

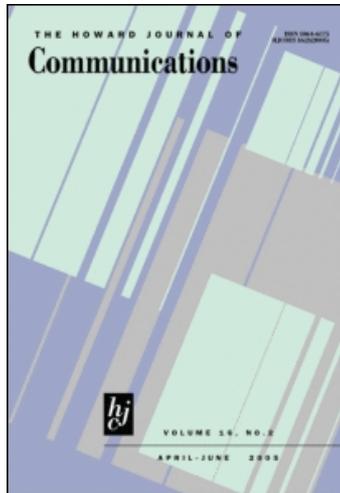
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Ronald L. Jackson II

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Exploring African American Identity Negotiation in the Academy: Toward a Transformative Vision of African American Communication Scholarship

Ronald L. Jackson, II

Pennsylvania State University
University Park, Pennsylvania, USA

Within this article, I have three simple objectives: to explain (1) where we are as African American communication researchers, (2) how we arrived at this point, and (3) where we should go from here. In explaining where we are, I assess the state of African American communication research. Then I introduce the cultural contracts paradigm to facilitate strategies of transformation and gradual agency over the politics of identity, which continue to restrict African American communicology. Finally, I discuss both my visions and an agenda for the future of African American communication research.

KEYWORDS *Cultural contracts theory, identity negotiation, identity, culture, African Americans, African American intellectualism, curriculum and instruction*

One of the first articles by an African American communicologist I remember reading was written by Molefi Asante (1988) as an opening chapter in his book *Afrocentricity*. I read this in 1992 while in my master's program at the University of Cincinnati. I was alarmed, engaged, and somewhat scared for him as I thought, "Can he say that? Can he talk about African ancestral legacies and linguistic continuities in the context of the United States with such force and agency without being censored?" I was already familiar with scholars such as Frances Cress Welsing, Leonard Jefferies, and Chiekh Anta Diop, who were being ostracized by their respective

A version of the cultural contracts theory introduced here was presented at the Eastern Communication Association conference in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, April 2000, and was included in the NCA Diversity Monograph edited by Judith Trent. Although explained differently, the model is intact in each version.

Address correspondence to Ronald L. Jackson, II, Department of Speech Communication, Pennsylvania State University, 234 Sparks Building, University Park, PA 16802, USA. E-mail: rlj6@psu.edu

disciplines for antagonizing established European-centered epistemologies. They were censored for having the audacity to resist “traditional” interpretations and replace them with well-researched and well-articulated African-centered paradigms. For at least the next two years, I was still baffled, vigilant, and somewhat curious about what appeared to me to be Asante’s intellectual insurgency. Subsequently, I read books like Marimba Ani’s (1994) *Yurugu*, which thoroughly deconstructed the incomplete nature of Whiteness and oppressive knowledge forms. Then I was awestruck by English professor bell hooks’s (1994) *Outlaw Culture*, which had a very graphically titled opening chapter, and I finally answered my own question with, “I guess Asante *can* take such agency, Ani, hooks, and many others have.” I began to think that it was not necessarily common, but acceptable to vociferously interrogate patriarchal tendencies wherever they might be discovered as a way to take agency in defining my own identity and reclaiming access to the value of my humanity. I admired the three of them for boldly standing up to refute the denial of their humanity and intellectuality. I was just as proud of them as I was of Maria Stewart, Audre Lorde, Angela Davis, James Baldwin, The Combahee River Collective, Richard Wright, and Ralph Ellison. Each sought institutional change and was willing to fight for their beliefs.

The brands of critical scholarship espoused by Asante, Ani, and hooks gave me hope that I could contribute to the transformation of knowledge about culturally particular communicative patterns and experiences among African Americans without reservation or threat of censure. I entered my master’s program and eventually the discipline with visions of hope and renewal. I write this article with that same spirit of hope and transformative vision.

As we begin the new millennium, African American intellectualism remains subordinated within the communication discipline, which institutionally refuses to acknowledge the importance of non-White ways of knowing. With that refusal comes a dismissal of African American identities, which are enveloped in African American communication research. Essentially, many African American communicologists are being forced to negotiate their identities on a daily basis in academe no matter what their area of research inquiry. We tend to function with a Du Boisian (1903) “double consciousness”—“two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings in one dark body whose dogged strength alone keeps us from being torn asunder” (p. 12). Within such a climate, it is extremely difficult to maintain complete alliances to African American epistemologies and ontologies; hence, identity negotiation ensues.

This is not to say that all African American communicologists study African American communication and culture, nor is it to say that all who study African American communication and culture are African Americans. There are many non-African Americans who have substantial research commitments and investments in the study of African American communication and culture and they are invited to share in this conversation. At times in this article, I speak directly about and to African Americans who conduct African American communication research as well as to non-African American communication researchers; however, I am writing most directly to an audience of African American intellectuals in the discipline of communication. Keep in mind this essay argues in favor of all African American intellectual products regardless of one’s area of study. It is interesting to note that this preambulatory act of naming audiences and locating intellectual placement is exemplary of the kind of identity negotiation of which I speak in this article.

The roles and functions of African American communication research can best be explained by using what I have coined as the cultural contracts paradigm, an offshoot of Stella Ting-Toomey's identity negotiation theory. Ting-Toomey asserts:

The identity negotiation theory focuses on the motif of identity security-vulnerability as the base that affects intercultural encounters. . . . It explains how one's self-conception profoundly influences one's cognitions, emotions and interactions. It explains why and how people draw intergroup boundaries. (1999, pp. 26–27)

Everyone has a cultural contract or implicit agreement to coordinate his or her relationships with cultural others; however there is a unique set of concerns that promote African American identity negotiation. Despite the present intellectual revival emerging among young African American communication scholars, a new brand of coping has developed. It is the result of an intensively inquisitive and politically savvy set of scholars who have learned from much more experienced African American communicologists such as Orlando Taylor, Melbourne Cummings, Jack Daniel, Geneva Smitherman, Molefi Asante, and many others. They have not only acquired a new understanding of the politics and process of performing communication research, but also ways to self-authorize and legitimate their lines of culture-centered inquiry.

Within this article, I have three simple objectives: to explain (1) where we are as African American communication researchers, (2) how we arrived at this point, and (3) where we should go from here. This will be followed by implications for future research. In explaining where we are, I will assess the state of African American communication research. Then I will introduce the cultural contracts paradigm to facilitate strategies of transformation and gradual agency over the politics of identity, which continue to restrict African American communicology. Finally, I will discuss both my visions and an agenda for the future of African American communication research.

Where We Are: The State of African American Communication Research

While it would be wonderful to offer only optimistic millenarian projections for African American communication research, I would be remiss if I did not recognize the current predicament that plagues this area of social scientific and humanistic inquiry. Within the discipline of communication, diversity is celebrated less frequently than it ought to be. As a result, the state of African American communication research, as one form of diversified scholarship, needs enhancement. There are four areas of grave concern as I think about the state of African American communicology: low presence of African American researchers, limited diversity among disciplinary editors, limited diversity among disciplinary leaders, and disciplinary dismissal of African American theoretic legacies.

First, there are absolutely too few African American communication researchers. In 1996, approximately 1,200 communication departments and programs were invited by the National Communication Association (NCA) to participate in a national survey concerning racial and ethnic diversity in the twenty-first century. The results were published

in 1997 (Morreale & Jones, 1997). Of the 304 departments of communication who participated, there were only 106 African American doctoral students and 426 African American master's students. This indicates that African Americans in these programs make up 7% of all doctoral students and 9% of all master's students specializing in communication studies. Of those that remain in academia, many are being hired as instructors and professors in comprehensive liberal arts institutions and four-year colleges. Among the "big ten" schools alone, which produce many of the Ph.D.s from research institutions in the discipline, there are a mere 10 tenure-line professors. These numbers are dismal and awfully telling as we consider the future directions of African American communication research.

Second, in the history of the discipline, there has *never* been an African American scholar who has served as editor of any of our 17 association-sponsored publications from the following organizations: International Communication Association (ICA), NCA, Eastern Communication Association, Western States Communication Association, Southern States Communication Association, Central States Communication Association, and the World Communication Association. In their report, "The Status of Research Productivity in Communication: 1915–1995," Hickson, Stacks and Bodon (1999) listed the top 100 active researchers of communication studies, none of whom were African American. It is not that African Americans are not publishing, but that many are publishing in noncommunication journals. In a follow-up article, Bodon, Powell, and Hickson (1999) listed the top 50 book authors in the discipline, none of whom were African American. Naturally, given these numbers, one might think that there are no qualified African Americans to serve as editors of our most prestigious journals. It is illuminating to reflect on the blatant omissions in the research of Hickson and associates and other scholars who do not take into account the research productivity of African American communicologists within and without the discipline. One prime example is Molefi Asante, formerly known as Arthur Smith. With more than 40 books and 200 articles, he has single-handedly published more than any scholar in communication and yet his accomplishments continue to go unrecognized by the discipline with the exception of a "distinguished lecture" given at an NCA convention a few years ago. The point is that there are qualified African American communicologists to fill the roles as editors of the previously mentioned journals, but they are very rarely being considered for these opportunities. This fosters a climate of African American distrust toward communication organizations' processes of selecting editors. As a result, many African American scholars choose to publish outside of the discipline such as in the *Journal of Black Studies*, where they feel secure about receiving a fair and equitable blind review. Every area of the discipline suffers when there is an absence of diversity. This is especially true because new knowledge is often limited to culturally homogenized analyses and paradigms: hence that is what students are required to read and know as they familiarize themselves with the literature and concepts of communication research.

Third, among the associations mentioned above, there have been three African American presidents, one of whom is Orlando Taylor, who has been the only African American president of the NCA in its 86-year history. There has never been an African American president of the International Communication Association, which is considered to be a prestigious multidisciplinary organization that attracts many of the most well published scholars in the field.

There is a tremendous need to have a more diverse leadership among our major organizations. Diversity cannot continue to simply mean an increase in more women as leaders

of our profession. Women should be applauded for their most thorough leadership and we should continue to recruit and retain women in leadership positions. Likewise, we should also expand the entryways for other marginalized group members to serve in these capacities. The message is loud and clear; the discipline of communication rarely values diversity. This is only one telltale sign of a discipline bereft of multiculturalism. At first glance, diversity and multiculturalism seem synonymous; however, they are vastly different. Diversity merely suggests the presence of difference. This is easily accomplished by simply recruiting someone who looks different, but does not necessarily see the world differently. Multiculturalism refers to the existence and embrace of multiple cultural perspectives cohabitating within the same context. So, simply appointing a journal editor or association president who is African American or non-White does not advance our discipline. That may satisfy the uncritical observer; however, persons who bring a unique perspective that accents cultural particularities best facilitate advancement of the communication field.

Finally, as I have written elsewhere (Jackson, 2000), there is almost no recognition of African American communication research or theoretic paradigms in the literature of the discipline. There are virtually no textbooks that mention McPhail's complicity theory or Asante's metatheory of Afrocentricity, the latter of which has been celebrated in practically every other liberal arts discipline. I am dumbfounded by this explicit disregard for critical approaches developed by African Americans. It is reminiscent of the sentiment that African American consumer products and services are inferior to "mainstream" consumer products and services. One example of this in academe is the average research institution's attitude toward publishing in culture-centered journals such as the *Journal of Black Studies*, even if one does culture-centered research. The *Journal of Black Studies* is the premier journal in African American studies. It would be logical that if one specializes in communication and African American studies, this would be both an appropriate and ideal venue for such work. However, there is a tragic devaluation of African American intellectual products, theoretic paradigms, and cultural relevancies in the discipline of communication.

Additionally, contemporary African American communication research concerns me in that there are still relatively few emergent revolutionary theoretic interventions that have shifted extant paradigms. With the exception of Asante's metatheory of Afrocentricity, McPhail's complicity theory, Daniel and Smitherman's reconnaissance of linguistic carryovers, and a small minority of other scholars' works, there is a lacuna of innovative thinking about our multiple communicative experiences. Every study and every line of research inquiry is a direct commentary on the cultural identities of the author(s) that produced it. That is, no matter how eccentric the topic may be, researchers can only investigate that which they know directly or vicariously, and these topics are chosen as conscious or subconscious iterations, reaffirmations and reproductions of the cultural self. Consequently, researchers who study African American communication and culture must attune themselves to theories and research that reaffirm African American ontological experiences.

Stuart Hall (1992) insightfully contends identities are the ways we characterize who we are with respect to the past. The link between naming identities and identifying antecedent realities has transformative potential because of the power we have as African Americans to reshape and recenter our intellectual legacies and to legitimize our experiences without waiting for the discipline to do it for us or without assimilating to

“mainstream” disciplinary trajectories as though we do not belong to the mainstream. Meanwhile, as we renegotiate our cultural contracts with the discipline, we must be ever mindful of how we arrived at our present state and condition. The cultural contracts paradigm facilitates understanding of how we can strategically transform our peripheralized positioning and identities.

Understanding How We Got Here: Cultural Contracts Paradigm and Identity Negotiation

The cultural contracts paradigm suggests that at any given point in time human beings are coordinating relationships founded upon assimilation (ready-to-sign contract), adaptation (quasi-completed contract), or valuation of one another (cocreated contract). By understanding what kind of contract(s) you have, as an African American communicationist, and determining when and why you signed it, it is possible to deconstruct your relational position in the academy and renegotiate your contract(s). The tragic reality is that most people do not understand the contracts they have signed much less the implications of having signed them. In this section, I try to offer several examples of the kinds of cultural contracts that exist. Cultural contracts can manifest themselves within and among persons, institutions, and cultures. There are certainly numerous culturally constructed meanings and ways of behaving that permeate the roles and relationships of scholars, and these constitute implicitly negotiated agreements to behave in conformity with social, cultural, and institutional standards. Naturally, the nature of these contracts shifts as we mature, discover new approaches, and/or find identity shifting so exhausting that we select one contract as a means of stabilizing our lives.

Before going further, it is important that I explain how the identity negotiation process occurs (Jackson, 1999) via three cultural contract types: ready to sign, quasi-completed, and cocreated. *Ready-to-sign* cultural contracts are prenegotiated and no further negotiation is allowed. “Signing” or relational coordination may or may not be the goal. A White faculty member, for example, may not even be aware that his or her Whiteness is a marker of normality and privilege and that that might effect his research, pedagogy, and service. If a professor of an intercultural communication course refuses to acknowledge that his Whiteness is politically advantageous, then he may not realize that although the selected course texts affirm his existence, they may not affirm everyone else’s. Essentially, he is asking that his students “sign” his ready-to-sign cultural contract, affirming the importance of White epistemologies and centrality. This contract type suggests that “I am not going to change who I am, so if you want this relationship to work, you must act like me.” As mentioned previously, there is no such thing as not having a contract. To say that one has no cultural contract is to say that one has neither a culture nor understanding of how to function in the culture where he or she lives. In the prior examples, the cultural contracts were defined by someone’s interest in maintaining White privilege, but they may also manifest themselves intraculturally.

Quasi-completed cultural contracts are partly prenegotiated and partly open for negotiation. The people with quasi-completed cultural contracts are not ready to fully value the other’s cultural worldview because of the effects they think that might have on maintaining their own worldview. They “straddle the fence” in terms of their commitment to reorder privilege. With the ready-to-sign contract, privilege is implied because assimilation is required.

Although you may not be the one with privilege, your “signature” verifies your participation in facilitating the maintenance of it. With quasi-completed contracts, there is recognition that there is something fundamentally wrong with assimilation and something equally wrong with polarity. So, this contract type suggests, “In order for this relationship to work, we both have to negotiate part of our identities.” For example, if an African American communicationist always adopts European-centered paradigms to study African artifacts, then he has most likely “signed” a quasi-completed contract, which may imply that he will use nonindigenous paradigms if it will more likely lead him to publication. This is perhaps the least effective and least long-lasting contract because of the strain and tension of monitoring one’s degree of commitment. However, many African American scholars are stuck in this modality their entire professional careers as they codeswitch before and after work.

Finally, *cocreated* cultural contracts are fully negotiable, with the only limits being personal preferences or requirements. This is often perceived as the optimal means of relational coordination across cultures, since the relationship is fully negotiable and open to differences. If a cultural contract is cocreated, there is an acknowledgment and valuation of cultural differences by all parties involved. In a discipline that seldom celebrates African American intellectual legacies, cocreated contracts can only be envisioned and actualized on an individual basis. Some African American scholars experience intellectual appreciation, while the masses of scholars tend to not have their work considered significant enough to include in mainstream disciplinary conversations.

With a cocreated cultural contract, cultural differences are not ignored, yet they do not become the only reason the two relational partners are together. The emphasis is truly on mutual satisfaction rather than obligation. Cocreated cultural contracts are most often discovered among interactants of the same culture, where there are minimized differences. When there is little to no value placed on African American intellectualism, it is difficult to decipher whether the reason is that the scholarship is poor or the attitude toward the scholarship is poor. The cocreated cultural contract assures interactants that there is optimal respect for the individual such that the scholarship is most likely to be the concern and not the attitude toward the person. This contract type suggests, “I am comfortable with and value you for who you are, and I am not interested in changing you in any way.” Metaphorically, each contract type is a result of how identities have been personally and socially constructed and explored.

Generally, identity negotiation refers to a conscious and mindful process of shifting one’s worldview or cultural behaviors or both. During this process, cultural patterns of communicating and ways of seeing the world are at stake. A shift in anyone or any part of one of these aspects of identity constitutes the “signing” of a cultural contract.

Everyone has “signed” at least one cultural contract in his or her life, and with every significant encounter, one or more of those cultural contracts is negotiated. I coined the term “cultural contract” to mean an agreement between two or more interactants who have different interpretations of culture and who have decided whether to coordinate their relationship with one another so that the relationship is deemed valuable to both (Cronen, Chen, & Pearce, 1988). The term “cultural contracts” refers to the end product of identity negotiation; hence, every “signed” or agreed-upon cultural contract has a direct impact on one’s identity. Two points of clarity must be offered here. First, this definition allows for the possibility of intracultural contracts. Second, unlike some previous research (Hecht, Ribeau, & Alberts, 1989), the definition does not assume that the relationship is mutually satisfying, only that it is deemed important. It is critical to mention this, since it

is quite possible that a person is forced to sign a cultural contract, at work for example, in order to preserve their livelihood. Although this may not have been the preferred choice, it is deemed valuable because it is necessary for survival. As with all negotiations, power is often a constitutive feature of cultural contracts and cannot be ignored.

The effects on identities, whether it is a shifting or solidifying move, depend upon the nature of the identity negotiation process or the significance of the incident that initiated the negotiation. For example, an African American graduate student who is advised to use Fisher's narrative approach rather than an Africological paradigm to frame her study of African American proverbs will most likely be conditioned to believe that Africological approaches are substandard and likely to obstruct the possibilities of getting published. That one cognitive shift will eventually have an effect on her cultural self-perception and her understanding of disciplinary publishing. If she is not culturally conscious and does not receive any counterclaims, she is likely to be dissuaded from using culture-centered approaches in her research. In her willingness to comply with using only widely accepted disciplinary paradigms, she will have "signed" a ready-to-sign cultural contract requiring her to assimilate her ideas.

The word "cultural" in cultural contracts is deliberate. It is impossible to exist without culture. Even if one is unable to articulate the particularities of the cultural value system to which he or she subscribes, there are still cultural patterns of interaction, rules, and norms that guide everyday behavior (Calloway-Thomas, Cooper, & Blake, 1999). So, with this cultural contracts paradigm, there is no such thing as a noncultural or culturally generic contract, and everyone has at least one cultural contract.

Everyone has identified or aligned him- or herself with others throughout his or her life. This alignment can be behavioral, cognitive or both. The cultural contracts paradigm is most concerned with sustained alignments, whether short or long term. As mentioned previously, one may choose to align oneself with our discipline's traditions and accepted epistemologies by adopting a Burkean paradigm rather than Afrocentricity to achieve desired ends, such as getting published in one of our discipline's journals. One may not agree with, question, or even like the biased standards of some journals; however, one will continue to publish with a given journal in order to meet institutional expectations. Consequently, one has sustained and coordinated the relationship (Jackson, Morrison, & Dangerfield, in press) because the perceived ends outweigh the means. Essentially, one will have agreed to a ready-to-sign cultural contract, and in doing so, one has placed a portion of one's cultural values, norms, and/or beliefs aside.

As with any negotiation, one can either abide by an existing contractual arrangement, change the terms of the contract if permissible, or choose another contract. Although the concept of identity negotiation is simple, it is not always clear what is being negotiated, especially since identities are nonmaterial. The cultural contracts paradigm is being introduced to make sense of what is actually being negotiated. Hecht, Collier, and Ribeau (1993) contend that identities are relational and negotiated in everyday interaction with others. Specifically, they assert, "Identity is defined by the individual and is co-created as people come into contact with one another and the environment. As people align themselves with various groups this co-creation process is negotiated" (p. 30).

Professional identities are constantly attached to cultural epistemologies and ontologies. The way we learn to coordinate our cultural identities and perspectives so that they are aligned with other cultural identities and perspectives is perhaps one of the world's most intricate balancing acts, and everyone who is employed must participate in it. This

activity is complicated by the negotiation of identity as evidenced in identity conflicts. A conflict is usually understood to be the result of incompatible goals and interests, so when identities are unaligned, there is said to be an identity conflict (Roloff & Cloven, 1990). An example of this is the limited recruitment of students of color in the communication major. The conflict is most obvious in the disciplinary conversation about diversity; some scholars are concerned with diversity, while others are not. The goals and interests are not only incompatible, but they also lead to marginalized identities by politically situating White identities at the center of recruitment and curricular efforts. The cultural contracts approach facilitates mapping of the kinds of choices African American communicologists have made to date. In order to shift the direction in which we are going, we must renegotiate those cultural contracts that limit our progress.

Where Do We Go from Here? Transformative Visions and an Agenda for the Future

Recent African American communication research has shown signs of an evolution, a renegotiation of outdated cultural contracts. Many scholars are not as preoccupied with artificially linking their cultural experiences with those of European Americans. For example, Karla Scott's (in press) essay in Houston and Davis's anthology explores the intersection of culture, gender, and language by examining Black women's everyday talk. She accomplishes this while utilizing the work of Marsha Houston and Geneva Smitherman. Her analysis is rightfully rooted in African American theoretic traditions. There is a revived sense of autonomy developing among African American communicologists that self-authorizes scholarship about African American communicative experiences using African American paradigms as the theoretic framework and/or inviting African American participants or coresearchers to take part in a study about their own experience. The fact that there are more indigenous African-centered paradigms and concepts that are being logged into the range of epistemologies communication scholars adopt to capture the logic of their investigations is promising. I maintain five prescriptive visions as I ruminate about where African American communication research must go and what we must do as African American communicologists in the years to come.

Vision 1

Those of us who study African American communicative practices must be unafraid to place African- and African American-centered paradigms at the center of our analyses of Black diasporic experiences. Many African American communicologists seem to be fearful of the real possibilities of not getting published when they use literature that is foreign to many Whites. For example, I have never read a communication study presented in essay form that used the conceptual work of Chiekh Anta Diop, Linda James-Myers, Maulana Karenga, Theophile Obenga, Marcelle Griaule, Amos Wilson, Haki Madhubuti, Jawanza Kunjufu, or Marimba Ani, all of whom are well-respected scholars in African American studies. We are much more prone to using non-Black scholars outside of the discipline such as Michel Foucault, Gayatri Spivak, Clifford Geertz, Carolyn Ellis, Roland Barthes, Julia Kristeva, and Elizabeth Grosz. If we can use Burke's pentadic analysis to study rap music, we can also use Asante's Afrocentricity or Diop's cosmological triad. Although one paradigm may suffice within a given study, this is not to say that one

must replace the other or be introduced at the exclusion of the other. Another option is to triangulate theoretic approaches so that theories produced to explain African American culture, epistemologies, and communicative behaviors may be juxtaposed with theories that were produced to accent European American culture, epistemologies, and communicative behaviors. This functions as a cocreated contractual arrangement where cocultural standpoints are valued equally.

Vision 2

We must be unafraid to cite one another's work. Rarely do we as African American scholars critique and engage one another's ideas, but even in the absence of public debate, we still implicitly suggest that our own paradigms and studies are unworthy of consideration by not acknowledging their existence. In this way, we become, as McPhail (1991, 1994) might contend, complicitous with hegemonic devaluations of African American intellectual production. There is a common saying among African Americans that advises people not to "air their dirty laundry" and, unfortunately, I think this axiom has facilitated a restrictive intellectual atmosphere. Many intellectuals find it impermissible to critique another scholar's work unless one has a vendetta against that scholar. Nonetheless, I am convinced that positive, good-willed criticism of African American paradigms will lead to more recognition of approaches and theories produced by African Americans.

As Hickson and associates have illustrated via their study of research productivity in the communication field, citation indexes are critical instruments used for measuring productivity and peer recognition. Naturally, there is a limited set of journals and publication outlets that count within the indexes; however, as scholars who study African American communication see fit, it is necessary to quote and cite African American scholars who have made significant contributions in one's respective areas of inquiry. In this way, we cocreate and affirm an intellectual presence in the field. Without personal efforts to acknowledge the work of African American intellectuals, the bevy of African American intellectual products remains unnoticed.

Vision 3

We must form research collaboratives and alliances. The 25 most active producers of communication research amassed the prolific records they have today due to their willingness to collaborate. Many of them accomplished 50% or more of their research collaboratively. There is still a consistent tendency among African American scholars to publish alone. Many of us have been taught to function as islands, detached and autonomous. The danger in this can be illustrated with numbers alone. A person such as Professor X who has more than 100 manuscripts to his credit might publish eight to 15 articles in a year, none of which are single authored, which means he always has a set of ongoing projects even when he is not writing much. He is working smarter, not harder. On the other hand, Professor Z has about 40 publications to his credit, and in any given year he has three to six articles published. He is still quite prolific; however, his output is less and he is probably working harder. Which model would you choose?

The reality is that even if one has a magnum opus, that one work alone probably will not help one earn tenure, but suppose one is already tenured; then what is the benefit of collaborating? The dearth of knowledge about African American communication

requires that research constantly be generated. One concern some African Americans have is that there are non-African Americans researching African American communication. For that, I have two responses. First, this is not new. People of other cultures have always studied other civilizations and cultural patterns and in some ways it is a compliment. If scholars choose to conduct fair and balanced studies of your experience, recognizing that they do not have all of the answers, then that shows they have some value of your culture. Second, why complain if you are not doing the work others are? We cannot blame others for theorizing about African American communicative experiences, especially if we are not doing that work. There is a plethora of themes that have barely been examined in our discipline, including, but not limited to, Black masculinities, Black aesthetic forms of expression, Black homosexuality, African diasporic orature, and nonverbal subtleties indigenous to African American and African cultures. Additionally, we have a limited range of studies concerning the confluence between African American culture, discourse and art, architecture, science, spirituality, philosophy, and history. Collaborating will produce such knowledge more rapidly and efficiently.

Keep in mind that there are six caveats to doing collaborative research. First, if one is on tenure track, one must publish several manuscripts either alone or as first author to establish oneself as a scholar who is capable of intellectual rigor. Second, when comparing social scientific research versus humanistic studies like rhetorical criticism, collaborations tend to be with fewer coauthors and, overall, they are less frequent. Third, one should try to be first or second author more often than not. Fourth, collaboration is not always productive on every project, so select collaborators and collaborative projects carefully. Fifth, every friend is not a good collaborator, and every good collaborator is not your friend. Sixth, collaboration can be stressful unless all research partners are accountable, punctual, energized, goal directed, organized, and competent.

Eventually, establishing African American research collaboratives and alliances in the discipline may lead to expanding the boundaries of thinking about communicative experiences and/or founding another professional organization that meets the needs of marginalized group members. As our interests and possibilities expand, so will our need to be openly validated, valued, and recognized by the discipline and its associations. Just as the discipline of psychology underwent a radical change in the 1970s with the implementation of a "school" of Black psychologists, likewise Black communicologists may need to do likewise. For some people, this may be interpreted as a move toward separatism. In fact, it would be a move toward the acknowledgment of a diversified human experience. There will still be those who participate in NCA, ICA, and the regional associations, but their primary allegiance would be to the organizational body that appreciated their scholarship.

Vision 4

We must participate in recruitment and retention efforts at every level of postsecondary education. This can be strenuous given the other demands on one's time in research, teaching and service-related activities. However, longstanding evidence suggests that faculty tend to be retained when they feel supported and surrounded by people with similar interests and backgrounds. It is professionally healthy to have people who share perspectives, experiences, and directions.

Obviously, the major problems with ensuring student cultural diversity are recruiting and maintaining African Americans and non-Whites in the discipline. Personally, I had no plans of staying in academia, because the environment did not seem conducive for me, and although I saw that as my problem, I did not see it as my battle to fight. Now, I see it as my battle, because when I read the flurry of communication textbooks and articles emerging from varying publication vehicles, I still see few studies that tell of my cultural experiences. Obviously, the more students are retained, the more likely they are to pursue a terminal degree and stay within the profession and discipline, which, of course, potentially leads to a wider range of positive, liberatory voices in our disciplinary literatures.

Although recruitment of diverse student and faculty scholars may seem external to one's present responsibilities, it is only so because communal responsibility has been arrested within the academy and often is treated as secondary to the university mission. "Town and gown relations" is a buzz phrase used in the academy to signify a rejoinder or detachment from the community, depending on how one perceives it. For a collective people, detachment is not an option to be exercised for any length of time lest we subscribe to a ready-to-sign cultural contract that abandons community in favor of personal interests.

Community connectedness does not always translate into physical presence at a community center; one form of community connectedness may also mean empowering a community by participating as an institutionally situated community advocate for recruitment and retention of culturally diverse students and faculty.

Vision 5

We must speak to, with, and regarding our own communities, and they are varied. Some of us have grown up in lower-class ghettos, some in class-varied rural enclaves, others in middle- and upper-class neighborhoods. Each of these experiences is different and worthy of examination. West (1993) speaks of organic intellectualism as a return to home and a commitment to the communities in which we have lived. African American scholars cannot afford to disengage ourselves from our communities, because of our collective nature. Mbiti (1990) suggests the old adage, "I am because we are and because we are, I am." It is our obligation to return. In doing so, we may locate issues or problems that confront the communities and offer strategies and methods to resolve or assist in resolving the conundrums. For example, there is a great program in Cincinnati, Ohio, which began in the early 1990s, called the 'Summer Incentive Program.' This grass-roots tough-love program for preteen adolescent males is structured to emphasize cultural awareness, communicative competency, educational achievement, familial respect, and social responsibility. It was designed to help low-income, at-risk children confront and resist the pressures of academic, personal, and eventually professional failure. Programs like this for boys and girls, men and women may target community concerns regarding safety, homelessness, starvation, and employment to financial investment and community banking. For ideas that represent such a transformative vision, see Amos Wilson's (1998) latest book, *Blueprint for Black Power*.

These five visions offer a path for future African American communication research. It is imperative that each of these prescriptions be filled if we are to effectively advance the research of African Americans in the discipline.

Implications

Where do we stand as African American communicologists at the birth of the new millennium? We are in a precarious position. On the one hand, we are fortunate not to be in the post civil rights era when scholars were distracted by the inhumane acts of violence perpetrated by federal, state, and local authorities as well as centralized hate groups. On the other hand, we are still stunted by our limited collective visions. I am confident African American communicologists will transcend the machinery of race. This does not mean we will be unfazed by it; rather, we will not be consumed by it to the extent that it hinders our progress. Admittedly, the intellectual landscape in the discipline for African Americans is often overwhelming, but there is hope. This was evident as we celebrated Orlando Taylor as the first African American president of NCA. Likewise, we have celebrated other African Americans who have been leaders of our regional associations. Carolyn Calloway-Thomas and Deborah Atwater have presided over the Central States Communication Association and Eastern Communication Association, respectively. More African American and non-White scholars are needed to serve as professional leaders of our major associations, including, but not limited to, the ICA. Likewise, we need African Americans to serve as editors, researchers, and in every other facet of our discipline so that our identities are not continually marginalized.

Identities are perhaps the most dynamic feature of human communication behavior. As human beings, we have the fascinating ability to shape, position, and reconstitute dimensions of ourselves throughout time, space, and interactions, even in repressive climates such as that which we have in our discipline. Critical studies scholars such as postmodernists, feminists, Afrocentrists, and postcolonialists suggest that the power differentials among interactants interrupt harmonious and equitable relationships even when assimilation occurs. This is an important point, because oftentimes within inequitable relationships, artificial congruence in opinion and behaviors seems awfully real. If a subordinate in a supervisor–subordinate relationship enacts codeswitching properly, for example, then on the surface everything may appear intact. But, beneath the surface, the identity negotiation that has taken place has inhibited freedom of expression and negatively impacted the subordinate's identity by lowering his or her self-efficacy (Houston, 1983). This is only one possible identity effect among African American communicologists.

Here are two of the implicit questions we must ask ourselves as African American communicologists: Who controls how we define ourselves culturally and to what degree is power an intermediating variable in how African American research is shaped and understood? While the cultural contracts approach helps us to understand how we arrived at our current disciplinary condition and whether we are persistently signing ready-to-sign cultural contracts, we still have the ability to take agency in how new knowledge concerning African American communicative experiences is constructed within the discipline.

Within the racially and culturally oppressive disciplinary climate in which we professionally exist, it is extremely difficult to independently explore the communicative nuances of African American lives without reference to hegemony. Often we feel compelled to investigate Whiteness in order to access our Blackness. On the surface, this seems

problematic, because it suggests that understanding Blackness is contingent upon understanding Whiteness. Bodunrun (1991) insightfully asserts,

Philosophers cannot afford to expend all their energies on the often unproductive and self-stultifying we-versus-you scholarship. Africans must talk to one another. We are likely to have a more frank debate that way. (p. 84)

Often, we are afraid to engage one another's scholarship, but in failing to do so, we limit the multiple ways we can conceptually frame our own experiences. I remember hearing Molefi Asante's distinguished lecture at the 1995 NCA convention in San Antonio, Texas. He was using Egyptological and other African texts and concepts with which I was quite familiar, but I was sure he had lost half the audience. At first, I was a bit uneasy about it because of what I have learned about audience analysis and not alienating one's audience. It appeared that he was not concerned about how or whether they received the information. As I reflected more, I realized that this was not his intent. He was affirming the cultural uniqueness of African-centered intellectual legacies without making reference to Europe. This was unique for me, because in my training, Europe had always been the center around which other legacies were required to orbit. I remember thinking that this set of emotions I initially felt when hearing Asante's lecture was exactly how I felt throughout my undergraduate and master's degree education. I understood the jargon, but I still felt alien to the experience. For years, professors, students, and other researchers were not talking to me; they were talking among themselves about communicative experiences they could relate to most. They did not seem to be the least bit concerned about my level of comfort or the way in which I received the information. Suddenly, I felt myself cheering Asante once again for teaching me that it is okay to investigate my own ancestral epistemologies and cosmological forms of expression. As Bodunrun suggests in the above quotation, we must talk to one another via our research and reshape the discussion of African American particularities so that it reflects the fullness of African American culture.

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