled with oppression.

In 1841 Northup is kidnapped, and for 12 years he is forced to experience the world as a slave. His is a voice strikingly similar to 20th and 21st century Black males profiled in this investigation, in that it is greatly informed by the White
power structure. The peculiar institution of slavery may have been the most brutal power ever felt by the Black male, and once he is forced into it, Northup begins to verbalize his perceptions and experiences. This is how he describes himself within the societal structure of slavery:

Too ignorant, perhaps too independent to conceive how any one could not comprehend the justice of that law, or that religion, which upholds or recognizes the principle of slavery. (Northup, 1968, p. 10)

Northup's (1968) insight signifies the depth of a White power structure that is unfair, unjust, and irrational to anyone other than the slave owner, whose laws and religion have been shaped to support the institution of slavery. His standpoint is different from that of slaves who have never known freedom. Although he has not totally escaped it, he is still an outsider within that system and makes observation of it (Collins, 1986). After his kidnapping, Northup begins to think more critically about the ways in which societal power is exercised. Interestingly, the author makes specific reference to that power to sustain slavery, which is exercised under the guise of law and religion. He continues his poignant illustration with a descriptive narrative about the forces behind the peculiar institution of slavery (Northup, 1968, p. 252). He writes about Tanner, the slave owner who quotes Luke 12: 47 as justification for its brutality:

Like William Ford, his brother-in-law, Tanner was in the habit of reading the Bible to his slaves on the Sabbath, but in a somewhat different spirit. He was an impressive commentator on the New Testament. The first Sunday after my coming to the plantation, he called them together, and began to read the twelfth chapter of Luke. When he came to the 47th verse, he looked deliberately around him, and continued, "And that servant which knew his lord’s will, (the slave owner pauses to look deliberately around him, and continues), and that servant which knew his lord’s will (he pauses to look even more deliberately than before) and prepared not for himself
(pause) not for himself, neither did according to his will, shall be beaten. (Northup, 1968, p. 94)

Northup (1968) recognizes the hegemonic forces at work within this structure. Perhaps it is due to his perception of freedom that he is able to recognize and critically examine these forces. Moreover, Northup understands that slaves are expected to buy into this philosophy because the slave owner has already done so. Northup frequently discusses the White power structure as a double-edged sword, implying that slavery has harmed the slave owner as well as the slave. The author narrates the brutality of slavery as “daily witness of human suffering, the merciless lash, bitten and torn by dogs, dying without attention, and buried without shroud or coffin” (Northup, 1968, p. 157). Northup also explores how the system of slavery affects Whites. He writes of the slave owner as unable to contend with the power behind the system:

It is true there are many kind hearted and good men in the Parish, such men as William Ford who can look with pity upon the sufferings of a slave. It is not the fault of the slave holder that he is cruel, so much as it is the fault of the system under which he lives. He cannot withstand the influence of habit and associations that surround him. (Northup, 1968, p. 157)

This statement signifies a power that is detrimental to Black slaves and almost irresistible to White slave owners. Northup describes this particular slave owner as almost having been coerced to act violently within the system. Perhaps the question then becomes whether or not these hegemonic forces allow some slave owners to operate outside the system.

In The Rage of a Privileged Class, Cose (1993) shares a narrative about a Black professional who is stopped by police, pulled from his car, handcuffed, and accused of holding his White female passenger against her will (p. 100). These,
and other 20th century experiences, illustrate how power is privilege for many Whites in dominant structures, whereas Black males in the same structures may be subjected to a form of “instant slavery,” at any given time. This instant slavery includes any power play that attempts to reduce the Black professional to little more than the slave of Northup’s era.

At the threshold of the 21st century, money, title, education, and accomplishment helped to define power for both Blacks and Whites. Black Americans are increasingly classified as middle class (Cose, 1993) and if participation within the U.S. structure is any indication of power (Collins, 1986) then surely Black Americans have seen an increase in both. Yet lack of power is just as impeding in the lives of these Black males as it was for Northup (1968) and Invisible Man (Ellison, 1952). The sentiments of many 21st century Black males lend evidence to the notion that their connection to power results from being on the receiving end of serious discrimination. One participant describes his opinion of the impact of race in the organization:

For most Blacks in America, regardless of status, political persuasion, or accomplishments, the moment never arrives when race can be treated as a total irrelevancy. Instead, too often it is the only relevant factor defining our existence. (Cose, 1993, p. 28)

Here, professional status is not a way of escaping the power of racism. Furthermore, what interviewees identify as organizational existence perhaps may be better described as the existence of outsiders within (Collins, 1986).

Cose’s (1993) collection of interviews with middle and upper class Black Americans includes the perceptions of other Black males who have find their race and gender to be barriers in corporate structures. Although these Black lawyers,
doctors, bankers, educators, and businessmen have made monumental strides, taken as a whole these professional achievements fall short when compared to White men in these professions. Additionally, the power of Whites to act on their biases works against Black men for whom discrimination is often times transparent. In 21st century structures, elusive biases create corporate handcuffs for Black males who thought going to the right schools, working hard, and staying out of trouble would propel them through the ranks of the corporate world. Instead, what many Black males have found is a ceiling of steel.

When asked to identify the major restraining force on their careers, most of Cose’s participants responded with the power of “racism” (Cose, 1993, p. 82). Unlike the days of Northup (1968) and Invisible Man (1952), 21st century racism is not easily distinguished in the words and actions of Whites. Cose (1993) quotes a 21st century Black professional male on the issue of corporate power, “Modern racism less often involves blatant door slamming exclusion, and more often takes the form of tracking, limiting or blocking promotions, harassment, and other differential treatment signaling disrespect” (p. 159).

The power of modern racism is covert, evasive, and heavily masked. Its purpose is to create and maintain a structure that restricts and oppresses some members, while simultaneously benefiting those members in a dominant position. This is a power so forceful, convenient, and persuasive, it allows those Whites who do not consider themselves racist to take advantage of the system by simply doing what comes naturally (Cose, 1993). Furthermore, if there were a choice in the matter, a great number of Whites would choose not to participate in a racist U.S.
power structure. However, like Northup’s description of the hegemonic forces of slavery, the modern U.S. power structure leaves little choice in the matter (Northup, 1968; Rutstein, 1993).

**Power Informs Image of the Black Male**

The result of an oppressive U.S. structure is an extremely limited image of the African American male, one in which America would have him toil to transcend. (Hopson, 2001, p. 7)

The U.S. Black male is engaged in a war of images. For the Black man, his image of self includes his commitment to family, citizenship, optimism, and achievement. However, the U.S. societal structure portrays the Black male as inferior, criminal, ultra-sexual, and deviant (Dyson, 1996; Hopson, 2001). The Black male constantly battles the negative images imposed upon him. Furthermore, these polarized images are present throughout the identity development of the Black male, and specifications concerning what and who he is, have historically been circumscribed by groups other than his own. Society regulates the Black male to grasp for identification through a narrow likeness and definition readily available to him (Dates & Barlow, 1990; Hopson, 2001). This same hegemony helps to create and maintain slavery during the mid-1800s:

He looked upon the Black man simply as an animal, differing in no respect from any other animal, save in the gift of speech and the possession of somewhat higher instincts, and, therefore, the more valuable. To work like his father’s mules—to be whipped and kicked and scourged through life—to address the White man with hat in hand, and eyes bent servilely on the earth, in his mind, was the natural and proper destiny of the slave. (Northup, 1968, p. 201)

In Northup’s case, the peculiar institution of slavery manipulates images of the Black male and uses these images as weapons of choice for maintaining an
oppressive system. Embedded within slavery is the deliberate perpetration of stereotypes in order to develop an image of Black people as subhuman or animals, and to frame a perception of superiority and domination for Whites over Blacks (Dates & Barlow, 1990). By and large, members of both groups are greatly influenced by these images despite daily contact. In the following example, Northup recalls a conversation between slave owner Epps and his friend Bass (the man who would eventually help Northup to freedom), as they discuss the ideology of slavery, and the differences between a White man and a Black man. More specifically, they examine the image of the Black male as subhuman. Bass (italicized) begins with the question:

*Now in the sight of God, Epps what is the difference between a White man and a Black one?*

All the difference in the world, replied Epps. You might as well ask what the difference is between a White man and a baboon. Now, I’ve seen one of them critters in Orleans that knowed just as much as any ni—I’ve got. You’d call them feller citizens I s’pose? (Northup, 1968, p. 206)

Epps, the slave owner, verbalizes what he believes is true. Within a few seconds of discourse the image of the Black man as ‘less than a man’ is constructed and perpetrated. With these words, the image is reinforced not only in the mind of the slave master, but for all who listen, as he simply passes on information that was undoubtedly passed to him—the Black male as inferior. This image is perpetrated throughout all levels of Northup’s society, up to and including the constitutional definition of the slave as three-fifths of a man, unintelligent, and subhuman. These are the images created to rationalize and sustain the ideology of White superiority and slavery. There is organizational, institutional, and societal power behind these words. Bass continues with his question:
Are all men created fair and equal as the Declaration of Independence holds they are?
Yes, responded Epps, But all men, ni--, and monkeys ain't. And he broke forth into a more boisterous laughter than before. (Northup, 1968, p. 206)

The stereotypes perpetuated by the slave master's statement are grounded in a xenophobic perception of Black people. These images are powerful tools for oppression, and reinforce the bigger misconception that Black males are inhuman and meant to be enslaved.

In addition to verbally reinforcing an image of inferiority, the power structure of 1841 uses other methods to frame Black people as something other than human. A recurring scenario in Northup's (1968) narrative is the slave auction. Slave auctions are common place in New Orleans, and Blacks are regularly put out on the auction blocks as merchandise. Like professional athletes and high profile employees in 21st century corporations, the slaves of 1841 are viewed as commodities. Both slave owners and the general public attend these slave auctions, and the result is society's reinforced perceptions of Blacks as property. Blacks are presented as commodities to those in attendance, and this image is constantly reproduced so that everyone, including the slaves themselves, can see, hear, and understand it as reality. Northup's intense narrative of the auction process gives a clear image of the Black male as property:

Next day many customers called to examine Freeman's new lot. The latter gentleman was very loquacious, dwelling at much length upon our several good points and qualities. He would make us hold up our heads, walk briskly back and forth, while customers would feel of our hands and arms and bodies, turn us about, ask what we could do, make us open our mouths and show our teeth, precisely as a jockey would examine a horse which he is about to barter for or purchase. Sometimes a man or woman was taken back to the small house in the yard, stripped, and inspected more minutely. (Northup, 1968, p. 52)
As the buyer inspects what he considers to be a potential investment, he makes note of all its attributes. He wants to know if this property is good and sturdy. He asks questions about the product; Is it healthy, is it strong, do these scars indicate a problem with rebellion or unruly spirit (Northup, 1968, p. 53)?

The concerns of the buyer refer to the property set before him, and he does not consider the humanity of his actions. These societal images of Black people as subhuman are manufactured to benefit the system of slavery, and more often than not, these images will affect the discourse between Whites and Blacks during the time of slavery into our present complex interracial relations.

Northup, and all those in attendance, cannot help but to be influenced by the grand marketing scheme of 1841. At the auction block and beyond, Black men are framed and packaged as property, something to be bought and sold, expendable. Moreover, images of the Black man’s humanity and intelligence are not allowed to thrive in any level of the societal structure. In addition to the defamation of his public image, the Black man is forbidden to value images of himself. Slavery laws and common practices prohibit him from envisioning and believing in his own manhood. The hegemony of this structure has little purpose other than to destroy the total image of the Black male.

Ellison’s Invisible Man (1952) sees the Black male image of another time. His is a societal structure where images of the Black male as subhuman begin to interlace with the technological advances of the early 1900’s, and are strengthened and advanced through mass media. The hegemonic forces behind these negative images seem irreversible and are poignantly explored in the discourse of Dr.
Bledsoe (the college president) and Invisible Man. They are in the midst of a heated discussion concerning Invisible Man's expulsion from school, when he confronts Dr. Bledsoe with the threat of exposing his actions. Dr. Bledsoe scoffs at his threat, and responds by verbalizing the societal power behind the Black male image:

> These White folk have newspapers, magazines, radios, and spokesman to get their ideas across. If they want to tell the world a lie, they can do it so well that it becomes the truth, and if I tell them that you're lying, they'll tell the world even if you prove you're telling the truth. Because it's the kind of lie they want to hear. (Ellison, 1952, p. 110)

Here, the Black male image enters an era where negativity is mass created. The lies that Dr. Bledsoe refers to in the passage are perpetuated with such force that few Black men, if any, go unaffected. The public image of the Black male is all around him.

The Power of Labels

Society creates and controls the rhetoric used to describe the lives of Black men. This rhetoric signifies countless racial stereotypes that are destructive to Black males. Stereotypes are perpetuated by labeling the Black male as dangerous, violent, angry, gangster, drug dealers, clowns, and womanizers (Dates & Barlow, 1990; Hopson, 2001; Orbe & Hopson, 2002; Orbe, Warren, & Cornwell, 2001). These racial stereotypes are particularly destructive to young Black males, spreading throughout every segment of popular culture, and constantly finding life within U.S. organizational, institutional, and societal structures (Cose, 1993). Furthermore, oppressive and stereotypical images will influence the communication of Black men who attempt to succeed in these structures.
Throughout his narrative, Invisible Man is confronted by the image of the Black male. He begins a life in the country where his grandfather impresses upon him the dangers of living within an oppressive society. Invisible Man carries this warning north as he searches for himself and his future in what he believes to be a world of possibility. During his search he finds the Brotherhood, a grass roots organization with a mission for social change. After a representative of the Brotherhood witnesses his oratory during a neighborhood conflict, Invisible Man is invited to join the organization. However, this invitation comes with strings attached. During his first formal meeting with members of the predominantly White Brotherhood, Invisible Man overhears someone ask whether he should “be a little blacker” (Ellison, 1952, p. 230), presumably for maximum impact as a speaker and leader of Black people. Invisible Man cannot help but ask himself:

So she doesn’t think I’m Black enough. What does she want, a Black face comedian? Who is she anyway, Brother Jack’s wife, his girlfriend? Maybe she wants to see me sweat coal tar, ink, shoe polish, graphite. What was I, a man or a natural resource? (Ellison, 1952, p. 230)

Stereotypical images run rampant throughout his interactions with the Brotherhood, and one particular member expresses his perceptions of Invisible Man in this way:

You’re just who we need. We been looking for you.  

Oh, I said.  

How about a spiritual, Brother? One of those real good ole Negro work songs? Like this: Ah went to Atlanta-nevah been there befo’, he sang, his arms held out from his body like a penguin’s wings, glass in one hand, cigar in the other…White man sleep in a feather bed, n—sleep on the flo’…Ha Ha, How about it, Brother?  

The Brother does not sing! Brother Jack roared staccato.  

Nonsense, all colored people sing.
This is an outrageous example of unconscious racial chauvinism, Jack said. Nonsense, I like their singing...Come on Brother, git hot! (Ellison, 1952, p. 237).

Similar to Invisible Man's era, U.S. society is currently filled with attitudes, assumptions, stereotypes, and behaviors that make it impossible for Black males to believe the nation is serious about equality. Even the most superficial and charitable readings of U.S. history reveal stereotypes and the justification for them, and these stereotypes have never needed much confirmation in order to exist (Watkins, 1994). Niggaz, ganstas, bitches, hoes, clowns, and studs are some of the images manufactured by a 21st century structure searching for signs that Black males are intellectually inferior and morally degenerate (Dates & Barlow, 1990). Just as Invisible Man's image is attacked by the Brotherhood, and just as the slave master's words and auctions of Northup's time oppress his image, the image of the 21st century Black male is also under attack via television, movies, and the internet. These oppressive images permeate every level of the organizational, institutional, and societal structure.

At every level, the Black male is situated within racist stereotypes in a way that dominant group members are not. Negative images of the Black male include lazy, unpatriotic, unintelligent, and prone to violence (Cose, 1996, p. 118; Orbe & Hopson, 2002). These are the images that the U.S. Black male toils to transcend in 21st century organizational structures (Hopson, 2001). Furthermore, these stereotypical images will greatly influence how organizational group members construct their sense of others in daily interactions (Orbe, Warren, & Cornwell, 2001).
The purpose behind oppressive images of the 19th and 20th centuries remains the same in the 21st century; that is to create a means of power and control over Black males and other non-dominant group members. This societal power and control helps to create a public perception of non-dominant groups as inferior, and serves to limit the self-image of non-dominant group members as well. Although some Black males wage war on these negative images, confronting the structure that perpetuates these images may result in being labeled as overly sensitive, having a problem with authority, maladjusted, and malcontent, and then being eased out and dismissed from organizational structures (Cose, 1993; Hopson, 2001).

Historically, labels have been used within the dominant power structures to classify groups of Black males (Hopson, 2001). These labels include volatile, aggressive, threatening and dangerous, and have been used to de-emphasize the image of Black males as human. U.S. Society seeks to create identity for Black men and specifically labels them. Furthermore, these are the names young Black males are forced to bear as they attempt to succeed in academic institutions and professional organizations.

Northup’s (1968) struggle with image is also signified through labeling. A slave’s name changes with the change of his master, and the change in name serves both an economic and psychological purpose (Northup, 1968, p. 93). The system of slavery would rather not acknowledge or perceive the slave as a person with a name, life, and history, but rather as property. Additionally, stripping a man of his
name is the first step to removing him from his sense of identity and sense of self (Bowder, 1996).

As a slave, Northup is forced to change his name to Platt (Northup, 1968, p. 49). He explains how the name change was necessary for kidnappers to sell him, adding that kidnapping is a serious offense and kidnappers can be jailed. Refusal to accept the name change poses a threat to the kidnappers, who in turn, threaten Blacks with severe punishment or death. Fearing for his life Northup cannot object to the name change, nor can he object to slavery. Rather than object to the power structure, he chooses to participate until his opportunity arises to escape the power that enslaves him, “I decided to say nothing further on the subject of being a free man” (Northup, 1968, p. 34). Labeling is a critical tool for gaining power, and as Northup says, essential to maintaining the privilege of dominant group members, “Burch taught me, impressed indelibly upon my mind the danger and uselessness of asserting I was a freeman” (Northup, 1968, p. 211).

This is a manifold of power dynamics where in the land the liberty, one finds it detrimental to declare his name and freedom. Furthermore, Blacks are enslaved, beaten, and hanged regularly by the same legal system that protects them from kidnapping. Northup is keenly aware of his Nation’s power structure, as well as his position within it.

Stereotypical Images

Interestingly, Invisible Man’s narrative on image includes being roused from sleep to find cast-iron bank. The bank is described as a very black, red lipped, wide-mouthed Negro image, with an enormous grin and a large Black hand held palm up
The bank is a piece of early American art whereby “a coin is placed in it’s hand and the lever pushed, to raise it’s arm and flip the coin into it’s grinning mouth” (Ellison, 1952, p. 242). This symbol of Blackness infuriates Invisible Man and he wonders what would possess his landlord, Mary, to keep the self-mocking image around.

In the midst of anger attributed to the noise that wakes him (the building’s hot water is out and the tenants are beating on the pipes), and now with the image of himself in his hand, Invisible Man begins to question everything:

How did it get here? Who started all this (referring to the image and/or the noise), I wondered, who’s responsible? Why don’t you act like responsible people living in the 20th century? Get rid of your cotton patch ways! Get civilized! (Ellison, 1952, p. 242)

Again, the reader wonders whether Invisible Man is talking about the image, the noise, or both. This critical interpretation identifies them as one and the same, the image is responsible for the aggravating noise in his head. He breaks the bank violently and wraps it up in newspaper, intending to later discard the psychological burden of his Blackness on his way to the Brotherhood office.

After a short walk, Invisible Man attempts to throw the package away. But he cannot escape the negative image. At one point a woman runs out of her front door and confronts him about leaving his package in her trashcan. It is as though she is rejecting the humiliating image wrapped in the paper, and projecting it upon Invisible Man. She yells at him:

I’m sick and tired of having you southern Negroes messing things up for the rest of us. I can see you’re no gentleman. (Ellison, 1952, p. 249)
As a result of his race and gender, Invisible Man is labeled as one who messes things up, and another negative image of the Black male is perpetrated.

A few minutes later Invisible Man attempts to rid himself of the package again, only to be discovered by a man who returns the package and accuses him of being a dope peddler or confidence man (Ellison, 1952, p. 249). Ironically, the perpetrator is an older Black male who offers a symbolic perspective of young Black males. He tries to return the package but Invisible Man does not want it, calling it nothing more than trash. The older man insists Invisible Man take possession of it:

Don’t try to hand me that simple minded crap, he wheezed. I know what kind of garbage it is. You young New York Negroes is a blip. I swear you is. I hope they catch you and put your ass under the jail. (Ellison, 1952, p. 250)

“He thinks it is a gun or stolen goods,” (Ellison, 1952, p. 250) Invisible Man says to himself as he recognizes the image he has just run up against. Whether it is as a New York City drug dealer or a southern troublemaker, Invisible Man understands the negative images that often represent him. Just before he attempts to throw the package a third time he sees the Black man returning with another person, looking and pointing. Weary, and fearful that the men may involve the police, Invisible Man drops the package into his briefcase, planning to discard it downtown. Symbolically, he is unable to escape these images.

This exploration of stereotypical imagery is continued through discourse involving Invisible Man and the wife of a Brotherhood member. Their communication is based on the stereotypes they see in each other. For Invisible Man, the White woman represents information, power, and freedom. For her,
Invisible Man represents Black "Brother Taboo-with-whom-all things-are-possible" (Ellison, 1952, p. 391). After a Brotherhood party, and in the midst of a drunken rendezvous, the White woman asks Invisible Man to act like a Black buck who threatens her for sex. Invisible Man recognizes the irony of the request, and like Northup, attributes these stereotypical images to hegemonic forces. He says:

Why be surprised, when that's what they hear all their lives [about Blacks]. When it's made into a great power, and they're taught to worship all kinds of power? With all the warnings against it some are bound to want to try it for themselves. The conqueror conquered. Besides, she thinks I'm an entertainer. That's something else they're taught. (Ellison, 1952, p. 393)

This woman's request for a Buck is driven by a societal stereotype of Black males as sexually aggressive. She takes part in a structure that lends credibility to negative images in various ways.

Negative images include labels and stereotypes of Black males and transcend throughout time. These misconceptions find homes within organizational, institutional, and societal structures. Furthermore, the hegemonic forces behind these images affect dominant and non-dominant group members within each structure.

Does oppression traumatize its victims? Does the Black male absorb or repel the societal images cast upon him? If public images impact self-esteem for Black males, then surely there must be some consequence to the negativity. The following section explores how self-image is informed by oppressive power structures.
Self Image

I poured forth the supplications of a broken spirit, imploring strength from on high to bear up against the burden of my troubles, until the morning light aroused the slumberers, ushering in another day of bondage. (Northup, 1968, p. 50)

The side effects of brutal oppression include conflicting self-images for Black males within the U.S. system. These narratives describe public images of the Black male while simultaneously revealing his self-concept (Stanback & Pearce, 1981). Furthermore, the expressions presented here indicate that self-image has been largely impacted by outside influences. As a slave, Northup awakens each morning in search of his freedom. Similar to 21st century organizational members, he approaches each day with hopes that it will be better than the last and that he will move closer to his goal. Northup knows that he must participate in order to see any possibility of regaining his freedom. He calls on the Most High for strength to resist that power which would break his spirit. Although there is little hope, for now he is a slave.

And I passed to see a group of boys watching their distorted images as they danced before the jagged glass. (Ellison, 1952)

Are U.S. Black males of the 1940’s and 1950’s beyond a slavery mentality? Or are their minds the byproducts of generations of experiences within a structure that historically sought to oppress them in every realm of society?

Throughout his narrative, Invisible Man (Ellison, 1952) makes a strong differentiation in his perceptions of Black and White. His words reveal a societal power difference between the groups, and for the first few chapters of this text his fate depends chiefly on the decisions of Whites.
Does this oppressive power effect Invisible Man in the same ways as it did Northup (1968)? Is this the same oppressive structure that attempts to break the spirit of the Black male and causes him to pray daily for strength? Invisible Man makes note of the group of boys who dance before broken glass as they watch their distorted images. However, reading this section with a critical lens reveals that it may be Invisible Man’s self-image that has been broken and distorted by an oppressive U.S. power structure. This is the same structure that led him to believe hard work and determination would put him beyond the reach of an oppressive south. What he finds instead is the freedom that would enable a White man to succeed in within U.S. organizational, institutional, and societal structures, may be denied to a Black man.

Senior corporate executives and senior partners in law firms are expected to conform to a certain image. And though their positions may not require golden hair and blue eyes, they do require the ability to look like-and be accepted as-the ultimate authority. To many Americans that image still seems fundamentally incongruous with kinky hair and Black skin. (Cose, 1993, p. 91)

Cose (1993) writes about the experiences of 21st century Black professionals who are expected to accept and conform to an organizational power structure which favors “blonde hair and blue eyes” (Cose, 1993, p. 91). This quote is symbolic of the power of Whites and includes physical features, dialect, and status associated with Whiteness. For the Black professional, these traits represent hegemony to the extent each trait becomes symbolic of the U.S. power structure. For example, the intelligence of the Black U.S. organizational member may be judged, literally, by his appearance or diction. How does trading his physical and psychological traits of self, in exchange for those of the dominant
culture, affect the Black male? If he chooses not to make the trade, what becomes of the Black male who operate as an outsider within (Collins, 1986) the U.S. societal structure that frames him as inherently unsuccessful? Historically, the Black male experience includes an image of success that is constantly at odds with his existence.

In Northup’s desire to give an accurate account of slavery “only so far as I have known and experienced it” (Northup, 1968, p. 3), he documents candid and truthful facts about himself as a human being within the system of slavery. He is an individual, born free, who writes from the perspective of an outsider-within slavery (Collins, 1986). Yet, his life is inextricably tied to the lives of hundreds of millions forced into slavery. Northup must survive an oppressive structure and describes several heart-wrenching interactions within it. He is directly and indirectly involved in these interactions, and offers thick descriptions of the discourse he witnesses.

He writes of watching Randall, the little boy at the slave auction who is made to “jump and run across the floor, and perform many other feats, exhibiting his activity and condition. The little boy’s mother “breaks into a paroxysm of grief, weeping plaintively” (Northup, 1968, p. 53) at the thought of having her son taken away. She cries, begs, and pleads for the buyer to purchase her too, but she is threatened; stop the noise or be whipped. As her son is led away he says repeatedly, “Don’t cry moma, I’ll be a good boy, don’t cry” (Northup, 1968, p. 53).
What becomes of little Randall and his perceptions of self after being torn from his mother? How has he been traumatized by the power structure? The answers to these questions may only be found in Northup's sentiment, "God knows" (Northup, 1968, p. 54). After having been slowly stripped of his humanity, little Randall may conclude his young Black life will be forever at odds with an oppressive structure. His promise to be a good boy is all he has to offer his mother. Like Invisible Man and other 21st century Black men, little Randall may feel that being a good boy is his only hope of surviving this oppression. In this case the wounds of slavery leave a lasting impression on the little boy, and are surely engraved in Northup's mind as well.

Oppression influences the self-image of Black men differently (Watkins, 1993, p. 51), and one's reaction to oppression may ultimately help to construct his identity (Hopson, 2001, p. 16). As a Black male interacting within the U.S. structure of 1841, Northup's standpoint is complex. He is far from naive. He is indubitably aware of an existing power structure detrimental to people of color. Superiority and inferiority are concepts he refuses to buy into, even though he understands in order to win he must play along. He writes:

Conscious I possessed the same feelings and affections that find a place in the White man's breast, conscious, moreover, of an intelligence equal to that of some men, at least, with a fairer skin. (Northup, 1968, p. 10)

Northup sees himself within the system of slavery as a husband and father, hardworking, intelligent, and talented. He is at war with images (Hopson, 2001) cast upon him by a society that sees him as nothing more than a slave. All that he experiences impacts his image of self. He is loving, passionate, and observant, yet
he is wounded, angry, and distrustful of the establishment. After he is taken from his family and enslaved, Northup begins to acknowledge and adopt some of the images perpetuated in this slave society. Like little Randall, Northup maintains the good boy status in hopes of seeing his family again. He becomes the quiet and passive slave for much of his narrative. This is a means to survival. He makes no mention of his freedom, obeys the slave owner, and constantly feigns contentment. However, Northup’s true intentions remain clear, he is a man seeking his way back to freedom. Although his time in captivity is spent learning and projecting acceptable images back to the public, the life and beauty of Northup’s self-image is never conceded to the oppressor.

Watkins (1994) writes that the first line of defense for Black people dropped in the middle of a brutally and psychologically abusive system is to calculate cunning and deceit. Therefore, many slaves adopted an obsequious social mask as an essential survival apparatus (Watkins, 1994, p. 50; Stanback & Pearce, 1981). This mask is used to operate within an oppressive societal structure as effectively as possible (Orbe, 1998b; Stanback & Pearce, 1981; Watkins, 1994). The mask comes in many forms. Some of these images projected to the rest of the world include the Black male as silent and unattached to the rest of the world (Northup, 1968 p. 180), content, aloof, and the comical Sambo (Watkins, 1994, p. 50; Orbe & Hopson, 2002). Although these signifiers may contribute to an inaccurate and negative image of the Black male, they may also be viewed as tools for survival. Entertainer Stepin Fetchit, who represents one of the most popular
early-American, mass mediated images of Black males, explains the concept in
this way:

You made an image in your mind that I was lazy, good for nothing, from a
character that you seen me doin’ when I was doin’ a high class job of
entertainment—Stepin Fetchit. (Watkins, 1994, p. 201)

Does his public image influence the self-concept of the Black male
(Stanback & Pearce, 1981)? Can one portray the image so often and so well that
eventually the image becomes reality? Does the internalization of these images
require the Black male to transform his concept of self?

Reflecting on his life, Invisible Man writes of a world of illusions where
“images of past humiliations flickered through my head and I saw that they were
more than separate experiences. They were me; they defined me” (Ellison, 1952,
p. 385). In the early part of his narrative, Invisible Man is defined mainly by his
efforts to be a good boy and please others. He is conscious of a racist power
structure and constantly reinvents himself to transcend its barriers. He transforms
himself in order to please the White men at the Battle Royal (Ellison, 1952, p. 19),
the college trustees (Ellison, 1952, p. 36), and perhaps most of all, the educated
and successful Dr. Bledsoe who represents the ultimate Black male success story.
In their presence, Invisible Man is humble, soft spoken, and patient. He is
infatuated with the power of these men and strives to become part of their system,
the same system that currently oppresses him. Invisible Man, like some Black men
in Northup’s era, or Black men in 21st century structures, has bought into the
White male philosophy of success. He mimics what he believes to be traits of their
achievements, and expresses overwhelming commitment to these images, even if it requires slowly trading in his own ideas and self-respect.

(The Black businessman) had acquired the requisite symbols of success: a huge office, a generous compensation package, and a summer home away from home. But he had one price. He had decided along the way, he said matter-of-factly, that he could no longer afford to be Black. (Cose, 1993, p. 65)

This quote exemplifies the willingness of the 21st century Black male, to become what he must in order to succeed within organizational, institutional, and societal structures. Similar to Invisible Man, this man has discarded portions of his race, culture, and ethnicity in order to pass as acceptable and to avoid having Whites typecast him as undesirable. He sheds all hints of a racial agenda, which results in other Blacks labeling him an Uncle Tom (Cose, 1993, p. 66).

Some Black males express anguish over their struggle with images in 21st century organizational structures. Their statements indicate the manipulation of self-image as a form of oppression. Cose’s (1993) interviews speak of organizations that see nothing but color. Additionally, some of these Black professionals believe they are viewed as little more than “a dark blur” within organizational structures that affirm dominant group member’s perpetration of the inferiority/superiority status (Cose, 1993, p. 49). Black men discuss the burden of societal constraints regardless of their education, talent, and work ethic. For example, unspoken racial messages implicate his race and gender as inferior when the Black male is passed over for promotions and/or regulated to lower level managerial positions within organizational structures. These constraints impel Black males to repudiate their identity, self-esteem, and cultural frames of
reference, to the point they manufacture their own oppression. One person put it this way, “If someone’s competency is consistently doubted the person begins to question his own abilities” (Cose, 1993, p. 60).

The development of the Black male self-image is complex. It is constructed through his public-mage, his image of others, and his concept of self. Perhaps most of all, the self-image of the Black male is a culmination of his experiences with oppression, confusion, and pain. Invisible Man also refers to his war of images this way:

I was pulled this way and that way for as long as I can remember. And my problem was that I always tried to go in everyone’s way but my own. I have also been called one thing or another while no one wished to hear what I called myself. So after years of trying to adopt the opinions of others I finally rebelled. (Ellison, 1952, p. 433)

White power structures serve as a primary influence on Black male perceptions of self-image (Hopson, 2001). Narratives detail experiences of Black manhood which do not include being respected and treated as such (Cose, 1993, p. 14; Ellison, 1952, p. 111; Northup, 1968, p. 247). In the case of Northup he is, by law, three fifths of a man and unable to testify on his own behalf during his trial for freedom. He describes the White face as a representation of that power (Northup, 1968, p. 26), and feels so victimized by it that for 10 years he addressed the white face with down cast eyes.

Invisible Man refers to feeling impacted by that power which Black men do not control (Ellison, 1952, p. 32). Throughout his narrative he reflects on his life as if he were in a fishbowl or involved in a secret test, unaware of the rules and unsure of how to meet his challenge. His self-concept is molded and shaped by
everyday experiences of oppression. At times he is skeptical of himself, confident only in the fact that Black males never really know their place in the dominant structure. He describes the power and mystery of the White man’s oppression “as all too surreal” (Ellison, 1952, p. 218). He is denied equal participation yet he is expected to successfully compete. He phrases one example:

White folks seem to always expect for you to know those things which they’d done everything they could think of to prevent you from knowing. The thing to do was to be prepared—as my grandfather had been when it was demanded that he quote the entire United States Constitution as a test of his fitness to vote. He had confounded them all by passing the test, although they still refused him the ballot. (Ellison, 1952, p. 239)

Invisible Man’s grandfather taught him long ago that he should not be surprised by the actions of Whites, adding that if he is caught off guard then he is at fault. He begins to understand that as a Black man he must expect the unexpected, and stay ready at all times for anything life has to offer.

Similar to that of Northup (1968) and Invisible Man (1952), 21st century organizations are impacted by power which Black men do not control. Although they may do and say all the right things, these Black males may find that being a good boy simply reinforces an image of the Black male as less than a man or a boy. Cose (1993) describes one 21st Black man’s experience at a company retreat:

An expert in group dynamics encouraged consultants to explore their feelings about their new boss [Joseph, a Black man]. At the expert’s urging a [White] consultant drew a picture of how he saw Joseph in relation to himself, showing Joseph as a child being physically supported by the consultant. (Cose, 1993, p. 26)

Cose goes on to describe how Joseph found the image indicative of a depressing lack of confidence in him as a leader. The 21st century Black professional found
that, with all his academic accomplishments and international reputation, he was not being taken seriously (Cose, 1993, p. 26).

Does this reference to the dominant images of Black men as boys indicate another site of struggle for self-image? If he is constantly framed as less than a man within a society which seems intent on making sure he does not forget it, perhaps the results will be those insecurities that some Black males go through great lengths to counter. Furthermore, how is the Black male’s perception of self informed by dominant societal images of Black men as athletes, criminals, womanizers, and dangerous (Orbe & Hopson, 2002)? As opposed to images of loving and intelligent doctors, lawyers, educators, providers, business persons, laborers, and citizens (the latter groups being virtually invisible in 21st century societal structures)?

The Black Male as Invisible

Although co-cultures exist all around us, co-cultural group member’s experiences are often made invisible by the pervasiveness of the dominant culture (Orbe, 1998b; Samovar & Porter, 1994). Black males feel their faces are not generally recognized as faces meant to run large corporations (Cose, 1993, p. 91), rather their presence is associated with only Black issues and Black problems (Cose, 1993, p. 14). Others feel completely excluded from the good old boys clubs (Cose, 1993, p. 57), and other groups that control their organizational structure.

Authors of these narratives (Cose, 1993; Northup, 1968; Ellison, 1952) illustrate that Black males encounter oppressive actions, misperceptions, and stereotypes that make it difficult for them to be seen or heard in dominant
organizational structures. Historically, their legal and illegal exclusion from these structures has limited Black male participation to virtual non-existence. Consequently, U.S. educational and employment structures blame non-dominant groups for their own minimal participation, citing a lack of qualified applicants/employees (Cose, 1993) among other reasons.

Moreover, when Black males do infiltrate traditionally segregated structures they are often times required to strip away all other evidence of their "Blackness" in order to adopt a more favorable appearance to dominant group members, thus rendering them invisible as Black men. This includes concealing feelings about key issues, the acceptance of feeling overlooked and devalued, and bearing the discriminatory burden of corporate shackles. As an alternative to relinquishing their hard earned presence within dominant structures, Black professionals ask how to address issues of race and power when it is impossible to get key players to engage in necessary discourse (Cose, 1993, p. 32). Dominant group members often shut their eyes and ears to these issues as they continue to believe everything will be all right in a matter of time (Cose, 1993, p. 178). For Black males to speak out means to be labeled as a troublemaker, complainer, chronic malcontent, or a maladjusted person who perhaps needs to be eased out (Cose, 1993, p. 33), rendering them as non-players in the organizational structures; invisible. The structural reality becomes invisibility and omission of Black males and their concerns.

The following quote describes a statement made in a staff meeting that included eight European Americans and two African Americans. It exemplifies
how some dominant group members may consciously and unconsciously overlook matters of race, culture, and ethnicity:

I sat in the meeting listening while my co-worker described the new African American volunteer as wonderful. When she said, “She’s so articulate,” I cringed (Hopson, 2002).

In what way is the African American volunteer wonderful? Is she wonderful solely because of her articulation of the English language? The implication is that the way in which she speaks somehow sets her apart from other African Americans. Furthermore, her skill, intelligence, and talent is narrowly judged in a way that our organization’s European American volunteers are not. This insulting stereotype is perpetrated in the presence of the two African American professionals as though they are invisible. Furthermore, the power to construct this stereotype is flaunted in the face of Black associates who may or may not be comfortable addressing another example of oppressive language for fear of being labeled as hypersensitive (Hopson, 2001a). Would that same statement be made about a European American volunteer? If so, given the existing organizational, institutional, and societal power structures the implications of racial comments may not be the same. The following example depicts how power and privilege protect dominant group members from the threat of war with images:

Our topic of conversation focused on our childhood aspirations. When the supervisor asked, we all began to share our childhood dreams. I wanted to be a football player, and an African-American intern had planned to be a singer. When the supervisor presented the same question to the White woman sitting in the next cubicle the woman replied, I wanted to be a monkey doctor. The intern and I looked at each other with disbelief, and without a word we gave the woman the benefit of the doubt. We assumed she did not understand how a comment like that can make a person of color wonder what she truly meant. Was she sincere or was she making a racist joke? After a moment of silence another White co-worker yelled over, You
can play with me (laughing), you can play with me and I won’t get mad if you call me a monkey. I said, loud enough for all to hear, to make that comment is an example of privilege in the workplace. My co-workers didn’t say anything. I would find out later that the African American intern and I both recognized the hegemony behind the statement. We chalked it up as yet another example of how some Whites in our organization knowingly and unknowingly make racist comments in the presence of Black members as if we were not there. (Hopson, 2002)

This discourse exemplifies power and privilege, enough power and privilege that White members of the non-profit agency are not concerned about comments which have historically been used to demean and oppress Black Americans. Considering that the co-worker may not have consciously made the racist remark, the fact that another White co-worker volunteered to play the role of the monkey implores the critical thinker to ask questions. What is it that gives dominant group members the comfort to make comments about monkeys in organizations where Black organizational members feel uncomfortable in doing so? Furthermore, should visible Black faces cause Whites to reconsider comments such as this, or should Blacks in predominantly White structures reconsider taking offense to comments not directed towards them?

Black males of the 1840’s also describe their existence within dominant structures as though they are outsiders within dominant structures (Collins, 1986; Northup, 1968). At three fifths of a man, Northup is neither seen nor acknowledged as a full human being. Before slavery, he writes of his common, and not so common, hopes and loves of an obscure colored man (Northup, 1968, p. 11). After his kidnapping, his name, history, and life are changed, and he is stripped of all identity other than property of his master. As a slave he is forced to become the background of society, invisible. He is beaten with a whip until he
denies that he is a free man, until he ceases to repeat his name, and until he
succumbs to obscurity. Ironically, this part of Northup’s narrative takes place in a
Washington City slave pen located within the very shadow of the capital. He is so
close to the symbol of manhood and freedom that he can hear it and feel it. Yet
that very symbol of freedom does not acknowledge him and does not see him, for
he is invisible. From the slave pen, Northup hears “the voices of patriotic
representatives boasting of freedom and equality, and the rattling of the poor slaves
chains almost commingled” (Northup, 1968, p. 23).

At times, Invisible Man (1952) and other Black males in dominant
structures (Cose, 1993) offer experiences strikingly similar to those of Solomon
Northup. These include feelings of nonexistence and obscurity within various
White power structures. Other structures require them to change, reconstruct, and
alter their appearances, speech, and concerns in order to participate at all.

It is interesting to note that, throughout Invisible Man’s narrative, his name
is never mentioned. The entire narrative is told in first person, and, rather
symbolically, Ellison (1952) has left his protagonist without a name or face. This
notion is illustrated during Invisible Man’s interaction with the vet and the
powerful college trustee, Mr. Norton. In the early part of his narrative, Invisible
Man is assigned the responsibility of taking Mr. Norton on a tour of the
countryside. Instead, due to unexpected difficulties, Mr. Norton begins to feel
faint. Invisible Man takes him to the Golden Day in hopes of reviving him with a
stimulant of double whiskey, and during their stop they meet the vet. The vet is an
eccentric African American man with a propensity for being long-winded. During
their conversation the vet describes for Mr. Norton, the process of Black males becoming socially and psychologically invisible:

You see, he said turning to Mr. Norton, he has eyes and ears and a good distended African nose, but he fails to understand the simple facts of life. Understand? It’s worse than that. He registers with his senses but short-circuits his brain. Nothing has meaning. He takes it in but he doesn’t digest it. Already he is-well, bless my soul! Behold! A walking zombie! Already he’s learned to repress not only his emotions but his humanity. He’s invisible, a walking personification of the negative, the most perfect achievement of your dreams sir. The mechanical man. (Ellison, 1952, p. 72)

Perhaps the vet is able to verbalize Invisible Man’s obscurity because he, like other Black males, has had to alter his own appearance, speech, and emotions in order to participate in society. Furthermore, it may be due to his unsuccessful efforts that he is also forced to leave the south.

In his continued exploration of the relationship between Mr. Norton and Invisible Man, the vet expounds on his theory of the Black male as invisible, and discusses oppression’s fate for the White man as well. “Poor stumblers,” he says, “neither of you can see the other” (Ellison, 1952, p. 72). Here, what sounds like sarcasm on the vet’s part just might be better described as reality. Similar to the narratives of Northup (1968) and Cose (1993), Mr. Norton does not see Invisible Man as having hopes, dreams, aspirations, and feelings. And, regardless of his generosity to the college and promises of fate and the future, Mr. Norton’s interests are not necessarily directed towards a man, but, as the vet says, towards “a black amorphous thing, a mark on the scorecard of your achievement” (Ellison, 1952, p. 73). In other words, Mr. Norton’s good will is more political than humanitarian.
At the opposite end of the spectrum, the vet says that Invisible Man does not see Norton as a man “but a god, a force“ (Ellison, 1952, p. 73). The vet’s scenario is accurate, neither man sees the other as such, they only recognize their perceptions of Black and White.

Throughout his narrative, Invisible Man discusses both the disappointments and the benefits of being invisible. Down south, he struggles with the shame of his grandparents having been slaves, the disappointing images of those Blacks he describes as “poor and ignorant” (Ellison, 1952, p. 77), and the faded photographs of Black people “who stand expressionless, seemingly watching and waiting for something, anything” (Ellison, 1952, p. 33). If he had his way all these reminders of his past and present would disappear. Moving north, Invisible Man strives to overcome these stereotypes and envisions organizational, institutional, and societal success as his path to clarity. However, he quickly learns that as a Black male, he may never know true visibility.

The concept of visibility for the Black male may be best characterized in the following excerpt. Upon entering New York Invisible Man is startled by White folks who say excuse me when they bump into him. Although he enjoys the newfound visibility he begins to realize that even though they are polite these folks barely even see him:

Walking about the streets, sitting in the subways besides Whites, eating with them in the same cafeterias (although I avoided their tables) gave me the eerie, out-of-focus sensation of a dream. My clothing felt ill-fitting; and for all my letters to men of power, I was unsure of how I should act. For the first time, as I swung along the streets, I though consciously of how I conducted myself at home. I hadn’t worried too much about Whites as people. Some were friendly and some were not, and you tried not to offend either. But here they all seemed impersonal; and yet when most impersonal
they startled me by being most polite, by begging my pardon after brushing against me in a crowd. Still I felt that even though they were polite they hardly saw me, that they would have begged the pardon of Jack the Bear, never glancing his way if the bear happened to be walking along minding his business. It was confusing. I did not know if it was desirable or undesirable. (Ellison, 1952, p. 129)

In the midst of a crowd he is invisible. His intelligence and emotion are cloaked in Black skin and hidden from the rest of the world. One might assume that Invisible Man would stand out in this crowd but the exact opposite is true. That Blackness, that blur, goes unnoticed even to those who look in his direction. Maybe they do not see him and instead peer through him. When he smiles do they smile? When he speaks do they speak? Should he wait for acknowledgement and then react? Or should he accept the fact, symbolically, he is invisible.

Like Invisible Man, Black men in 21st century organizational structures seek a place in a world in which no one, White or Black, knows precisely where that place will, or can be (Cose, 1993, p. 151). Covert racism serves to muddle those instances in organizational structures when it is difficult to know whether a situation is racial or not (Cose, 1993, p. 75). Still, like Ellison’s Invisible Man (1952) the Black male in the 21st century organizational structure need not be blindsided with overt racial hatred to realize that his existence within this society is defined largely by skin color. The reality is that many Black men may never reach their full potential, because they will quietly and politely be written off as merely Black skin within a dominant structure.

Instead of becoming disturbed, Invisible Man begins to question whether he should be concerned about this realization. Perhaps he is better suited to oppression that is vague and subtle, rather than direct and piercing. Additionally,
it may take him less effort to dismiss this type of oppression as oversight. As he attempts to make connections within the city, Invisible Man is faced with numerous oversights. He describes the process of contacting the list of New York trustees given to him by Dr. Bledsoe:

I succeeded in reaching several trustees' secretaries during these days that followed, and all were friendly and encouraging. Some looked at me strangely, but I dismissed it since it didn’t appear to be antagonism. Perhaps they’re surprised to see someone like me with introductions to such important men, I thought. Well, there were unseen lines that ran from North to South, and Mr. Norton had called me his destiny. (Ellison, 1952, p. 128)

Invisible Man is still an outsider within the dominant structure (Collins, 1986). He goes unseen and, like some Black males in similar situations, continues to make excuses as to why he feels this way. As he says, the secretaries were friendly and encouraging although some looked at him strangely, this being the case, Invisible Man is unsuccessful in his attempts to meet with any one of the trustees.

As the narrative progresses, the theme of the Black male as invisible is repeated. Invisible Man may say it best when he makes the following statement about his odd invisibility at a mostly White social event:

I felt extremely uncomfortable, although after brief glances no one paid me any special attention. It was as though they hadn’t seen me, as though I were here and yet not here. (Ellison, 1952, p. 229)

At times he is something to everyone, and at other times he feels as though he does not exist at all. Ironically, the ability to remain inconspicuous may be an asset to Black men as well. Invisible Man begins to understand these benefits when members of the Brotherhood instruct him to maintain his anonymity in order to continue his effectiveness (Ellison, 1952, p. 216). As he operates in the busy
city he is able to move relatively undetected, realizing that sometimes it is best for
a Black male to avoid attention. At one point, in the heat of controversy with the
Brotherhood, he takes on the multiple identities of Rinehart. Rinehart is a
neighborhood hero of sorts who is well known for his clothes, hat, and dark
glasses. When Invisible Man dons a disguise in the streets of New York he is
mistaken for “Rine the runner, Rine the gambler, Rine the briber, Rine the lover,
and Rinehart the Reverend” (Ellison, 1952, p. 376). Here, Invisible Man
discovers his most powerful weapon is his ability to disappear.

The Black male experiences multiple tensions in Black-White discourse.
His tendency to deconstruct conflicting interaction is done in hopes of
understanding and avoiding similar tensions in the future. After a member of the
Brotherhood makes a racist joke, Invisible Man becomes embarrassed, not for
himself, but more for the Whites around him. He wants to end the uncomfortable
silence. He wants to put everyone at ease. He expresses his reoccurring urge to
literally disappear from the uncomfortable and compromising interaction:

After the embarrassment I fought against the painful laughter and as I
calmed I saw them looking at me with a sort of embarrassed gratitude. It
was sobering and yet they seemed bent on pretending nothing unusual had
happened. They smiled. Several seemed to come over and pound my
back, shake my hand. It was as though I had told them something which
they’d wished very much to hear, had rendered them an important service
which they couldn’t understand. But there it was, working in their faces.
My stomach ached. I wanted to leave, to get their eyes off me. Then a thin
little woman came over and grasped my hand [and said], allow me to

This discourse reflects the communicative struggle of Black men. Some
believe they can never say, “well that’s settled. I can drop my guard. I can relax”
(Cose, 1993, p. 40). Others will do whatever it takes to relax, even if it means
reconstructing their feelings, beliefs, and values. Like many Black males, *Invisible Man* seeks to quickly classify an uncomfortable encounter. To file and forget it means to regain the comfort of visibility again.

Black males continue to negotiate visibility. *Invisible Man*’s narrative describes Blacks who wear chauffeurs caps when driving through certain areas of town, in order to avert being pulled over by police (Ellison, 1952). Elsewhere, Black men describe 21\textsuperscript{st} century tactics of invisibility and anonymity, such as removing baseball caps and other Black male signifiers to avoid being stopped by police for driving while Black (DWB) (Hopson, 2001b). The Journal of Intergroup Relations devotes two issues to the truths of Black males who have experienced the victimization of racial profiling (2001b). Some of these Black males regularly negotiate visibility to avoid racist law enforcement.

Power, image, and the Black male as invisible embody the central themes for this research. The following sections identify specific dialectical tensions and communication strategies that emerge from these themes.

**Coping with Dialectical Tensions**

This business of being a brother is a full time job. (Ellison, 1952, p. 297)

Black males identify tensions as ever present in dominant structures (Cose, 1993). The tensions that stem from racism and oppression within these structures only multiply the stress of day-to-day responsibilities, and for some Black males, coping with this experience can be mentally and physically exasperating.

Cose (1993) describes coping with tensions as time consuming and fatiguing for those Black professionals who exist in a world that is unwilling to
acknowledge the status their credentials ought to confer (p. 56). Coping with tensions involves encountering the harsh realities of race and gender, and managing constant acts of racism that crop up. Some participants describe coping with racism as:

What a Black manager feels upon being told that a client is uncomfortable with his handling an account, or what a Black professor goes through upon being asked whether [he] is qualified to teach. (Cose, 1993, p. 55)

Northup describes coping with racial tensions from the perspective of a slave. He describes his societal structure as an institution that “tolerates wrong and inhumanity,” and refers to it as “cruel, unjust, and barbarous” (Northup; 1968, p. 158). Racial tensions frequently arise from this cruel system, and Northup is forced to cope or perish. Here, he writes of the severity of tensions endured by Black men of his time, and encourages the reader to:

Learn [the Black man’s] secret thoughts. Thoughts he dare not utter in the hearing of the White man; let them sit by him in the silent watches of the night, converse with him in trustful confidence, of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, and they will find that ninety-nine out of every hundred are intelligent enough to understand their situation, and to cherish in their bosoms the love of freedom, as passionately as themselves. (Northup, 1968, p. 158)

The 21st century Black male has little choice but to cope with racial tensions. He copes with the fact that he can never expect to be treated in a fair and equal manner within the U.S. structure, and he copes with shattered hopes after realizing there is something systematic working against him (Cose, 1993, p. 60). He copes with the inability to fit in (Cose, 1993, p. 56), understanding that within corporate structures appearance and linguistics may be valued more than ability. Furthermore, being Black and male means being pigeon-holed (Cose, 1993, p.
stereotyped, and packaged in an inaccurate likeness of himself, and then forced to participate with a smile, within a structure that often practices “guilt by association” (Cose, 1993, p. 69). Thus, the positive Black male wearily copes with the negative images that others would have become his symbol.

The following sections continue explorations of tensions created by racial, cultural, and ethnic differences within dominant structures. Included are common dialectical tensions of the Black males in each of the three narratives.

Rational/Irrational

It means tolerating the unctuous boor whose only topic of party conversation is Blacks he happens to know. But the price of continual coping is not insignificant. In addition to creating an unhealthy level of stress it puts many into such a wary state of mind that insults are seen where none were intended, often complicating communications even with sensitive, well-meaning Whites who unwittingly stumble into the racial mindfield. (Cose, 1993, p. 56)

Oppression may compel the oppressed to rationalize irrational acts and behaviors. Perceptions of what is rational and what is irrational involves the efforts of Black males to make excuses for acts of racism in order to file and forget the experience. Some Black men in 21st century organizational structures are subjected to racism to the extent it no longer seems abnormal. They tolerate overt and covert jokes, comments, and actions that are based on White power and privilege. Regardless of whether the action is completely absurd, Black men, and other non-dominant group members, reconstruct their thinking to rationalize and normalize racism as a way to cope with it. To face every battle of discrimination, racism, and oppression can be draining for the non-dominant group member, but to quietly accept every oppressive act can be just as unhealthy (Cose, 1993, p. 56). Thus begins the Black
man's tension of deciding which battles to fight, as he oscillates between normal and abnormal, and rational and irrational behavior.

Northup's autobiography includes a poem that offers the reader a critical lens from which to view the system of slavery. This poem addresses the question Solomon Northup is forced to endure every day of his existence; How can a man, made up of the same compounds, the same elements, and the same feelings of another, declare himself the only free man in the land? Northup may wonder where lies the rationality in that belief:

Such dupes are men to custom, and so prone to reverence what is ancient, and can plead course of long observance for its use, that even servitude, the worst of ills, because delivered down from sire to son, is kept and guarded as a sacred thing. But is it fit, or can it bear the shock of rational discussion, that a man compounded and made up, like other men, of elements tumultuous, in whom lust and folly in as ample measure meet, as in the bosom of the slave he rules, should be a despot absolute, and boast himself the only freeman of his land?

Cowper
(Northup, 1968, p. xxix)

Ironically, Northup begins chapter one of his narrative by introducing himself as "Having been born a freeman, and for more than thirty years having enjoyed the blessings of liberty in a free state" (Northup, 1968, p. 3). This is an ironic statement considering he is living in an era known for the worst case of racial domination ever to exist in a U.S. organizational structure. As a free Black man, his societal positioning allows him to conceptualize liberty; however, in order to operate within a racist structure he must relinquish some of these liberties.

Northup is born free, but cannot travel through certain states without documentation to prove it. How does the 19th century free Black man come to
accept irrational oppression and slavery? After he is kidnapped the irrational
becomes reality:

Blow after blow was inflicted upon my naked body. When his unrelenting arm grew tired, he stopped and asked if I still insisted I was a free man. I did insist upon it, and then the blows renewed, faster and more energetically, if possible, than before. When again tired, he would repeat the same question, and receiving the same answer, continued his cruel labor. All this time the incarnate devil was uttering most fiendish oaths. At length the paddle broke leaving the useless handle in his hand. Still I would not yield. All his brutal blows could not force from my lips the foul lie that I was a slave. Casting madly on the floor the handle of the broken paddle, he seized the rope. This was far more painful than the other. I struggled with all my power but it was in vain. I prayed for mercy, but my prayer was only answered with imprecations and with stripes. I thought I must die beneath the lashes of the accursed brute. At last I became silent to his repeated questions. I would make no reply. In fact, I was becoming most unable to speak. (Northup, 1968, p. 25)

Here, Northup informs the critical researcher as to how the slave, beaten and broken in mind, body, and spirit, comes to accept the irrational system of slavery.

Perhaps this beating is also symbolic of the ways in which oppressive 20th and 21st century organizational structures force Black males to accept the irrational as rational.

In a segregated society, Invisible Man is often faced with the question of rational versus irrational. For example, When a drunken Brotherhood member asks him to sing an old Negro work song at a dinner party, Invisible Man spends time and energy questioning whether he should take offense. He attempts to rationalize the discourse this way:

Shouldn’t there be some way for us to be asked to sing? Shouldn’t the short man have the right to make a mistake without his motives being considered consciously or unconsciously malicious? After all, he was singing, or trying to. What if I asked him to sing? (Ellison, 1952, p. 239)
To imply that all Black people are entertainers is both a racist stereotype and an insult. The tension surrounding the comment is clear, and for a moment, Invisible Man is resentful. However, he then attempts to cope with the uneasiness by creating excuses for the perpetrator. He questions his own logic. He labels the act as an unconscious mistake in order to rationalize the irrational request. Reason being, if he can justify the act and convince himself that it is not as bad as it seems, perhaps he can move beyond the uncomfortable experience and begin to relax.

In another example of rationalizing the irrational, Invisible Man attends what is called the Battle Royal. He believes the White townsmen have invited him to the function for the purpose of delivering a speech on social responsibility. Instead, Invisible Man finds that he is part of a group of Black boys who have been brought in to provide entertainment for the onlookers, by fist fighting each other while blindfolded. Throughout the ordeal, Invisible Man is verbally, physically, and sexually abused by the White males in attendance. When their blindfolds are removed, the boys are forced to cast their eyes upon a naked White woman, with a harsh penalty for the wrong reaction. After his speech, and after an evening of ridicule and pain, Invisible Man is rewarded with a black briefcase. He is overjoyed and "moved beyond words" (Ellison 1952, p. 26). Almost immediately, he becomes numb to the abuse, and uses the briefcase to fill that void created by physical pain and humiliation. As he wipes the bloody saliva away from his mouth, Invisible Man is overcome by a level of importance he describes as one "I have never dreamed" (Ellison, 1952, p. 26). Perhaps, in this scenario, the briefcase is his reward for endurance.
This illustration raises a question. At what point, or price, do co-cultural group members become numb to the pain of racism? Moreover, at what point, or price, does the abnormal become normal, and irrational acts of racism become rational? Day by day, Invisible Man seems to cope with as much tension as he can bear. Perhaps his briefcase, like coping with dialectical tensions, is symbolic of the possibilities for tomorrow.

Cose’s (1993, p. 70) text offers a different perspective of the abnormal and illogical as it pertains to young Black men in organizational structures. A White writer shares an experience from 1992, when he narrowly escaped a mugger in a New York subway. As he entered the subway he saw a young Black man sitting on the bottom step. He automatically thought of the situation as dangerous, but resolved not to let that racial stereotype cloud his thinking and turn him away. As he feared, he was attacked. He eluded his assailant by jumping between the subway tracks and fleeing. In this example, the writer observed a potentially dangerous situation. But, by questioning his rationalization and ignoring his first instinct, he was almost mugged. Could the writer have avoided the situation by following his first instinct? Furthermore, how will he rationalize his next encounter with a young Black man? Hindsight compelled the writer to examine his experience of the rational/irrational. Perhaps his words lend something of value to the study of Black/White discourse. He says, “racism is not always just an illogical, detached, and cruel attitude deriving from callous hate. Racism and hate have their genesis in fear” (Cose, 1993, p. 70).
Still, even if Black men understand the sense of fear, hate, and illogical attitudes that make up 21st century organizational structures, the problem becomes recognizing it as such and not making excuses for it.

**Constantly Running/Staying & Relaxing**

No man has never been placed in such a situation, can comprehend the thousand obstacles thrown in the way of the flying slave. Every white man’s hand is raised against him—the country is such as renders it impossible to pass through it with any safety. The patrollers are watching for him—the hounds are ready to follow in his track, and the nature of the country is such as renders it impossible to pass through it with any safety. I thought however that the time might come, perhaps, when I should be running through the swamps again. (Northup, 1996, p. 183)

The dialectical tension of running/staying represents a means to freedom, safety, and life. If Northup stays within the system he will live as a slave, having his basic needs met and giving up the possibility of ever seeing his family again. In his running he is susceptible to the patrollers who will capture him for profit, to dogs that will destroy him, and to death. All things considered, Northup cannot help but think of fleeing. Freedom is worth every chance he can take. He adamantly concludes his powerful statement with hopes of running through the swamps again.

Participants verbalize the escape from oppressive structures in various ways. Like Northup who dreams of literally running from slavery, 21st century Black males express their desire for societal freedom as well. Although their destinations are not stated as concisely, the urge to run, escape, and flee is made clear. Black males in organizational structures strive to find that place of comfort. In one example of escaping captivity, Invisible Man describes the dialectical
tension in no uncertain terms, "I ran wildly, boiling with despair and harsh laughter. Running from the birds, to what I didn't know. I ran" (Ellison, 1952).

Elsewhere, authors suggest that 21st century Black men are still running (Cose, 1993, Hopson, 2001a). Some Black men express a constant uneasiness about their roles in dominant structures, including feelings of being chased and/or running from danger. Others feel their time in any one dominant structure is limited due to the unpredictable acts of some dominant group members, so these Black males view their participation as temporary. This is the tension of never being able to relax for fear of a hostile takeover (Hopson, 2001a).

They admitted to being under great stress, and many [particularly among the Black men in the sample] seemed to be fleeing the field. (Cose, 1993, p. 77)

Black males can never become too confident and comfortable within dominant structures. If bad comes to worse, he knows he is subject to become disposable to the organization, and therefore, he must always have a backup plan. The objective of his fleeing may be to obtain a better opportunity, organizational success, or simply freedom. In some cases the Black male will flee before he is annihilated.

In one study (Cose, 1993), Black professionals shared examples of race related experiences within their organizations. Researchers expected some indication of unhappiness but were shocked at the magnitude and pervasiveness of racism within dominant structures (Cose, 1993, p. 77). Included in their cornucopia of discontent were complaints of being purposely left out of meetings, routed of informal communications, and passed over for promotions. However,
the choice remains the same for many co-cultural group members in these structures, endure these oppressive acts and feelings or leave.

The Black man is constantly moving, contemplating, and plotting to get to a safer and more comfortable place. Meanwhile, the dialectical tension of running/staying is ever present and ever changing. His ability to manage this dialectical tension will determine his success. If he can handle the pressure of oppression he will stay, if not, he will run for freedom.

Some professional Black males will literally relocate in their attempt to escape oppression. Cose’s (1993) collection of non-dominant group member’s experiences includes that of a Black professional who left town to find a less oppressive environment. Joseph recalls going to a nightclub with a reputation for catering to Whites and rebuffing Blacks. As he attempted to enter the nightclub, he and his associate were told the club was only for members, “All of the sudden the club had become private” (Cose, 1993, p. 25). His experience is similar to that of other non-dominant group members who feel unwelcome in restaurants, department stores, corporations, and other dominant structures. Many non-dominant group members choose to leave rather than stay in oppressive structures. After being turned away from this and other social events, Joseph began a job search in the Atlanta, D.C., and Philadelphia areas (Cose, 1993, p. 25).

Some Black males express feeling as if there is no escape and no way around the oppression in 21st century structures. They feel that in order to succeed within these structures they must endure the consequences of staying (Cose, 1993). Like Northup (1968), these Black men feel they must play the game until they win,
lose the game by quitting or being forced out, or run to another game that might
give them more time and a better chance at succeeding. These Black males
express feelings of being treated different from White males in 21st century
structures. Their experiences reveal that Black men with the same aggressive
attitudes as Whites must either “walk softly or face being driven out” (Cose, 1993,
p. 77).

The concept of running is as symbolic for the 21st century Black male as
Dr. Bledsoe’s letters concerning Invisible Man. Written to the White male
trustees, these letters urge the White power structure to continue with its’ main
goal, and read this way:

Help him continue in that direction of that promise which, like the horizon
recedes ever brightly and distantly beyond the hopeful traveler. (Ellison,
1952, p. 145)

Surprised, shocked, and saddened at the reality of his situation, Invisible Man
translates the words of the in letters, “Please hope him to death, and keep him
running” (Ellison, 1952, p. 147).

The dialectical tension of Invisible Man’s running from oppressive
organizational and societal structures versus his staying and relaxing, appears early
and threads throughout his narrative. It may have been most poignantly stated in a
dream. Here, the words of his grandfather offer Invisible Man a glimpse into his
future, as he is commanded to open an engraved document containing a short
message in letters of gold. It reads, “Keep this Nigger-Boy running” (Ellison,
1952, p. 26).
Opposition/Participation within the Organization

Opposition versus participation involves actions of dominant group members in organizational, institutional, and societal structures. Some Black men feel that dominant group members buy into stereotypical propaganda and myths of inferiority/superiority due to their own insecurities. Cose (1993) writes that even though the number of Black males in organizational structures is very small, some dominant group members still think there are too many. These members see Black males as a threat and deliberately attempt to oppose their participation in dominant structures. Some Black males perceive this opposition as an attempt to destroy their careers (Cose, 1993, p. 19). Here, the dialectical tension for Black males is not the result of any one individual's power, but the power structure these individuals claim rights to and represent.

Black males are constantly opposed in ways other organizational members are not (Cose, 1993). Rather than drawing descriptions of his participation within the organization, the Black male describes the wrath of those who scrutinize his every effort. This antagonistic opposition comes from the watchful eye of dominant group members who constantly question the competence and integrity of non-dominant group members (Cose, 1993). Furthermore, these individuals constantly seek evidence to support their theories, and use race related issues like affirmative action to undermine the credibility of Black males and other non-dominant group members. It is important to note that both Black and White organizational members may experience this overseer mentality, but Black members are more likely to be victimized by it (Cose, 1993).
The Black male describes scenarios where dominant group members purposely interfere with his participation within the organizational structure. Although his is a different era, Northup's example of opposition is symbolic of Black men attempting to make advancements within 21st century structures. During his enslavement, Northup is required to carry a pass every time he leaves the plantation. These permission slips are dated and read this way:

Platt has permission to go to Ford's plantation, on Bayou Boeuf, and return by Tuesday morning.

John M. Tibeats
(Northup, 1993, p. 118)

The slave is required to present his pass to any White man upon demand. Without a pass, the slave is subject to seizure and return to his rightful owner, usually for a fee. The slave's pass serves as proof that his master has given him permission to proceed from plantation to plantation, within the organizational structure.

Symbolic passes for Black men in 21st century structures may include college degrees and prestigious certificates that give him license to travel from corporation to corporation, within the organizational structure. Additionally, the Black man's pass or permission slip may be his association with Whites members of dominant structures who give their approval for his participation. Without their approval he may be subject to seizure, opposition, and rejection. Similar to Black men in 21st century organizational structures, the slave needs permission, or a pass, to participate within the structure. Furthermore, it is not uncommon to have one's pass revoked by dominant group members, which would then deny slaves and Black men in 21st century organizational structures from further participation.
Without permission from a credible White the Black man may not be allowed to participate, much less make any progress at all.

Similar to Black men in 21st century organizational structures, Northup is constantly watched by the opposition, and describes the process of catching runaways as a “money-making business” (Northup, 1968, p. 118). His opposition is the money hungry overseer who surveys the dirt roads and would take great pleasure in catching him. Northup is not permitted to look freedom in the face without the written consent of his owner, so he is closely scrutinized any time he travels outside the boundaries of his master’s plantation. If he is captured and goes unclaimed, he will be sold to the highest bidder. Northup writes, “A mean White considers it a god-send to meet an unknown Negro without a pass” (Northup, 1968, p. 119). He describes himself as “scrutinized and examined in the most thorough manner” every time he interacts within the oppressive system (Northup, 1968, p. 119). Similar to Black men in 21st century structures, he is wary of those who would find satisfaction in exposing any wrongdoing on his part, so like these men, he practices cautious interaction with the opposition. Furthermore, these Black men describe watchful dominant structures as purposely oppressive, having ears and eyes everywhere (Hopson, 2001b, p. 165).

Opposition comes in various forms, and Black men see this opposition as a way to stifle, eliminate, and destroy their futures (Cose, 1993). Northup also encounters his opposition in the form of the overseer, Tibeats. Tibeats is prone to violent outbursts against the African slaves at anytime. Northup describes his outbursts as “periodical fits of spleen and ill humor to which he was frequently
subject, making him more venomous and disagreeable than usual” (Northup, 1968, p. 97).

One morning Northup is made the victim of one of Tibeats’ fits. It seems that Northup is unable to satisfy Tibeats, regardless of his efforts. After a disagreement, his anger grows violent, and Tibeats grabs a hatchet with the intent of cutting Northup’s head open. In order to protect himself, Northup kicks the overseer and wrestles the hatchet away. The overseer grabs a stick and Northup wrestles that away as well. Northup then leaps the fence and runs. From that moment on he carries the reputation as the slave who beat his master. Tibeats uses this reputation as incentive for every available opportunity to destroy Northup.

Northup is well aware of the overseer’s intentions, and like Black men in the 21st century organizational structures, he knows he must remain wary of the opposition that will destroy him if given half a chance (Cose, 1993, p. 19).

Invisible Man also describes a society that uses every opportunity to oppose him. The overseer mentality is very apparent, and in his narrative Invisible Man describes the watchful eye of his opposition in this way:

By men who looked down at you through peepholes in the ceiling and walls, watching you constantly, silently waiting for a wrong move. Perhaps even now an eye had picked me up and watched my every movement. (Ellison, 1952, p. 126)

Invisible Man perceives some members of the White power structure as out to eliminate him. His opposition includes both Blacks and Whites whose objective is the same: use him, set him up for failure, and destroy him. After Invisible Man achieves nominal success and popularity within The Brotherhood, some members become envious. They begin to accuse Invisible Man of a hidden agenda and
slander both his work and his person. This opposition leaves him little choice but to flee or fight back, although in reality he knows he can never regain his standing within the organization.

One example of Invisible Man’s opposition within the Brotherhood organization is Brother Wrestrum, the Black man used as a pawn to create doubt and tension against him. Wrestrum is described as one who “seemed to possess some kind of authority in the Brotherhood, although his exact function was unclear. He was, I felt, something of a meddler” (Ellison, 1952, p. 295). Brother Wrestrum’s accusations of hidden agendas and self centered thinking cause the others to question Invisible Man’s credibility, thus beginning the process for his downfall. Wrestrum and other Brotherhood members arrange for a community publication to interview Invisible Man, and then use the article to frame him as power hungry and media driven. At the climax of their discourse, Wrestrum and Invisible Man begin to argue, and in the presence of White Brotherhood members, Wrestrum calls him an opportunist. Images of both the set-up and the argument symbolize the opposition of Black men, and are framed in the words of Invisible Man:

He had snatched me back to the south in the midst of one of the top Brotherhood committees and I felt naked. I could have throttled him—forcing me to take part in a childish dispute before the others. Yet I had to fight him, in terms he understood, even though we sounded like characters in a razor-slinging vaudeville skit. (Ellison, 1952, p. 301)

After he is harangued, The Brotherhood begins the process of eliminating Invisible Man. Specific acts of his elimination include stripping him of organizational authority, reassigning him to a less visible region of the structure,
and excluding him from meetings where decisions are made. Thus he is forced into limited participation role where he must act alone, without the support he had once received. Like Northup, and Black men in 21st century structures, Invisible Man begins to understand the realization that he cannot satisfy his superiors because they oppose his participation.

Black males in 21st century structures describe experiences similar to that of Invisible Man. Cose (1993) shares one Black’s man experience of subtle opposition in a major law firm where, having previously worked for the government, he had no idea of how to bill clients for his time. Because no one volunteered to show him the procedure, he resolved to figure it out on his own, “I would go in on Saturday and sneak into people’s offices to see what in the fu— they were doing” (Cose, 1993, p. 16). Interestingly, this Black professional is one of many non-dominant group members to persevere and eventually prosper within dominant structures. He further describes his personal experience by citing an extremely influential factor for his participation within a capitalistic society, “If I was valuable to the bottom line, a lot of that racial sh-- would be overcome” (Cose, 1993, p. 16).

In ways similar to Northup and Invisible Man, many Black men within 21st century structures face the hegemonic forces of opposition rather than invitations for participation. Additionally, some of these participants believe that the latter part of the 20th century saw a shift in oppressive practices. They compare the societal structures of yesterday, where racial attitudes were freely exhibited without censure or embarrassment, to the structure of today, where socially
unacceptable attitudes are often exhibited under a cloak of secrecy. These perceptions are verbalized by one participant who says, “White folks ain’t saying what they mean” (Cose, 1993, p. 148). In fact, some of these same Black men voice their preference to return to the brutal honesty of the past, when racist intentions were clear, and communication was not so complicated.

**Oppression as Abuse/Organizational Wellness**

Black males report the sting of racism in both their professional and personal lives (Cose, 1993). Some describe oppression as an incredible burden that often results in mental and physical side effects for its victims. For these participants, the path to organizational success comes at a high price. Some endure racist acts regularly, and will choose to trade in their Blackness and/or sanity to achieve organizational success. These participants disassociate themselves from anything considered Black, choosing rather to adopt the opinions and actions of the dominant group. Feeling insulted, demeaned, opposed, and targeted within a dominant organizational structure, one participant describes the cost as mentally exasperating, stating, “[I was] afraid if I stayed one second longer I was going to go off the deep end” (Cose, 1993, p. 64).

Black professionals describe the inability to cope within an oppressive structure as detrimental to one’s success, sanity, and general well being. Some participants express frustration at having their feelings discounted and discredited by their White peers. Topics of race and racism conjure up feelings of confusion and guilt among Whites (Cose, 1993, p. 14). There is the belief that organizations lack climates of support when dealing with racial issues (Cose, 1993, p. 45), and
many concerns of Black professionals are merely swept under the rug. Problems are not solved and these professionals are left to endure them alone. The result is a sense of rage, inner conflict, deep dissatisfaction (Cose, 1993, p. 160), and physical/emotional turmoil among Blacks (Cose, 1993, p. 19). For example, when one participant blindly attempts to surpass his organization’s excruciating demands by overcompensating, he becomes overburdened with stress. After his social life vanishes, he begins to put on weight and finds himself diagnosed with a blood clot for which he is hospitalized for a week (Cose, 1993, p. 26).

Cecil Williams, writes of racial tensions in the 1960’s that “left him shaken” (Cose, 1993, p. 54). As a young Black male, he is introduced to the brutal realities of racism. Upon the death of his grandfather, Williams begins to take notice of a power structure seemingly determined to make him “accept the life of a n— in the south.” His battles with oppression begin to take the form of mental, emotional, and psychological issues. One day these perceptions, along with visions of his grandfather buried in an unmarked grave reserved for Blacks, disturb the young man immensely and he suffers a nervous breakdown. Looking back Williams relates the bulk of his problems to racism. He says, “I still feel that humiliation [visited upon him by Whites] was really the deepest part of that void which disturbed my sanity” (Cose, 1993, p. 54).

Co-cultural group members reveal the emotional price of their race and gender as very real, and reports of depression and migraine headaches resulting from the pressure of oppressive structures are not uncommon (Cose, 1993, p. 20). The pain and suffering experienced by victims of oppression take the forms of
physical and mental illness and insecurities. When a specific interaction with his supervisor took a turn for the worse, one Black male describes feeling intense anxiety, "This frustration was the result of my laboring to avoid calling the situation racial, when indeed it truly was" (Hopson, 2001, p. 17).

Narratives written by and about Black men reveal other signs of psychological abuse. For example, when Invisible Man arrives in New York he expects to utilize Dr. Bledsoe's job contacts so that he can quickly return to college, but he soon discovers that he has been manipulated, and that no one is prepared to offer him assistance. Invisible Man becomes deeply depressed at this realization, and frustrations overwhelm him to the point that he begins to hear voices in his head. Invisible Man has a difficult time accepting the fact that he will not return to college because of the dominant power structure. "I had lost my sense of direction," he says (Ellison, 1952, p. 197). Hurt and confused, he begins to question himself and his future. He describes a painful and contradictory voice growing within him, a voice demanding revenge. He is throbbing with guilt and puzzlement when he explains his emotional state:

One minute I was willing to lie on blazing coals, do anything to attain a position on campus, then snap! It was done with, finished, through. Now there was the problem of forgetting it. If only all the contradictory voices shouting inside my head would calm down and sing a song in unison, whatever it was I wouldn't care as long as they sang without dissonance; yes, and avoided the uncertain extremes of the scale. But there was no relief. I was wild with resentment but too much under self control. I became afraid of what I might do. (Ellison, 1952, p. 197)

Black professionals in 21st century organizational structures describe the side effects of abuse as rage, depression, confusion, guilt, and paranoia. Some of these professionals believe so strongly that the U.S. power structure is out to
stymie Black achievement, that failure is essentially the only option, whatever the reality of the situation (Cose, 1993, p. 59). Thus, the Black male can never be certain he has met his fullest potential. However, all is not lost for Black men. Scholars lend evidence to the fact that Black men do not have to internalize the abuse of an oppressive structure. Although passion, anger, and rage are products of his confusion, these are by no means the Black male’s only option for feeling. He does not have to allow the disease of racism to eat away at his soul. To the contrary, Cose writes:

To be Black and relatively conscious in America is not necessarily to be in a perpetual state of rage. Few human beings of any race could survive the psychic toll of uninterrupted anger. Those who did would be in such a miserable state that they could scarcely cope with life, much less succeed at it. (Cose, 1993, p. 44)

This thesis does not contend that some non-dominant group members do not find satisfaction within the dominant organizational structure. Undoubtedly, some Black men will feel perfectly content in their organizational roles. Others may feel more like survivors of racial abuse, and experience sleeplessness, anxiety, loss of appetite, and distrust of organizational group members. Additionally, repeated encounters with oppressive attitudes and actions may only serve to increase tension for the Black man, as opposed to organizational wellness.

The next section will present tensions related to physical stature. As was mentioned earlier in this thesis, negative stereotypes frame Black men as something other than human. Additionally, large physical stature may multiply dominant group member’s perceptions of Black men as something to be feared. Mass media connects images of Black men to violence, aggression, confrontation,
and sexual promiscuity. To some degree, these images will infiltrate all levels of
the organizational structure (Dates & Barlow, 1990; Hopson, 2001; Orbe &
Hopson, 2001).

Somatic Perceptions /Cerebral Realities

Oh, he was a brute, huge, with white teeth, what they call a buck. And he
said b-- drop your drawers, and then he did it. She’s such a lovely girl too,
really delicate with a complexion like strawberries and cream. You can’t
imagine anyone calling her a name like that. (Ellison, 1952, p. 392)

In this statement, the wife of a Brotherhood member shares with Invisible Man, her
perception of Black men. This statement symbolizes the foundation for what
researchers refer to as a phallocentric model for Black manhood (hooks, 1992).

For many organizational members, the physical presence of Black men equates to
stereotypes of violence and sexual aggression. Furthermore, the image of Black
men as dangerously violent and sexual has permeated U.S. structures and beyond.

The perpetuation of these stereotypical images may be seen as a form of bondage
and restriction for Black men attempting to succeed within organizational
structures. In ‘Reconstructing Black masculinity,’ hooks (1992) describes the
historical significance of societal stereotypes which wildly sexualize, and restrict,
Black men:

It is easy to see how this [image] served the interests of a Capitalist state
which was indeed depriving men of their rights, exploiting their labor in
such a way that they only indirectly received the benefits, to deflect away
from a patriarchal power based on ruling others and to emphasize a
masculine status that would depend solely on the penis. (hooks, 1992, p.
94)

Generations of distorted images surround Black manhood. Generally, mass
media does not recognize Black men for their intelligence, perseverance, or the
ability to love and care for family. To the contrary, racist stereotypes have reduced Black manhood to one particular body organ. Moreover, some scholars describe the physical domination and sexual possession of women, as a stereotype that could be accessible to all men. However, U.S. history has reserved this stereotype primarily for Black men (Cose, 1993, p. 94). Furthermore, this stereotype served to evoke a fear that justified brutality, particularly for White men.

In every level of the U.S. structure Black men are forced to answer to White fear of violence from a few Black men (Cose, 1993, p. 96). Physical stature is sometimes used to distort the image of Black males as something other than human. These images do not exude signs of intelligence, model citizenship or corporate leadership, instead the media perpetrates the physical stature of Black males as dangerous, sexual, trouble, ex-con, and intimidating (Ellison, 1952; Hopson, 2001). The Black male has been identified through racist stereotypes and forced out of organizational structures by dominant group members uncomfortable with his physical presence.

Cose’s (1993) collection of narratives explore the physical stature of Black males by describing an early American societal structure bent on destroying the physical threat of the Black male after having already taken his mentality of freedom. He quotes an African American historian who describes stripping the Black male of his physical stature as a way to further oppress him. The author writes:

The [Black man] is debarred from violent expressions or threats in defending his wife, sister, or daughter. Every [Black man] in the south knows he is under a kind of death sentence, he does not know when his
turn will come, it may never come, but it may also come at any time.
(Cose, 1993, p. 98)

Large physical stature is viewed as a threat when accompanied by a Black face. Cose (1993) presents Rodney King as a prime example of a larger Black male who is brutalized by L. A. police, and framed as inhuman as justification for this brutality. In Cose’s (1993) narrative, police refer to King as “a huge guy possessing super human strength, and seemingly oblivious to pain” (p. 183).

These descriptions send a message that positions the Black male as something to be feared. This is harmful because erasing the image of humanity for the Black man helps to create a society that will more readily buy into the myth that he must be exterminated. Black males in organizational, institutional, and societal structures suffer from these myths.

Interestingly, Invisible Man’s narrative addresses physical stature by identifying the successful Dr. Bledsoe as a man who works at maintaining a posture of humility and meekness to intentionally make himself seem smaller than the White males around him, despite being physically larger. Before his speech Dr. Bledsoe sits on the podium with his shoulders dropped, his back hunched, and his appearance less than intimidating. As the young impressionable Invisible Man looks on he offers a critical explication of physical stature, Black men, and power structures:

In spite of the array of important men beside him, and despite the posture of humility and meekness which made him seem smaller than the others (although he was physically larger), Dr. Bledsoe made his presence by us with a greater impact. I remembered the legend of how he had come to the college, a barefoot boy who in his fervor for education had trudged with his bundle of ragged clothing across two states. And how he was given a job feeding slop to the hogs but had made himself the best slop dispenser in the
history of the school; and how the founder had been impressed and made him his office boy. Each of us knew of his rise over ten years of hard work to the presidency, and each of us at some time wished that he had walked to the school or pushed a wheelbarrow or performed some other act of determination and sacrifice to attest his eagerness for knowledge. (Ellison, 1952, p. 90)

Undoubtedly, this statement lends evidence to the truths of physical stature in Black/White discourse. Dr. Bledsoe, it seems, has based his success at the college on making Whites comfortable. He does so at times by making himself appear smaller than those Whites around him. He literally becomes shorter, quieter, and less intimidating for the sake of gaining the acceptance of Whites. Although Invisible Man can clearly see this physical transformation he is not critical, instead he seems to be in agreement with Dr. Bledsoe’s actions and would gratefully accept the opportunity to prove his own determination and eagerness to succeed within the dominant organizational structure.

Abram was tall, standing a full head above any common man. In his youth he was renowned for his great strength, but age and unremitting toil have somewhat shattered his powerful frame and enfeebled his mental faculties. (Northup, 1968, p. 140)

Recurring references indicate that fear of the Black male’s physical stature can be traced back to one of the most well known stereotypes of Northup’s (1968) time. Throughout slavery, the Black buck (Northup, 1968) is recognized as one of the strongest, most reliable, and most precious properties of the slave owner. Signifiers of the buck include a large physical stature, very dark skin, and white teeth (Ellison, 1952). These are also attributes used to determine the value of the Black male as livestock. Although the buck is seen as valuable, dependable, and ideal for breeding, he is also seen as dangerous. Dehumanizing stereotypes of the
sort African Americans encounter help create images the Black male as a threat and dangerous (Cose, 1993). Furthermore, the implication offered in these narratives is that physical stature remains as intimidating for some dominant group members in 21st century structures as it was 150 years ago.

The previous sections have identified a variety of tensions for Black males in dominant structures. This exploration presents White power as a major influence on Black men within organizational, institutional, and societal structures. Furthermore, dialectical tensions will result from oppressive power structures and include the formation of negative public images and stereotypes. Black men are in constant battle with mediated stereotypes that attempt to frame them as violent, lazy, and sexually aggressive (Orbe & Hopson, 2001). Furthermore, public image may inform self-image for the Black man who is bombarded with negative stereotypes of his likeness at organizational every level. Thus, he fluctuates between acting out other's perceptions of him, to completely disassociating himself from anything related to images of his race and gender (including speech patterns, dress and appearance, and social circles). In addition, the Black man may find himself stereotyped by those who view his physical stature as threatening, intimidating, or sexual.

The previous section also included descriptions of the Black man's struggle for visibility within dominant structures. Narratives presented organizational members who described themselves as going unnoticed and virtually invisible in these structures. In some cases participants choose to remain invisible as opposed to being forced into stereotypical roles. In either case, these participants may find
themselves constantly seeking personal and professional satisfaction within the dominant organizational structure.

Dialectical tensions of Black men in dominant organizations include the concept of running from oppressive structures as opposed to staying and relaxing. The decision to leave the structure will often depend on the urgency of the matter. For example, the Black man might leave because he has been forced out, or he may choose to run as a method for staying ahead of the game that will eventually target him.

Opposition/participation can be both individual and collective acts of oppression, where the primary purpose is to maintain power and control over the participation of Black males and other non-dominant group members within dominant structures.

Rationalizing irrational acts of racism is done in order to file it and forget it. Also, Black men will overlook insulting jokes or stereotypes in order to gain the favor of dominant group members. Rationalizing these acts will not necessarily guarantee Black men favor in dominant organizational structures, and repeated exposure to abusive racism may contribute to physical and mental despair.

Tensions resulting from race and gender will influence communicative practices of non-dominant group members in dominant organizational structures. The following sections discuss communication strategies of Black males.
Co-cultural Communication Strategies

I knew White folks. I knew how to deal with them. [I] understood how to ask non-confrontational questions, and how to appear calm and deliberate. (Cose, 1993, p. 16)

Co-cultural communication strategies may be described as "a variety of communicative practices that co-cultural group members engage in when interacting with dominant group members" (Orbe, 1998b, p. 50). In his attempt to negotiate tensions within dominant structures, the Black male draws from various communicative strategies. These strategies result from the need to address the tensions of oppressive structures, negative public and self images, feelings of invisibility to self and others within the structure, rationalizing the irrational, constantly coping and running from tensions, opposition or participation, oppression as abuse, and perceptions of physical stature.

The following section explicates communication strategies used to address the previously named tensions. These strategies, like the previously named tensions, extend throughout the history of U.S. organizational, institutional, and societal structures. Strategies include censoring self, making Whites comfortable, ridicule of self, confrontation, and bargaining for position. Narratives of Black men's experiences suggest that similar communication strategies were utilized throughout each era represented in this study.

Censoring Self

Co-cultural group members use communication strategies as a means to survival within dominant organizational structures. These strategies include the Black male's practice of silence, suppressing rage, or what scholars refer to as censoring
Historically, the censoring of self in the face of oppressive attitudes and actions helped to make it possible for slaves to avoid confrontation, and to maintain a secret agenda for freedom (Northup, 1968). Stanbeck and Pearce (1981) report the continued need for marginalized groups to utilize strategies which will allow them to operate within the constraints imposed by their self concepts, intentions, and awareness of dominant group expectations. Furthermore, 21st Century Black males speak of mastering and honing the ability to manage uncomfortable situations they attribute to race and gender. They smile for members of the organization, even after feeling demeaned, insulted, disrespected, and cheated out of accolades and financial rewards. For example, after a Black U.S. general flashes his two star badge and is still refused admittance to a military base, he does not show his fuming anger for those who exercise the oppression. Instead the general is described as holding in his frustration, and quietly “rocking with rage” (Cose, 1993, p. 50).

Beginning with slavery, narratives describe censorship as a reservoir of despair, humiliation, and guilt, and express concern over the potential physical and psychological affects of internalizing these feelings as evidenced in Northup’s text:

I endeavored to keep up my spirits. I revolved in my mind a hundred plans of escape, and fully determined to make the attempt the first desperate chance that offered. I had by this time become satisfied, however, that my true policy was to say nothing further on the subject of my having been born a freeman. It would but expose me to maltreatment, and diminish the chances of liberation. (Northup, 1968, p. 35)

Northup practices censorship (Orbe, 1998b), deciding he “will say nothing further on the subject of being a free man” (Northup, 1968, p. 34). He does so after he is beaten with the whip for maintaining his free status. At this point he becomes
aware of the hostile environment created by these words, and he is instructed to never repeat his true history again. Fearful of further repercussions and trusting no one, Northup is determined to keep his agenda for freedom a secret. He describes an incident where he is inspected by a potential slave buyer and asked about his home. Forgetting himself, Northup answers truthfully, “New York” (Northup, 1968, p. 38). Later the overseer threatens him with a horrible death if he should ever answer in that way again. Northup censors self for 12 years, and when he is finally able to regain his freedom he is still at a lost for words, “I essayed to make some answer, but emotion choked all utterance, and I was silent” (Northup, 1968, p. 237).

Northup (1968) also verbalizes the strategy of censoring with a description of Wiley, another slave on the plantation:

Wiley seldom opened his mouth, and revolved in his obscure and unpretending orbit without a single grumble, nonetheless the warm elements of sociality were strong in the bosom of that silent ‘nigger.’ (Northup, 1968, p. 180)

Wiley practices a “taciturn and retiring nature” keeping him far in the background” (Northup, 1968, p. 180). He is constantly quiet, and he lives and labors in his world of slavery without so much as a “grumble.” However, Northup explains, when Wiley travels off the plantation without a pass, he finds that his many years of quiet and complacent servitude do nothing to protect him from the severity of the whip (Northup, 1968, p. 180). Thus, censoring self is not guaranteed effective for a slave.

At times, Invisible Man also censors himself. When interacting with Whites, he speaks softly and powerlessly, asks no questions (Ellison, 1952, pp.
120, 152), and chooses instead to mutter disagreements to himself (Ellison, 1952, p. 201). He contemplates his communication with Whites to be sure it is as perfect and respectful as possible, and views his interaction with them as mainly a time for listening (Ellison, 1952, p. 270). As he interacts within dominant structures, Invisible Man is aware of the power dynamics involved and strategic in his every move. For example, he discusses his communicative strategy with members of the Brotherhood:

Every occasion became a study situation, even the parties that sometimes followed the meetings. During these I had to take mental notes on the ideological attitudes revealed in the guest’s conversations. I had soon learned the method in it. (Ellison, 1952, p. 270)

The method he speaks of includes the Brotherhood’s desire for Invisible Man to be little more than a well disciplined Black face. As he studies the discourse at Brotherhood parties, Invisible Man learns to develop strategy for future interaction with dominant group members. His goal is not to express his own ideologies but to practice communication that is carefully selected, well though out, and focused on task orientation (Orbe, 1998b, p. 70).

Black males must make careful choices if they intend to succeed in dominant structures. Sometimes they choose to remain quiet for the sake of the bigger picture. Invisible Man compares the sacrifice of keeping his mouth shut for the monetary reward he will receive if he pleases the Brotherhood:

How far could I trust them, and in what way were they different from the trustees? Whatever, I was committed; I’d learn in the process of working with them, I thought, remembering the money. The bills were crispy and fresh and I tried to imagine Mary’s surprise when I paid her all my back rent and board. (Ellison, 1952, p. 240)
At this point in the narrative Invisible Man considers the money he earns from the Brotherhood worth the cost of his censorship. He will purposely keep his mouth closed in order to make progress within that organizational structure. In addition to Invisible Man censoring himself, the Brotherhood also attempts to censor him when they instruct him not to think independently when it comes to matters of the Brotherhood, but to let the executive committee do his thinking for him (Ellison, 1952, p. 355).

He had watched, one year after another, as less qualified Whites were promoted over him. And each year he swallowed his disappointment, twisted his face into a smile, and congratulated his White friends as he hid his rage—so determined was he to avoid being categorized as a race-obsessed troublemaker. And he endured other affronts in silence. (Cose, 1993, p. 66)

Co-cultural group members identify self-censorship as a common practice in their attempts to succeed within the 21st organizational structure (Orbe, 1998b; Cose, 1993). Black males admit to maintaining silence in the face of racial issues, swallowing the disappointment of discrimination, twisting frowns into smiles within dominant structures, and hiding rage to avoid being labeled a troublemaker (Cose, 1993, p. 66). When they choose not to censor themselves, some Black men find they become the recipients of punishment inflicted by the power structure. Labels of trouble maker, defiant, and overly sensitive (Cose, 1993; Hopson, 2001) are symbolic of the whip in Northup’s narrative (Northup, 1947, p. 180), and most often delivered with serious consequences. The Black male’s organizational success may be the trade-off for not censoring self.

Some Black men believe the dangers of censorship include deepening a reservoir of frustration and endangering mental and physical health (Cose, 1993).
Additionally, these Black men worry that burying their frustrations will result in an explosion of sorts. They fear that after years of mastering and honing slights, all these emotions will come pouring out onto “some luckless White person” (Cose, 1993, p. 67). This outpouring of emotion is referred to as confronting (Orbe, 1998b, p. 79), and is covered later in this section.

There is evidence of censorship in the narratives of Northup (1968), Invisible Man (1952) and Cose (1993), and this strategy may be used to put Whites at ease during interracial communication. The following section further explicates the efforts of Black males to make Whites comfortable in predominantly White organization structures.

**Making Whites Comfortable with the Black Presence**

Co-cultural group members consciously try to assist in the maintenance of positive face for dominant group members. Politeness and other forms of respectful communication are strategies for gaining or maintaining favor. (Orbe, 1998b, p. 67)

Constant attempts to make dominant group members comfortable during discourse may be both a strategy and tension for Black males in organizational, institutional, and societal structures. Tensions may result from consciously and continuously accepting subordinate positioning during discourse, while simultaneously assisting dominant group members to save face and retain power (Wright, 1999). If the comfort level of dominant group members is consistently made top priority for non-dominant group members, then these persons may experience inner tension. This tension is the result of setting aside one’s own values and beliefs for the sake of others, even if it is detrimental to the non-dominant group member’s personal and professional wellbeing. However, when the attempt to make dominant group
members comfortable is conscious and intentional for the purpose of a specific

goal, it then becomes a strategy for non-dominant group members. For example,

Invisible Man says that he was never more hated than when he tried to be honest,

and never more loved than when he tried to “justify someone’s mistaken beliefs”

(Ellison, 1952, p. 432). He admits to giving dominant group members the

“incorrect, absurd answers they wished to hear” so that they might feel

comfortable. “In my presence they could talk and agree with themselves, the

world was nailed down and they loved it” (Ellison, 1952, p. 432).

Tension also may result from conflict between the Black male’s self-image

and the perceptions others have of him. Thus, he spends a lot of energy trying to

manage these images. His success is largely influenced by his ability to make

dominant group members comfortable with his presence. Invisible Man’s

narrative is full of such dynamic power interactions, many of which occur in

dominant structures where he wishes that the eyes of dominant group members

could not rest on him, and he would not be forced to draw their attention (Ellison,

1952). His desire, or strategy, for invisibility seems more for the sake of White

group members than for his own, and like other Black males, Invisible Man will at

times deny his own existence if it makes them comfortable.

When attempting to make Whites comfortable, the Black male may prepare

extensively, and selectively choose the words and style in which he speaks (Orbe,

1998b). For example, Invisible Man takes notice of the speech patterns and tones

of others when addressing Whites. He envies their freedom. However, his own

words are patterned after Dr. Bledsoe’s in that he says only what he believes others
want to hear. Invisible Man comes to understand the importance of mirroring the perceptions of the dominant group (Orbe, 1998b). In a reference to his work with the Brotherhood he describes mirroring as the attempt to "keep ever before them the picture of a bright passive good humored receptive mass ever willing to accept their every scheme" (Ellison, 1952, p. 389).

Northup (1968) writes of the thankful slave willing to go through great lengths to show gratitude to the model master "who slows the rope and spares my life" (p. 89). He saves face (Wright, 1999) for the master by remaining gracious in the face of injustice for fear of punishment. Making the master comfortable includes Northup's agreeable behavior during enslavement and saying nothing of his real name or history of freedom.

Some African Americans in dominant structures also refer to such gratitude as "doing the White man's bidding" (Cose, 1993, p. 150). This bidding is done when Black men and other non-dominant group members attempt to show gratitude for being allowed to participate in the dominant structure, by advocating on behalf of the dominant structure. In terms of the gratitude expected of him, Invisible Man refers to the power structure of the Brotherhood, "I would be their assured voice of denial," meaning he would help them to escape the guilt of oppression by assuring them of their righteousness. Interestingly, he recognizes how this illusion creates a counter illusion and asks himself whether dominant members who are made to feel too comfortable start to believe their own propaganda (Ellison, 1952, p. 389).
Black men employed in dominant structures express the need to assess the comfort level of Whites (Cose, 1993, p. 127), and spend an inordinate amount of effort trying to make Whites comfortable with them (Cose, 1993, p. 77). After recognizing the illusion of his success within the brotherhood, Invisible Man, similar to Black males in 21st century structures, is faced with the reality of his own efforts. He contemplates, “how much time have I wasted trying to be what they would have me to be” (Cose, 1993; Ellison, 1952, p. 202)?

In other parts of his narrative, Invisible Man further identifies the pains of making Whites comfortable. With hopes of gaining employment, he contemplates on how to enter the office of a powerful White man. He wonders how his Black presence will make the man feel, “Whites were funny. Bates might not want to see a Negro first thing in the morning” (Ellison, 1952, p. 126). Invisible Man also questions the cut of his hair and his suit, while deciding that he will speak like Dr. Bledsoe and give Whites what they want from Black men:

When I meet the big men to whom my letters were addressed I would put on my best manner. I would speak softly, in my most polished tones, smile agreeably and be most polite; I would remember that if he (he meant any of the important gentleman) should begin a topic of conversation (I would never begin a subject of my own) which I found unfamiliar, I would smile and agree. My shoes would be polished, my suit pressed, my hair dressed (not too much grease) and parted on the right side; my nails would be clean and my armpits well deodorized-you had to watch that last item. You couldn’t allow them to think all of us smelled bad. The very thought of my contacts gave me a feeling of sophistication, of worldliness, which, as I fingered the seven important letters in my pocket, made me feel light and expansive. (Ellison, 1952, p. 120)

There are multiple dynamics of communication going on in the previous statement. Obviously the White power structure has had some impact on the communication of Invisible Man. As he prepares extensively to make the
acquaintance of the “powerful liaisons” (Orbe, 1998b, p. 77), he allows the reader a glimpse of his “perceptions of self” (Orbe, 1998b, p. 69; Stanback and Pearce, 1981). Invisible Man understands that his communication will be filtered through a power structure that rewards Black men who put on their “best manner, speak softly, do not begin conversations, and smile and agree” (Ellison, 1952, p. 120). Similar to Black men in 21st century structures, he is aware that his dress and hair could mean the difference between acceptance and rejection, and so he is careful about parting it on the right side and hair grease. Invisible is also very aware of the fact that he is up against the stereotypes that precede him and represent Black men as “smelling bad” (Ellison, 1952, p. 120). In that sense, he is under a lot of pressure even before he walks through the office door. Not to mention the work skills he might need.

All that mastering and honing. You manage that over a lifetime. You take the slights. And you manage the ability to take the slights. (Cose, 1993, p. 50)

Similar to Northup (1968) and Invisible Man (1952) some Black men in 21st century organizations strive to make dominant group members as comfortable as possible during interracial communication. In their efforts, many of these Black men humble themselves beyond personal and professional expectations, take slights associated with promotions and advancement, ignore racist comments, and assume the role of company chameleon. Hence, Black males become whatever is necessary to succeed (Cose, 1993), even if it means putting the comfort of Whites before their own, or feeling worse in order to make Whites feel better. In the true sense of co-cultural communication theory (Orbe, 1998b), these sacrifices are
made in an effort to gain any advantage in White/Black discourse (p. 80).

Interestingly, some Whites may perceive this Black male as one who can be counted on in the most precarious circumstances (Ellison, 1952, p. 273).

**Ridicule of Self**

In his efforts to make Whites comfortable, it is interesting to note Invisible Man’s use of the co-cultural communication strategy “ridiculing self” (Orbe, 1998b, p. 76). Ridiculing self takes a number of forms, and generally uses tactics to poke fun at one’s own race, culture, or ethnicity in order to be considered one of the guys (dominant group members) (Orbe, 1998b, p. 76). By ridiculing self, the Black male may believe he will be accepted within the dominant structure that would not accept him otherwise. So he uses humor to differentiate himself from other Black males and instead emphasize commonalities with Whites (Orbe, 1998b, p. 58; Orbe & Hopson, 2002).

Invisible Man makes such a pertinent example of ridiculing self that the strategy cannot be denied. For instance, after the drunkard is escorted out of the Brotherhood party for insisting that Invisible Man sing, an uncomfortable tension fills the room. To break the oppressive silence Invisible Man begins to ridicule himself:

> For a moment I stood there, my eyes riveted upon the door, then I turned, the glass hot in my hand, my face feeling as though it would explode. Why was everyone staring at me as though I were responsible? Why the hell were they staring at me? Suddenly I yelled, “What’s the matter with you? Haven’t you ever seen a drunk?” When somewhere off the foyer the broad man’s voice staggered drunkenly to us, “St. Louis mammieeee -with her diamond riiings,” and was clipped off by the slamming door, leaving a roomful of bewildered faces. And suddenly I was laughing hysterically. “He hit me in the face,” I wheezed. “He hit me in the face with a yard of chitterlings!” Bending double roaring, the whole room seeming to dance
up and down with each rapid eruption of laughter. "He threw me a hog
mow," I cried, but no one seemed to understand. My eyes filled, I could
barely see. "He's high as a Georgia pine," I laughed, turning to the group
nearest me. "He's abso-lutely drunk, off music!" "Yes. Sure," a man said
nervously. Ha, ha." Three sheets in the wind," I laughed, getting my
breath now, and discovering that the silent tension of the others was ebbing
into a ripple of laughter that sounded throughout the room, growing swiftly
to a roar, a laugh of all dimensions, intensities, and intonations. Everyone
was joining in. The room fairly bounced. (Ellison, 1952, p. 238)

Clearly, Invisible Man is making fun of himself by connecting his
Blackness to stereotypical images of chitterlings and hog maws. Perhaps he
believes he can gain control of the situation through the use of humor and get
Whites to laugh with him rather than at him.

Invisible Man’s use of ridiculing self may be an implication of one way
Black men gain acceptance from Whites in the 19th and 21st centuries? Would 19th
century Black males ridicule themselves to avoid the whip and gain the acceptance
of plantation owners? Northup’s narrative does not give specific evidence of this,
but one may presume that some Black males ridiculed stereotypical images of
themselves (the origins of Stepin Fetchit) with hopes of influencing the perceptions
of Whites.

Black males ridicule self in other ways in order to gain acceptance within
21st century structures. Some Black men do not ridicule themselves outright, but
they assume stereotypical roles within the White power structure. Cose’s (1993)
collection of narratives provides an example. One participant describes his
conversation with a Black attorney. After the participant inquires about
employment opportunities at a prestigious law firm, the sole Black attorney at the
firm boasts, “There’s only room for one of us here, and I’m it” (Cose, 1993, p.
Cose's (1993) participant admits he was rankled by the comment, and felt that the Black attorney "took delight in doing the White man's bidding" (p. 150). The assumption here is that the Black attorney has accepted his role as fulfilling the firm's quota, and he is willing to admit to the reality by claiming ownership of the stereotype. Perhaps the next question is what other ridiculing stereotypes has the Black attorney claimed within the organization?

**Emphasizing Strength and Value**

Black men practice other communication strategies including emphasizing one's strengths and value to the dominant structure (Orbe, 1998b, p. 19). Scholars report the non-dominant group member's emphasis on strengths as his attempt to counter pervasive myths and negative stereotypes of his worth. Here, the non-dominant group member seeks acceptance by working diligently to prove himself as contributing to the dominant structure.

Northup proved to be valuable commodity to the slave master because he was an ingenious craftsman. Throughout his narrative Northup describes inventions and improvements upon existing equipment that greatly please and benefit the slave master; this earns him the reputation as the "smartest n— in Pine Woods" (Northup, 1968, p. 71). With this reputation he becomes a valuable commodity, which may have ultimately saved his life during a time when Black lives were expendable.

Northup also gains a reputation as a fine musician, and is often summoned for his violin from a distance of 10 miles. This allows him to escape the
exhausting work of the fields and brutal beatings, if only for a little while. He writes of other benefits extended to him because of his skill:

Alas, had it not been for my beloved violin, I scarcely can conceive how I could have endured the long years of bondage. It introduced me to great houses-relieved me of many day’s labor in the field, supplied me with conveniences for my cabin, with pipes, and tobacco, and extra pair of shoes, and often times led me away from the presence of a hard master, to witness scenes of jolly and mirth. (Northup, 1968, p. 165)

Northup’s violin often takes him from the field to those places of “jollity and mirth” where he able to earn the extra contributions of those “to whose delight I had administered” (Northup, 1968, p. 165). His talents do indeed become strengths within the slavery structure and he is able to achieve the previously mentioned benefits much easier than other slaves.

Similar to Northup, the Black male in the 21st century must also prove his value by exemplifying strengths. One professional views himself as the ultimate “company man” (Cose, 1993, p. 81), who exemplifies his strengths by overcompensating (Orbe, 1998b, p. 70) on the job in order to earn the company more money. His assumption is that increased profits will increase his value to the organization. He describes his loyalty as “putting the company first and working hard to earn its unconditional respect” (Cose, 1993, p. 81). However, the harsh reality is that many black professionals find themselves facing old myths, stereotypes, and possible extermination if they are unable to sustain the high level of service.

Invisible Man seeks to prove his value in his own way. This may be best exemplified in a conversation with a White male receptionist who answers his inquiry about a job. Invisible Man is determined to personally deliver the last of
Dr. Bledoe’s letters because, he thinks, if he can express his strengths and value to the powerful trustee he will be rewarded with a job, and allowed to return to college. But the White man sitting behind the reception desk refuses to assist him in reaching his destination. Invisible Man appears desperate to prove his worth.

His discourse with the receptionist looks like this:

Once I see Mr. Emerson, it’ll be up to me. All I want to do is speak to him. Couldn’t you let me talk to him for just five minutes? I’m sure I can convince him that I’m worthy of a job. And if there is someone who has tampered with my letter I’ll prove my identity. I only want to make enough money to return to my studies. I’m not bothered about all the other things, whatever they are sir. They’re not for me to interfere with. (Ellison, 1952, p. 143)

Invisible Man’s strength and value lies in his willingness to work at, support, and uphold the values of the power structure created by men like Mr. Emerson and Dr. Bledsoe. However, with all his begging and pleading Invisible Man does not get through to the powerful Mr. Emerson. Instead the receptionist opens Dr. Bledsoe’s letter and allows Invisible Man to read it. As he reads the letter, Invisible Man is mortified to find that he is no longer of value to the structure in which he has based all his beliefs.

Confrontation as Strategy

Arkansas bought out Nolan Richardson’s contract for $3 million Friday, capping a week in which the outspoken coach complained he was treated differently because he is black. (The Grand Rapids Press, 2002, p. C3)

The headlines said it all. The 1994 national championship coach was ousted a week after he voiced his opinions about his differential treatment by media and school administration. Richardson, who led the University of Arkansas Razorbacks men’s basketball team to the post season 15 of the last 16 years, may
be considered a high profile example of what happens when Black males directly confront what they perceive as unfair and unequal treatment within U.S. structures.

Unlike censoring where the intent is to make gains without highlighting differences, “confronting” is meant to resist power, emphasize differences, and gain an advantage by attempting to freeze the enemy in self-consciousness during discourse (Steele, 1990; Orbe; 1998b). Non-dominant group members who openly defy oppression and privilege in dominant group settings do so assuming dominant group members would choose to deny its existence, and relinquish some level of power or opportunity in order to avoid further confrontation. Therefore, forcing acknowledgement of oppressive structures may be viewed as an advantage for the non-dominant group member who feels the outcome is worth the possibility of repercussion.

Orbe (1998b) describes the process of confronting as “in your face tactics” (p. 79), or alternatives to those less conflicting strategies which seek to “sustain or tactfully” oppose dominant structures. Confronting completely opposes tactics such as censoring self and emphasizing strengths to make Whites comfortable. Co-cultural group members who openly confront oppressive structures may feel it is necessary to get one’s point across regardless of the consequences. For many Black males, these consequences include feeling stifled, and experiencing minimum advancement in their careers.

Richardson, one of the first Blacks to hold such a high profile position at Arkansas, may have considered his reputation for confronting as a strategy for getting his point across. However, his comments about being treated like a slave
within the predominantly White institution may have been the straw to break the camel’s back. Originally, the school’s administration reported that Richardson would remain the head coach for as long as he so desired. One week later he was fired.

For the majority of Black males their ousting does not include a $3 million buyout and a civil rights attorney. These Black males are offered no media coverage and little chance of remuneration to help recover from the repercussions of confrontation. Rather, these Black males are tossed out with little more than a word, and their departure may include labels such as rabble-rouser, overly sensitive, and having a problem with authority (Cose, 1993; Hopson, 2001a), reputations that may follow them from place of employment to place of employment.

One of Cose’s (1993) participants is Joel Dreyfuss, an editor who believes unfair labeling as a rabble-rouser has limited his success (p. 18). His experience with confronting the dominant power structure is extensive, and includes Dreyfuss questioning a White writer about the use of race in a story. Cose describes:

He saw an AP story about three black men who had been accused of a crime. He questioned whether the racial identification was appropriate, citing AP policy prohibiting the use of racial designations unless they were somehow relevant to the story. The editor, in explaining why race was in fact relevant, asked, Aren’t Blacks arming themselves? (Cose, 1993, p. 19)

Admonishing the connection, Dreyfuss marks that insulting racist remark as one of many in his professional career, “I became outraged and I remained outraged for about twenty years” (Cose, 1993, p. 19). From that point on Dreyfuss regularly confronted such foolishness, and soon found himself labeled as a “pain in the ass,
and a rabble-rouser” (Cose, 1993, p. 20), making it difficult to for him to gain entry into the mainstream media.

The Black male reveals that the threat of being forced out of organizational, institutional, and societal structures means being forced to acknowledge and concede to the power of Whites, or suffer from a battle he can not win. Thus, his options are to run away from that organization, or stay and work to succeed. This success will often depend upon the communication strategy he employs within the dominant structure.

In the case of Nolan Richardson, confronting the establishment resulted in a more subtle labeling and easing out process (Cose, 1993). Statements made by University of Arkansas Chancellor John White read this way:

He has made many valuable contributions to the University of Arkansas and has provided exemplary service to causes and charities throughout the state. His legacy will last forever, but it is now time to look to the future. (The Grand Rapids Press, 2002)

Almost 150 years prior to Nolan Richardson’s accusations of slave treatment, Solomon Northup (1968) also resists an oppressive power structure. Northup confronts the dominant power structure in the form of a fight with the overseer Tibeats. For Northup, the overseer represents an oppressive structure that would choose to destroy him. When the two men begin to argue over Northup’s use of nails, nails that the slave master originally told him to use, Tibeats attempts to beat him. Northup refuses to bare his back for a beating he does not deserve.

He describes his feelings about this injustice:

My fear changed to anger, and before he reached me I had made up my mind fully not to be whipped, let the result be life or death. Master Tibeats, I said, looking him boldly in the face, I will not. (Northup, 1968, p. 80)
When Tibeats rushes after Northup, the two struggle, and Northup’s confronting turns physical:

I snatched the whip from his hand. He struggled with all his power; swore that I would not live to see another day; and that he would tear out my heart. But his struggles and his threats were alike in vain. I cannot tell how many times I struck him. Blow after blow fast and heavy upon his wriggling form. At length he screamed-cried murder—and at last the blasphemous tyrant called on God for mercy. But he who had never shown mercy did not receive it. (Northup, 1968, p. 80)

It might be said that Northup’s struggle is symbolic of other example of confrontation presented in this section. Like the others, Northup’s confrontation is his resistance to oppression. He verbalizes this by telling Tibeats that he will not bare his back to accept another beating. He continues to make his point in this instance of violence. Confronting involves a wide range actions (Orbe, 1998b), all with the purpose of resisting oppression. Northup’s fight will continue to put him at odds with Tibeats, and like other Black men in this thesis, the repercussions from the power structure may prove to be fatal.

In another example of confronting, Northup must protect himself from a hatchet. Again, Tibeats does not approve of his Northup’s work and uses this excuse to threaten his life. Just before the overseer attacks him with the hatchet, Northup is faced with that “moment of life or death” that describes the Black man’s decision to confront White power structures (Northup, 1968, p. 98).

Northup can see the overseer becoming more and more violent. With the overseer rushing towards him, Northup describes his decision to confront:

I reasoned with myself. If I stood still, my doom was certain; if I fled, ten chances to one the hatchet, flying from his hand with a too-deadly and unerring aim, would strike me in the back. There was but one course to
take. Springing towards him with all my power, and meeting him full half way, before he could bring down the blow, with one hand I caught his uplifted arm, with the other seized him by the throat. We stood looking each other in the eyes. In his I could see murder. I felt as if I had a serpent by the neck, watching the slightest relaxation of my grip, to coil itself round my body, crushing and stinging it to death. I thought to scream aloud, trusting that some ear might catch the sound—but Chapin was away; the hands were in the field; there was no living soul in sight or hearing. (Northup, 1968, p. 98)

Northup’s proactive decision saved his life. In these narratives, confronting the dominant structure is seen as a form of personal and/or professional preservation. Opposition is enacted through various means yet the main objective is the same—to resist oppression. In this particular situation, Northup has made it clear that he will not be brutalized. Instead he has chosen to defend himself regardless of the outcome.

The Black male confronts the power system in order to be heard, to be taken seriously, to fight back, and to defend himself against oppression at every level of the organizational structure. As in the case of Northup (1968), he will often choose to do so regardless of the outcome. Additionally, Black men in 20th century organizational structures describe incidents of confronting similar to those described by Northup (1968). In one example, Invisible Man finds himself standing up for an elderly Black couple. His confrontation exemplifies a strategy to resist discrimination, racism, prejudice, and oppression, regardless of the circumstances and dangers involved.

Invisible Man’s confrontation with New York City police begins his ascension within the Brotherhood. This happens when he stumbles upon the eviction of an eighty-seven year old man and wife, and he stops to join their cause
(Ellison, 1952, p. 211). To the crowd, the White moving men are symbolic of the power system that has dispossessed them and is now guilty of putting the elderly couple on the streets. As the mob turns from sullen to angry Invisible Man begins to speak:

Look at him, I called to the angry crowd. With his blue steel pistol and his blue serge suit. You heard him, he’s the law. He says he’ll shoot us down because we’re law abiding people. So we’ve been dispossessed, and what’s more he thinks he’s God. Look up there backed against the post with a criminal on either side of him. Can’t you feel the cold wind, can’t you hear it asking, what did you do with your heavy labor? What did you do? When you look at all you haven’t got in eighty-seven years you feel ashamed. (Ellison, 1952, p. 212)

Here, Invisible Man openly confronts the establishment and begins to sabotage the moving men’s efforts. “In organizational settings, sabotaging others may include other behaviors that damage the overall effectiveness of the organization” (Orbe, 1998b, p. 84). Invisible Man gets the crowd involved by telling them to put all the items back into the elderly couple’s apartment:

We’re dispossessed, I sang at the top of my voice, dispossessed and we want to pray. Let’s go in and pray. Let’s have a big prayer meeting. But we’ll need some chairs to sit in, rest upon as we kneel. We’ll need some chairs! (Ellison, 1952, p. 213)

The confronting continues:

Sure I called, take everything. Take it all, hide that junk! Put it back where it came from. It’s blocking the street and the sidewalk, and that’s against the law. We’re law abiding, so clear the street of debris. Put it out of sight! Hide it, hide their shame! Hide our shame. Come on I yelled, dashing down the steps and seizing a chair and starting back, no longer struggling against or thinking about the nature of my action. (Ellison, 1952, p. 213)
Before Invisible Man can finish telling them to take everything back into the building the crowd attacks the moving men in a revolutionary overpowering of the structure (Ellison, 1952).

**Bargaining**

The final communication strategy discussed in this section describes the Black man’s attempt to bargain (Orbe, 1998b) for position inside predominantly White organizational structures.

Scholars report that communicative advantage may be achieved through bargaining (Steele, 1990; Orbe, 1993). Bargaining is the mutual agreement between dominant and non-dominant group members that power and oppression will not be made an issue during discourse. The unspoken agreement assumes that dominant group members will not be held responsible for oppression if co-cultural group members are allowed to participate in dominant structures. Orbe (1998b) describes the position of the non-dominant bargainer, “I already believe that you are innocent (good, fair minded, and have faith that you will prove it” (p. 82).

Cose’s (1993) narrative describes Black professionals who seek to show the world that “we who are black are not so marked by our history of racist oppression that we are incapable of intellectual achievement on the same terms as everyone else” (p. 129). Furthermore, some Black professionals will go through great lengths to achieve success in the predominantly White organization. These professionals desire to participate within the White power structure that would minimize the Black presence, trading in their identity and pride to do so (Cose, 1993). As Black men enter predominantly White structures they may realize the
need to bargain (Orbe, 1998b) with those in power, regarding the elements of race, culture, and ethnicity will be included or omitted with their Black presence.

In *Invisible Man* (Ellison, 1952), Dr. Bledsoe bargains his way to the top and simultaneously helps to legitimize the dominant power structure. His request for permission to participate was granted at the price of putting his face on the body of the structure. He represents the White power that controls the predominantly Black school. This is a trade that allows him to maintain a prominent and presumably well paid position, at the cost of doing the White man’s bidding. Dr. Bledsoe is aware of this agreement, and in his opinion he is well ahead of the game. He describes the deal to *Invisible Man*:

> You’re nobody son. You don’t exist-can’t you see that? The white folk tell everybody what to think-except men like me. I tell *them*; that’s my life, telling white folks how to think about things I know about. Shocks you doesn’t it? Well that’s the way it is. It’s a nasty deal and I don’t always like it myself. But you listen to me; I didn’t make it and I know that I can’t change it. But I’ve made my place in it and I’ll have every Negro in the county hanging on tree limbs by morning if it means staying where I am. (Ellison, 1952, p. 110)

In this case, the reality of Dr. Bledsoe’s power is not as much an issue as the fact that he has struck a bargain of his own. Ultimately, he has traded his face, self-respect, and humility for the price of an influential and well paid position within the institutional structure. He is conscious of the cost and adamant about the rewards:

> I mean it, son, he said. I had to be strong and purposeful to get where I am. I had to wait and plan and lick around. Yes, I had to act the nigger! He said, adding another fiery, Yes! I don’t even insist that it was worth it, but now I’m here and I mean to stay-after you win the game, you take the prize and you keep it, protect it; there’s nothing else to do. (Ellison, 1952, p. 110)
Perhaps the previous quote best summarizes this chapter. What other words can better describe Dr. Bledsoe’s path to a prominent position? He was strong and purposeful. He planned his work, and seems to have worked his plan. He admits to playing the game and feels he has it won. So why does he equate his victory to that of “acting the nigger” (Ellison, 1952, p. 110) within the dominant structure? Could this be caused by the pride he had to give up in order to succeed? Did he censor himself mentally and physically ill, as he played the middleman between the predominantly Black College and the White trustees who control it? Did the hegemonic forces of racism coerce him into rationalizing the irrational to the point he could no longer distinguish between the two? Perhaps Dr. Bledsoe is more of a puppet than a leader of the Black College. Or maybe he is a driven man who has found that the only way to accomplish his mission is to hide behind the stereotypical image of the “nigger” (Ellison, 1952, p. 110), cloaked and invisible. Dr. Bledoe’s examples of what is required for this role describe organizational members who wait around for scraps of opportunity, and lick around the shoes of influential members who offer them a connection to the dominant power structure. Perhaps this too is also strategy for negotiating for position within this structure.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION

I had endeavored to do exactly as he wanted, but nothing would satisfy the unreasonable man. In silence and in dread I stood by the sweep, holding the jack plane in my right hand, not knowing what to do, and not daring to be idle. (Northup, 1968, p. 98)

The narratives used in this thesis reveal common experiences for Black males within different organizational structures and eras. By interpreting their observations, this thesis argues that the communicative experiences of Solomon Northup, Invisible Man, and Black men in 21st century U.S. structures have been inextricably tied to issues of oppression and power. The implication behind their common experiences include the notion that, regardless of the time period, the U.S. White power structure continues to oppress and inform the communication of Black men. Thus, there are similarities between slavery, Jim Crow, pre-civil rights era, and current organizational structures. This thesis reveals that generations of oppressive hegemony exist within organizational, institutional, and societal structures, and for centuries, Black men have had to endure similar dialectical tensions, and practice similar communication strategies, in order to succeed within these oppressive structures.

The following presents an overview of dialectical tensions and co-cultural communication strategies of Black men in the 1840s, the 1940s, and the 1990s. Furthermore, the ability to negotiate these dialectical tensions, and juggle communication strategies, is summarized as the game played by Black men within
the predominantly White organizational structure. Thus, contributions and limitations of this exploration are offered. Included in this section are future directions for Black male communication research, as well as personal observations of the 21st century researcher.

Overview of Tensions Experienced by Black Males

Northup is a Black man living within a system of slavery. All his experiences are filtered through this oppressive structure. Like Black males in 21st century structures, Northup struggles with popular images that frame Black men as inferior and inhuman throughout all levels of society. Although he is an intelligent and sensitive individual, Northup finds it difficult to escape the negative stereotypical images around him, and to some degree these images challenge his view of himself. Northup addresses his diminishing image on a daily basis, in hopes that he will, once again, be free.

As a Black man, Northup is invisible/visible to the society in which he lives. He is the Invisible Man (1952) of his era, in that he is a man but not recognized as such. He faces the rational/irrationality of his enslavement yet he is forced to survive within an oppressive structure. After his kidnapping, Northup is transported across state lines as though he were cargo, similar to 21st century professionals who find themselves selected, traded, bargained for, and treated as rare and valued commodities in 21st century structures.

At times Northup contemplates running/staying, but he reconsiders this notion at the threat of torture and death. He is resigned to a system of domination and opposition/participation in the forms of law, religion, and the slave master.
The slave suffers from oppression when the overseer physically assaults him in order to control him. In addition, Northup is impacted by the mental and physical abuse forced on those around him. The result of Northup’s victimization is deep sadness and confusion.

Invisible Man is faced with similar issues of race and gender, and throughout his narrative he finds that his distorted image permeates throughout the southern and northern U.S. regions. He faces oppression on the job, in the city streets, and in the Brotherhood (Ellison, 1952). Like Northup, Invisible Man attempts to make sense out of his predicament by rationalizing the irrational. He makes excuses for Whites who assume all Blacks are singers and/or sexually aggressive. He also faces opposition/participation at every turn, and even after accepting the Brotherhood’s commitment for liberation, he cannot escape the abuse/wellness of racism. Similar to Northup and Black men in 21st century organizational structures, Invisible Man is sickened and saddened by this abuse. His experiences exemplify framing Black men as property, ultra sexual, threatening, and dangerous.

Black male’s experiences in 21st century structures parallel Northup and Invisible Man in that they continue to suffer from negative stereotypes. When their focus should be on organizational success, these Black males spend an inordinate amount of time trying to move beyond stereotypical images. Participants share experiences in which they are labeled as undeserving, troublemaker, overly sensitive, and aggressive (Hopson, 2001a). Losing the struggle to overcome these public images may impact the self-image of the Black
man, causing him to doubt himself and his abilities to the point failure is inevitable. The ways in which Black men feel invisible/visible within 21st century structures are reminiscent of slavery and Jim Crow eras, where Northup and Invisible Man are seldom acknowledged in the same ways as Whites. These Black men believe dominant group members see them as representing only Black problems and Black issues (Cose, 1993), hence, they are invisible as human beings. Thus, due to dialectical tensions, Black men are stretched between two worlds, oscillating between his personal definition of self and the confines of destructive societal images (Hopson, 2001a).

Overview of Co-cultural Communication Strategies

In addition to exploring the tensions inherent in Black male communicative experiences, this thesis seeks to extend existing investigations of co-cultural communication strategies (Orbe, 1998a & 1998b). The communication strategies of Black males and other non-dominant groups is a direct result of tensions and strategies related to race, culture, and ethnicity differences within dominant structures (Fine, 1991). Whether situated within the system of slavery, segregation, or 21st organizational structures, the communication strategies of Black men will be based largely within Orbe's (1998b) premises of co-cultural communication. These notions include:

U.S. hierarchy privileges men, European Americans, heterosexual, able bodied, middle and upper class. Dominant group members occupy positions of power that they use consciously or unconsciously to create and maintain systems that reflect, reinforce, and promote their experiences. Co-cultural group members adopt certain communication behaviors when functioning within the confines of public communicative structures. (Orbe, 1998b, p. 12)
This thesis extends Orbe’s (1998a & 1998b) research by identifying those dialectical tensions and co-cultural communication strategies common throughout 250 years of slavery, 100 years of legally enforced segregation, and decades of racial discrimination in every facet of U.S. life (Gibbs, 1988). In essence, this thesis highlighted tensions and communication strategies birthed from generations of racist oppression, and which significantly impact the Black male experience. Black men in 21st century organizational structures will endure tensions similar to those woven throughout the life experiences of Solomon Northup (1968), Invisible Man (1947), and Cose’s (1993) participants. Although they represent different eras, these Black men respond to similar racial tensions with similar communication strategies.

Northup’s survival depends on his interaction within the system of slavery. Each day presents a new communicative challenge. Although this system leaves him little choice in whether he will participate, Northup does have a choice in how he participates. At times he is passive, non-confrontational, and censors (Orbe, 1998b, p. 68) himself during Black-White discourse. He does this to keep his goal of freedom as inconspicuous as possible.

Also, Northup attempts to make Whites comfortable with his presence, in order to gain an advantage. His quiet and willing demeanor seemingly puts the slave master at ease with their roles in discourse. Perhaps the slave master’s comfort will spare Northup a beating, earn him extra food, or get him into the big house. This strategy is used to gain favor from the slave master. If Northup makes the slave master, and others, comfortable there is a good possibility his efforts will
be rewarded. He works hard to prove his worth to the slave master. Extra coins, travel, and status are the result of his accomplished violin skills, craftsmanship, and commitment. If successful, Northup’s strategy will allow him to bargain for extra privileges not extended to other slaves (Orbe, 1998b, p. 81).

Like Northup, Invisible Man recognizes power differences in Black/White discourse. As a young man, Invisible Man’s grandfather teaches him about the public image of the Black man. He learns that oppression is destiny for Black men living in the south. Experiences like the Battle Royal teach him that, for Blacks, academic achievement and perseverance will not necessarily equate to achieving the status of full manhood. Plus, Invisible Man learns that his human value may not exist in the eyes of some dominant group members. In order to survive, Invisible Man must find a way to interact within the dominant structure.

Invisible Man searches for his freedom by going to college, traveling to New York City, and joining the Brotherhood. However, each structure leaves him lacking for that freedom which he aspires to obtain. The communication strategies he practices within these structures include his efforts to censor self (Orbe, 1998b) his attempts to make Whites comfortable, emphasis on his strengths and value to dominant structures (Orbe, 1998b, p. 59), confronting oppression (Orbe, 1998b, p. 79), ridiculing self (Orbe, 1998b, p. 76), and bargaining (Orbe, 1998b, p. 81) for position within the dominant structure.

When Invisible Man censors self he says nothing to the White men who abuse him at the Battle Royal. He says little to Dr. Bledsoe who unjustly expels him from school. When he joins the Brotherhood he is determined to succeed, and
in the midst of conflict with the organization, he decides not to rebel but to agree with their every idea and to “yessuh them to death” (Ellison, 1952, p. 389).

**Making Whites comfortable with the Black presence** is a priority in Invisible Man’s effort for achievement. As a little boy growing up in the south, he uses this strategy as a way to gain acceptance from Whites. As an adult he endures countless oppressive interactions while searching for an advantage to be gained from it. For example, after being harassed by the Brotherhood member who badgers him to sing, Invisible Man becomes uncomfortable because the Whites around him are uncomfortable. He is more concerned about their comfort than his own, and works to put them at ease. Invisible has unconsciously decided he will go though great lengths to gain their acceptance.

Black men strive to make Whites comfortable with their presence in 21st century organizational structures as a way to gain acceptance. Based on Orbe’ (1998b) communicative strategy of developing positive face (p. 67), this strategy is often used by Black men seeking to put Whites at ease with their presence, “I find myself having to approach them differently, with a softer tone. I have to go in there and really make it seem like it was their (co-worker’s) idea, to be less of a threat” (Orbe, 1998b, p. 68). Although developing positive face (Orbe, 1998b, p. 68) and **making Whites comfortable with the Black presence** are very similar strategies, the latter is distinguished in this thesis by overly increased efforts of Black men who perceive their Blackness to be an instant barrier in Black-White communication. Therefore, some of these men juggle a plethora of communication strategies that include modifying their dress, speech, political
ideology, and spiritual beliefs. Others consciously negate their Blackness and themselves in order to make it through the game. For example, they may choose not to display family photos in their work areas in order to minimize the Black presence. Also, they may avoid blending their personal lives with professional lives and elect not to participate in activities that combine work and family (for example, take your child to work day). The intent here may be to keep dominant group members as comfortable as possible, so that non-dominant group members can maintain a sense of comfort as a result. Additionally, some Black men decide to follow whatever direction Whites choose to lead them, whenever, and place no limit to the extent they will go to gain acceptance in 21st century organizational structures.

Black males in all three narratives use similar co-cultural practices of confronting (Orbe, 1998b) the dominant structure. Black males in 21st century structures confront by publicly speaking out against racism, questioning oppressive power structures, and threats of legal action. Northup confronts oppression through a physical altercation with the overseer and as a result he is almost hanged. Invisible Man confronts the Brotherhood by voicing his concerns, which in turn results in their actions to discipline him. Like the Black males in the other eras, Invisible Man is punished for opposing the White power structure. After an argument with high-ranking officials of the Brotherhood, he is transferred to a less desirable district and forced to perform menial tasks.

Black men constantly juggle communication strategies, seeking that strategy which will be most effective in Black-White discourse. For these Black
men, their choice of strategy results from years of personal and shared experiences handed down through the generations. Furthermore, their choice of strategy will have a tremendous impact on their future success within the dominant structure. Indeed, this process of maintaining strategy within these structures is similar to a game, complete with guidelines, rules, penalties, actions, and reactions (Orbe, 1994).

The Game Summarized

Play the game, but don't believe in it—that much you owe yourself. Even if it lands you in a strait jacket or a padded cell. Play the game, but play it your own way—part of the time at least. Play the game but raise the ante, my boy. Learn how it operates, learn how you operate—I wish I had time to tell you only a fragment. We're an ass-backward people, though. You might even beat the game. It's really a very crude affair. Really pre-Renaissance—and that game has been analyzed, put down in books. But down here they've forgotten to take care of the books and that's your opportunity. You're hidden right out in the open—that is, you would be if you only realized it. They wouldn't see you because they don't expect you to know anything, since they believe they've taken care of that. (Ellison, 1952, p. 118)

In an era where the U.S. entertainment industry has only acknowledged three Black actors for leading roles, perhaps it is safe to say that the first Oscar Award presented to a Black actor should have gone to Stepin' Fetchit. Symbolically, it is his acting job that has transcended the barriers of time, distance, and the walls of all organizational structures.

The title of this thesis comes from the conversations of Black men. These words reflect a sentiment, and generations of experience, that Black men have come to know as truth. Players in the game include both dominant group members and non-dominant group members who recognize how power is manipulated within organizational structures. The title implies that some non-dominant group
members will strategically work to get an advantage in the dominant structure, whereas some dominant group members may take White privilege for granted. Yet, non-dominant group member may feel obligated to play the game if one is ever going to win. Here, victory is constantly negotiated and includes the survival and success of non-dominant group members within dominant U.S. structures.

Orbe (1994) parallels the game of intercultural communication within the dominant organizational structure to a basketball game, where it’s always Whites ball. The metaphor is symbolic of the notion that in the case of all discrepancies, the benefit of the doubt goes to the dominant team. Hence, instead of playing a basketball game of five on five, non-dominant group members view their game within the dominant structure as five on seven, putting them at a definite disadvantage.

Elsewhere in this thesis, Martin and Nakayama (1999) refer to common tensions that emerge during intercultural communication and reflect the struggles of non-dominant group members who attempt to succeed in dominant structures. Hence, the game of intercultural communication becomes apparent within these structures, where the objective for all members is to win. Included in the concept of winning is personal and professional success, as well as obtaining and maintaining a certain level of comfort and satisfaction within the organization. At times the game of intercultural communication can be a challenge, especially for non-dominant group members who feel the odds stacked against them. Critical to this thesis is the notion that Martin and Nakayama’s (1999) “cultural-individual” dialectic will emerge in any attempt to essentialize communication practices
without generalizing non-dominant group members (p. 15). Communication studies should recognize people as individuals as well as members of their cultural groups (Martin & Nakayama, 1999, p. 15). The communicative experiences of Solomon Northup (1968), Invisible Man (1952), and Cose’s (1993) participants may reveal communicative tensions and strategies of Black men, but there is also much difference in their communication styles as well. Critical scholars attempt to avoid labeling an entire group of people with an individual’s behavior.

Martin and Nakayama (1999) also identify “present-future/ history-past” as a tension Black men may experience when interacting within dominant structures (p. 15). The experiences of Northup (1968), Invisible Man (1952), and Cose’s (1993) 21st century participants, represent the power of racism and its’ long term effects on Black men in predominantly White organizations. Organizational members enter their respective structures with preconceived notions concerning race, culture, and ethnicity differences. Morris (1997) connects the historical impact of slavery to current communication between African Americans and European Americans. For example, some Whites may see Blacks as inferior in the same way that slaves were viewed as inferior, and some Blacks may distrust Whites due to a history of slavery and racial conflict. The foundation of this thesis lies in the explication of those tensions that interfere with intercultural communication (invisible/visibility, running/staying and relaxing), and seemingly transcend across three eras in U.S. history.

This thesis also acknowledges Martin and Nakayama’s (1999) discussion of “privilege-disadvantage” (p. 18). Depending on the “topic or context” White
members in predominantly White organizational structures may receive certain privileges that Black members may not be privy to. In Northup's era, Whites were privileged to read and write, eat healthy, and sleep in beds, while slaves received no education, ate whatever was available, and were forced to sleep on floors. Invisible Man also experiences privilege (based on education and his connection to the Brotherhood) and disadvantage in a segregated societal structure. Although he is able to move about, he is still subjected to oppressive societal attitudes. As he walks through the streets of New York he interacts with Whites who do not acknowledge him. He has some college education but is unable to find a job until he becomes an assistant in the steam room of a paint shop.

In 21st century organizations, privilege and disadvantage may include the access to informal, yet important, information channels made available only to White members, the access to certain customers, raises and promotion received largely by Whites, and the benefit of the doubt (knowledge, honesty, and credibility) (Cose, 1993). For these men, what begins as a case of privilege versus disadvantage, may ultimately equate to success versus non-success. In each U.S. era, Black men find themselves in dominant group settings where they are judged and oppressed because of the color of their skin.

Black men understand that, often times, success within dominant structures is determined by much more than ability. The Black man is judged on his manner of speech, style of dress, and even the way he walks. Public perceptions of the Black man will have considerable impact on his participation in the organizational, institutional, and societal game. In hopes of winning the game, the Black man will
engage in strategies based on his preferred outcome and communication approach (Orbe, 1998b). If the objective is to remain within the dominant structure and to attempt to succeed without being labeled as ultra-sensitive or a rabble-rouser, the Black man will negotiate these tensions and censor himself. If the objective is to freeze dominant group members by exposing racist acts, the Black male will confront these members. Additionally, some Black males will choose to emulate the politics, philosophy, speech, and dress of the dominant culture, in order to put dominant group members at ease with the Black presence. Other Black men will disagree with this process of conforming, and refuse to mimic what they cannot become. For these men, maintaining their afro-centric appearance, ideologies, and beliefs becomes priority over trading in, thus selling out, their Blackness (Hopson, 2001a).

Deciding how one chooses to participate defines the game for the Black man within 19th, 20th, and 21st century structures. Whether he chooses to emulate, confront, bargain, censor, or ridicule himself, the point remains the same: the Black males will face some dialectical tensions due to his race and gender. These tensions will include feeling invisible/visibility, running/staying and relaxing, and rationalizing irrational racist acts. There is a strong likelihood that these and other forms of dialectical tension will exist for the Black man in the predominantly White organizational structure. The purpose of this thesis was to identify these tensions and to address the question of strategies for maintaining these tensions.

Contributions and Limitations

The consciousness of a race is the gift of individuals who see, evaluate, and record. We create the race by creating ourselves and then to our great
astonishment we will have created something far more important: We will have created a culture. (Ellison, 1952, p. 268)

This study shares powerful experiences of Black men in predominantly White organizational structures. Additionally, this thesis adds to existing explorations of gender and culture and examines their impact on ongoing masculinity research (Hopson, 2001) which has traditionally been equated with White masculinity (Jackson, 1997). Through this textual analysis, readers have been enlightened to the communicative struggles and accomplishments of co-cultural group members living and surviving within three eras of U.S. organizational structures.

This critical analysis incorporates the perspective of the outsider-within (Collins, 1986) dominant structures, and focuses on the standpoints (Harding, 1987, 1991; Hartsock, 1983; Smith, 1987; Wood, 1992) of Black males, for the purpose of extending scholarly investigations of power and communication. The dialectical tensions and communication strategies presented here are not new to the field of communication or to the general U.S. population, yet they are largely overlooked. Too often, power issues concerning African Americans and other co-cultural groups arise only to be set aside, or ignored, by the dominant organizational structure. Nonetheless, co-cultural group members embody more than enough communicative experiences to make this kind of research a viable means for creating a voice. This voice is deserving of listeners, and may enlighten those listeners who desire insight to the communicative tensions and strategies of Black males and other non-dominant groups in predominantly White organizations.
This scholarly investigation adds a distinct perspective to the existing breadth of organizational and intercultural communication research. Other co-cultural group members (Latinos/Latinas, women, gay and lesbian) may undoubtedly expand upon these explorations of discourse by incorporating their own experiences. In terms of diversity, which seems to be a popular catch phrase for the 21st century workplace, the inquiries of this research may add to a very necessary foundation from which to further discussions of race, ethnicity, and gender within U.S. organizational structures.

In the process of identifying dialectical tensions of Black men within predominantly White organizational structures, this thesis expands previous investigations of non-dominant groups (Collins, 1986; Foss & Foss, 1994; Hopson, 2001a; Orbe & Hopson, 2002; Orbe, Warren, & Cornwell, 2001). Also, based within the scholarly foundations of dialectical tensions (Martin & Nakayama, 1999), this thesis reveals tensions for non-dominant group members in general, and for Black males specifically.

These dialectical tensions include opposition/participation, where Black men believe their participation is vehemently opposed by a select group of Whites within the dominant structure. This opposition can be as small as withholding pertinent information from non-dominant group members, and as large as setting these members up for failure (questioning their loyalty and commitment, watching and waiting for every mistake), with the intent of eliminating them from the organization. Also, the notion of oppression as abuse/organizational wellness reveals new descriptions of racism as a painful reality experienced by Black men
and other non-dominant group members in dominant organizations. The result of which includes both physical and mental illness and aggravation, as opposed to organizational satisfaction.

Additionally, this thesis lends evidence to oppression as irrational/rational tension. Here, Black males endure racist acts and attitudes by making excuses for it. Hence, they rationalize irrational acts and behaviors in order to file them and forget them, choosing to focus on comfort in their positions rather than frustration.

This thesis also highlights ways in which dominant perceptions of Black men are sometimes based on appearance, particularly physical stature. In various levels of the organizational, institutional, and societal structure, perceptions of Black men are based on stereotypes and negative images. The dialectical tension of somatic perceptions /cerebral realities is used to address stereotypes of tall or large Black males as imposing or inhuman. For this reason, some Black males feel they are seen as a threat to be eliminated from society. Furthermore, the danger of somatic perceptions includes the notion that it is less of a social issue to oppress an inhuman object or thing, as opposed to a human being. As a result, the Black man may oscillate between that physical, hard core image bestowed upon him, and the sensitive, caring, and intelligent man he desires to become.

Contributions of this thesis extend the research on communication strategies (Orbe, 1998b) utilized by Black men in predominantly White organizational structures. Common strategies derived from the narratives of Northup (1968), Invisible Man (1952), and Cose (1993) include Orbe’s (1998b)
censoring self (p. 68), emphasis on strength and value (p. 59), ridiculing self (p. 76), confrontation (p. 79), and bargaining (p. 81).

Additionally, this composition revealed the ways in which Black men attempt to make Whites comfortable with the Black presence. This strategy is an extension of Orbe's developing positive face (1998b, p. 67), where Black men and other non-dominant group members go out of their way to make dominant group members comfortable with their presence. Making Whites comfortable means that Black men will alter their reactions to oppressive acts and comments in order to put dominant members at ease, for the sake of achieving some level of comfort and success for themselves. Black males will also use a pro-active approach to making Whites, and thus themselves, comfortable. For example, some Black men restrict themselves from eliciting actions and conversations related to race and ethnicity issues that may put dominant group members in an uncomfortable position during discourse. These Black men may avoid displaying family photos, and other evidence of cultural/ethnic difference, in work areas, or they may avoid taking family members and friends to organizational events. Their observations include the notion that conversations about their personal lives will eventually lead to a disturbing racial comment or action. So, these Black men maintain their anonymity within the dominant structure, feeling "the less dominant group members know (about them) the better." Conceptually, this strategy is based on the premise that if dominant group members are made to feel comfortable, the benefits will greatly outweigh the cost for non-dominant group members.
The experiences shared in this thesis were extracted through textual analysis and include an autobiography, a work of fiction, and a collection of essays. Perhaps, some of the very elements that lend to its strength help to limit this research as well. The depth of experience included in this study spans almost two centuries and represents the challenges and successes of Black men in dominant organizational structures. However, this thesis does not claim to speak for all Black men.

Presumably, Black men will see themselves in this research. Some will attest to many of the themes. Others will recognize only a few. Still, some Black men may deny having any connection whatsoever to the experiences presented here, for each individual will experience his own reality. Therefore, limitations to this research include the use of secondary data that has been filtered through the lived experiences of the researcher. Because I was unable to engage in a personal exchange with the narrators, these texts have been interpreted through my own experiences. Hence, it is likely that these texts will signify issues for me that would not be signified to another researcher. Critical interpretations will be influenced by the perceptions of the researcher, and this thesis is no exception (Van Manen, 1990). Additionally, this investigation cannot draw specifics about a group of men who are vast in personalities, experiences, values, goals, and beliefs. Instead, this thesis may contribute to existing explorations of Black male communication within the predominantly White structure, as well as setting a foundation for future research.
Another challenge was the variety in the texts. This thesis analyzed Northup’s (1968) autobiography, Ellison’s (1952) work of fiction, and Cose’s (1993) collection of lived experiences, as opposed to analyzing three of the same style texts (three autobiographies, three works of fiction, or three collections of essays). At times it became difficult to compare the perceptions of Black male communication offered in each of these texts because of the various ways in which these observations are presented. Northup (1968) and Invisible Man (1952) present first person narratives, whereas Cose (1993) often describes experiences that participants have shared with him. In essence, he is a third party, offering second hand information, which has been filtered through his own perceptions and experiences. As such, Cose’s (1993) deconstruction of Black male communication may influence the researcher’s capta. For example, much of Cose’s narrative is based on descriptions of his participant’s organizational experiences, so fewer direct quotes are available as compared to the work of Northup (1968) and Ellison (1952). Also, Cose (1993) includes many experiences of Black professional women, whereas this particular research concentrated primarily on Black men.

The following section offers future directions for scholarly research. Suggestions for future exploration include the ways in which Black women inform the communication of Black men within the dominant structure (Hopson, 2001a). Additionally, this section highlights research ideas derived from the conversations of Black men. Lastly, observations of the 21st century researcher summarize a personal lesson in Black male communication.
Future Directions for Research

Mary reminded me constantly that something was expected of me, some act of leadership, some newsworthy achievement; and I was torn between resenting her for it and loving her for the nebulous hope she kept alive. (Ellison, 1952, p. 197)

Future directions for research should seek the historical, philosophical, and societal connections between Black women and Black men within the U.S. structure.

Existing research reports that Black women feel like outsiders within their dominant structures (Collins, 1986). Also, these Black women document experiences of oppression within the organizational, institutional, and societal structure (Cose, 1993).

Similar to Black men, Black women are also impacted by oppressive power structures. Critical investigation should focus on how the predominantly White power structure informs the communication of the Black woman? Does she experience tensions and communication strategies similar to those of the Black men described in this thesis? How is the discourse of Black women and Black men informed by the predominantly White power structure (Hopson, 2001a)? Additionally, how do Black women and Black men work together in these structures? These are serious and important questions for future research.

Scholars report that some members of the academy regard difference based on race or ethnicity, gender, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation, as oppositional and harmful to the existing status of the academy (Allen, Orbe, and Olivas, 1999, p. 403). Scholars also report a disturbing attitude from representatives of the academy who perceive cultural differences as insignificant and not worthy of the academy’s attention (Allen, Orbe, and Olivas, 1999, p. 403).
This thesis opposes ideologies that stifle the study of differences within the organization. Instead this thesis urges future explications of difference to include Black women and Black men within the dominant organizational, institutional, and societal structure. Specific focus should address how Black women and men are influenced by the dominant U.S. power structure and, in turn, how the power structure informs communication between these two groups.

Future scholarship should recognize the history of power dynamics that impact the construction of both Black womanhood and Black masculinity within U.S. social structures. In “Reconstructing Black Masculinity,” bell hooks (1992) discusses U.S. society as intentionally brutalizing Black men. This Black feminist/womanist perspective offers critical examination to what some Black men describe in their narratives as painful and racial abuse. Additionally, hooks (1992) adds that true Black manhood cannot be understood without recognizing Black womanhood. The scholar pays particular attention to generations of oppression as interconnected with the discourse of Black women and Black men:

Those representations of Black gender relationships that perpetually pit Black women and men against one another deny the complexity of our experiences and intensify mutually destructive internecine gender conflict. (hooks, 1992, p. 100)

In order to grow female-male relationships, this scholarly perspective argues, focus must be removed from portraits that imply all Black men are sexist, and inherently supportive of male domination, and instead be placed on those portraits of men who oppose sexism and patriarchy (hooks, 1992, p. 100). Both women and men are victims of generations of sexual politics, and for Black women and Black men,
these politics have undermined solidarity and created tension within the Black community (hooks, 1992, p. 101). The influence Black women and Black men have on one another cannot be denied. The two groups share centuries of pain and hardship.

The influence of Black women is expressed in Invisible Man's narrative. Although her presence is never truly centralized, Invisible Man's description of the Black woman is based on a precedent borrowed from the Black American experience. She is a primary force in maintaining his physical, cultural, and ethnic existence (Russell, 1998). For example, after the boiler room explosion at the paint factory (Ellison, 1952, p. 175), Invisible Man receives medical attention from factory doctors who make him the subject of what seems to be a racist experiment. The doctors eventually revive him, offer him a small payment for his suffering, and send him on his way. Weak and drowsy, Invisible Man stumbles out to the streets of New York. He finds himself on Lennox Avenue, in and out of consciousness, until he faints on the sidewalk. A crowd forms around him and before long he is helped to his feet by a woman who says:

Where you live son, somewhere around her? Men's House, shucks that ain't no place for nobody in your condition what's weak and needs a woman to keep an eye on you awhile. (Ellison, 1952, p. 191)

This woman parallels Black women across generations. Throughout their interaction this woman is aware of her power to heal the Black man. Her approach to him is one of familiarity and exemplifies, historically, who has been there to help lift the Black man to his feet. Seemingly, Invisible Man could not be in better
hands. The Black woman’s nurturing and support continues as she insists that Invisible Man come to her home to rest:

I just live up the street and round the corner, you better come round and rest till you feel stronger. I’ll phone Men’s House and tell ‘em where you at. You take it easy. I’ll take care of you like I did a heap of others, my names Mary Rambo. (Ellison, 1952, p. 192)

Mary escorts Invisible Man to her home, where she cares for him until he is able to get back on his feet. The Black man and woman befriend one another as they help each other survive an oppressive structure that leaves them very few options. Once he becomes a viable part of the Brotherhood, Invisible Man begins to experience an increase in options and resources. At this time Brotherhood members encourage him to leave Mary’s home in order to live in a place more suitable for “the next Booker T. Washington” (Ellison, 1952, p. 233). Invisible Man follows their advice and moves out. Perhaps his moving up and moving out is symbolic of another Black female/Black male interaction, worthy of future exploration as well.

Future research should also seek to address generations of abusive oppression suffered by Black women throughout U.S. history. Critically deconstructing portions of the Black woman’s experience with racism, sexism, and power struggles (both within and outside the Black community) may help researchers to better identify how these struggles help to shape communication, and ultimately relationships of Black women and Black men within 21st century organizational structures (hooks, 1992).

History may prove to be a valuable resource in female/male communication. For example, Northup offers a description of the Black woman in
a dominant and abusive 19th century societal structure. He paints the vivid picture of a slave auction, and tells the story of Eliza, who, along with her two children, was also kidnapped and sold into slavery. When her son Randall is taken and sold to another a slave owner, Eliza’s heart is broken. Northup is greatly affected by this scene of inhumanity and describes Eliza’s reaction as weeping plaintively (Northup, 1968, p. 53). She begs the slave owner to purchase her as well, and promises to be the most faithful slave that has ever lived. But the slave owner replies that he cannot afford it, and the transaction is complete. Frantic, Eliza runs up to her son, embraces him passionately, and begins to kiss him again and again. Still holding him, she tells her son to remember her face, “all the while her tears falling down the boy’s face like rain” (Northup, 1968, p. 54).

Northup continuous to observe Eliza’s strength and perseverance, and writes of another slave auction, or what he refers to as the sale-room (Northup, 1968). This time Eliza is about to be sold away from her daughter. Again, Northup is sympathetic of Eliza’s plight and records her experience as if it were his own. He witnesses Eliza being torn from her children, only to have them sold into the most physically, psychologically, and sexually abusive system known to mankind. Eliza will never see her 8 year-old, baby girl again. Northup describes the scene as “more mournful and affecting than any language can portray.” He writes:

I have seen mothers kissing for the last time the face of their dead offspring; I have seen them looking down into the grave, as the earth fell with a dull sound upon their coffins, hiding them from their eyes forever; but never have I seen such an exhibition of intense, unmeasured, and unbounded grief as when Eliza was parted from her child.
She broke from her place in the line of women, and rushing down where [her daughter] was standing, caught her in her arms. The child, sensible of some impending danger, instinctively fastened her hands around her other's neck and nestled her little head upon her bosom. (Northup, 1968, p. 57)

Northup's description of Eliza offers evidence that Black women have long been abused by oppressive forces, including racism and sexism. Coupled with Invisible Man's descriptions of Mary Rambo, these narratives reveal the many ways Black women and Black men will bond in their response to an oppressive U.S. structure. Future investigations may choose to build on those experiences of the past, that offer insight to relationships between Black women and Black men in dominant 21st century organizational structures.

Barbershop Conversations and Future Research Possibilities

In researching the game of Black male communication within the predominantly White organizational structure, I found myself both consciously and unconsciously listening to the organizational experiences of Black males, many of whom I would continue to engage in conversation. At times I found myself sharing with them the focus of my thesis, which would almost always spark more conversation. I received profound support and feedback that included statements like, "About time somebody started paying attention to our experiences," and "I've got plenty of things you can add to your research." The heterogeneity of responses confirmed for me not only the scholarly implications of this research, but also of its potential for practical use as well. Our conversations served as confirmation that none of us were alone in the frustrations, tensions, and strategies we have experienced within dominant structures. The fact that we are not alone may be reason enough to remain unwavering in this war of images (Hopson, 2001a), as we continue to seek
altruism in our roles as organizational members. Additionally, the vastness of non-dominant experiences within U.S. organizational, institutional, and societal structures imply a great need for further explications of culture and communication. This research may benefit the organizational member that seeks to understand the value in diversity.

Some Black professionals recommended topics that were not covered in this thesis, but certainly deserving of scholarly attention. For example, their observations describe dominant group members who “talk fast,” literally, in order to keep non-dominant group members off guard and uninformed. One young, Black professional believes some people in positions of power talk fast because “in all honesty, they really don’t know as much as they would lead us to believe, so they fake it.” This MSW describes a situation where two White supervisors wanted her to change her work schedule, again, in order to accommodate their own, “so they cornered me in this meeting which had obviously been planned, and proceeded to quickly run down options which left me little choice in the matter.” When asked about her strategies to communicate with those who talk fast, the professional replied:

At first it would bother me because I felt I always had to have an answer ready, and because these answers were usually made in haste, I would say things I would later regret. But, after my older brother advised me never to agree to a rushed decision, I figured out that it was better for me to admit that I needed time to think before making any decisions-regardless of what they (White supervisors) said, or thought about me. (Hopson, 2002)

The conversation with this professional included the notion that some dominant group members might imply that she, and other non-dominant group members, are less intelligent because they need time to think. “But in reality,” the
professional said, “if they really had your best interest at heart, as well as the best interest of the organization, they would appreciate an informed decision.”

**Explorations on Appearance**

Ask them why we have to shave off our goatees. It’s like we become threatening when we have hair on our face. And most Black men don’t need to walk around with a bare upper lip. (Hopson, 2002)

Black males have a lot to share, even on the subject of facial hair (Orbe, Warren, Cornwell, 2001). The conversations of Black men include examples of organizational rules they perceive as “anti-Black.” Black men describe organizational structures that formally and informally require Black men to shave facial hair, a procedure that some Black men believe put them at a disadvantage.

In terms of appearance, one Black man observed that those Black men “who look like Bryant Gumbel” are considered less threatening, and are more accepted within predominantly White organizations.

He discovered that one partner, disapproving of his Afro hairstyle, had fretted over his “bushy” appearance. Another worried that clients might not accept him. Yet another, noting that he had worked for a civil rights agency, wondered whether his politics might not be too radical. (Cose, 1993, p. 17)

How does physical appearance influence participation for non-dominant group members in dominant U.S. organizational structures? Although this question is addressed elsewhere in this thesis, Black male observations reveal a need to further this investigation. Some Black men suggest that some dominant organizations want Black males to look like White males as much as possible, so they are prohibited from wearing goatees, mustaches, and/or locked, braided, and afro hair styles. Furthermore, they believe that some Whites associate Black
men’s hair with an anti-establishment political stance. Still, other non-dominant group members do not question organizational guidelines for appearance. These non-dominant members consider appearance guidelines to be a part of professional etiquette, and they conform to these guidelines as a way to exist, and eventually cause change, within dominant structures. Existing research describes conforming as “playing the part” in predominantly White organizations, and suggests that playing the part may refute existing negative stereotypes without directly confronting stereotypical thinking by Whites (Orbe, Warren, & Cornwell, 2001, p. 127).

Observations of a 21st Century Researcher

Communication joins an array disciplines (anthropology, psychology, ethnic studies) that appreciate and value the epistemological value in the human experience. My experiences speak to a reality for some people. Additionally, these are experiences that others may not know as reality. In writing this thesis, I have begun to understand my own communication process with great depth. Some of my own experiences are not that far removed from those found in the narratives of Northup (1968), Invisible Man (1952), and Cose (1993). At times it became difficult to compose this thesis because I felt so close to the voices of the participants.

At the time of this thesis my own professional experience is one where I am the only Black, male, full time employee in a predominantly White, non-profit organization. For me, the impact of race, culture, and ethnicity differences within the organizational structure is ever present. This difference surrounds my
interaction with others, and I can seldom recall a time when this reality was not first and foremost in our discourse. Sometimes I feel like Northup or Invisible Man, in that others perceive me as subhuman or three-fifths of a man (less than a man). Additionally, I feel that I am perceived as a novelty, or something different from the White males who interact with our organization. I refer to "our" organization because I feel I’ve earned that right, but most of the time I feel like an outsider within the organization (Collins, 1986).

I have observed that when White men enter our organization the assumption is that these men will bring something important to the structure, be it business expertise, financial contribution, or networking potential. Presumably, these men deserve the respect of the organization’s members even before they have earned it. That respect is shown in a variety of ways. For example, these White males receive smiles, coffee, friendly help, and all the amenities of a guest. However, I have personally witnessed a different reaction to Blacks, Latinos, and other non-dominant group members. When they enter the organization, these non-dominant group members must earn the respect of our organization’s White members. Blacks, Hispanics, and other non-dominant group members may, or may not, receive the same level of hospitality and amenities extended to Whites. Although they do indeed receive professional service, it is not likely to include the same enthusiasm, because the Black or Hispanic presence does not represent the same value to the organization. As the organization’s only Black male employee, I feel I must earn the respect of my peers daily, while White male visitors have it instantly bestowed upon them.
Often times I feel invisible. These are times when others cannot seem to see me as anything other than Black. Although it goes unsaid, I perceive that my color is always at the forefront of my communication with many of the organization’s members and guests. Dynamic images of Black men fill the minds of those group members who have had little, if any, interaction with people of color. As a professional I make a point to greet my co-workers. However, some Whites (peers and visitors alike) will walk right past me, saying nothing as if I was not there, or as if I were one of the homeless men who look through the trash dumpsters in the parking lot. Others Whites don’t know what to say, and stumble for words to break the silence. Still, others can be overly polite, to the point I become uncomfortable with the overextended good will. I cannot help but to wonder if they feel an embarrassing need to put me at ease because they in fact are uncomfortable with my presence.

Furthermore, when I become visible, I often feel like I’m being watched and scrutinized, chased, set-up, and critiqued. My organizational experiences include having my supervisor question my commitment to the organization because of my hesitancy to work on a Saturday, when I would rather spend the day with my family. It also includes instances when my supervisor called my assignment location, supposedly for reasons other than to check-up on me. The set-up continues with last minute projects that demand a lot of stress and effort crammed into an afternoon deadline, emergency meetings, and emailing complaints marked cc: Executive Director.
Sometimes, after experiences like this, paranoia sets in and I cannot help but to wonder, worry, and expect racist power plays from those dominant group members who would attempt to end my professional survival within the dominant structure. I am the 21st century participant. I am Invisible Man. I am Solomon Northup. I look back to see how far history has brought me, yet I see that little has actually changed. Institutionalized racism and discrimination, built firmly on segregation and Jim Crow laws, connect my professional experiences to slavery. In the words of one of Cose’s participants, “It’s not about past days, from history. This is everyday reality” (Cose, 1993).

As I conducted this research, I found myself viewing and reviewing the Black male experience bound between the pages of these narratives. In the cyclical process of submerging myself in their experiences, voices of the past spoke both to me and through me. At times it was as though a revelation was occurring and a curtain was being pulled back, allowing me to take a glimpse at how U.S. organizational structures came to be, and how they currently operate. Ellison (1952, p. 232) writes, “in times of indecision people look back to the past, to the dead, to give them a clue.” The author describes the voice of experience in terms that the critical researcher will value:

It would be a great mistake to assume that the dead are absolutely powerless. They are powerless only to give the full answers to the new questions posed to the living by history. But they try! Whenever they hear the imperious cries of a people in a crisis, the dead respond! (Ellison, 1952, p. 232)

This thesis cries out to those who may add clarity to the historical experiences of Black males in predominantly White structures. Perhaps what I
have attempted to do with this composition is to gather generations of experiences in order to gain a better sense of understanding of myself, one I can verbalize and communicate to future generations.

As a Black man, I believe in the efforts of the Black men who came before me. I believe in Northup’s search for freedom, and I believe in Invisible Man’s search for manhood, equality, and purpose. Like Cose, (1993) I encourage Black men to seek these qualities within themselves and within organizational structures. As we search, we should write, verbalize and share our experiences so that others will know.

In my own searching I find that I embody the majority of the previously mentioned organizational experiences, dialectical tensions, and communicative strategies. Like Northup (1968), I have felt like a slave who is expected to grin and bear unfair treatment, and expected to rationalize irrational acts of racist power. Also, like other Black men in 21st organizational structures (Cose, 1993), I have been sick to my stomach with tension after racist power was blatantly used against me. But, after this thesis, I find that I am most like Invisible Man, changed as a result of my experiences and unable to totally return to those familiar places of my past. I can only move ahead or stay underground until I am chased out. However, I will remain, and I will continue to write, for “Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you (Ellison, 1952, p. 439)?”
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