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## **So Real Illusions of Black Intellectualism: Exploring Race, Roles, and Gender in the Academy**

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*The absence of any written mainstream valuation of African American theories and historical relevancies presents a significant commentary and dilemma within the field of human communication studies and other disciplines as well. It forces committed African American intellectuals to ask ourselves if we have created a large enough arsenal of quality theories or if we have simply recycled theories produced by “observers” to describe our communicative behavior. If African American theories have been created, tested, and verified, then where are they, and why are they not being recognized by the academy? African American scholars must define what it means to be central to critical scholarship, determine whether this position has been achieved, and finally decide to continue to push the margins. This essay is to be read as an initial exploration that examines the sociopolitical factors of race and gender as contributing variables to the success of African American intellectualism.*

I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allen Poe; nor am I one of your hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. (Ellison, 1972, p. 3)

Ellison eloquently captures the sense of invisibility, dismissal, and devaluation of Black intellectualism I have observed in the academy. This has become clear to me in a variety of instances, such as when scholarly works are disregarded by gatekeepers such as thesis and dissertation committee chairs. A few years ago, Michon Hicks (1996), a graduate student at Howard University, completed a very important thesis concerning the million man march using an afrocentric model of communication. After she presented her research at a national conference, she and I had dinner with six Black graduate students at predominantly White universities. Several of them shared their frustrations about being

admonished not to use controversial cultural paradigms such as afrocentricity in their theses and dissertations. One of them stated, “You just don’t know how lucky you are. I was told by my advisor that my committee would not allow me to use an afrocentric method, because it is not well outlined and has no substance.” Another student interjected, “I’ve been told that it has not yet been validated.” The implications of this discussion are clear: Methods that universally appear in major texts and top tier journals are thought to be valid and acceptable. The void in many of these texts and journals implies that the afrocentric method is insufficient, inappropriate, and substandard, yet nondominant cultural perspectives should not be ignored. Basic academic texts are the means by which many individuals are introduced to the discipline and subdisciplines of communication. Of course, it could be argued that afrocentricity has not been entirely ignored, as panels dedicated to afrocentricity have been formed in the National Communication Association over several years. The fact still remains that the discipline does not fully embrace afrocentrism. I will discuss the theory at length later in this essay.

The relationship between invisibility and existence, difference and acceptance is quite perplexing, especially when one examines the lives of Black intellectuals in the academy. Ellison’s notion of “invisibility” vividly captures the pain and disenchantment I sometimes feel as a Black intellectual in the academy.

Conceptually, the disprivilege that accompanies invisibility is marked by the inability to speak for oneself and have that voice acknowledged and valued. Consequently, the voice is not only marginalized, but suppressed and silenced (Freire, 1995). As Collins (1991) cleverly states, “Oppressed groups are frequently placed in the situation of being listened to only if we frame our ideas in the language that is familiar to and comfortable for a dominant group” (p. xiii). Clearly, the assumption is that visible or mainstream “voices” can unequivocally and effectively speak to and for everyone, but of course this is erroneous. It is impossible for one voice to even approach a complete version of reality that is fully representative of all human and cultural activities. However, mainstreaming is parochial by nature and is defined by the indissociability among power, ideology, and discourse (Jackson, 1999a). Indeed, one could argue that marginalization is about racism or parochialism, though it is much more complex than that. As McPhail (1998) argues in his review of U.S. race relations, there are “participatory dimensions of racism” (p. 348). He frames his discussion by using his complicity theory to explore how race is constituted, reproduced, and understood by the authors of the books. McPhail posits that interactants in racist encounters are mutually participating and often complicitous in producing the exchange, although some would rather place the blame solely on Blacks or

Whites. He concludes, "The struggle for racial equality in America suggests that the need for non-oppositional forms of symbolic interaction has never been greater" (p. 356).

It should be understood that racism is not about "Black" and "White"; it is about someone's humanity being disregarded or attacked. The mere mention of race in the academy ignites negative responses from those who are unwilling to publicly admit that "other" voices do matter (Freire, 1995). One of the clearest examples of academic marginalization, which I will discuss throughout this essay, is African American theory-building. This brand of scholarship is not new or fully restricted; it is just peripheral to mainstream scholarship, hence the title of this essay "so real illusions." African American theory-building exists, but it is often treated as though it is invisible or insignificant.

### **Exploring Race**

"Race," as the progenitor of racism, occupies a peculiar position in the lives of African Americans, for truly, we are the reason why racism as a social disease still has utility in the U.S. It is not because we have created it, but that we are the primary canvases upon which the racist's insecurities, fears, and anxieties get projected (Akbar, 1995; Ani, 1994). I use the term "disease," in this case, to mean an external discomfort that has become internalized to the extent that it leads to deterioration, debilitation, or both. Race is a constant in the African American ontological equation without which there would be no need to reflect upon social disprivilege or invisibility. Essentially, an individual who does not have to think about race on an almost daily basis is one who also does not have to think about difference (Jackson, 1999a; McIntosh, 1994; Pajakowska & Young, 1992). In some respects, African American identities are riddled by this preoccupation with difference and devaluation. According to the literature pertaining to whiteness, European American identities tend not to be (Gresson, 1995; McIntosh, 1994; Pajackowska & Young, 1992). So, it is both strange and understandable why I have found that many of my White colleagues have not fully contemplated how their identities are enwrapped in their own work and everyday lives (Jackson, 1999b).

For example, there are White scholars whose professional careers have been catapulted by their production of theories, including intercultural ones that often add to larger social problems because the authors' indigenuous assimilationist attitudes are revealed at the crux of the theory. Hence, the theory is only operable if assimilation is truly a viable solution, but what about human beings who do not want to change who they are, who simply want to have their humanity acknowledged and valued?

The goal of any and all scholarship, regardless of racial, political, or

socioeconomic conditions, should be the enhancement of the human predicament. Yet, many scholars have written for years about exclusionary practices within and beyond the academy and African American intellectual is challenged by the disproportionate shaping of mainstream discourse (hooks, 1995). The words used to describe this allegedly purposeful insularity are patriarchal, hegemonic, essentialist, and universalistic discourse (Collins, 1991; hooks, 1995; Hull, Scott, & Smith, 1986; Lorde, 1980; West, 1993).

The absence of any written mainstream valuation of African American theories and historical relevancies presents a significant commentary and dilemma within the communication discipline. It forces committed African American communication intellectuals to ask if we have created a large enough arsenal of quality theories, or if we have simply recycled theories produced by “observers” to describe our communicative behaviors. By African American communication theories, I mean those paradigms and approaches produced by, for, or about African Americans. I have had students ask that if African American theories have been created, tested, and verified, then where are they, and why aren't they being recognized by the academy? I have directed them to Asante's (1980) metatheory of “afrocentricity”; McPhail's (1991; 1994b; 1998) “complicity theory”; Starosta & Olorunnisola's (as cited in Chen & Starosta, 1998) “third culture building model”; Hecht, Collier, & Ribeau's (1993) “communication theory of ethnic identity”; Gresson's (1995) “theory of recovery”; Orbe's (1997) “co-cultural communication theory”; and Wilson's (1999) “discursive theory of racial identity.” Due to space constraints, I'll limit my discussion to three theories. The first two, McPhail's complicity theory and Gresson's theory of recovery are not new theories, but have not been featured often in communication literature. The final theory, Asante's afrocentricity, has evoked highly controversial national debates and won critical acclaim.

McPhail is a professor of speech communication at the University of Utah. He introduced his complicity theory in the *Howard Journal of Communication* in 1991 and has since further developed it in a series of articles that have appeared in major communication outlets such as *Quarterly Journal of Speech*, *Communication Theory*, *Critical Studies in Mass Communication*, *Western Journal of Communication*, and in two university press books—*Zen in the Art of Rhetoric* and *Rhetoric of Racism*. The basic philosophical tenet of his complicity theory is that all successful human interaction requires balanced and harmonious energy. It is only when two or more energies are incongruent that imbalance and disorder are introduced. Although it draws upon much of Eastern and martial arts philosophy, complicity is a race-related theory that states that racism occurs because of social, personal, psychological, cultural,

or emotional imbalance, or some combination thereof, between two or more parties. However, balance may be restored by establishing coherence or understanding of each other and one's self and then positively acting upon that synthetic appreciation of the other's existence. This requires that one observes critically how she is complying with or participating in the production of racist encounters. The theory advises against falling into a cycle of placing blame for one's negative encounters completely upon others, since two or more energies must be at work in order to complete any interactive episode. The author uses this concept to explore afrocentricity critically (McPhail, 1998) and racism in the media (Flores & McPhail, 1997) as separate and essentialist discourses. McPhail reviews both, Gresson's and Asante's works. Still, McPhail's theory is underutilized in published articles and books in communication.

Gresson is a professor of educational theory and policy at Penn State University. His theory of recovery is best explained in his book, *The Recovery of Race in America*. Conceptually, complicity is very similar to recovery. Essentially, the concept of recovery suggests that all human beings, at some point, experience loss and are inspired to seek recovery from that which is deemed lost. Naturally, this idea can be applied in multiple ways; however, Gresson dedicates most of his discussion to the recovery of race. He discusses a variety of topics, including, but not limited to, reverse discrimination and affirmative action. He contends that the reason for anxiety on the part of some Whites about affirmative action is that they feel they have somehow lost something by yielding some semblance of power to non-Whites. He suggests that the "lost" access to power and control over resources is frightening, so much so that it becomes incumbent upon some Whites to fight to save that access before it is exhausted and delivered to others. There is a constant negotiation of the self that is engaged by the problematization of difference. Theoretically, this paradigm (like McPhail's) offers emancipatory possibilities. Its end goal is to "free up" human interactants so that they are unafraid to question themselves and deconstruct the origin of their fears and insecurities that promote misalignment with others. In other words, if human beings can get to the point where they are able to assess critically their own sense of loss, then they may also be able to pinpoint the reasons for their retaliation (which may not always be justifiable) and relational disruption. Then, recovery will be facilitated and perhaps expedited by this understanding. Racial recovery will function in the same way and subsequently, healing will begin. This paradigm, though celebrated with an Eastern Communication Association book award, has been widely ignored in communication texts explaining culture and race theory.

Asante is a professor of African and African American studies and communication at Temple University. His metatheory was developed in the 1970s and first published in 1980 in a book entitled, *Afrocentricity: Theory of Social Change*. Asante (1990) explains, "The afrocentrist seeks to uncover and use codes, paradigms, symbols, motifs, myths, and circles of discussion that reinforce the centrality of African ideals and values as a valid frame of reference for acquiring and examining data" (p. 6). Afrocentricity has been associated with everything from the clothes one wears to the disposition one has on life. This broad range of interpretations is partly due to the very basic etymology of the word, which derives from "Afro-" meaning from Africa, and "centri-" meaning "centered." So, any philosophy or way of being that places Africa at the center of its core is thought to be afrocentric. As a theory, it has been peripheralized and treated as a threat to European-centered models, because scholars have misunderstood it to mean that all good things come from Africa and all things African are good (Lefkowitz, 1997). Although Afrocentricity has been publicly affirmed and debated across several disciplines and within several books (Crouch, 1997; Hamlet, 1998; Hill Collins, 1991; Lefkowitz, 1997), it is treated as virtually invisible in the communication discipline from which it emanated. Only two major texts (Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 1991, and Brummett, 1994) have acknowledged the paradigm, and of the two, Brummett is the only one who has explicated it by demonstrating how it can be utilized as a critical rhetorical method. It has seldom appeared in the major rhetorical theory and criticism texts, although Asante is known as a rhetorical theorist. When cultural theory is discussed in these major texts, the discussion turns to postmodernism, feminism, and British critical theory paradigms. There is rarely any mention of other culture-specific rhetorical paradigms such as those of African Americans. African American scholars often have been rendered invisible.

These three paradigms are both similar and different. Each attempts to move scholarly discussions on race to more liberating dialogues that may help to mend U.S. race relations. However, they move to accomplish this in different ways. Each recommends self-analysis as a means for understanding how racism evolves. McPhail suggests understanding all dialectical racial perspectives involved in order to reach coherence, synthesis, and harmony. According to this approach, no one party is held solely responsible for racial disruption. Gresson argues that racial conflict arises when at least one party senses loss and retaliates, then the other interactant(s) move to a defense from the oncoming attack. By understanding this process, one is able to discern where the breakdown occurs and may seek a remedy. Both of these paradigms suggest that liberation begins by analyzing participation in the racial episode. Asante

is more of a cultural than racial theorist. He contends that human interaction is disrupted because we don't understand each other's cultural worldview. He seems to be suggesting that without self-alignment via one's culture, alignment with others is impossible. The afrocetric position is to seek balance by coordinating and appreciating multiple identities at work in the same context.

### **Black Male as Scholar, Teacher, Theorist**

I approach the topic of race with deliberate caution and probity, especially when defining my role as a Black male in the academy, because we have now invited the distinguishing characteristic of gender to the discussion. I believe my role as a Black male in the academy is threefold—being a scholar, an organic intellectual-teacher, and a theorist. First, I will express some issues related to the terminology, *Black male scholarship*, then I will discuss my three roles as a Black male in the academy. This will be followed by a few directions in which Black communication inquiry will most likely go.

Above, when I listed the three roles of Black males in the academy, I chose to speak of scholarship generically without the prefixed qualifier “Black” because all Black intellectuals are not, and perhaps should not be, the sole producers of Black diasporic inquiry. This is the first issue. For me, “Black scholarship” is a term to be reserved for those conducting scientific investigations pertaining to the values, insights, traditions, and cosmological perspectives particular to Black folks. Naturally, this definition includes persons who are not Black. I do not find this to be problematic, as long as “outside” researchers understand that the most accurate accounts of Black diasporic phenomena are rendered by those who live the experience.

The second issue is gender. Obviously, women have a different set of experiences and struggles than men do (Probyn, 1992; Wood, 1996). Some would even argue that the distinction becomes increasingly more pronounced across racial, socioeconomic, or generational boundaries (Allen, 1995; Collins, 1991; hooks, 1995; Houston, 1992). So, although others may be able to comment as external observers of these varied experiences, again, the ones who live these daily experiences, are the most well qualified and well suited to convey the intricacies of personally lived events. In this way, the roles of Black men and women are experientially different. Allen (1998), a tenured African American communication professor, reveals:

I also display an ethic of caring by spending a lot of time in one-on-one interaction during my office hours with students, who often discuss personal problems. Students of color who are not in my classes also visit me to discuss their personal as well as school-related concerns. Some of my colleagues also visit me to discuss various issues.

My mother calls me Mary Worth or Ann Landers because I am always trying to assist other people with their life problems. (p. 582)

Collins (1991) contends that there is a complex and contradictory matrix that takes place with the Black woman. She is seen as nurturing mother (even at work), which is an historical and traditional role. Her availability, however, becomes burdensome as she attempts to accomplish everyday tasks. This simply is not an institutional role that the male is expected to play, which makes detachment the standard and may not encourage students to pursue more profound relationships with male professors or vice versa. I have not discovered any literature that suggests that men abandon the student-teacher relationship as some men abandon other kinds of relationships. However, there is some similarity between the academic, relational, and family roles women play. Black women have been more prolific and forthright than men in their explanations of institutional oppression in the academy (Allen, 1998; Collins, 1991; hooks, 1994; 1995). It is my belief that this is because (a) Black men do not experience all of the same kinds of oppression as Black women, and (b) we have the ability to be oppressor and oppressed because of our gender and race, respectively.

Collins illustrates that Black women have experiences and insights obscured from Black men due mostly to status differentials and social expectation differences. As I was writing this essay and rereading feminist works, I realized that Black feminist scholars tend to pluralize the power-laden tag “dominant groups,” while I, as a Black man, speak of one dominant group. I have never considered women, as a group, to be dominant. This revelation may seem elementary, but I have been well aware of the “double jeopardy” (Hull et al., 1986) hypothesis for years and have only concentrated on how Black women are doubly oppressed, not of how I participate in part of their oppression. I have been privileged not to think of that reality of my social position. In many ways, by reconstructing the act of oppression and its effect on their everyday lives, Black women scholars have been most successful in gradually emerging from invisibility, though still not completely visible.

Until recently, it was rarely acceptable to count critical autobiographical essays as scientifically rigorous scholarship. However, the momentum of this brand of theorizing has accelerated in recent years because of the influential works of hooks (1997), Gates (1995), Bell-Scott (1998), Lorde (1980), Belton (1996), Boyd & Allen (1996), and others. The pace has been enhanced with the advent of autoethnographic scholarship (Denzin, 1997). This method is distinctive because it allows different interpretations to emerge in contexts where “voices” may become submerged and invisible. Ellis (1997) has also been well cited as one of the leading



autoethnographic researchers, and several others have been instrumental in advancing this approach in communication (Anderson & Goodall, 1994; Conquergood, 1991; Foss & Griffin, 1995).

Some might credit feminist scholars for the advent of this paradigm, and they are correct in suggesting that feminist intellectual productivity has been pivotal in this regard. So, it could be argued that women contribute distinctive methods than men in the academy, and therefore this offers an additional reason why their scholarly roles should be considered uniquely different. Seldom do Black male scholars critique themselves so thoroughly, hence much emancipatory work is still left for us to do and our invisibility will remain until it is done.

Having noted these issues and exceptions, I proceed by stating that my abbreviated mention of women as equal participants (in Black scholarship) without thorough explication of their roles in particular is not an oversight. I have consciously chosen to speak of Black scholarship in a composite manner, inclusive of feminist and masculinist orientations, recognizing that there are some limitations to this approach. At times, I take leave of this composite approach in order to accent specific challenges confronted by Black males. Of course, I take full responsibility for any unintended inference within this essay that indicates false notions of sameness between the two culture-gender perspectives.

### **Role as Scholar**

There are two ways that I, in my role as scholar, am challenged to negotiate codes of identity: altering language and accenting community versus individualism.

**Altering Language and Negotiating Identity.** Giles, Coupland, & Coupland's (1991) speech accommodation theory and concept of ethnolinguistic vitality explain how identities are negotiated when language is adjusted to accommodate others. Communication that diverges from normative codes of interaction is often considered unhealthy, counterproductive, and incompetent, so code switching becomes necessary as a means of survival. I remember a statement that one of my instructors in the doctoral program once made. He said, "There has never been a leader chosen by the African American community who has primarily spoken in any other language mode than that of standard American English." Many Black scholars must function with a dual sensibility (Allen, 1995; DuBois, 1903; Jackson, 1999c); they speak and express themselves straddling diversely different audiences. Black speakers must appropriate codes within varying rhetorical situations to demonstrate our communication competencies. This has been forced into our literary styles and approaches. When we write a book, article, or essay, the most culturally conscious of all of us must at one point decide to whom we are speaking—the masses, the academy, or both. Some scholars have

decided that this is a dichotomous question, so they choose one or the other based on personal and professional motivations, preferences, or goals. If one chooses to speak to both, the masses and the academy, then the diction must be carefully selected so as not to exclude the average nonacademic reader. I have decided to vary my writing style to correspond to the context or outlet in which I am writing.

**Accenting Community vs. Individualism.** Since African American culture accents community over individualism, it is almost antithetic to African American cultural worldviews to disregard the community within scholarly writings, especially as we are often discussing our relationship or experiences with the African American community. This has been a central concern of mine. After I completed my dissertation, one of my professors remarked, “You know this has nothing to do with the man on the street who has nothing to eat or the kid who will never go to college. Somehow, we must reach them.” This admonition helped me to rejoin reality; I hadn’t escaped from anything just because I was preparing to receive my PhD. My education had to stand for more than that. I had to connect myself with my cultural community. Surely, the forced dichotomy between community and individual not only limits readership of scholarly pieces, but also speaks to the fragmentation of professional and personal lives.

### **Role as an Organic Intellectual-Teacher**

Universities distinguish between two types of service—university and community. They, more often than not, count for-profit consulting, speaking, and training as community service activities. The fact is that most academic institutions are not serious about requiring their faculty to interact and serve the larger community, unless it is profit driven. This does not encourage scholars to be organic intellectuals. An organic intellectual is one who considers privileged and underprivileged factions of the larger community in every facet of his or her job. The term “organic” is used to signify that which is fundamental, basic, homegrown, indigenous, and connected to the larger organism. A major criticism of intellectuals is that they are disconnected from the masses. To some degree, we have become clones of the literary elite, and the masses are left curbside. Organic intellectualism helps remedy this problem by reconnecting ourselves, and being actively involved in protecting the community’s well-being. It is the systematic move to oneness and coherence that invites nonoppositional discourse with the community (McPhail, 1991; 1994a; 1994b).

Organic intellectualism also allows us to teach wholism at every level of academic activity from classroom to professional conference to institutional administration. At the microlevel, teachers of public speaking can institute change. For example, many communication scholars are

still teaching students rhetoric and public speaking using the old Aristotelian model inclusive of the five canons of rhetoric. It is clear that this model is limited in its ability to account for an audience that might engage the speaker. Although there are alternative theoretic approaches that attempt to resolve this problem, such as that of invitational rhetoric, there are still many speech teachers who do not prepare students for these kinds of instances. So, even the pedagogy is limited, because it reaffirms the primitivistic linear model of communication, which suggests that the speaker talks while the audience listens without ever giving any verbal feedback. Our students prepare speeches analyzing an audience who has yet to respond to the actual speech. A wholistic approach would teach the students to respond to the audience's needs before and during the oral presentation (as well as afterwards). An organic intellectual would know to do this, especially for the sake of culturally cognizant students who may likely speak at some point within a setting, such as the Black church that demands interaction via call and response. Critical pedagogy is one necessary means of arriving at organic intellectualism.

Hooks (1995) is on point in her call for a critical pedagogy in all areas of Black life. Critical practices must celebrate, analyze, redeem, deconstruct, value, theorize about, and illuminate multiple realities, including Black diasporic experiences. Every progressive scholar must understand that liberation is a collective venture that cannot occur single-handedly inside academic circles guarded by pristine walls. It must occur outside of the academy, and it should be the goal of every university to reconnect with the larger community to which we all belong. If this type of unifying activity is promoted at all levels of the academy, it will make it difficult for any member of the university to see cultural others as insignificant, whether affiliated with the university or not. It breaks down boundaries and accents cohesion.

### **Role as Teacher in Different Race Contexts**

I have taught at both historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs) and predominantly White community colleges, but the largest shift occurred when I began teaching at a predominantly White university (PWU). This transition initiated my first set of encounters with students who had significant problems with my authority as a young, Black, male professor, and these issues were manifested through behaviors that exhibited a sense of White entitlement.

There are countless and vivid distinctions between teaching students at HBCUs versus students at PWUs, so many that I cannot rightfully explore all of them in this limited space. The two prominent differences, from my experience, are as follows: (a) White students' sense of entitlement, and (b) cultural differences in the way that Black and White students relate to the instructor in varying contexts.

First, it is amazing how White privilege and entitlement plays out on some campuses that are predominantly White. I have resonated with many of my Black colleagues on both of these previously mentioned concerns. So, how does it happen? One vehicle in which this sense of entitlement is manifested is via the student reminding the instructor that “I am paying for you to be here. Without me, you would not have a job.” Although this is seldom a direct statement, I remember teaching at a community college and having a student question my Socratic pedagogical method. On the first day of a basic speech class, I asked each student to tell me his or her greatest weakness. A 40-something, White, male student spoke up immediately, “Well, why don’t you tell us what our weaknesses are; you’re the expert!” Although I was retracted and appalled by his disrespectful outburst, I calmly explained to the class that public speaking is not just about being an orator, but also about being a critical observer of one’s own and others’ speaking habits. I recall thinking that I would never get this sort of response from Black students. It is also typical for students at HBCUs to address their professors with either “Dr.” or “Professor,” even if they see that professor at the grocery store or a party. Many students at PWUs have become accustomed to calling their professors by their first names, which by HBCU and general African American cultural standards is a sign of disrespect that is often believed to be an indicator of White entitlement.

### **Role as Theorist**

Because the current state of African American theory construction holds a direct relationship with current knowledge development and dissemination about African Americans, it must be thoroughly examined and understood. It is critical that the present discussion highlights one area central to African American communication theory development—gender theory.

Gender has been a focal point of critical communication inquiry for over a decade. Increasingly, communication scholars have imported the works of anthropologists, psychologists, sociologists, historians, and literary experts to encase our own gender commentaries (Houston, 1992; Probyn, 1992; Stewart, Cooper, Stewart, & Friedley, 1996; Wood, 1996). Frequently, our models have also been exported to define and describe cultural nuances within workplace organizations and elsewhere. However, gender, like race, poses complex and often avoided questions and disturbs the guilty consciences of traditionalists (Collins, 1991). It’s sad that they can be labeled “traditionalists,” because the term implies a loyal attachment to a certain historical legacy. In this case, the legacy has failed to inscribe the cultural heritages of marginalized global communities. The nature of this exclusionary canon formation and perpetuation is the impetus for the introduction of feminist studies (Collins, 1991).

Led by hooks (1981), Collins (1991), Lorde (1980), and Wallace (1978), the Black feminist movement has heightened its presence within contemporary gender scholarship. Woman scholars, such as Walker (1983), have chosen to separate themselves from the label asserted and defined by White females (i.e., feminism) in order to accent both the distinctive political and cultural challenges confronted by Black women in the struggle to define self. White males have already developed an extensive body of masculinist responses and theories. Kimmel (1995), although not the first to respond, has emerged as a profeminist leader in the national discussion concerning "men as gendered beings." His works have included the perspectives of African American, Chicano, Jewish, and European American male and female scholars. African American men have already created their own gender commentaries, but have not formed a coalition, nor have they formally introduced themselves as masculinist scholars. Madhubuti (1990) and Akbar (1990) write extensively about Black boys maturing to manhood. Hare and Hare (1985) concentrate on Black male rites of passage. So, the articulations of a "Black masculinist" approach already exist. There must be a set of formally established Black masculinist perspectives in communication, however.

Carol Spitzack (1998) edited a wonderful forum in *Communication Theory* introducing a set of theoretical and conceptual pieces concerning masculinity. Although I thoroughly enjoyed the volume, the forum was limited in that none of these articles commented upon culture-specific masculinities. If Black masculine theory is described as a set of explanations that stipulates a defining relationship between Black males and their environment, then certainly communication scholars should be allowed space to develop this brand of theory. However, if its primary function is to illustrate its opposition to feminine ways of knowing, or to simply react to the content of feminist discourse, then the venture is counterproductive and unworthy of pursuit (Jackson, 1997). The major project confronting the African American intellectual is liberating the masses from ignorance and negative self-evolvement. A formal inauguration of Black masculinist thought must begin with this premise.

### **Conclusion and Revisiting Theory**

So, what is my role as a Black male in the academy and the overall path to enchantment? The abbreviated answers are as follows: (a) to work toward the systematic elimination of academic bias and proposal of new ways of viewing cultural reality; (b) to work toward the institutionalization of organic intellectualism; and (c) to work toward the initiation of radical progressive pedagogy. This is one formula for the academic improvement of the human condition, and the major redeeming quality of the academy is that it invites scholarly evolution. It is still one of the few

places where new ideas can be introduced and challenged. That is the primary thrill or “enchantment” I have with the academy.

Teaching and theorizing about African American communication is very important because it explores another set of identities that often go unmentioned. The small legion of Black communication scholars should probably be the guiding force in this initiative, just as other cultural scholars may take the lead in theorizing about their respective cultures. Clearly, the most sophisticated scholar-theorist has done little more than comment upon critical if not obvious daily realities and behavioral consistencies. This is not to belittle the task of theory construction, but to suggest that theory building is easier accomplished by people who are able to define, articulate, and assess systematically their own observations and experiences. Rather than advocate or dismiss a single approach, I recommend that we adopt a variety of approaches that facilitate our understanding of the identities we enact in intercultural interactions. McPhail, Gresson, and Asante’s theories, as well as others, are worthy of advancement in the discipline of communication.

Dubois (1903) was correct. The greatest problem of the 20th century has been the problem of the color line. I believe that the single most influential problem of the coming century will not still be the color line, however, but that of identity. The most illuminating research and scholarship will in some way explore how humans define themselves and their relationships to others. So, the work must begin with ourselves and move outward into our classrooms, institutions, communities, and personal relationships. The best preparation for this will be an equitable and mainstream valuation of gender- and culture-specific theories.

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